

Quakerism understood in relation to Calvinism: The theology of George Fox

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Abstract

This article starts from the position that Quakerism has yet to be properly located within the firmament of Christian theology. A new starting point is proposed in the relation to the historical environment of Calvinism, the effect of which is to place Quakerism within the ancient stand-off between Augustine and Pelagius. In the article's first part, four theological propositions taken from the *Journal* of George Fox are first contrasted with propositions from John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and then correlated with those of James Arminius to confirm the Pelagian nature of the theology. The second part of the article departs from particular doctrinal elements and attempts to grasp the contrasting characters of Quakerism and Calvinism.

Keywords: James Arminius, John Calvin, George Fox, Synod of Dort, Westminster Confession, Edward Worsdell

The variety and mutual contradiction of the various theories of Quaker theology suggests that there is yet some way to go to place this religion within the firmament of Christianity.¹ I propose that the relationship to the Calvinist environment of the seventeenth century, in which Quakerism arose,

¹ Rufus Jones framed Quakerism as a religion emerging from the mystical tradition. *Studies in Mystical Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1909). This interpretation pervaded the other five volumes of the Quaker History Series. Geoffrey Nuttall framed Quakerism as a logical development of Puritanism in *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947). Douglas Gwyn claimed Quakerism as an apocalyptic religion in *Apocalypse of the Word: The Life and Message of George Fox* (Richmond: Friends United Press, 1986); cf. Pink Dandelion's agreement in *An Introduction to Quakerism* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), p.4. Rex Ambler and Patricia Williams give panentheist renditions; see Ambler, *The Quaker Way* (Winchester: John Hunt Christian Alternative, 2013), and Williams, *Quakerism: A Theology for our Time* (West Conshohocken: Infinity, 2008). Carol Spencer reworks the mystical explanation with her proposal of holiness/perfection as the paradigm in 'Holiness: The Quaker Way of Perfection', in Pink Dandelion (ed.), *The Creation of Quaker Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004). Rachael Hadley King discovered that Fox stood in contradiction to Calvin, but the theology was outside the scope of her thesis in *George Fox and the Light within* (Philadelphia: Monthly Meeting, 1940).

provides a grounding of some parameters to the theology. This provides clues to the attraction of the religion and reasons for its immediate success. My proposal is that the starting point for appreciating the theology of Quakerism lies somewhere along the spectrum that runs between Calvinism and Arminianism. Quakerism may be sited between the two poles of God's absolute discretion and human participation in salvation. In this way, it originates in a recurrence of the old stand-off between Pelagius and Augustine.

Preliminary considerations

The feasibility of discussing George Fox (1624–91) as a theologian and the question of the historical context of Calvinism needs to be clarified from the outset. Fox would not have considered himself to be doing theology. In his own estimation he was an apostle. As he tells us, 'they said it was presumptuous for any to say that they had the same power and spirit that the apostles had and were in'.² Fox is readily understood as a prophet. His relative is John the Baptist. On arrival in any town, Fox would stand in the marketplace and issue his call: 'I warned the priest that was in the street and people to repent and turn to the Lord . . . and that the day of the lord was coming upon all sin and wickedness'.³ In the prophetic tradition Fox was a protester against hypocrisy: 'For you indeed justify yourselves before men. But God knoweth your hearts; for he will not be worshipped with your forms and profession and shows of religion.'⁴

Fox was unlettered. His religion was a direct response to the gospel. His inspiration came after a period of 'great misery and trouble', during which he could not find consolation from the priests.⁵ There is in his response to the Bible the acute eye of a child. His style in theological disputation has something of the naive directness that outsider art has in relation to trained artists. This can be seen in the following passage dismissing transubstantiation.

Then G.F. gave forth a challenge . . . to come forth and try their God and their Christ that they had made of bread and wine. . . . But no answer could he get . . . so he told them, they were worse than the priests of Baal, for Baal's priest tried their wooden God which they had made, but

² *The Journal of George Fox*, ed. John Nickalls (Cambridge: CUP, 1952), p. 418.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

they durst not try their bread and wine God, and Baal's priest and people did not eat their god as they did, and then make another.⁶

Fox was unlearned in the theological subtleties of the Reformation. His forms of thought can fall outside the standard conversational parameters, and it is inappropriate to assess him as a theologian in the sense of holding doctrinal positions in conscious relation to other doctrinal positions. Fox had theological disputation thrust upon him by the clash of his vision with the contemporary environment.

It is inevitable however, given the comprehensive scope of discussion in Christian tradition, that any vision, once analysed, will be found to constitute in fact elements of one doctrinal position in relation to another. What is discussed here then is the *de facto* theology in Fox's religion. A fully systematic statement of the Quaker position in relation to Calvinism by a trained theologian was forthcoming in 1678 with the publication of Robert Barclay's *Apology*.⁷ In the interests of brevity, I will be presenting only the original materials available in Fox's *Journal*. By the same token materials in Calvin's *Institutes* are used here, in the main, to define Calvinism.

With regard to the historical background of Calvinism there has been uncertainty about the Calvinist character of seventeenth-century England, in contrast to appreciation of its definitive installation in Scotland. As Andrew Pettegree remarks 'commentators on the English Reformation have often presented England as at best a semi-detached part of the international Calvinist community'.⁸ Quaker theorists have been slack in taking the theological background of the time as Puritan without specifying how far Puritanism was Calvinist, Lutheran or in some sense specifically English.⁹ Nor is Calvinist preponderance immediately apparent to readers of Fox's *Journal*. Calvinists are here mentioned only incidentally in a list that comprises 'Presbyterians, Independents, Seekers, Baptists, Episcopal men, Socinians, Brownists, Lutherans, Calvinists, Arians, Fifth Monarchy Men, Familists, Muggletonians, Ranters'.¹⁰

But the origin of Puritanism lies in the return under Elizabeth of the Marian exiles from the Calvinist educational centres of Strasbourg and Geneva. It was

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 538.

⁷ Robert Barclay, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (Farmington, ME: Quaker Heritage Press, n.d.).

⁸ Andrew Pettegree, 'The Spread of Calvin's Thought', in Donald McKinn (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), p. 210.

⁹ Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit*. Cf. Hugh Barbour, *The Quakers in Puritan England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964).

¹⁰ Fox, *Journal*, p. 419.

specifically Calvinist and not Lutheran. It was fuelled by the complaint that the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Elizabethan settlement were not unambiguously Calvinist. For example, Nicholas Tyacke records the Puritan demand at the 1604 Hampton Court conference for incorporation into the Thirty-Nine Articles of Whitgift's more tightly Calvinist Lambeth Articles of 1595.¹¹ He notes that 'the characteristic theology of English Protestant Sainthood was Calvinism'.¹² Pettegree's analysis of the publishing output demonstrates the Calvinist orientation:

By far the largest market for Calvin's writings in the later part of the sixteenth century was not his native France, but England. . . . English readers had an almost insatiable appetite for Calvin's works. . . . England was also the only European tradition that developed a popular abridgement of Calvin's *Institutes*. . . . Evidence from surviving wills and inventories suggests that Calvin clearly outstripped all other authors, English or continental, in English book collections. By whatever measure one adopts, Calvin emerges as the dominant force in the theology of the Elizabethan church.¹³

Yet still the matter is convoluted. Elizabeth drew the line at exact statement on predestination, considering it 'a matter tender and dangerous'.¹⁴ She maintained an iron-willed moderation that is characteristic of retrospectively named Anglicanism, and which preserved the freedom of conscience of her people against would-be heresy hunters. At the same time exact followers of Calvin, such as the widely read William Perkins, presented a precise Calvinism as Church of England orthodoxy.¹⁵

The grounds of dispute between Calvinism and what later coalesced as Arminianism simmered, under repeated bans on public discussion, at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge throughout Elizabeth's reign. The debate spilled out to a more public arena with the Synod of Dort in 1618–19. The resulting reaffirmation of Calvinism rejected thirty-four Arminian errors. The Canons of Dort thus provided a ready reference test for heresy. Tyacke notes that this synod, which received an official English delegation, 'acted as a catalyst on the English religious thought of the early seventeenth century'.¹⁶ He quotes one Thomas Goodwin to the effect that, 'the noise of

¹¹ Nicholas Tyacke, *The Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 23.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹³ Pettegree, 'Spread of Calvin's Thought', p. 210.

¹⁴ H. C. Porter, *Reformation and Reaction in Tudor Cambridge* (Cambridge: CUP, 1958), p. 374.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

¹⁶ Tyacke, *The Anti-Calvinists*, p. 87.

the Arminian controversy in Holland . . . and the several opinions of that controversy, began to be every man's talk and enquiry'.¹⁷ This was written five years before Fox's birth.

The central document evidencing the Calvinist environment of Fox's day is the Westminster Confession of Faith, issued in 1649. This distillation of the efforts of 120 divines indicates the leanings towards Calvinism of the ecclesiastical establishment. As one commentator observes of it, 'there is no indecision . . . we find no concession to Arminianism'.¹⁸ As Benjamin Warfield noted, the Westminster Confession, 'to which the whole of Puritan Britain gave its assent . . . is precisely the same system of truth which is embodied in all the great historic Reformed confessions'.¹⁹

To conclude this preamble, I take the British theological environment of Fox's day to be suffused with Calvin's theology. It was with this that Fox's vision clashed. A significant companion aspect of this environment was the pool of alienated congregations, such as the Seekers, longing for a new religious dispensation, who, particularly in the North of England, turned out to form the nucleus of Quakerism.

The theological clash with Calvinism

There is recurring evidence in Fox's journal of opposition from the religious establishment. Fox reports the excommunication of Friends by the Presbyterian priests in Edinburgh.²⁰ He tells of the 'rage of the professors' (priests) and his disputes with 'jangling professors'.²¹ 'The priests began to be in a mighty rage at Newcastle and Kendal: and up and down in most of the northern countries.'²² Part of this rage was due to his slight to their livings in the claim that Christ had come to teach people in their hearts free of charge. Fox likened priests to market traders selling scripture.²³

There was, however, a specifically theological provocation to this rage. As Fox tells us, 'But the professors were in a rage pleading for sin and imperfection, and could not endure to hear talk of perfection and an holy and sinless life.'²⁴ 'I found none that could bear to be told that any should

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ John Macpherson, 'Introduction', to *The Confession of Faith*, ed. Marcus Dods and Alexander Whyte (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1882), p. 26.

¹⁹ Benjamin Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1956), p. 295.

²⁰ Fox, *Journal*, p. 323.

²¹ Ibid., p. 285.

²² Ibid., p. 176.

²³ Ibid., p. 39.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

come to Adam's perfection, into that image of God and righteousness and holiness that Adam was in before he fell.'²⁵ 'The priest began to rage against the Light and denied it.'²⁶ 'Great opposition did the priests and professors make about this time against the light of Christ Jesus, denying it to be universally given.'²⁷

These few examples have already displayed three main heads on which Fox clashed with Calvinism. His claim to Christ's reinstatement of Adam's perfection stands in opposition to Calvin's insistence that perfection comes only with the resurrection. Fox's claim that Christ died for all men opposes the Calvinist assertion that Christ died effectually only for the elect. Fox's inspiration by the light opposes Calvin's insistence that scripture is the only source of revelation. A fourth main head of opposition can be added. This is Fox's belief that salvation, proceeding from the universal gift of grace, is thereafter by merit. This clashes with Calvin's categorically gratuitous election. The theology of Fox as a whole can thus be classed as a non-predestination theology. These four heads of disagreement can be illustrated in turn.

Salvation by merit

On the subject of salvation Fox reports:

We had a great meeting and several professors came out. And the priests had frightened people with the doctrine of election and reprobation, and said that the greatest part of men and women God had ordained for hell, let them pray, or preach or sing, and do what they could, it was all nothing if they were ordained for hell . . . So I was made to open to the people the folly of their priests' doctrines. And I showed them how the priests had abused those Scriptures . . . for did not God warn Cain and Balaam and gave a promise to Cain if he did well he should be accepted. For if those called Christians resist the Gospel . . . is not here a fault, which fault is in themselves and the cause of their reprobation and not God.²⁸

This opposes Calvin's statement that 'man has no means within himself by which he can escape from guilt and the impending curse . . . everything that proceeds from him is of the nature of sin'.²⁹ Calvin expounded on the need

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

²⁸ Fox, *Journal*, p. 316.

²⁹ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., trans. Henry Beveridge (London: James Clarke & Co., 1962), vol. 1, p. 28.

to renounce any trace of self-confidence: 'He who is most deeply abased and alarmed by the consciousness of his disgrace, nakedness, want and misery, has made the greatest progress in the knowledge of himself.'³⁰ Calvin is also adamantly anti-Pelagian. He refers to 'the pestilential dogma of Pelagius, who made human merit the first cause of salvation'.³¹ In Calvin's scheme of gratuitous election there is no distinction between men that may attract election. As the Canons of Dort describe this aspect of the elect, they are 'a certain number of persons . . . by nature neither better nor more deserving than others'.³² Fox's teaching falls under the rejection of errors specifically listed by the Canons of Dort, which has antennae sensitive to any doctrine displaying even the faintest implication of human initiative, referred to as the 'poison of the Pelagian errors'.³³ Fox's teaching also contradicts Westminster Confession 5.3, which reads:

Those of mankind that are predestined unto life, God . . . according to the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love, without foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or cause moving him therunto.³⁴

Christ died for all

On this subject Fox reports the occasion of dispute with Dr Wittie and a number of great persons:

He affirmed before them all that Christ had not enlightened every man that cometh into the world and that the grace of God had not appeared to all men, that brought salvation, and that Christ had not died for all men. Then I asked what sort of men were those that Christ . . . had not died for. And he said, 'He did not die for adulterers and idolaters and wicked men.' Then I asked him again whether adulterers and idolaters and wicked men were not sinners, and whether Christ did not die for sinners. . . . And he said 'Yes' 'So', said I, 'Thou has stopped they own mouth'.³⁵

³⁰ Ibid., p. 231.

³¹ Ibid., p. 257.

³² Canons of Dort, 1.7. <http://archive.is/KpSPI> (archived from <http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/creeds/dort.htm>). Accessed April 2016.

³³ Canons of Dort, 1.4; 2.6; 3/4.7; 5.2.

³⁴ *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, ed. Marcus Dods and Alexander Whyte (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1882), p. 48.

³⁵ Fox, *Journal*, p. 497.

In opposing this bald statement that Christ did not die for all men, Fox did not contradict any such direct statement by Calvin. Calvin is circumspect in the matter, being sensitive that on the subject of election 'great and difficult questions immediately arise, questions which are inexplicable'.³⁶ He leaves the matter of obtaining the grace of Christ discretely subsumed in 'the secret efficacy of the Spirit'.³⁷ Calvin's 'universal call' and 'special call' encompasses both the exclusive and universality of Christ's saving grace.³⁸ In this division of responsibility between Christ who made a perfect sacrifice for all and God who applies that mediation to some only, there is a certain subtlety that less circumspect minds will inevitably penetrate as the bald statement that Christ did not die for all men. Dort's Canon 2.8 is specific about the exclusion that 'the new covenant should effectually redeem . . . all those and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father'. Westminster Confession 5.8 is equally explicit about the exclusion: 'The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself . . . purchased . . . an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.'

Sanctification and the perfectibility of human nature

On the subject of perfectibility Fox records a number of occasions of dispute:

Many would force us to hear the hirelings who plead for sin and the body of death to the grave, which savours of the Devil's teaching, not Christ's. . . . They that come to be renewed up again into the divine heavenly image, in which man was first made, will know the same God, that was the first teacher of Adam and Eve in Paradise.³⁹

On another occasion he writes:

He took upon him to make a speech, and said that Christ had taken away the guilt of sin but had left the power of sin remaining in us. I told him this was a strange doctrine, for Christ came to destroy the Devil and his works . . . and so to cleanse men from sin . . . And Christ saith 'be ye perfect even as my heavenly father is perfect' for he who was perfect comes to make man and woman perfect again and bring them again to the state God made them in.⁴⁰

³⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 2, p. 202.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 462.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 247.

³⁹ *Fox Journal*, p. 666.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 352, 358.

This stands in opposition to Calvin's insistence that justifying does not make just.⁴¹ Grace, without purifying human nature, goes only so far as to 'lay it under internal restraint.'⁴² So it is that '[e]ven saints cannot perform one work which, if judged on its own merits, is not deserving of condemnation'.⁴³ 'There is always sin in the saints, until they are freed from their mortal frame, because depraved concupiscence resides in their flesh.'⁴⁴ The impossibility of perfection is confirmed by the Westminster Confession 1.8 on sanctification: 'This sanctification is throughout in the whole man, yet imperfect in this life, there abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part.'

Calvin's doctrine of the incorrigible imperfection of man had become so much the official convention that Fox faced the dangerous and imprisonable charge of blasphemy for his claim to be 'in the righteousness of Christ'.⁴⁵ But Fox was undaunted:

But I told him, 'There is a perfection in Christ, above Adam and beyond falling; and that it was the work of the ministers of Christ to present every man perfect in Christ; and for the perfecting of whom they had their gifts from Christ; therefore they that denied perfection denied the work of the ministry, and the gifts which Christ gave for the perfecting of the saints.'⁴⁶

The Light and the subordination of scripture

Fox's inspiration was the Light. This was understood by him to be a guide antecedent to the scriptures. In this he took at face value the opening lines of John's Gospel: 'In the beginning was the Word . . . What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people' (John 1:1, 4). Although the scriptures are Fox's constant source of reference, in the last resort he has a tendency to subordinate the authority of scripture to the Light.

Fox records the occasion of his inspiration. This event illustrates the priority of the Light:

Now the Lord God hath opened to me by his invisible power how that every man was enlightened by the divine light of Christ: and I saw it shine through all, and that they that believed in it came out of condemnation and came to the light of life . . . and they that hated it, and did not believe

⁴¹ Calvin *Institutes*, vol. 2, p. 42.

⁴² *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 251

⁴³ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 80.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 517.

⁴⁵ Fox, *Journal*, p. 354; cf. p. 52: 'And so they committed me as a blasphemer and as a man that had no sin.'

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 688.

in it, were condemned by it, though they made profession of Christ. This I saw in the pure openings of the Light without the help of any man, neither did I then know where to find it in the Scriptures; though afterwards, searching the Scriptures I found it.⁴⁷

Fox is hereby a culprit in Calvin's campaign against '[a]ll the principles of piety subverted by fanatics, who substitute revelations for Scripture'.⁴⁸ As Calvin insisted, 'It is impossible for any man to obtain even the minutest portion of right and sound doctrine without being a disciple of Scripture.'⁴⁹

Fox's view of the constituency of the Gospel encompasses a universal domain alien to Calvin. Fox reports:

They reasoned that the Gospel was the four books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and natural. But I told them the Gospel was the power of God, which was preached before any of them were printed or written, and was preached to every creature who might never see nor hear of the four books aforesaid.⁵⁰

This contradicts the exclusivist restriction of the power of the gospel in Calvin's claim that God does not send the word to all:

Those therefore, whom he has created for dishonour during life and destruction at death, that they may be vessels of wrath . . . he at one time deprives of the means of hearing the word, at another by the preaching of it blinds and stupefies them the more. The examples of the former case are innumerable, but let us select one of the most remarkable of all. Before the advent of Christ about four thousand years passed away, during which he hid the light of saving doctrine from all nations.⁵¹

This list summarises four main heads of polarisation between Quakerism and Calvinism. By an intuitive response to the message of the Gospel, with no apparent rehearsal, Fox has stated the main grounds of the theology of James Arminius. Fox's grounds can be neatly tied in with various heads of

⁴⁷ Fox, *Journal*, p. 33.

⁴⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, chapter heading IX.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 66; cf. vol. 2, p. 205: 'Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which as nothing useful and necessary to be known has been omitted, so nothing is taught in it but what it is important to know.'

⁵⁰ Fox, *Journal*, p. 445.

⁵¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 2, p. 251.

Arminius' *Apology Against Thirty-One Deformatory Articles*.⁵² The relevant sections are as follows.

8. Sufficient grace of the Holy Spirit is bestowed on those to whom the Gospel is preached, whosoever they may be; so that, if they will, they may believe: Otherwise God would only be mocking mankind.
12. Christ has died for all men and for every individual.
- 13 and 14. Original sin will condemn no man.
16. The works of the unregenerate can be pleasing to God.
18. God undoubtedly converts, without the external preaching of the Gospel, great numbers of people to the saving knowledge of Christ . . . He effects such conversions either by the inward revelation of the Holy Spirit, or by the ministry of angels.
29. Believers can perfectly fulfill the law and live in the world without sin.

At this stage it can be noted that Calvinists accused Quakers of the same sorts of Pelagian errors of which they also accused Catholics and Lutherans.⁵³ This belies the suspicion (characteristic of both Catholic and Protestant interpretations of the movement) that Quakerism is a fringe interpretation of Christianity. Of course, that suspicion cannot be allayed exclusively on the basis of theology. To elicit the grounds of real difference it would be necessary to examine forms and practices, a question that would need to be the subject of a separate article. Still, some concluding comparisons are possible.

Comparison of the overall character of Quakerism and Calvinism

Although we tend to demarcate different faiths by sets of doctrinal propositions, the true character of any religion is always something more than the sum of its parts. It is something in that character as a whole that forms the basis of attraction for different religious temperaments. What are the psychological attractions of Calvinism and Quakerism? What aspects would incline some people to one religion and some to the other?

The attraction of Calvinism is the absolutely unquestionable glory attributed to God. 'God . . . is the fountain of all goodness . . . not a particle of light, or wisdom, or justice, or power, or rectitude, or genuine truth, will anywhere be found, which does not flow from him.'⁵⁴ Calvin's piety is that of the perfect submission of the creature to the Creator. 'Since you

⁵² *The Writings of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and W. R. Bagnall (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), vol. 1.

⁵³ Porter, *Reformation and Reaction*, p. 283.

⁵⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, p. 40.

are his workmanship, you are bound, by the very law of creation, to submit to his authority.'⁵⁵ Calvinism is the religion of perfect humility. As Warfield sums up the case, Calvinism is the synthesis of all Christianities, in their highest form, by degree.⁵⁶ The clear-cut test of any deviation from this pinnacle is any hint of initiative attributed to man. In this Calvinism is pure and unsurpassable. Calvinism is like an exquisite rose whose beauty puts all other flowers in the shade.

The attraction of Quakerism is its Pelagianism. Although the name has been much denigrated, it is an equally attractive glorification of God. Calvinism presents Pelagianism with two falsely exclusive alternatives: either give the glory to God, or give the glory to man. But that is not fair to the Pelagian position. To draw an analogy, we rightly honour our parents because they gave us everything that we have and everything that we are; but it is the most glorious part of that honour that they gave us the initiative to act as independent people able in turn to repeat God's glorious process of creation. It is that glory of the creature in relation to its creator that Pelagianism offers to God.

Two different celebrations of God are in play. These suggest different psychologies for the two religious movements. Taking the psychology of Calvinism first, the indelibly depraved and impotent individual posited by Calvin requires a compensating focus of confidence if it is not simply to fall into a situation of despair. For example, Edward Worsdell, the once devout Calvinist turned Quaker, wrote of his vivid recollection of the preciousness of the Calvinist experience, especially 'the moment at which he found he could rest in the acceptance of Christ as his Substitute'.⁵⁷ This focus faithfully reflects Calvin's pastoral advice in the face of anxiety to look only and always to Christ as 'the mirror in which . . . we may contemplate our election'.⁵⁸

Calvin was well aware of the anxiety inherent in the doctrine of gratuitous election.

Among the temptations with which Satan assaults believers, none is greater or more perilous, than when disquieting them with doubts of their election, he at the same time stimulates them with a depraved desire of inquiring after it out of the proper way. . . . And this temptation is the more fatal, that it is the temptation to which of all others almost all of us are prone. For there is scarcely a mind in which the thought does not sometimes arise. . . . But what proof have you of election? When

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p 41.

⁵⁶ Benjamin Warfield, 'John Calvin the Theologian', in Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*.

⁵⁷ Edmund Worsdell, *The Gospel of Divine Help* (London: Samuel Harris & Co., 1888), p. 110.

⁵⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 2, p. 244.

once this thought has taken possession of an individual, it keeps him perpetually miserable, subjects him to dire torment, or throws him into a state of complete stupor.⁵⁹

Pelagianism has a different psychology that stems from a different understanding of the power of Christ. From a Pelagian perspective, Calvin's Christ is a passive receiver of that quota of people allocated to him by God. By contrast, the Pelagian Christ is an active seeker with power to increase the number of those saved. As Worsdell explains, 'the distinctive belief . . . is that God has revealed Himself to the world in Christ, as one whose unchangeable purpose for the sinner is to win him to holiness, and who will never cease to use means to this end so long as his reformation is possible – if indeed, it can ever become impossible'.⁶⁰ There is a universal potential here which generates a sunny confidence. It is experienced as 'a life-giving power over us . . . one in kind with the influence over us of some earthly friend'.⁶¹ Friendship is nothing if not reciprocal, and so we ourselves become harnessed to the mission of Christ to win people to him. This endeavour is complemented by the encouraging possibility of a Christian journey out of the misery of human nature towards perfection. This psychology is altogether empowering.

Calvin's dynamic engenders a different psychology. The impotent role in our own salvation means that we are equally powerless to secure the election of our loved ones. This introduces a second dimension of anxiety, which is exacerbated by the fact that any appearance of faith that our initiative might induce in others is no security for election. As Calvin explains the temporary faith given by God's special call: 'sometimes, however, he communicates it also to those whom he enlightens only for a time, and whom afterwards, in just punishment for their ingratitude, he abandons and smites with greater blindness'.⁶² Worsdell tells of his anxious sense of the 'awful impending fate over those around him' and the 'strain of effort and concern'.⁶³

It is testimony to how far Calvin's tornado had swept clean through England that Fox's gospel came as something new. He records the priest of his hometown, Nathaniel Stephens, who had never heard that Christ died for all men.⁶⁴ He records, on the occasion of preaching to seamen in

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

⁶⁰ Worsdell, *Gospel of Divine Help*, p. 25.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶² Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 2, p. 247.

⁶³ Worsdell, *Gospel of Divine Help*, p. 74.

⁶⁴ Fox, *Journal*, p. 5.

Bristol harbour, the relief and refreshment with which his teaching met.⁶⁵ Fox considered he was preaching against a dark and discouraging form of religion. As quoted above, he considered Calvin's doctrine of imperfection to be the devil's teaching, not Christ's. He considered that the priests 'acted by the dark power'.⁶⁶ He was at pains to counter what he considered to be the 'dark teachings' of the Scottish priests regarding reprobation and perfection. He considered it to be 'a sad and comfortless sort of striving to strive with a belief that we should never overcome'.⁶⁷

The testimony of Margaret Fell, who became the joint founder of Quakerism, gives some sense of a dramatic switch from one interpretation of Christianity to another. After hearing Fox preach in her local church in Ulverston she reported:

And so he spoke of his own great spiritual experience, of the inwardness of true religion, of the indwelling Light of Christ, of the Light that would gather every man to God. I stood up in my pew and wondered at his doctrine, for I had never heard such before. Then he went on to rebuke those who understood the Scriptures only for themselves, without the illumination of the Spirit of Christ. This opened me so, that it cut me to the heart; and I saw then clearly that we were all wrong.⁶⁸

The shining glory that Calvin attributes to God comes with a dark side: a demand to accept cognitive dissonance regarding the justice of God. 'No necessity was laid upon God . . . that out of man's fall he might extract materials for his own glory.'⁶⁹ 'It equally appertains to his glory to store up punishment for one, and eternal life for another.'⁷⁰ The exquisite beauty of Calvin's rose comes at a cost. In proportion as the flower is beautiful, so the thorns are barbaric. Calvin himself could number those thorns and was not shy of them. 'The human mind, when it hears this doctrine, cannot resign its petulance, but boils and rages as if aroused by the sound of a trumpet.'⁷¹ 'They ask why God is offended with his creatures, who have not provoked him by any previous offence: for to devote to destruction whomsoever he pleases more resembles the caprice of a tyrant.'⁷²

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 660.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 688.

⁶⁸ Isabel Ross, *Margaret Fell: Mother of Quakerism* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1949), p. 10.

⁶⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, p. 70.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 225.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 227.

Calvin's solution is to swathe the thorns with pious respect for the incomprehensible discretion of God:

Nor is it possible to restrain the petulance of men . . . in regard to his incomprehensible counsels . . . for it were unjust that those profound judgments, which transcend all our powers of discernment, should be subject to our calculation. . . . But because many are the species of blasphemy which these virulent dogs utter against God. . . . If at any time thoughts of this kind come into the minds of the pious, they will be sufficiently armed to repress them, by considering how sinful it is to insist on knowing the causes of the divine will . . . so that everything which he wills must be held righteous by the mere fact of his willing it.⁷³

This involves a measure of cognitive dissonance in reconciling, for instance, the 'infinite mercy of God' with its strict circumscription. Calvin's thought must ever provoke to rebellion those temperaments, even within the Reformed tradition, who are not able to accommodate this.⁷⁴

It was this dissonance that produced Worsdell's conversion to Quakerism. It was for him a condition of the Christian revelation to conscience that 'the human conception of "right", however imperfect it may be, is not different in kind from the Divine'.⁷⁵ For Worsdell the Calvinist creed is 'irreverent and dishonouring to God . . . it is scarcely possible to overestimate the evils of doubt, anguish, despair and infidelity, resulting from doctrines which attribute to the Heavenly Father schemes and designs utterly at variance with the moral sense of His creatures, and which in them would be regarded as unspeakably unjust and cruel'.⁷⁶

Calvin might reply to this, 'we do not imagine God to be lawless. He is a law unto himself.'⁷⁷

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 226–7.

⁷⁴ For notable examples, Peter Baro (1534–99, England). Moses Amyraut (1596–1664, France). Nicholas Hemingius (1513–1600, Denmark).

⁷⁵ Worsdell, *Gospel of Divine Help*, p. 14.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Prefatory Note.

⁷⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 2, p. 227.