

Towards Universalism

by

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1. '-isms'

We are surrounded by -isms. Examples include pacifism, socialism, vegetarianism, behaviourism, materialism, Buddhism, theism, unitarianism and many others. There are also words which are like -ism words in that they carry demands for allegiance even though they do not in fact end in -ism, for example Christianity (which could equally be called Christ-ism), religion and democracy. These words are tiresome for three main reasons. In the first place disputes over -isms sometimes reflect failure of communication and give rise to seeming disagreements which could be resolved if terms were more clearly defined; for example someone who claims to be defending pacifism may be using the word differently from someone who claims to be attacking 'it' (yet how can there be an 'it' if the two sides are talking about something different?) Secondly, -isms sometimes encourage the riding of hobby horses; for example we may be tempted to talk about our commitment to pacifism, socialism, vegetarianism or whatever at inappropriate times, bringing the matter in 'by the scruff of the neck', as it were, when it would have been better to have kept silent. Thirdly, -isms are liable to be divisive. Thus if we feel strongly about a particular -ism, say pacifism, we are likely to wonder how it is that any right-minded Friend could be so misguided as to disagree with us. We may even wonder if we should continue to be a member of a Society which 'drags its feet' on what we consider to be crucial issues, or, more aggressively, we may feel, like asking if there is room in the Society for those who differ from us on matters of such importance. -isms tend to 'steal the show' and to divert us from 'waiting upon God'.

Yet the Society would be the poorer if we none of us subscribed to any -ism. Without -isms our moral and spiritual insights could not grow. We need them as rallying points. Most of us would pay lip-service to the quotation which in the past used to appear on the cover of *The Friend*: 'In essentials unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things charity'. But in practice there may be disagreements as to what *is* essential. If Quakerism is to be something more than a kind of benevolent humanism in which any view within very broad limits is tolerated we are right to feel strongly on certain issues. An important point about -isms is that they have to be taken *seriously*; they make demands upon us and, in some cases at least, what is called for is total commitment. How, then, can we combine total commitment with tolerance?

As I see the situation, part of Friends' commitment is a commitment to *listen*. Not all that is said at Meeting for Worship will necessarily 'speak to our condition' since we are all made differently. What is said, however, may still be meaningful or 'authentic' for the person

concerned and for others present, and this is something which we can share and rejoice in. What is distinctive about Friends (and it is not necessarily arrogant to look for distinctive features) is not only the silence in Meeting for Worship but the commitment to listening. The same kind of listening is agreed to be necessary in our business meetings.

-isms, then, need not be divisive in any uncomfortable way, provided they are not defended or attacked with the intention of 'winning' the argument. It is no sin to feel certainty in one's commitment to an -ism, provided only that it is an 'open-minded certainty' - something which one does not wish to thrust down the throats of others¹. It is perfectly proper for Friends to move (or consider moving) *towards* a particular -ism. What none of us should do is to wave a banner with our particular -ism engraved upon it and expect everyone to become immediate converts.

It is with these considerations in mind that I have entitled this pamphlet *Towards Universalism*. I shall be inviting Friends to move - or at least consider moving - in the direction of universalism. This implies, not that universalism is some new creed or -ism to which all Friends are being asked to subscribe, but that we should give further thought to expressing our message in universalist terms.

2. Universalism

There is a technical theological sense in which universalism is defined as 'the doctrine of universal salvation or redemption' (O.E.D.), a universalist being 'one who believes or maintains the doctrine that redemption or election is extended to the whole of mankind'. This sense need not concern us here. The relevant sense is that given on the inside front cover of recent issues of 'The Universalist', viz. the view that 'no religion has the final and exclusive revelation of truth'.

In what follows I shall not attempt a defence of universalism in general. My purpose is to give expression to the difficulties which some of us feel over the claim that historical Christianity is the one true religion. For purposes of exposition I shall group these difficulties under two heads. In the first place, if we make this claim it is hard to see how we can avoid the charge of parochialism. Secondly, if the claim is valid, it follows that in order to be a Christian one must believe in certain *historical facts*; and this requirement is uncomfortable since one's duty when faced with documents which purport to be historical must surely be to search for truth and not distort the evidence in the interests of some interpretation which has been specified in advance. The next section will deal with the first of these difficulties and the following section the second.

To avoid any possible misunderstanding I should like to make clear that I am not suggesting that all religions are saying the same thing. Exploration of common ground between different religions is of course a worthwhile exercise, but detailed studies in the area of comparative religion would be needed before one could speak on this subject with any confidence. More important, I shall not be suggesting that those brought up in a particular religious tradition should change their allegiance by forgoing their existing beliefs and opting for universalism instead. There is room for what John Hick² has called 'religious pluralism', according to which it is possible for individuals to retain the beliefs of their own tradition while allowing that there are other routes to enlightenment. In addition, however, there may be many people nowadays who find themselves with no specific religious affiliation of any kind. By moving further along the road to universalism the Society of Friends might well find itself in a position to offer a home to such people, and this must surely be welcomed. In contrast, if there is insistence that the Society should be exclusively Christian, then no such development would be possible, nor would it be easy for us to claim any longer that our Society does not require its members to subscribe to creeds.

3. The charge of parochialism

A striking attempt to face the issue of 'parochialism' was recently made by John Hick³.

I cannot then, as a Christian, solve the problem of religious pluralism by holding that my own religion is a response to the divine reality but that others are merely human projections. I cannot say, with Karl Barth, that 'the Christian religion is true, because it pleased God, who alone can be the judge in the matter, to affirm it to be the true religion', so that 'it alone has the commission and the authority to be a missionary religion, i.e. to confront the world of religions as the only true religion, with absolute self-confidence to invite and challenge it to abandon its ways and to start on the Christian way' (Church Dogmatics, 1/2, pp350 & 337). Such sublime bigotry could only be possible for one who had no real interest in or awareness of the wider religious life of mankind . . . There may be clear and convincing criteria by which some forms of religion can be seen to be 'better' or 'higher' than others. But if we restrict our attention to the great world traditions the only criterion by which any one of these could be judged to be the only true religion, with all others dismissed as false, would be its own dogmatic assertion, in its more chauvinistic moments, to this effect.

It is perhaps unfair to Barth to quote him out of context. His words as they stand, however, imply an exclusiveness which large numbers of Friends, I am sure - and perhaps many members of other denominations - would find unacceptable. They come uncomfortably near to expressing the kind of narrow-mindedness which Fielding has caricatured in his portrait of Mr Thwackum⁴. Moreover this view is a harsh one since it seems to imply that anyone outside 'our' group - anyone not of 'our' particular religion - is necessarily excluded from salvation.

It is interesting to note that even in the early centuries of Christianity attempts were made to modify this extreme form of exclusivity. The following passage from Justin Martyr is a striking example of this:

But lest some should, without reason, and for the perversion of what we teach, maintain that we say that Christ was born one hundred and fifty years ago under Quirinius, and taught what we say he taught subsequently in the time of Pontius Pilate; and should urge against us as though all men who were born before him were irresponsible - let us anticipate and solve the difficulty. We have been taught that Christ is the firstborn of God, and we have declared above that he is the Word of whom every race of men were partakers; and those who lived with reason are Christians, even though they were thought atheists; as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and men like them; and among the barbarians, Abraham and Ananias, Azarias and Misael and Elias, and many others whose actions and names we decline for the present to recount because we know it would be tedious.⁵

This passage seems to me to be a brave attempt to avoid the charge of parochialism by suggesting that a person can still be a Christian even though he has in fact never heard of Jesus Christ. In recent years such persons have been referred to as 'anonymous Christians': they may not actually use the *name* of Christ but they can still be his followers without knowing it.

John Hick's comment on the view that there can be 'anonymous Christians' is that it is 'well-intentioned' but that it cannot stand as more than an 'interim measure'.⁶ It seems to me that there are three reasons why this view is no satisfactory answer to the charge of parochialism. In the first place it shows a lack of sensitivity since it is surely unpleasantly patronising to say to another person, 'You are a member of our exclusive group even though you do not realise the fact'. There is a story that Gandhi, when told what a good Christian he was, replied, perhaps with a suggestion of reproof, that he was a Hindu. One must surely agree that this reproof was

merited. Secondly, if the contention that there are ‘anonymous Christians’ is valid at all, it is hard to see why in that case there should not be ‘anonymous Buddhists’, ‘anonymous Muslims’ etc; and, if so, we are back where we started, since there would be a number of different claims to primacy with no clear criteria for distinguishing between them. Thirdly, we should remember that, except in a small number of cases, people follow the religion of the country in which they were born and brought up⁷; and it is surely uncomfortable to suppose that only those born or brought up in certain parts of the world have the chance to hear about the one and only true religion.

Some may wish to say that making this sort of claim on behalf of historical Christianity is not only parochial but even arrogant. Although the charge of parochialism seems to me difficult to avoid, the charge of arrogance is less straightforward. There are some Christian denominations where emphasis is placed on the appeal to authority - for example the authority of the church in the case of Roman Catholics and that of the bible in the case of some evangelical sects. Here there can be no question of arrogance, since such people are not speaking 'of themselves' but on the basis of ecclesiastical or biblical authority. In the case of those religious groups which rely on conscience or personal revelation, however, the situation is more complicated. Thus if, as Friends, we make claims either singly or collectively, to correctness on religious or moral matters we clearly need to search our consciences very closely *in case* we are merely being opinionated or arrogant. There may be circumstances, however, where we have no option but to follow the demands of conscience however arrogant this may seem, for example if we have been asked to enlist for military service and believe this to be wrong. In general, therefore, the charge of arrogance is different from the charge of parochialism and less easy to substantiate.

In retrospect one may perhaps wonder how it is that the charge of parochialism has so far received relatively little attention from theologians and others. What seems plain is that with increasing ease of travel from one part of the world to another and - at least as far as Britain is concerned - the presence in our schools of children from many different racial and religious backgrounds, the charge is not one that will simply disappear. To reiterate the ‘certainties’ of historical Christianity may meet the needs of some individuals, but one must expect a growing number for whom this will be insufficient.

4. The duty to believe in historical facts

It is a commonplace among philosophers that the word ‘believe’ is not the name of some activity. Thus it makes no sense to speak of doing one's believing quickly, slowly or carefully; nor is it the case, as the White Queen appears to have supposed, that with sufficient practice one might succeed in believing as many as six impossible things before breakfast.⁸ One can think of situations where there is the duty to believe *in* someone in the sense of trusting them; but there is surely something absurd in requiring a person to interpret historical evidence in a particular way even though in all sincerity he believes that a different interpretation is likely to be true.

Moreover even if such a person indicated that he was prepared to conform and that from now on he would try, for example, to interpret the gospel narrative in a particular way, it is hard to see what there could be that is specifically *religious* about such an undertaking. The person who says ‘Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief’⁹ is committing himself unconditionally to a way of life; and it would be absurd to interpret these words as a request to be made more credulous over certain historical or factual issues. To commit oneself to a particular religious standpoint is totally different from coming to a fresh belief about the interpretation of an historical document. In the words of Ralph Hetherington, ‘Once we are into the game of carbon dating . . . we enter an entirely new universe of discourse’.¹⁰

It remains to consider an objection. It might be said that any organisation has the right to require certain commitments from its members and that those who feel unable to make such commitments are at liberty not to join. Now there are of course organisations where such a

requirement would be entirely reasonable. For example, if a group of people choose to form a society for restoring the good name of King Richard III it would be quite unobjectionable if they made membership conditional on the belief that Richard did *not* murder the princes in the tower; and if someone believes that he *did* murder them, such a person would have no cause for complaint if his application for membership was turned down. The present discussion, however, is concerned not just with any organisation but with a *religious* organisation claiming to be in possession of the final truth; and in view of this claim one would in effect be saying to a prospective applicant, 'Yes, of course you are free not to join us, but I should warn you that you are jeopardising your chances of salvation if you choose not to do so.' Religious bodies can justifiably require (or perhaps better, as in the case of Friends, encourage) their members to *act* in certain ways, for example by attending places of worship, and they can ask for commitment to certain views about the human condition, for example the view that there is 'that of God in every man' (provided it is not given the status a dogma); but if they require belief in particular historical matters they are no longer asking for a *religious* commitment but for something else. This can be shown if one considers the case of a person who reads the gospels and the relevant passages in Tacitus and Pliny and announces: 'Yes, you've convinced me - he was a historical figure. This is a change of mind, certainly, but it is a change which has nothing to do with religion.'

Now many of us are glad of the fact that, even in the case of religious commitment, the Society of Friends imposes fewer constraints than most other religious bodies, but few of us, I am sure, would want to argue that there should be no constraints at all. Thus a person who had no intention of coming to Meeting for Worship would need to be questioned very carefully about his reasons for applying for membership, while someone who showed racial prejudice or believed that the main objective in life was to 'get rich quick' (and showed no sign of being open to the possibility of reconsidering these beliefs) would no doubt be told - quietly one hopes, but in no uncertain terms - that, for the present at least, the Society was not the place for him. In brief, a religious body is entitled to make religious demands, but it is inappropriate for it to ask its members to accept any particular historical beliefs. Now it may be said that there is nothing unreasonable in asking people to accept the gospel narratives as basically historical. If anyone supposes otherwise (so runs the argument) he would have to accept some greater absurdity, for example the somewhat extravagant idea that the gospel narrative is the script of a mystery drama¹¹; and this seems to call for far more credulity than does the acceptance of the more conventional view.

This argument misses the point. The suggestion that the Jesus of the gospels was a character in a Mystery Play may well be bad history, but its truth or falsity can be determined only by historical criteria. The following example, though unlikely to arise in practice, highlights the difficulty. Let us consider the case of a person - a sincere seeker with face set 'towards the light' - who is also a professional historian. Let us suppose that such a person applied for membership of the Society and that, when he was visited, it transpired that he regarded the 'Mystery Play' theory as the best available interpretation of the evidence. Would he then be refused membership? And if we told him that he *must* believe in the existence of an historical Jesus as a condition of becoming a member, would we not be asking him to compromise his professional integrity?

There is a further aspect to the problem which has not, I think, been adequately faced either by Friends or by thoughtful Christians of other denominations. It is widely accepted nowadays that the opening chapters of the book of Genesis do not give us factual truth. What we are normally told is that the story of Adam and Eve is a myth - not, indeed, a falsehood, since some myths can be very important, but something which need not be interpreted as literal history. In this context the word 'myth' has the same sense as it does when people say that the idea of a 'social contract' (as discussed in particular by Rousseau¹²) is a myth. The 'message' of the myth in this case is

that we are all implicitly under contract to obey the laws of our country - a message which does not lose its importance merely because, as a matter of history, it is false that our ancestors ever met together and signed such a contract. Similarly the message of the Genesis myth is that man has free will and sometimes chooses evil; and this message is expressed by means of a story in which a particular man and a particular woman disobeyed the commands of God.

This myth is central to orthodox Christianity. What is claimed is that man is separated from God by his sin but that there is nevertheless hope of redemption through the saving grace of Jesus Christ. 'As in Adam all die', says St Paul, 'even so in Christ shall all be made alive'¹³. Similarly we are told, in the words of the hymn written by Cardinal Newman:

*When all was sin and shame
A second Adam to the fight
And to the rescue came.*

It is, of course, not surprising that language of this kind has 'spoken to the condition' of countless numbers of people. What seems to me somewhat incongruous, however, is the readiness with which present day orthodoxy is prepared to allow that the biblical account of Adam and Eve is mythical while insisting that the account of Jesus Christ is historical. If the first Adam is a myth, why is it necessary to believe that the second Adam was an historical figure?

When we consider the actual documents which are said to be evidence for the existence of an historical Jesus, the difficulties start to multiply. At best the evidence is fragmentary, and even if, on balance, it is more likely than not that someone called Jesus existed as an historical person, there is still room for a variety of different types of interpretation of the gospel narratives, only some of which are compatible with belief in historical Christianity.

If one is to avoid the charge of parochialism, mentioned earlier, it seems to me essential that one should try to come to the gospel narrative with, as it were, fresh eyes. I should like in this connection to mention two books which have considerably influenced my own thinking on these matters. One is Dr C. G. Montefiore's commentary on the synoptic gospels¹⁴; the other is *The Jesus Report* by Johannes Lehmann¹⁵. Dr Montefiore writes from the point of view of a liberal Jew. To him Jesus was one of many Jewish rabbis. He praises Jesus' teaching where he believes praise to be due, but he has no hesitation, for example, in deploring the 'sheep and goats' passage¹⁶ and the many references to 'everlasting fire'. Even the beatitudes are seen not as eternal truths but rather as typical juxtapositions (e.g. 'The merciful . . . shall obtain mercy'), such as Jewish rabbis commonly used in their preaching. Lehmann produces an even more remarkable picture. He suggests that 'Rabbi J.' (he uses this name in the attempt to encourage readers to abandon their existing preconceptions) lived in the wilderness with the Essenes and that many of the teachings attributed to him were commonplace among this sect. Moreover its members met in secret and only the initiated would understand the message (hence Lehmann's interpretation of the seemingly trite words 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear'¹⁷). If they conveyed a special message to the initiated they were anything but trite. He also suggests that from the gospel narratives as they have come down to us it is hard to see how Jesus could ever have been considered dangerous or, since he regularly spoke in public, why there was any need for Judas Iscariot to point him out to people who apparently did not know him. Yet these puzzling facts, so he claims, fall into place if one supposes him to have been a member of a secret sect which had political objectives.

I am not suggesting that either Montefiore's interpretation of the gospel narratives or that of Lehmann should command general acceptance. What I am saying is that if a person were convinced on historical grounds by either writer this should not, on its own, preclude him from membership of the Society.

Moreover, if we simply take the evidence of the gospels as we find it, without any attempt at

reconstruction, difficulties remain. In particular it seems to me that people have often failed to appreciate how much there is in the gospels - or at least in the synoptic gospels - which ought to cause us discomfort. Certainly we find the injunction to love our enemies¹⁸, to be a peacemaker¹⁹, to seek first the kingdom of God²⁰, to take up the cross daily²¹, and to show compassion to strangers as did the good Samaritan²². But there is also much of an entirely different kind: epigrams and witticisms of dubious relevance²³, parables whose meaning is unclear (e.g. that of the unjust steward²⁴), the demand to hate our family²⁵, implausible miracle stories, for example that of the virgin birth²⁶, that of the sending of devils into a herd of swine²⁷ and that of walking on the water²⁸, threats of eternal punishment²⁹, and all kinds of apocalyptic extravagances³⁰.

In the case of any particular saying or action it is of course possible to suggest ways of 'getting round' the apparent difficulty. Perhaps the belief that Jesus walked on the water or sent devils into a herd of swine arose from some misunderstanding of the original event. Perhaps the belief that he withered a fig tree³¹ - by our standards a singularly pointless act of apparent vindictiveness - arose because something which he *said* about fig trees was misreported. Perhaps the cry from the cross, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'³² (a quotation from the psalms) was not, as it appears to be, a cry of disillusionment. Perhaps he had good reason for inveighing against the Scribes and Pharisees³³; perhaps it does not matter too much if he believed that the world was shortly coming to an end³⁴; perhaps in threatening eternal torment he was merely using the colourful imagery of his day. Perhaps . . . But is there not far too much which has to be explained away?

I am not asking that others should share my scepticism about the historical Jesus. What I should like to suggest is that no religious organisation - least of all the Society of Friends - should require assent to historical statements as a necessary condition of membership. Such assent cannot from the nature of the case be an expression of *religious* commitment, and it seems to me morally wrong to *require* people to interpret historical evidence in a particular way. If someone holds racist views we would justifiably feel unhappy about joining him in Meeting for Worship and about the fact that he had been admitted to membership (although this is not to deny 'that of God' in such a person). But how can one justify being similarly unhappy about someone who accepts or rejects a particular interpretation of historical documents?

5. Concluding remarks

I have called attention to two arguments, both of which seem to me to lead in the direction of universalism. To claim that a particular religion possesses the final and exclusive revelation of truth seems to be parochial; and if the specific claim is made that historical Christianity represents this revelation, it follows that people are under obligation to interpret the historical evidence in a particular way however implausible this interpretation may seem to them. From the nature of the case, arguments as to which interpretation of historical documents is the most likely one cannot be *religious* arguments.

Whatever their limitations as historical documents, however, the books of the bible (or most of them) remain - as they always were - a striking testimony to man's religious insights. Whatever the historical difficulties over the 'second Adam' it is hard not to be moved by the claim that men 'loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil'³⁵. We can all be open to what Bultmann³⁶ has called the 'kerugma' (approximately 'proclamation' or 'message') of the gospels, and its force is not lessened just because it was originally presented in a context where people believed in angels, devils and the arrival on the clouds of an all-powerful Messiah.

If our religious sensitivity is to grow, what we need, I suggest, is a series of images (or parables or myths) each of which can complement the others without necessarily implying exclusion. Thus if there is a message in the words 'God is love'³⁷ this does not mean that there is no

message in the words 'God is light'³⁸; and to argue on logical grounds that if God is love he cannot also be light would clearly be absurd. In an earlier work³⁹ I suggested that the challenge of 'ultimate' questions - those concerned with the nature of God and man and with man's place in the universe - could usefully be met by the formula 'silence qualified by parables'. In a sense (I argued) there is no option but silence in the face of such questions, as indeed has been pointed out by thinkers of many different religious traditions; but parables or myths may still have a significant message for us. At the time of writing I left it an open question as to whether a limited number of parables - in particular the central ones of the Christian tradition - were the correct or compelling ones. I now believe that the claim that some parables are exclusively correct is divisive and unnecessary.

Here is no place to discuss in detail the special position of the fourth gospel in relation to the other three. I believe, however, that part of its appeal for Friends has arisen from the fact that it is the only one of the four gospels which comes near to being 'universalist'. If I have understood the writer correctly, the seemingly historical events which he describes provide only the setting for what is basically not an historical message at all, but a religious one. In a sense the historical Jesus fades into insignificance and a kind of 'universal Christ' takes his place.⁴⁰ This Christ is the logos⁴¹; he is 'the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world'.⁴² There are many sayings, too - for example 'Sayest thou this thing of thyself or did others tell it thee of me?'⁴³ - which clearly have a universal significance and are intended to apply to any of us, not simply to be a record of this or that historical incident. Similarly the stories of the healing of the blind man⁴⁴ and of the raising of Lazarus⁴⁵ are not primarily historical records but relate to ourselves: it is we who '(were) blind (and) now see'⁴⁶ and it is we who in some sense (though it may not be clear in exactly what sense) cannot be touched by death.⁴⁷ Although there are occasional passages which seem to imply exclusivity, for example 'No man cometh unto the Father, but by me'⁴⁸, the sense is surely of a universal Christ and does not imply 'Believe in a historical Jesus as opposed to a historical Buddha'.

With changes in social conditions people's views as to what images are appropriate may also change. For example many of us nowadays are less than happy about images of kings and rulers who require to be 'praised', who keep us in check by means of their 'sovereign power' and who punish us if we transgress their commands. But this need not prevent us from recognising the importance of such images to people of earlier generations and indeed to some people - if not everyone - of our own day.

In effect, then, I am suggesting to Friends that they should move further in the direction of universalism by being open to images and parables of all kinds. I would emphasize that this is not to propose a novelty. It is rather to invite Friends to take account explicitly of ideas which are already implicit in their present practices. In particular it is no part of present practice to require applicants for membership to subscribe to any form of creed. If, however, it were to become policy that no one should be admitted to the Society if he does not interpret the gospel narrative in a particular way, this would be a retrograde step and, indeed, tantamount to the imposition of a creed. In addition, if we take seriously the injunction to be 'open to new light from whatever quarter it may arise'⁴⁹, it is hard to see how at the same time we can insist that the only source of light is historical Christianity.

A particular strength of Quakerism has been its ability to adapt to changing times without losing the insights which it has gained from the past. One of the striking changes that has taken place over the last century is that there is now vastly more opportunity for people with different backgrounds to meet and exchange ideas; and, this being so, it would be sad if those brought up in Jewish, Buddhist, Moslem or other traditions - and indeed those with no religious upbringing of any kind - were excluded at the outset from full participation in the affairs of the Society. I would suggest that further thought be given to ways of ensuring that such people are positively *welcomed* into the Society. No one is being asked to *give up* any cherished conviction: those

who wish to retain traditional Christian beliefs are in no way being discouraged from doing so; and, indeed, for many people this may be the right and only road to travel. I hope, however, that such people will be willing to worship *alongside* those who - if they break the silence at all - might choose to use somewhat different forms of language. One could perhaps say that, in an important sense, universalism comes 'not to destroy . . . but to fulfil' ⁵⁰. We should see it not as an -ism which asserts that rival -isms are false but rather as a way of life in which there is commitment to take seriously religious beliefs of all kinds. The commitment is not to exclusiveness but to willingness to listen. As with other -isms, the name is relatively unimportant; what is important is the willingness to make this kind of commitment.

In brief, it is possible to be wholehearted in one's religious beliefs without claiming that any one formulation represents the final truth.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. I came on the phrase 'open-minded certainty' in a letter to *The Times* (7.1.84) and I am grateful to the writer, Bruce Findlow, for introducing me to it.
2. John Hick: 'Towards a philosophy of religious pluralism'. *Faith and Freedom*, **34**, 3, 102, 1981. pp. 139-156.
3. John Hick. *ibid.* p. 140.
4. 'When I mention religion', says Mr Thwackum, 'I mean the Christian religion; and not only the Christian religion but the Protestant religion; and not only the Protestant religion but the Church of England". From Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, Book III, chap. 3.
5. Justin Martyr, *Apology*, 1, 46.
6. John Hick, *Christ in a Universe of Faiths*, QUG Pamphlet No. 3, p. 4.
7. John Hick, *ibid.* p. 1.
8. See Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, chap. 5.
9. Mark, ix, 24.
10. Ralph Hetherington, *Universal Quakerism*, QUG Pamphlet No. 4, p. 10.
11. J. M. Robertson, *Christianity and Mythology*. London, Watts & Co. 1910.
12. J. J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*.
13. I Corinthians, xv. 22.
14. C.G. Montefiore, *The Synoptic Gospels*. London, Macmillan. 1927.
15. Johannes Lehmann, *The Jesus Report*, tr. Michael Heron. London, Souvenir Press, 1971.
16. Matthew xxv, 31-46.
17. Mark iv, 9.
18. Matthew v, 44.
19. Matthew v, 9.
20. Matthew vi, 33.
21. Luke, ix, 30.
22. Luke, x, 30-37.
23. e.g. Matthew v, 30.
24. Luke, xvi, 1-8.
25. Luke xiv, 26.
26. Matthew, i, 18-26.
27. Matthew viii, 28-32.
28. Matthew, xiv, 25-31.
29. e.g. Matthew viii, 12-13.
30. e.g. Mark xiii, 24-27. At one time in my life I seriously considered becoming a unitarian, that is, one who believes that Jesus was a great teacher but who is not committed to the belief in the Trinity or to the belief that Jesus was God. This seemed to avoid theological complications and to leave the way clear for the kind of 'practical Christianity' which I

- wanted. But when I came to look at Jesus' teachings in detail I found not only some very strange sayings but a belief in a world-picture which is very far removed from our own.
31. Matthew, xxi, 19-20.
 32. Matthew, xxvii, 46.
 33. Matthew xxiii, 23-32.
 34. Matthew x, 23.
 35. John iii, 19.
 36. See especially R. Bultmann, 'New Testament and Mythology'. Chap. 1 of H.W. Bartsch (ed.) *Kerugma and Myth*. London, SPCK. 1964.
 37. I John iv, 8.
 38. I John i, 5.
 39. T.R. Miles, *Religion and the Scientific Outlook*. London, Allen & Unwin. 1959.
 40. It has been pointed out to me that even the word 'Christ' belongs to the Judaeo-Christian tradition and may therefore be meaningless or unacceptable to those outside this tradition. I do not myself find the word 'Christ' uncomfortable but I agree that the *caveat* is important.
 41. John i, 1.
 42. John i, 9.
 43. John xviii, 34.
 44. John ix, 1-41.
 45. John xi, 1-44.
 46. John ix, 25.
 47. John xi, 25.
 48. John xiv, 6.
 49. *Church Government*. Religious Society of Friends, 1968, London. para. 703, No. 12.
 50. Matthew v, 17.