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Scholars of Quakerism, political scholars, and the reading public alike will be very interested in H. Larry Ingle's new book, *Nixon's First Cover-Up*, seeking to explain Richard Nixon's religion. As Quakerism's most notorious figure, Nixon elicits curiosity by those unfamiliar with Friendly faith and practice, and Quakerism scholars are expected to explain (or, perhaps, even defend) his place among Friends.

Because Quaker studies is a relatively small field, its scholars are often asked by those outside to comment on topics well beyond their areas of expertise. Although I am no expert on Nixon or twentieth-century Quakerism, it seems to me Ingle has gone far towards explaining—though by no means defending—the religious life of this complex figure. It took a scholar of seventeenth-century Quakers to categorise Nixon's alleged Quakerism. He was not a Quaker, Ingle argues, but a Ranter, an antinomian, one who lived by faith entirely his own with no outward accountability, much like the counter-culture radicals Nixon despised.<sup>1</sup> What is ironic in modern-day America is that this sort of libertinism—as early modern people would have termed it—has spread to the wider culture, encompassing both sides of the political spectrum, liberal and conservative alike. It seems to be an American phenomenon. In other words, Nixon's 'faith', rather than being an actual religion or even a watered-down spirituality, seems to be a manifestation of Alexis de Tocqueville's term 'individualism'. By that term he meant not healthy *individuality* of the sort that contributes individual talents to the flourishing of a community but rather dangerous ego-centrism that damns up the well-spring of virtue and inclines people pursue their own selfish interests.<sup>2</sup> But even that definition does not capture the pathology that was so clearly a part of Nixon's psychic constitution, because Nixon did not merely ignore Quaker testimonies—he flagrantly and cynically distained them, all the while claiming to be a Quaker and hiding behind the falsity that Quakers are 'private' about their faith.

1 Ingle, H. L., *Nixon's First Cover-Up: the religious life of a Quaker president*, Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2015, pp. 5–6, *passim*.

2 de Tocqueville, A., *Democracy in America*, Mayer J. P., (ed.); trans. Lawrence, G., New York: Harper Perennial, 1988, pp. 506–08.

The title of this volume is wonderful in many ways, yet it raises a question that goes to the very heart of Ingle's study. The short title, *Nixon's First Cover-Up*, is perfect, couching his religion in the context of his political career and suggesting it was just as duplicitous and the deception went even deeper. The long title, however, *The Religious Life of a Quaker President* (my emphasis), strikes me as problematic. It is misleading because it conflicts with the long title. It seems that the word 'Quaker' should have been in scare quotes. That it and other references to Nixon as a Quaker are not qualified sets up an inherent conflict in Ingle's message.

Ingle repeatedly, eloquently, unequivocally, even scathingly, denies Nixon's claims to Quakerism. The reader is confused to find Nixon described as having no core religion, being remote from Quakerism by any definition, whether evangelical or liberal, and then, throughout, seeing him referred to as 'Nixon the Quaker', 'Friend Nixon', 'the Quaker candidate', 'the Quaker president' or 'the California Quaker'. 'Richard Milhous Nixon was a Quaker,' says Ingle. 'Not just any Quaker but a life-long, birthright Quaker'.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps he meant these appellations ironically. Perhaps they were rhetorical flourishes. Or perhaps they were intended to reflect how others saw him or how Nixon himself wanted to be perceived. Regardless, these descriptors came as a jolt every time and confused Ingle's message: was Nixon a Quaker or wasn't he?

This is a fraught question, and some scholars of Quakerism may argue that the answer is irrelevant—or relative. Quakerism has long been a fluid community of believers and 'fellow travellers'. As Ingle notes, seventeenth-century Friends rejected those extremists among them who transgressed the newly implemented Discipline—Ranters, who wanted to claim fellowship but refused to 'bear the cross of membership', as Quakers explained it. After their early enthusiastic beginnings, however, Friends embraced fellow-travellers, caring less whether they bore the name of 'Quaker' than that they *acted* like Quakers and adhered to their testimonies.<sup>4</sup> Still, eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Friends drew lines between themselves and non-Friends, becoming stricter in demanding adherence to particular testimonies and disowning those who transgressed them. 'I find it is the case', said Friend James Bringhurst in 1802, 'that many [people] at times attend [meeting] who are afraid of the cross in being members and therefore can indulge in their own ways.' And, he added, these people have 'brought Friends into disrepute'.<sup>5</sup> Twentieth-century Quakerism is far from the unified faith of two hundred years ago, but can it be infinitely flexible? Or does the name become meaningless if someone such as Nixon can call himself a Quaker with impunity? This is the question that will come to readers' minds, and it is a legitimate one.

3 Ingle, *Nixon's First Cover-Up*, p. 29.

4 Calvert, J. E., *Quaker Constitutionalism and the Political Thought of John Dickinson*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 55, 134, 194.

5 James Bringhurst to Thomas Pole, '12th mo. 29th day 1802', Bringhurst Letters, Friends' Historical Library, Swarthmore College.

It might be instructive to compare Nixon briefly with other Quakerly politicians and Quakers' responses to them. The ones I know best lived in the eighteenth century during the heyday of American Quakerism. Nixon is perhaps most like Benjamin Franklin in the way he traded on the Quaker name and image for political ends. Though Franklin shared some values with Friends and was certainly schooled by them in politics, he was not a Quaker. But he used Quakerism very effectively, posing as a Friend while in France to secure financial and military support for the American Revolution. He knew well how the French literary class was enamoured of Pennsylvania Quakerism, so he passed as one to achieve his ends. So effective was his ruse that even today some people who move in Friendly circles believe that Franklin was a Quaker. The Quakers, however, were neither fooled nor did they look the other way. In large part because of his rejection of the peace testimony, they despised Franklin, considering him 'a deadly threat to the soul of Quakerism'.<sup>6</sup>

In stark contrast to both Franklin and Nixon, in most ways, was Franklin's contemporary John Dickinson, leader of the American resistance to Britain before independence. Like Nixon, Dickinson was raised Quaker and was strongly influenced by the Quakerism of his mother. Also like Nixon, to some degree, Dickinson found it prudent to play down (although not deny or obscure) his Quakerism for political purposes. Dickinson also did not share the Quakers' adherence to absolute pacifism, believing in 'the lawfulness of defensive war', as he put it.<sup>7</sup> But the similarities between him and Nixon end there. Although Dickinson refused to join the meeting as a convinced member, he evolved to be more Quakerly than many devout Quakers, not just adopting most of their testimonies such as plain speech, dress and abolitionism, among other causes, but also working for peaceful reconciliation of domestic and foreign conflicts. In spite of his military service during the Revolution, Quakers very much wanted to claim Dickinson as one of their own, so much so that they allowed his interment in their burial ground. They recognised him as a real fellow traveller and were willing to overlook his stance on war because all of his actions aimed at preventing it. Moreover, true to his beliefs, Dickinson always resisted the label 'Quaker' or any accolades that might come to him because of it. To understand Dickinson, it is vital to know that he was not formally a Quaker; to understand Nixon, it is vital to know that he called himself a Quaker, but was not one—or not, at least, by the traditional definition of the term.

Nixon's situation seems to be one in which it would be appropriate for Friends to draw a boundary between themselves and others who differ from them so drastically. And, in fact, some Quakers did during the worst days of Vietnam.

6 Hutson, J. H., *Pennsylvania Politics, 1746–1770: the movement for royal government and its consequences*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972, p. 166.

7 John Dickinson to Tench Coxe, 24 January 1807, Tench Coxe Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

In a telling but perhaps too-brief section, Ingle describes how eastern, liberal Friends challenged Nixon's home meeting, East Whittier Friends Church, to labour with or even disown Nixon. Other Friends, however, were not so direct. The superintendent of California Yearly Meeting, himself a devout pacifist and a person we might expect to assume leadership on this issue, sidestepped it entirely. Meanwhile, under pressure from various Friends to deal with Nixon, Whittier Church determined it would be 'Unchristian' to disown him. Ingle calls these responses part of the Quaker 'heritage of moderation'.<sup>8</sup> But unless this heritage developed in the twentieth century, it does not bear resemblance to Quaker moderation of their early period, which did not apply to individuals egregiously transgressing testimonies. Rather, Ingle's observations are a commentary on modern Quakerism. A key passage is when he writes, 'What Richard Nixon's religious life reveals is ultimately tragic, a simple warning against a self-made religion, a variant of ranterism, a tendency all too tempting to modern Quakers, whether their label be Evangelical or liberal.'<sup>9</sup> Traditionally, one cannot be both a Ranter and a Quaker.

But Quakerism has evolved drastically since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and by the mid twentieth century represented a plethora of expressions on all points of the religious spectrum. Even more perplexing, in today's cafeteria-style religious environment, individuals take helpings from many pots, describing themselves as Jewish-, Buddhist-, Muslim- and even atheist-Quakers. At times in his book, Ingle acknowledges that Nixon's evangelical brand of Quakerism had fallen away from the traditional testimonies and looked much more like reformed Calvinist evangelicalism than traditional or East Coast Quakerism. Peace was no longer a central feature. Therefore, we must wonder what his brethren thought of him and whether, within that specific kind of Quakerism, Nixon was indeed a real Quaker. That his home church did not sanction him in any way suggests a measure of support. Given that Nixon enjoyed significant support from Calvinist evangelicals, such as Billy Graham, one might assume Quaker evangelicals approved of him as well. However, one could argue that it is indeed fair to hold Nixon to a traditional definition of Quakerism—a Quakerism that prioritised peace and personal integrity—because that is how Nixon presented himself. Knowing that the American public held this 'Quaker Oats' image in their minds of the wholesome and honest Quaker, he traded on their assumptions and their ignorance.<sup>10</sup> Ingle might have taken the opportunity in this book to range a little further beyond Nixon himself to explore the varieties of Quakerism that could allow the sort of Quaker Nixon claimed to be and even to situate it in the

8 Ingle, *Nixon's First Cover-Up*, p. 166.

9 Ingle, *Nixon's First Cover-Up*, p. 11.

10 For a discussion of how Americans have used the Quaker image to portray their goods for sale as pure and wholesome, see Calvert, *Quaker Constitutionalism*, pp. 315–19.

broader political culture, which, like Nixon himself, was becoming increasingly solipsistic.

Another topic I would have liked to see Ingle press a little harder on was Nixon's rejection of Quaker process—although this too may be more particular to eastern Quakerism. He touches on the matter very nicely towards the end of the book, highlighting how Nixon eschewed traditional Quakerism's prioritising of (peaceful) means over ends (which themselves were always peace and reconciliation). Nixon, writes Ingle, 'sought a noble and glorious end through ignoble and inglorious means'.<sup>11</sup> But that turns out to be slightly inaccurate by Ingle's own analysis. Rather than pursuing peace, as Nixon claimed he was, Ingle explains that he instead supplanted it with a policy of war in pursuit of victory. The rhetoric of peace, as Ingle makes very plain, was just that: rhetoric. Ingle offers a wonderful observation when he shows how, in one of his many bizarre twists of mind, Nixon revealed his own political priorities to be exactly the same as those of his communist Russian foes.<sup>12</sup> A bit more clarity and contextualisation on this point earlier on might have been helpful for those readers unfamiliar with Quakerism.

Finally, I will offer one relatively small defence of Nixon as a 'Quaker' politician in a traditional sense. When Nixon intimated that he, as his opponent John Kennedy, 'would put the Constitution of the United States above any other consideration', Ingle argues that this 'was not what a serious Quaker—or for that matter a serious Christian of any sort—would say so absolutely'.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps, but only if we look at religion and politics as a zero-sum game and do not account for the important political purpose behind the statement. Nixon's point, as Ingle explained, was to assure voters that neither candidate would place his personal religion above the laws of the country. This sentiment is similar to William Penn's in his 1679 tract, *One Project for the Good of England*. Penn explained that, indeed, religion 'is the noblest End of Man's Life', but also that 'we must recur to some lower but true Principle' so that people of differing religious belief might live in peace with one another.<sup>14</sup> This 'lower principle'—religious liberty—was not protected in Penn's England but it was in Nixon's America—under the Constitution. I would argue further that John Dickinson—the most religiously devout of the framers of the Constitution and the only Quakerly one—held this principle as well. In other words, a serious Christian can most certainly put the Constitution first in good conscience because it secures him the freedom to exercise his conscience. So this is the least of Nixon's problems—if it is one—where religion and politics are concerned.

11 Ingle, *Nixon's First Cover-Up*, p. 162.

12 Ingle, *Nixon's First Cover-Up*, pp. 215–16.

13 Ingle, *Nixon's First Cover-Up*, pp. 106–07.

14 Penn, W., *One Project for the Good of England: that is, our civil union is our civil safety* [London, 1769], first page.

These criticisms notwithstanding, Larry Ingle has made a valuable and long-overdue contribution to scholarship on Nixon. Although it will raise difficult and perhaps unanswerable questions about the definition of modern American Quakerism(s), it will leave no doubt in the reader's mind about the hollow, self-serving and deceptive character of Richard Nixon's faith.