

# GEORGE KEITH: POST-RESTORATION QUAKER THEOLOGY AND THE EXPERIENCE OF DEFEAT

STEPHEN TROWELL\*  
JOHN RYLANDS RESEARCH INSTITUTE

By their research into the Quakers of the interregnum years Barry Reay and Christopher Hill have shown that the pacificism and political neutrality of late seventeenth-century Quakers is in sharp contrast to their conduct and belief before the Restoration. Reay and Hill argue that Quakers had hoped for the second coming of Christ and the commencement of his kingdom on earth. When these hopes were disappointed, by the failure of the Commonwealth and the subsequent restoration of the monarchy, the Quakers withdrew from all attempts to guide the affairs of the world. Christopher Hill writes:

The major rethinking which led to the peace principle, first clearly enunciated in 1661, and to withdrawal from political action, came after the Quakers had ceased to believe in the imminence of Christ's kingdom: the collapse of the Army and the reassertion of the power of the natural rulers seem to have been decisive in ending the utopian millenarian hopes to which Quakers and Fifth Monarchists clung on longer than other groups in English politics.<sup>1</sup>

Since the Quakers were a religious group we would expect this change in their attitude to the world to be prompted, or at the least reflected, by a change in theological belief. Reay and Hill both acknowledge this, but though Hill speaks generally of a new other-worldliness, for which he claims Robert Barclay's *Apology* 'provided the theological underpinning', Reay frankly states that 'we still do not know enough about the long-term development of Quaker theology to reach any firm conclusion about the period after 1660'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Hill, *The experience of defeat: Milton and some contemporaries* (London, 1984), 130.

<sup>2</sup> Hill, *Experience of defeat*, 164. Barry Reay, *The Quakers and the English Revolution* (London, 1985), 130. There are in fact already several excellent accounts of Quaker theology. Lief Eeg-Olofsson's *The conception of the inner light in Robert Barclay's theology* (Lund, 1954) positions Barclay very carefully amongst the great figures of European Protestantism, and J. William Frost in 'The dry bones of Quaker theology', *Church History*, 39 (1970), 503–23, has given a clear account of the differences between Quakers and other contemporary religious groups. Both these works, however, and this I think is Reay's point, deal with the Quakers as

Informed by Reay and Hill's account of the development in Quaker politics, my intention in this article is to begin to explore the shifts in Quaker theology in the post-Restoration years. To do this I shall examine the schism which developed between George Keith and the Quakers.

George Keith emigrated from London to Philadelphia in 1684 as one of the leading Quakers of the post-Restoration period. He had been a close friend of Robert Barclay from Barclay's conversion until his death. His *Immediate revelation* (1668) outlined many of the arguments Barclay employed in the *Apology* (1676) and was highly regarded in its own right. He had appeared beside Barclay in the disputation defending *Theses theologicae* (1675), the work in which Barclay first presented the theses he defended in the *Apology*. He had collaborated with George Whitehead on *The light of truth triumphing over darkness* (1670), and in 1677 he had travelled on a Quaker mission to Holland with George Fox and William Penn.

Keith was first employed in the new world as a state surveyor in Pennsylvania, a position for which his mathematical ability made him well suited. In 1689, however, he was appointed headmaster of a new Quaker school. Soon after establishing the school he fell into bitter disagreement with the Quakers governing the state. Keith attacked Pennsylvanian Quakers for falling away from Christianity. Such was the depth of the disagreement that he felt it necessary to establish a separate group, the 'Christian Quakers', to preserve his faith. In Pennsylvania, in these its early years, civil and ecclesiastical powers were closely intertwined. Keith's dispute inevitably led to his being gaoled.

Keith returned to London in 1694 hoping that the support of the powerful London Quakers would enable him to vindicate his objections against the Pennsylvanians. In particular he hoped that his past acquaintance and achievements would recommend him to Whitehead and Penn, who following the deaths of Fox, Barclay and most of the civil war Quakers, were two of the most respected living Quakers.<sup>3</sup>

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an homogeneous unit and so tell us little about their internal struggle. Maurice Creasey's *"Inward" and "Outward": a study in early Quaker language* (London, 1962) and M.B. Endy *William Penn and early Quakerism* (Princeton, 1973) are a little more sensitive to internal divisions. Creasey, however, does not mention Keith, and Endy concerns himself exclusively with Penn's arguments. There are more detailed accounts of the divisions within the Quakers: particularly relevant to this article are W.C. Braithwaite's *The second period of Quakerism* (2nd edn; Cambridge, 1961), 482-7, Alexander Gordon's article on George Keith in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (London, 1908), E.W. Kirby's *George Keith (1638-1716)* (New York, 1947) and Rufus M. Jones's *Quakerism in the colonies* (London, 1911), 445-58. These accounts, useful though they are in terms of people places and dates, present no more than a cursory explanation of the theological differences prompting the disagreements.

<sup>3</sup> Frost argues that Whitehead 'served as the informal leader of English Friends following Fox's death', 'The dry bones of Quaker theology', *Church History*, 39 (1970), 508-9. Many other Quakers were involved in Keith's schism. A fuller discussion than that presented in this article would explore the role of Thomas Ellwood and the use made of George Fox's writings.

However, though Whitehead and Penn appear to have initially treated Keith with respect, the London Quakers refused to condemn the Pennsylvanian Quakers unequivocally for their treatment of Keith, and eventually the Yearly Meeting of 1695, guided by them, disowned him.

Keith set up an independent meeting in London, at Turners Hall. From here, and in print, he attacked the Quakers for the next five years by giving 'narratives' of their doctrinal errors, illustrated by lengthy quotations from their writings. In 1700 he conformed to the Anglican Church and was immediately ordained. He left Turners Hall, but his attacks on the Quakers continued unabated. From 1702 to 1704 he returned to America, this time as an Anglican missionary. In 1705 he was presented with a small living in Edburton in Surrey, where he remained till his death in 1716.<sup>4</sup>

The Yearly Meeting of 1695 claimed to disown Keith not on doctrinal grounds but because of his unbearable temper. It is, however, clear that Keith's temper had been displayed in dispute over doctrine. Keith himself, in a letter he wrote to Gerard Croese, published in the English translation of Croese's *Historia Quakeriana* (1695), states that the nature of the difference between him and the Quakers concerned 'Christ within and Christ without'.<sup>5</sup> He wrote more fully in *The pretended yearly meeting of the Quakers* (1695), a work written as a response to his expulsion, that

the bottom and foundation of all this, and of my being thought so burdensome and troublesome to them in Meetings, is because they cannot endure sound Doctrine, especially their deep prejudice against my frequent preaching the great necessity of Faith in Christ Crucified, as necessary to Regeneration, Justification and Eternal Salvation, and also the Resurrection of the Dead, and Christ's coming without us, in his Glorified Body to Judg the Quick and the Dead.<sup>6</sup>

The faith that Keith would preach is a faith in 'Christ without'; that is, a faith in the historical Christ who was incarnated at Bethlehem, was the subject of the Gospels, and who, Keith here declares, will come again. This faith, he believes, is being neglected by the Quakers for a faith in 'Christ within'; a faith in the light with which, Quakers supposed, God blesses the mind of man to show him the way to truth and grace.

Keith does not dismiss the notion of Christ within, but understands it metaphorically as 'a certain ray or substantial influence' that is 'derived from out of the Man Christ in Heaven' in a manner analogous to the way the rays of the sun fall on the earth.<sup>7</sup> It is, he believes, a derivative of the external Christ.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed account of the people involved and the various stages in the unfolding of Keith's disputes see E.W. Kirby, *George Keith (1638 – 1716)*. Rufus M. Jones discusses Keith's impact on American Quakers in *Quakers in the colonies*, 445–58.

<sup>5</sup> Gerard Croese, *The general history of the Quakers* (London, 1696), Appendix, 13.

<sup>6</sup> George Keith, *The pretended yearly meeting of the Quakers* (London, 1695), 10.

<sup>7</sup> Croese, *General history*, Appendix, 15.

His objection then is not that the Quakers believe in the light within, but that they give it the wrong priority. It should be secondary to Christ without, whereas they, 'affirm that this inward Light is sufficient to bring forth the New Birth, and to give Eternal Salvation, without any thing without us, that is, without the Man-Christ, that was outwardly Born, and Crucified, and Rose again'.<sup>8</sup>

Keith claims that Penn, in the very speech in which he declared him to be an apostate from Quakerism, marked himself as an apostate from Christianity. Penn, Keith maintains, declared that Friends 'see no great need of Preaching the Faith of Christ's Death and Sufferings, for all *England* and all *Christendom* have that faith and it doth not profit them'.<sup>9</sup>

Keith's account of this doctrinal disagreement between himself and the Quakers, though stated without the caveats and conditions which Quakers would attach, was broadly speaking true. The leading Quakers at that time had not rejected historical faith, but they had argued that the light within could reveal all that it was necessary to know to make a man a Christian.

William Penn, in his response to an attack on the Quakers by John Faldo, a congregational minister, had written that Christianity 'is not an Historical Belief of the exterior Acts, the true Christ did in that bodily Appearance'. It is 'that which brings to God', so that those who were brought to God before Christ lived or died should be considered Christian regardless of their ignorance of Christ's life. Penn argued that what is important in judging whether a man is Christian is his relation to God, and the goodness of his life, rather than his knowledge of certain facts. Therefore he urged that to distinguish between the virtuous man and the Christian is detrimental to a true understanding of Christianity: 'The distinction between Moral and Christian, the making holy life *Legal*, and Faith in the History of Christ's outward Manifestation *Christianity*, has been a deadly Poyson these latter Ages have been infected with'.<sup>10</sup> When Faldo objected that 'Christianity was introduc'd by Preaching the Promised *Messias* and Pointing out his Human Person: but *Quakerism* by Preaching a Light within', Penn welcomed the distinction. He replied that to preach Christ 'now coming in the Flesh' would detract from his 'true and only great visible appearance' and would continue the world in the false hope that Christ was to come again in the flesh. This outward coming, Penn claims, is something the Christian world has 'long and lazily depended on . . . without their Thirsting after his Inward Holy appearance in the Conscience'.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Appendix, 20.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., Appendix, 20.

<sup>10</sup> William Penn, *Quakerism a new nickname for old Christianity* (n.p., 1672), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 12.

Penn even goes so far as to maintain that it is because men have thought of Christ only after the flesh and expected his second coming to be external that God has raised up the Quakers:

I say, since he has been so much talkt of, and depended on, as to his then Visible Manifestation of himself, and so little, if at all desired after, as to his Spiritual and Invisible Coming into the Hearts of Men, to finish Transgression, and bring in Everlasting Righteousness: Therefore God raised us up, and we are now gone forth into the World to declare *That he is Spiritually Manifested*.<sup>12</sup>

Christ's spiritual manifestation, Penn believes, is his second coming. The spirit of Christ in man perfects him, finishes transgression and leads into everlasting righteousness. The millennium then for which so many had waited has already happened.

Further evidence for Keith's claims can be found in the *Christian Quaker* (1674). Here Penn argued that virtuous heathens could have a saving knowledge of Christ which was entirely derived from the internal light. He wrote:

unless Men will be so unjust to God, as to think (contrary to Scripture and reason) He should let Millions of Men, and scores of Generations live in sin, *without a Light* to show it them, or Law to *limit* them, it must be yielded that they had Light and Law in their Hearts and Consciences, by which they were Convinced of Sin, and that such as obey'd it, were helpt and led to work Righteousness.<sup>13</sup>

Penn believes that the internal light can reveal information about the life of Christ. The argument then that virtuous heathens can be saved by an internal light does not of itself imply that he excludes knowledge of the external Christ from the knowledge necessary to salvation. However the evidence which Penn brings of heathens' knowledge suggests that all Penn considered it necessary to know was, in general terms, that there is a Christ, anointed by God, who will save mankind from sin. He wrote that the light God gave the gentiles 'was *sufficient*' to give 'them a *Sight* of Christ, with respect to the great *Performance*, for which he was so named'.<sup>14</sup>

In the *Christian Quaker* Penn even argued that, though Christ did appear bodily, in our reverence of that manifestation we should give priority to the spirit. It was the spirit which inhabited the body, 'the Invisible, Spiritual and Divine Life' which was the cause of man's salvation. Men then ought, '*chiefly*, to appropriate the Salvation to Christ; as the *Word-God* and to the holy Manhood, but *Secondarily* and *Instrumentally*: I mean, as it was a *Chosen Instrument or Vessel*'.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>13</sup> Penn, *The Christian Quaker* (London, 1699), 48. This is the second edition; the first edition was published in 1674.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 155.

In 1697, the year of Keith's second attack from Turners Hall, George Whitehead responded to Keith in *An antidote against the venome of the snake in the grass*.<sup>16</sup> He started his reply by explaining that the Quakers 'are not offended at G.K.'s preaching Christ, or his Suffering and Dying without us', but at 'his undervaluing the Light within *as not sufficient to Salvation*'.<sup>17</sup> Like Penn, he goes onto explain that it is the light within which is of primary importance.

Whitehead presents the importance of the inner light as one in a series of developments in God's relation to man. He writes that

God in his great Love and Wisdom has affected several Dispensations, one higher and more glorious than another, in order to bring man nearer and nearer to himself; as that of the Law, and of Shadows and Types; that of Prophets; that of *John the Baptist*; that of Christ in the Flesh, and that of Christ in the Spirit and New Covenant, which is higher, more powerful and more glorious than the former, and therein a more clear knowledge of Christ than in all the former.<sup>18</sup>

Keith, Whitehead is arguing, by insisting on Christ in the flesh is limiting his knowledge to that of a former dispensation. Christ in the spirit supersedes without contradicting Christ in the flesh, just as Christ in the flesh superseded the prophets.

Whitehead is quite explicit as to what he means by referring to Christ in the spirit as a new dispensation. Christ he believes has come a second time. Many have missed this coming because they looked for Christ bodily rather than in the spirit:

Because of the carnal Imaginations of too many thereof, who under pretence of expecting Christ to come again in the flesh, in the same manner as he was on Earth, and to be seen with their carnal Eyes, neglect the introversion of their minds to Christ's inward appearance in Spirit.<sup>19</sup>

Like Penn, Whitehead argues that it is the Quakers' purpose to turn men from the expectation of an outward Christ to a consciousness of the inward Christ. He writes that their endeavours are 'to draw People's Minds off, from their carnal expectations of Christ's outward coming again in the flesh', so that Men's 'Minds may be turned to his Light and Grace within them'.<sup>20</sup> It is by this light that Whitehead believes that men may achieve the state of perfection and righteousness which it was thought would follow the second coming: by it men 'may behold the Glory of God, and be

<sup>16</sup> As the title suggests Whitehead's publication is also directed against Charles Leslie's *The snake in the grass* (London, 1696). Leslie, a non-juring divine, accused the Quakers of Socinianism.

<sup>17</sup> George Whitehead, *An antidote against the venome of the snake in the grass* (London, 1697), 28.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 179–80. Penn used the same metaphor in the 'Preface' to George Fox's *Journal* (London, 1694), sigs. A1r–A2v.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

changed into the same Image from Glory to Glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord'.<sup>21</sup>

Far then from the Quakers being anti-Christian, as Keith has alleged, for turning men's minds from the Christ without to the Christ within, Whitehead writes that, 'Antichrist's work now-adays, is to oppose Christ's spiritual Coming and Kingdom; and yet pretend to own his coming in the Flesh'.<sup>22</sup>

Now, Reay and Hill have argued that the Quakers withdrew from worldly politics following the Restoration because their utopian hopes had been disappointed. Though with some complication, we can see that the theological position adopted by Whitehead and Penn, and rejected by Keith, shows a concomitant development. Instead of simply abandoning hope in the imminence of Christ's second coming, Whitehead and Penn argue that it has already happened, only people have failed to notice it. The millenarianism then of the interregnum years is not disappointed but redirected. By recognising the Christ within it is possible to attain the righteousness, the perfection, which was expected from the second coming.

Keith's own account of why he joined the Quakers, written after he had conformed to the Anglican church, confirms that he had started with millenarian expectations. He wrote that he and Robert Barclay

were deceived as many honest and well meaning Persons, under the Profession of the *Quakers*, have been and still are, having too much given up our selves by an implicate faith, to think and believe that *G.F* and others of the *Quakers* chief Teachers, were some eminent Instruments raised up of God, to make some great Reformation in the World.<sup>23</sup>

It might be suggested then that Keith split from the Quakers because he was not prepared to follow Whitehead and Penn's redirection of millenarianism. We might read his insistence on the external Christ, the history of the man who died and rose again at Jerusalem, as evidence that he could not accept that the second coming was a matter of spirit alone. He expected Christ to appear in the flesh.

In his first attack on the Quakers from Turners Hall Keith states this objection. The Quakers, he complains, by their 'Profession of Religion towards God and Light in Men' have excluded faith in Christ the 'God Man', 'as he dyed for us and rose again, and is set down in the Kingdom of the Father, and as he is to come again to judge the Quick and the Dead in the true intire glorified Nature of Man, having the true Soul and Body of Man, the

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>23</sup> Keith, *Standard of the Quakers examined* (London, 1702), 508.

same he had on Earth'.<sup>24</sup> As evidence of the Quakers' apostasy from Christianity Keith quotes the places where Whitehead and Penn deny that there is to be another external coming of Christ. He objects that Whitehead has 'Allegorized to Christ within' all the Scriptural proofs of Christ's external being and so has 'allegorized away his Birth, his Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, and coming to Judgment'.<sup>25</sup>

In his third attack from Turners Hall Keith lists four heads upon which he and the Quakers differ. Each is concerned with the external reality of Christianity. They state the necessity of faith in Christ as he suffered at Jerusalem and rose bodily into heaven, that justification is by Christ's blood outwardly shed, and that we are to expect a bodily resurrection. The final and culminating head is, 'That Christ is to come without us in his Glorified body; even the same that suffered Death for our Sins, to Judge the quick and the Dead'.<sup>26</sup>

Rather than give up the external reality of Christ's coming it would appear Keith responded to the failure of events to fulfil millenarian hopes by abandoning the expectation that the end of the world was imminent. He then looked upon his previous belief as a mistake, and adopted an orthodox position of waiting.

This model explains why Keith made a point of telling Penn at the Yearly Meeting of 1695 that he had been a Quaker before him. Keith tells us that he said,

*William Penn* it becomes thee not, so to abuse me in an open meeting at *Ratcliffe*, calling me an Apostate, and an open Adversary to Truth and Friends. I am thy Elder Brother, and was a Preacher among the *Quakers* before thou was a *Quaker*; though thou and some others of latter years, have lifted up the Heel against me.<sup>27</sup>

Keith believed that the doctrine he was opposing was an innovation. Here, he is claiming that he is in a better position to know in what Quakerism consists and that he is closer to the old truths of Quakerism than Penn. This is of course not entirely fair. Both he and his opponents have had to adapt their beliefs to cope with the disappointment of their millenarian hopes. One can though sympathise with Keith's outrage at being rejected from the religion in which he has spent most of his adult life because of a development in its doctrine.

There are however substantial problems with this model of events. Keith did not become a Quaker until after the restoration of the monarchy, probably towards the end of 1662. If we take Hill's dating of the enunciation of the peace principle, 1661, as marking

<sup>24</sup> Keith, *An exact narrative of the proceedings at Turners-Hall* (London, 1696), sig. [A]4r.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>26</sup> Keith, *A third narrative of the proceedings at Turners Hall* (London, 1698), 1.

<sup>27</sup> Keith, *Pretended yearly meeting of the Quakers*, 13.



the end of Quakers' hopes for a worldly millennium, then Keith was joining the Quakers after they had begun to turn inward. Hill and Reay have argued that it took some time from the first declaration of the peace principle till its universal adoption by Quakers. It appears then safe to assume that there was still much worldly millenarianism amongst Quakers in 1662. We have though to note that the experience of defeat, conceived simply in terms of the political failure of the Commonwealth, was not something Keith felt as a Quaker.

Further, in his early years as a Quaker Keith himself was a strong proponent of the inner Christ, and of the Kingdom of Heaven within. In *An account how George Keith became a Quaker* (1710?) Keith published a manuscript he had written many years before, while still a Quaker, in response to Henry More's observations on his *Immediate revelation*. In this Keith related his first encounter with Christ within, and described how Christ's presence increased daily. This roused him, he wrote, 'to retire out of the World and converse with all Worldly things'. In 'Retiredness and Solitude', he tells the reader,

I find the Gates of the Heavenly Paradice to be opened unto me in myself, in the Center of my Soul, in the Divine Birth, and Geniture of life in me. And though I do not in any sensible way Converse with Angels, See their Shapes or hear their Melody, or See into the Beauty and Glory of Paradise without me; yet I converse with God himself, and with Christ Jesus in Spirit.<sup>28</sup>

Here Keith, though reminding the reader of an external paradise, is claiming that he has achieved a return to paradise, the millenarian dream, within.

In *Immediate revelation* (1668) Keith claimed that knowledge of Christ within surpasses the 'knowledge of Christ after the flesh'. The Apostles, Keith maintained, were instructed not to rest in the knowledge of the external history of Christ but 'to look for a better, a more clear, and full manifestation in themselves, he appearing in a spiritual, glorious, heavenly, misterious way in their hearts'.<sup>29</sup> Keith even goes so far as to claim that the Kingdom of Christ, 'is not of this world, it is a spiritual Kingdom; it is a Kingdom within, and it comes with power and great glory, but not with observation to the eye that looks abroad'.<sup>30</sup>

Since we find here that Keith is espousing the very doctrine to which he later objected, and since he joined the Quakers after the experience of political defeat, is the model already offered to explain his disagreement with the Quakers in the 1690s invalidated? I think not, but we do need to recognise two major complications.

<sup>28</sup> Keith, *An account how George Keith became a Quaker* (?London, ?1710), 7.

<sup>29</sup> Keith, *Immediate revelation* (London?, 1668), 37–8.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

The millenarianism that Keith expressed as a Quaker during the 1660s was both internal and external. He could without conflict with other Quakers believe that the teaching of Quakers would lead so many people to experience the second coming and hence be perfected that, even though the second coming was to be experienced internally, the Kingdom of God would be built on earth.

In *An account how George Keith became a Quaker* Keith discussed the reformation of the world as being caused by a greater visitation of light, rather than the second bodily appearance of Christ. The reformation he envisaged was of the whole world. Keith even appears to have believed that his preaching would play a part in bringing it about. He wrote:

many times my Soul is moved with strong Cries and Yearnings unto God, for the good of all Man . . . that God would have Mercy upon them yet more abundantly, and visit them with a more abundant Visitation of his Life and Light, and Divine Power from Above; which I hope in due time shall be, so that poor Mankind shall no more be Satan's Drudges, but be Restored unto the Glorious Liberty of the Sons of God, in a manner as universally as their captivity hath been. And this God hath Promised, and is left upon Record in Scripture, and he hath given me Heart to believe that it shall be Fulfilled. Therefore I travel for the Good of all.<sup>31</sup>

Keith's belief that his preaching would contribute to the reformation suggests he thought that reformation was imminent.

In *Divine immediate revelation and inspiration continued in the true church* (1684) Keith wrote more explicitly, and perhaps with a touch of impatience, that the increase in light is to be expected soon: 'surely the time is near wherein God is to visit all *Nations*, with his *Spirit, Light, Life, and Grace* in a larger measure than in *ages* by gone'.<sup>32</sup>

Keith experienced defeat in the failure of these millenarian expectations to come to fruition. In the years following the Restoration, the Quakers, as Reay has shown, changed from an eagerly proselytizing group to a well defined minority sect.<sup>33</sup> The great visitation of light to all nations had not happened. The experience of defeat then did not occur in an instant with the Restoration, but grew gradually as the years and decades passed. Nevertheless, it was in the light of this defeat that Keith was eventually forced to decide whether to follow Penn and argue that Paradise is only to be found within a few individuals, or to accept that Christ's second coming had not happened and turn to orthodoxy to await his outward manifestation.

<sup>31</sup> Keith, *An account how George Keith became a Quaker*, 8.

<sup>32</sup> Keith, *Divine immediate revelation and inspiration continued in the true church* (London, 1684), sig. A7v.

<sup>33</sup> Barry Reay, *Quakers and the English Revolution*, 104–22.

Keith's decision was determined by a factor that we have not yet considered: a factor which leads us into an epistemological battle that was fought out within the Quakers following their concentration on Christ within.

Quakerism had from its conception talked of a light within by which knowledge of God was to be obtained. Following the Restoration and the new emphasis on the internal second coming of Christ the concept of the inner light, which was equated with Christ within, underwent considerable philosophical development. Maurice Creasey characterises the difference as a movement 'from the Meeting to the Study'. He writes insightfully that the 'contrast between the words "*inward*" and "*outward*" in Restoration Quaker theology is no longer, 'simply that between, on the one hand, formal, conventional knowledge of the Christian revelation and, on the other a genuine and transforming acquaintance with that same revelation'.<sup>34</sup> The new contrast is between different levels of knowledge, and different types of truth. Christ within, in the sense of the inner light, became the key term in the validation of Quaker doctrine. Keith's schism with the Quakers, and his decision to reject an internal second coming of Christ, can be seen as a consequence of his failure to control the epistemological consequences of the concept of Christ within, the inner light.

Restoration Quakers agreed that the light was added to the natural mind of man by God. They did not however speak with a single voice when it came to considering how that light operated; whether it acted by extending the natural capacity to know, that is whether it was like man's natural reason but reached beyond it, or whether it was a source of knowledge of an entirely different nature.

In his *Immediate revelation* Keith started a discussion of the inner light by distinguishing between that which is known by Christ within, immediate revelation, and that which is known 'meerly in the principle and light of reason, or in that principle where a man is capable to know the things of a man as a man'. From this distinction, he argued, a man cannot know 'things which are supernatural' in his natural reason. The minds of men can only know things 'in a principle that is proportionable unto them'.<sup>35</sup>

However, Keith went on to say that it is possible for a man to have knowledge 'touching natural things' revealed to him by God and understood by man 'in the nature and principle of his natural understanding or reason'.<sup>36</sup>

Keith's model of the inner light allows this complication because, according to Keith, God gives to men a new organ of understanding when he gives them the light. More important to

<sup>34</sup> Maurice A. Creasey, "*Inward*" and "*outward*", 11, 12.

<sup>35</sup> Keith, *Immediate revelation*, 4-5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

Keith than distinguishing the source of the knowledge is distinguishing the nature of the knowledge. So, if God reveals information that may be understood by natural reason, then, Keith believes, he does not do so in the inner light. Keith's priority is ensuring that the inner light is not confused with reason. It is by a different organ, not by an extension of man's reason, that that which is revealed by God concerning supernatural things is understood: 'This seed and birth of God, is only that suitable and proportionable Organ, instrument, or principle, in which divine & supernatural things can be sufficiently and satisfyingly, that is to say intuitively known'.<sup>37</sup> The only knowledge of supernatural things that men may have in their natural understanding is an 'abstractive' knowledge. This, according to Keith, is that which is 'received from the borrowed, improper and like (which are ever far unlike) forms, properties, qualities and idae's [*sic*] of things'.<sup>38</sup> It is a type of knowledge comparable, he writes, to knowing things by someone else's description of them. The intuitive knowledge of supernatural things that we have in the seed of God is, on the contrary, knowing things as they are in themselves. This is comparable to seeing something for ourselves.<sup>39</sup>

Robert Barclay, in his *Apology*, followed Keith in making a distinction between the organs as well as the sources of natural and supernatural knowledge. He writes that the rational principle in man is not 'the *right Organ*' for a knowledge of God.<sup>40</sup> Barclay does accept that the natural principle of man can obtain and deal with some knowledge of God, but like Keith he considers that the way in which the natural reason of man contains knowledge of God is inferior. For Keith's terms, abstract and intuitive, Barclay substitutes the more judgmental '*soaring airy-head-Knowledge*' and '*Saving, heart-Knowledge*'.<sup>41</sup> He goes further than Keith in condemning the use of reason in knowledge of supernatural things by asserting that the attempt to use the rational principle not only 'cannot profit' a man 'towards *Salvation*: but rather *hindreth*'.<sup>42</sup>

Barclay admits that as natural reason, Scripture and the divine light all come from God none will clash. However, he defends immediate revelation from scrutiny founded on reason or Scripture: 'it will not from thence follow, that these *Divine Revelations* are to be

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>39</sup> With this distinction of abstract and intuitive knowledge Keith is translating into philosophical terms the distinction that Creasey observes was commonly made in the interregnum years between a 'professor' and a 'possessor' of truth.

<sup>40</sup> Maurice Creasey has shown that in *The possibility and necessity of immediate revelation* (1686) Barclay distinguishes not only the organs of knowledge but also the ideas that they deal with into natural and supernatural, "*Inward*" and "*outward*", 16.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Barclay, *Truth triumphant* (London, 1692), 270.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 337.

subjected to the Examination either of the outward *Testimony of Scripture*, or of the humane or *Natural Reason* of man'.<sup>43</sup> Since, Barclay argues, 'Christ hath provided for us so good an *Instructor*', that is, the divine light, 'What need we set up our own *Carnal* and *Corrupt Reason* for a *Guide* to us in matters *spiritual*'.<sup>44</sup>

Barclay uses this reasoning throughout the *Apology* to attack those who rely too heavily on man's natural reason. This doctrine, as he puts it, 'Contradicts, Overturms and Enervates the false Doctrine of the *Pelagians*, *Semi-Pelagians*, *Socinians* and others, who exalt the *light of Nature*'.<sup>45</sup>

The number of times in the *Apology* that Barclay attacks those who construct theological doctrine by reason reveals that he considers it important to show that the Quakers' doctrines are different. There are, he believes, two reasons why the two have been confused. The first is that: 'such is the *malice* of our *Adversaries*, that they cease not sometimes to *Calumniate* us, as if we preached up a *Natural Light*'. The second is that,

there are some that lean to the *Doctrine* of *Socinus* and *Pelagius*, who perswade themselves through *mistake*, and out of no *ill design* to *Injure* us, as if this, which we preach up, were some *natural Power* and *Faculty* of the *Soul*; and that we only differ in the *wording* of it, and not in the thing itself.<sup>46</sup>

Barclay, then, is distinguishing Quakers from those who argue by reason, Socinians, not only because some people are maliciously confounding the two, but because some people quite sincerely believe the two to be the same. From this it may be inferred that Barclay is concerned that the doctrine some Quakers have presented resembles Socinianism. It thereby becomes apparent that one of Barclay's purposes in writing the *Apology* was to establish a controlling, definitive account of Quakerism, and in particular the doctrine of the inner light which excluded the possibility of Socinianism.

William Penn had indeed given cause for Quakerism to be confused with Socinianism.<sup>47</sup> In *The sandy foundation shaken* (1668) he had attacked three orthodox Christian doctrines on the grounds

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 284.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 331.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 337.

<sup>47</sup> H.J. McLachlan gives Penn a place in *Socinianism in seventeenth-century England* (Oxford, 1951), 303–7. M.B. Endy agrees that Penn's theology shows 'rationalist' inclinations. However he considers that it is Penn who is isolated within the Quakers; he writes, 'Penn was somewhat unique among the Quakers in the extent to which he linked the inner light with man's rational powers'. Though it may be true to say that Penn went further towards rationalism than other Quakers, the support that he received from Whitehead, and the expulsion of Keith, who was opposing this development, suggest that the Quakers were more in accord with Penn than Endy has recognised. M.B. Endy, *William Penn and early Quakerism*, 240.

that they disagreed with 'the Authority of Scripture Testimonies, and Right Reason'.<sup>48</sup> One of the doctrines was the Trinity; perhaps the doctrine most commonly doubted by those who judged religion by reason. Penn's refutation was itself of a logical kind: for instance he wrote,

If there be three distinct and separate Substances, because every person is inseparable from its own Substance; and as there is no person that's not a Substance in common acceptation among men, so do the Scriptures plentifully agree herein; and since the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God . . . then unless the Father, Son, and Spirit, are three distinct Nothings, they must be three distinct Gods.<sup>49</sup>

After reading this, and the many arguments like it, it is natural to assume that when Penn wrote that the mind must apply itself 'unto that Light and *Grace* which brings Salvation' in order to dispel 'those mists Tradition hath cast before thy eyes', the notion of light to which he was referring was very close to right reason.<sup>50</sup>

The publication of *The sandy foundation shaken* led to Penn being imprisoned in the Tower of London. From there he wrote an apology, *Innocency with her open face presented* (1669). This work contains an account of Socinus which though it stops well short of identifying Penn as a Socinian would certainly alarm anyone who considered Socinianism heretical. He wrote:

As for my being a *Socinian*, I must confess I have read of one *Socinus* of (that they call) a noble family in *Sene in Italy*, who . . . became a *perpetual Exile* for his *Conscience*, whose parts, wisdom, gravity and just behaviour made him the most famous with the *Polonian* and *Transylvanian* Churches; *but I was never baptized into his name*, and therefore deny that reproachful Epithete; and if in any thing I acknowledge the verity of his Doctrine, *it is for the Truth's sake*, of which, in many things he had a clearer prospect than most of his Contemporaries.<sup>51</sup>

We must not overstate the division between Penn and Barclay, or Keith in his Quaker days. In those places where Penn explicitly considered the divine light he always agreed with Barclay that it is something beyond the natural mind of man. In the *Christian Quaker* he described it as '*Superadded*, that is, over and above Man's Composition, as a *Meer Understanding Creature*'.<sup>52</sup> The difference lay in the way in which Penn employed the concept of the inner light. As this sympathy with Socinus's doctrines suggests, Penn believed the inner light to be very similar in nature to natural reason.

We can witness the difference of Penn's concept in his habit of arguing that knowledge which others believed to be obtained by

<sup>48</sup> Penn, *The sandy foundation shaken* (London, 1668), title page.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>51</sup> Penn, *Innocency with her open face presented* (London, 1669), 12.

<sup>52</sup> Penn, *The Christian Quaker* (London, 1699), 177.

natural reason was in fact derived from the inner light. For instance, in the *Christian Quaker* Penn argued virtuous heathens had the knowledge of God's existence from within, while it was commonly maintained that this much could be deduced merely by the natural reason examining the works of creation.

Further evidence is to be found in subtle differences in the accounts that he gave of the inner light. For example, in *The spirit of truth vindicated against that of error and envy* (1672) Penn defended the Quakers' claim of infallibility by arguing that the spirit which God has given to man, the inner light, has enabled the Quakers to return their understandings to the perfect state Adam's was in before the Fall. He wrote,

Man has to rectify and assist his Fallible Judgment, an Unerring, Certain, Infallible Spirit, Power or Principle; which as Man listens unto, and follows, his Understanding becomes illuminated, his Reason purified, and a Sound Judgment restored.<sup>53</sup>

Penn, it should be noted, does not claim that the spirit given by God is in itself illuminated reason, but that it illuminates reason. However, Penn is maintaining that a perfect reason is a blessing, and indeed a requirement, which follows from attending to the spirit.

In *An address to Protestants* (1679) Penn goes beyond Barclay's position that reason and religion will not conflict to argue that '*Religion and Reason* are so consistent, that *Religion* can neither be understood nor maintained without *Reason*'. As Endy has observed, the apparent conflict between this and Barclay's doctrine is mitigated by Penn's qualification that by reason he means,

the Reason of the first Nine Verses of the First of John. For so *Tertullian*, and some other Ancients as well as Modern Criticks, gives us the word *Logos*; and the Divine Reason is One in all; that Lamp of God which Lights our Candle and enlightens our Darkness, and is the Measure and Test of all our Knowledge.<sup>54</sup>

By this qualification Penn intends to convey the idea that the reason that he is talking about here is different from ordinary reason. However, in choosing to talk about the divine light as reason, albeit a special divine reason, Penn implicitly attacks the doctrine of the inner light as promulgated by Barclay and Keith.

In *A defence of a paper call'd Gospel truths* (1698), written after Keith left the Quakers, Penn presented an account of the distinction between the light and natural reason which again differed from that of Barclay and Keith. Instead of two separate organs he argued that

<sup>53</sup> Penn, *Works* (London, 1726), vol. ii, 106. M.B. Endy drew my attention to this work, to *An address to Protestants*, and to *A defence of a paper call'd Gospel truths*. See Endy, *William Penn and early Quakerism*, 249–51.

<sup>54</sup> Penn, *Works*, vol. i, 778.

the inner light simply provides new material for man's reason to exercise itself upon. The reader is told that 'our *Natural Rational Faculty is our Sight*, but not our *Light*', that is by reason 'we discern and judge what the Divine *Light* shows us'.<sup>55</sup>

That Penn is not isolated in the account he gives of the nature of the inner light can be seen in a book written with Whitehead, *A serious apology for the principles and practices of the people called Quakers* (1671). After taking care to explain that the 'true light' is 'Divine and Immortal (being the eternal Word) not Natural', Whitehead proceeds to write that 'it is a light of Reason, proceeding from the Word'.<sup>56</sup> His notion appears to be that the divine light contains truths and deals with subjects that as men we would not know, but that the knowledge derived from the light, in regard to its nature as knowledge rather than its subject matter, is of the same type as natural knowledge.

Whitehead then, like Penn, attributes many things to the divine light that others considered to be derived from natural reason. There is an example of this in his response to an attack on the Quakers by Thomas Jenner, a Presbyterian minister. Jenner disputed the Quaker belief in the universality of the divine light. He argued that the only universal light is the light of natural reason. Whitehead answered by listing those things which Jenner argued were known by natural reason, such as '*that there is a God, and that this God is to be Worshipped*'. Then, simply from this list, Whitehead claimed that Jenner is 'breaking the neck of his own cause'.<sup>57</sup> Whitehead's argument is that a light that reveals that there is a God and that he is to be worshipped must be divine.

To characterise the difference between Keith and Barclay on the one hand, and Whitehead and Penn on the other, we might say that though both accept that the divine light is something beyond natural reason, Whitehead and Penn believe it to be of a similar nature to reason, while Keith and Barclay do their best to assert its difference. Whitehead and Penn then reclassify knowledge which had been thought natural as supernatural, and test orthodox beliefs by this supernatural reason, while Keith and Barclay argue that reason is an inadequate and misleading guide in theological affairs.

Keith's insistence on the importance of Christ without is of a piece with his unhappiness with the concept of inner light, Christ within, as it was expressed by Whitehead and Penn. By stressing Christ without not only does Keith express his faith in an outward second coming, but he is able to assert more clearly the difference

<sup>55</sup> Penn, *Works*, vol. ii, 898.

<sup>56</sup> Penn and Whitehead, *A serious apology for the principles and practices of the people called Quakers* (London, 1671), 56, 58. Whitehead wrote the first, Penn the second part of this work.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.



between revelation and reason as sources of knowledge. The teachings and the history of the man who died at Golgotha and rose again were incontrovertibly distinct from the abstract reasonings of the mind.

In one of his most successful attacks on the Quakers, the *Deism of William Penn* (1699), Keith argued that Penn had deliberately attempted to introduce deism by his concept of the inner light. Keith based this claim on Penn's belief that 'the Light within every Conscience teacheth us, as well as Scriptures' all that it is necessary to know in order to be saved. To this Keith objected that:

none of all the twelve Articles of the Apostle's Creed, according to the true sense of Scripture, or the common received sense of all true Christians, are taught by the Light within, without the external Revelation of the Scripture; therefore according to *W.P.* the belief of none of these twelve Articles is necessary to our Salvation.<sup>58</sup>

So, he concludes, Penn's religion must be nothing but '*Plain Deism* appearing with her open face'.<sup>59</sup>

Keith now imposes a strict division between those things which can be known from within and those things for which men require external testimony. He writes:

The knowledge of God's Goodness, discoverable by the Light in every Conscience, in the Works of Creation and Providence, may give Men that are morally honest, some possible Faith, that he will be favourable to them: But the infallible ground of certainty, concerning eternal Life and Salvation, none ever had or can have without the Promises and special Revelation.<sup>60</sup>

These 'Promises and special Revelation' Keith argues, as a non-Quaker, are, for everyone except a very few prophets, only obtainable through Scripture.

The important development here from Keith's thought in his Quaker days is not in the knowledge he believed it necessary to have in order to be saved, but in the source of that knowledge. By insisting that saving information comes from outside the believer Keith prevents the Quaker tendency, as he sees it, of confusing saving knowledge with knowledge discovered by reason.

In *The standard of the Quakers examined* (1702) Keith takes on the task of answering Barclay's *Apology*. This he does with a very different tone to that in which he attacked Penn.<sup>61</sup> He writes in the

<sup>58</sup> Keith, *The deism of William Penn* (London, 1699), 20.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 14

<sup>61</sup> It is interesting to note that Maurice Creasey, a twentieth-century Quaker, independently makes the same distinction between Barclay and Penn. Barclay's acknowledgements of the value of Scripture he considers 'unquestionably sincere and genuine', while 'For all his rather laboured assurances that he does, indeed value highly the facts contained in the Gospels, Penn does not altogether avoid giving the impression that, in some way, the Word's becoming flesh is almost an embarrassment to him in his apologetic', "*Inward*" and "*outward*", 12, 13.

Preface that at the time the *Apology* was written he shared many of the author's errors, and admits that Barclay had in fact followed his *Immediate revelation*.<sup>62</sup> Keith even supposes that had Barclay lived he would have changed his opinions in the same way that Keith had done and so renounced Quakerism.<sup>63</sup>

With bitter experience Keith maintains that Barclay's doctrines inevitably lead to deism because he elevates the inner light over Scripture. This alone necessarily confuses reason and revelation so that,

notwithstanding this mighty difference that the Author makes, or seems to make betwixt the *Quakers* and *Pelagians*, and *Socinians* on this Head, the difference between them is not so much real, as Nominal; for what the *Pelagians* called the *light of Nature* and the *Socinians* now call it, is the very same, what the *Quakers* call the *Light within*.<sup>64</sup>

However, whilst Keith believes Penn was aware of the consequence of elevating the inner light, and was deliberately leading Quakerism towards deism, Keith asserts that for Barclay deism was an unforeseen and undesired consequence. He writes:

I am heartily sorry, to find this author while he thought himself in this his work, laying down a solid foundation for Christianity, to be in the mean while by his method of Doctrine undermining it and introducing meer *Deism* and *Natural Religion* in its room.<sup>65</sup>

Barclay, Keith maintains was a genuine Christian. He believed in the importance of the outward Christ and 'in this respect, as well as many others, he was more Christian than his 'elder brother G.W.', 'William Penn', or 'George Fox'.<sup>66</sup>

Since Keith has acknowledged that he shared Barclay's errors, and has suggested that Barclay, like him, would have eventually left the Quakers, it is fair to suggest that in writing about Barclay Keith is also writing about his own youthful self. In defending Barclay's intentions while attacking his doctrines Keith has implicitly argued that his own early position on the inner light was a mistake, the evil consequences of which he did not foresee. He would have us believe that the reason that he left the Quakers was that the logical consequences of this belief became apparent to him.

However, with regard to this side of our explanation, it will become us to be more critical of Keith's behaviour. We might rather argue that, instead of discovering a concealed logical consequence, Keith found that the notion of the inner light was not something

<sup>62</sup> Keith, *The standard of the Quakers examined* (London, 1702), sig. A4r.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. A5r.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

that he could rhetorically contain. He was happy with the inner light so long as it did not become a means to subject Scriptural doctrine to attack by reason. In time Keith became convinced that Penn and Whitehead were employing the concept of the inner light in this way, regardless of the attempts of Barclay and himself to limit its connection with reason. Following Barclay's death and the growing dominance of Whitehead and Penn, Keith was forced to abandon the concept of internal immediate revelation and return to more conventional ways of validating religion.

Now, the account of Keith's split with the Quakers that I would like to present turns, as Keith himself wrote, on the conflict between Christ within and Christ without. There were two developments in the Christ within with which Keith was unhappy. The first, that which fits with the account of Restoration Quakers given by Reay and Hill, is the turn to Christ within as a method of redirecting apparently disappointed millenarian hopes. The second was the way in which the Christ within, as it was epistemologically conceived – the inner light – was being employed so as to increasingly resemble reason.

Like the shift in millenarian hopes, the epistemological shift took place after the Restoration, yet it is less clear that it was caused by the Restoration. We may though suggest that the abstract, philosophical debate concerning the nature and the function of Christ within, as the inner light, was prompted by the heavy doctrinal load that the redirection of millenarian hopes forced that notion to carry.

Whatever the cause for the development, Keith, when his expectation of Christ's second coming, in the form of a mass conversion to Quakerism, was disappointed, questioned the insistence on Christ within. His disappointment combined with the running dispute over the nature of the inner light and led him to abandon the internal millennium with the internal light. He turned then to an external Christ and the evidence of Scripture, and so made what was for him a painful step out of Quakerism and into Anglicanism.

