

**"RITUALISM" OR "QUAKERISM?"  
BEING REMARKS ON A  
PAMPHLET BY J. W. C. ENTITLED  
"QUAKERISM AND THE CHURCH"**

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**JOHN BELLOWS**

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J. B.

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## “RITUALISM” OR “QUAKERISM.”

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A PAMPHLET has recently been published by J. W. C., (John William Cudworth,) entitled “Quakerism and the Church; being my reasons for leaving the Society of Friends and joining the Church.” These reasons are stated to be, That the doctrines held by the Society of Friends with regard to Baptism, the “Lord’s Supper,” Worship, and Ministry, are at variance with those of the New Testament; whilst those of the National “Church” are in harmony with them.

The author of the pamphlet states that he was brought up in the Society of Friends; that at one time he took it for granted that its creed was a sound one; but that after a time doubts arose in his mind with regard to the points above mentioned, which doubts were examined with great care, and resulted finally in his taking the step he has mentioned.

As a personal stranger to J. W. C., I shall perhaps best assure him that I appreciate his position, by stating that, like himself, I was educated in the Society of Friends; and, like himself, have had to pass through a season of doubt and mental struggle in

reference to its doctrines, especially those of Baptism and the "Lord's Supper."

For it is no matter in what form of belief we may have been brought up—no matter how powerful the force of early training, there comes a time, sooner or later, to every man, in which he feels the need of a deeper and more living knowledge of God, and of the things pertaining to His kingdom, than any he has gathered from tradition or hearsay; a time when much that he has taken for granted, slides from under his feet; when even lessons that have been instilled into him by a father's watchful care or a mother's love, can no longer be leaned upon; when the storm of tribulation sweeps away the building of years, and leaves him empty and desolate in the presence of the dread realities of the world to come. No notional religion, no *ism* of any sort will stand him in stead now, but in the anguish of his soul he has to cry to a living and powerful Saviour for help, or he must perish.

In this state, any step that promises even one ray of light is eagerly taken by the weary soul; and the Scriptures are searched in a very different spirit from what we have known before—not to prove that we are right, or that anyone else is wrong; but with a broken and a contrite heart, in the hope that God will condescend to open to us such portions as He may see meet, and enable us to do *His will*, whatever it may lead us to.

It was at such a time, and under such feelings, that I did what the author of the pamphlet advises. I searched the New Testament from beginning to end, to see whether the doctrines in question *were* really *true*, and would really bear adopting in such a time of fiery trial; and, it need hardly be added, with a full determination to leave the Society of Friends if I found they would not.

In saying thus much, and adding that the result of my search led to an opposite conclusion to that arrived at by John William Cudworth, I am too much in earnest to attach any weight to a remark he makes near the close of his book, where,



after recommending this careful study of the New Testament, and a comparison of it with Barclay's Apology,\* (a standard work on Friends' principles,) he says, that if after such study the reader "still thinks these specialities of Quakerism are in accordance with Holy Scripture, I shall be compelled to form a very low estimate of his mental powers and his judgment—or of my own." That is, in plain English, anyone who does not think with him is a fool.

But the true understanding of Scripture is *not* a question of mental powers or of natural ability; if it were, we should no longer see men of the highest mental calibre holding views that are diametrically opposed to each other; nor would the assertion hold good with regard to the way of Salvation, that "the way-faring man, *though a fool*, shall not err therein." †

If J. W. C. should after all be *wrong*, it would by no means follow that his mental powers or his judgment were of a low order, any more than it would follow that a man has bad sight because he fails to distinguish with the unaided eye, such things in the heavenly bodies as require a higher power than the unaided eye to discern.

In searching the Scriptures, and indeed in all seeking after religious truth, it is especially needful to bear in mind the injunction, "Trust in the Lord with *all* thine heart, and lean not to *thine own understanding*;" for if we do *lean* to it, instead of trusting with *all* our heart to this higher guidance, we shall but stumble upon the *letter*, while we entirely miss the *Spirit* that

\* A person who visited the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge, about 1820, speaks as follows of this work:—

"The librarian called our attention to a particular compartment. 'These are controversial works. All that impugn or attack the views and doctrines of the Church of England are placed by themselves. As you will observe, answers are invited. I am not aware that any work attacking our church has remained unnoticed or unanswered during the many years that I have been here, except this one,' which, says my informant, I well recollect stood by itself at the end of the shelf, and which, on opening, I found to be Robert Barclay's *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*. 'It is the only book,' continued the librarian, 'that comes back again and again without any answer. Not but that it has been frequently examined, but it comes back alone.'

† The translators of the authorized version of the English Bible, say in their "Address to the Reader," after stating modestly that they had thorough knowledge of the original tongues: "And in what sort did these [the translators] assemble? In the trust of *their own knowledge, or of their shortness of wit, or deepness of judgment?* At no hand. They trusted in Him that hath the key of David, opening, and no man shutting."

giveth *life*. The apostle Peter tells us *why* we are to trust in the Lord in the interpretation of Scripture, when, after testifying to that of which he had been an eye witness, he says, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts;" and then adds: "knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." In other words, we cannot unlock the Scriptures *ourselves*, no matter how plain we may seem to make them by our "private interpretations;" but we must be dependent for our right understanding of them, upon the same Spirit that gave them forth "in old time." \*

By his own showing, J. W. C. has made it simply a question of natural powers and judgment to discover the true meaning of Scripture; and where has his interpretation landed him?

I shall not follow his arguments step by step, but mainly deal with his conclusions, as being a more brief, and quite as certain a way of testing whether he is right or wrong. As with a sum in arithmetic, if the *total* is wrong, we may be very sure the *working* is wrong also; so if it should appear that any conclusion resulting from J. W. C.'s reasoning is untenable, we may rest assured that the arguments upon which it based are unsound.

When two lines run seemingly parallel for a short distance, it is often difficult to decide whether they *really* are so; if they are not, we have only to prolong them to find them becoming more and more divergent; but if they *are* really parallel, we may carry them as far as we please, and measure them at as many points as we choose, without their suffering by the test.

So it is with systems. What is absolutely true will bear pushing to extremes, and is always *self-consistent*.

\* Or, as Bem says, in his note on this passage: "For he that is the Author of the writings of the prophets is also the interpreter of them." At the words "private interpretations," he adds, "For all interpretation cometh from God." Dean Alford translates, "For prophecy was never at any time of man;" &c. In his revised translation, he says: "For prophecy was never sent after the will of man;" &c.

What is not absolutely true, but partly true and partly false, (as most false doctrine is,) will not bear carrying to extremes, without involving difficulties and contradictions. A false system, therefore, may be known *by its not being consistent with itself*, and by its attempting to hedge itself about with artificial barriers, beyond which enquiry respecting it must not be pushed.

Now if the system of doctrine held by the Society of Friends be *self-consistent*, and on the other hand that laid down by J.W.C., be *not* so, the first *may* be in accordance with Scripture, but the second *cannot* be; since nothing that contradicts itself can be true; and if not true, it cannot be in accordance with the Scriptures of truth.

No one, so far as I am aware, has ever denied that what are popularly known as “Quaker” doctrines are *self-consistent*. Many bitter opponents, who deem the system only a “cunningly devised fable,” admit *this* of it.

And what is this cunningly devised fable?

Its foundation doctrine—the foundation doctrine of Quakerism, out of which all the others spring, is this:—

That God not only so loved the world that He sent His Son into the world to atone for the sins of all mankind in the body of His flesh, through death; but that He also so loved the world that He has enlightened every man that comes into it with some measure of His own eternal Spirit, in order that no man might miss the offer of that salvation which He has thus prepared for *all*. This manifestation of God is described in the first chapter of John, as the “Word” by which all things were created, and as the true Light that enlighteneth *every* man that cometh into the world, although it shineth in darkness: and in the same chapter we read that this “Word,” which was “made flesh,” is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is elsewhere spoken of as the Word of God’s power by which He upholds all things—as the Spirit of God—as the pearl of great price—as the treasure that lay hid in a field—as the seed of the kingdom of heaven, &c.

This doctrine is termed by the schoolmen, The IMMEDIATE