

Francis Ellington's use of Prophecy to Explain the Appearance, Deliverance, and Apocalyptic Role of Quakers in the Last Days

Richard G. Bailey
Ontario

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Abstract

Early Quakers rarely relied on ancient or modern (seventeenth century) prophecy to authenticate their faith. The reason for this was their emphasis on inner revelation. After the Nayler episode Quakers slowly began to turn their energies toward making necessary theological and institutional adjustments that would better enable the movement to control the radical individualism of the inner light. One area that has not received much attention is how attitudes toward prophecy were changing. This paper focuses on one distinctive Quaker pamphlet which appeared in 1664. Francis Ellington's *A Christian Information Concerning These Last Times* demonstrates how one Quaker was struggling to understand the reasons for the long-delayed consummation of the Lamb's War. In the face of fierce persecution and the difficult conditions for Quakers during the Restoration Ellington searched back beyond Fox for new expressions of prophetic authentication and encouragement. The use of *specific* prophecy, now seen as coming true, was rare in Quaker writing. Ellington's voice may have been a distinctive one among Quakers of the time but his tendency to

incorporate a pacifist element into a militant apocalyptic rhetoric was not unusual in Quaker writing until the 1680s.

Keywords

Restoration Quakerism; Ellington; Boehme; Prophecy; Apocalyptic; Nonviolence

Behind apocalyptic lurks a fear that God has simply abandoned his people, and against that fear apocalyptic is a tremendous reassertion of the prophetic faith. In apocalyptic God's silence [during the inter-testamental period] was broken by the renewal of his past promises in their relevance to the present. God had not abandoned his people; his promised salvation was coming. Sometimes, perhaps, the apocalyptists broke God's silence with speculations of their own, forced too much contemporary relevance out of the prophecies, answered too precisely the unanswerable 'how long'. But their work ensured the survival of hope ... So the determinism of apocalyptic must be judged ... by its function ... to counter fatalistic despair, to lay open to men the eschatological future, and call men to appropriate action (Bauckham 1978:20-1, 23).

In May 1664 the Quaker Francis Ellington wrote a pamphlet entitled *Christian Information Concerning these Last times, Wherein all people may clearly see what Prophecies the Holy Prophets prophesied of should come to pass: which of them is fulfilling, and which is fulfilled; and how the lowest part of the great Image, that Daniel shewed to the King, is now breaking to powder, and by whom; whereby People may see, how very near Antichrist, or the great Whore of Babylon is to her End. Also some prophetical Passages gathered out of Jacob Behme's Works, who prophesied and gave them forth, in the year, 1623. Concerning what should come to pass in these Northern Islands; and as he then declared them, they are now come to pass; and also what he said concerning the Turk, what he was, what he should do, and what should at last become*

of him. He copied *Christian Information Concerning these Last Times* from the subtitle of an idiosyncratic collection of prophecies and statements about the last times drawn from Jacob Boehme's writings, known to us from John Sparrow's accurate English translation as *Mercurius Teutonicus; or a Christian Information concerning the last Times* (London, 1649).(1)

A native of Wellingborough in Northamptonshire, Ellington was twice imprisoned for his Quaker sympathies. He was the author of several pamphlets and numerous rhymes.(2) He explained that the reason he wrote *Christian Information* was to warn rulers - he mentioned King Charles by name (Ellington 1664:4) - of pending judgment, and to comfort Quakers who were suffering under a number of harsh and restrictive Restoration Acts against nonconformists. The day of deliverance was near:

For this the Lord hath commanded me to declare unto you, and also to his suffering Lambs, who suffer under your power at this day, that so you may be warned of the evil of your wayes, and his People may be comforted, *that their day of deliverance draweth very near*, so that they may stand with boldness this day of great tryal, not fearing what men can do unto them; for the Lord hath shewed unto me the signs of the time in which we live; and those *Visions that were for an appointed time*, shewed unto the Prophets of the Lord, *Hab. 2.3.* do now at last in this our day, *speak, and not lye*; and though it tarried, yet we have waited for it, and they are surely come, and must stay no longer (Ellington 1664:5).

Quakers had suffered a number of eschatological setbacks prior to 1664. In the early 1650s, many Quakers had believed that Christ in them was in the process of transforming the whole earth. Complete victory in the Lamb's War was only days, weeks, months or certainly no longer than a few short years away. But the years and the struggle dragged on and the Lamb's War seemed to lose more ground than it gained. Edward Burrough cried out 'How long', and asked why the Lord tarried

(Burrough 1656:41). The failure of the Godly Commonwealth coupled with the bitter factionalism that marred the Second Protectorate and brief military rule of 1659, only added to the disappointment of Quakers. Those who focused their hopes on Charles II to sympathize with the Quaker agenda for religious as well as socio-political reform soon suffered further disappointment when the Episcopacy was re-established and the *Quaker Act* (1662) was implemented. And still the Lord tarried, this time prompting William Bayly to ask 'How long' (Bayly 1662:15).

The Act which had the most frightening implications for Quakers was the *Conventicle Act*, which went into effect 1 July 1664. Ellington wrote his pamphlet in the 'fifth month' (Ellington 1664:title page), shortly after the Act took effect - if Ellington was following the Julian Calendar. Faced with withering persecution and dashed apocalyptic hopes, Ellington turned to prophecy to encourage Quakers. The day of deliverance had tarried but it would stay no longer.

The *Conventicle Act* was much harsher than the earlier *Quaker Act* in the penalties it imposed upon Quakers and other nonconformists for unlawful assembly. William Braithwaite gave us a glimpse of how intensely Quakers suffered under imposition of the Act. Between the commencement of the Act until the end of 1665 almost all of the over 900 convictions involved Quakers. The number of imprisonments of Quakers for contravening the Act was enormous in London alone - over 2,000. Many other Quakers, upon a third conviction, were banished from the realm for a period of seven years with the threat of the death penalty if they returned (Braithwaite 1979:40-53). Ellington's resort to prophecy was timely. Faced with the threat of terrible persecution Quakers were encouraged to recognize in themselves the fulfillment of ancient and modern prophecies which proved that the day of deliverance was imminent.

Ellington was writing 'in the mode', so to speak, for although there had been a widespread retreat from prophetic expression after the Restoration there was growing sentiment that the year 1666 would be the year of a great apocalyptic event. William Lilly - the famous

seventeenth century astrologer - believed that 1666 would be a year of great tumult for England. In his *Collection of Ancient and Moderne Prophecies* (1645) he predicted that about 1666 'the influence and efficacy of the third Conjunction of Saturne and Jupiter in Sagitarius then impending ... will produce no small alteration in the Church and Commone-wealth of England' (Lilly 1645:14-15).(3) The onslaught of the plague which carried away 30,000 Londoners in September 1665 and the Great Fire of London which destroyed 13,000 homes in September 1666 gave some credence to Lilly's predictions, and was taken by Quakers and others as a sign of God's vengeance upon an apostate generation. On the title page of his own pamphlet Ellington said: '*Here is Wisdom, let him that hath Wit, count the Number of the Beast for its the number of a Man; and his Number is* (all the numeral Letters in the Roman Alphabet, being rightly placed thus;) MDCLXVI. *Revel. 13.18*'. The number of the Beast (Antichrist) plus 1000 brought one to the year 1666 which the contents of the pamphlet implied would be the year of deliverance for Quakers from the persecuting armies of those who represented the spirit of Antichrist.(4)

Ellington said he knew the appointed time was imminent because unlike William Lilly 'who had a clear sight' of external events 'without him' - i.e. through astrology (Ellington 1664:5), Ellington had experienced the work of the Lord within. Therefore he was able to correctly interpret the course of external events, which confirmed to him the fulfillment of various ancient prophecies in his own day: 'for we live in these dayes, wherein Scripture-Prophecies are fulfilled, and the Ancient Visions do now speak' (Ellington 1664:15). Inner revelation was the true guide to interpreting the signs of the times:

Now this I declare not unto you by only reading of the History without me, hearing that such things are to come to pass; but I declare of what the Lord hath wrought of his Work *within me*: And who ever judgeth of the times by no other thing than what he finds in the history without him, or by what he may attain unto by the stars, or by the face of the heavens, without him, such a one can never know the signs of the times but is one with the

hypocritical Generation with whom he lives (Ellington 1664:5).

According to Ellington, William Lilly, in his book *Monarchy or no Monarchy* (1651), was able to explain how Quakers would prosper and be successful in England but without inner revelation he could not possibly recognize Quakers as 'the People of the Lord' who had been prophesied of in ancient biblical prophecies (Ellington 1664:5-6).

What were the ancient biblical prophecies that Ellington linked with the rise of Quakerism? The first was Ezekiel's prophecy of the dry bones brought to life again by the breath of God. Without inner revelation, said Ellington, it was not possible to recognize Quakers as 'the True Seed of Spiritual Israel' - the dry bones that came to life as envisioned by Ezekiel who 'prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone' (Ezekiel 37:7 *Authorized Version*, or 'bone to its bone' *Revised Standard Version*; Ellington 1664:6-7). The 'noise' and 'shaking' in the earliest Quaker gatherings was a sign that Quakers were the fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy:

So the Lord's Prophets prophesied as he had commanded them; and as they prophesied, there was a *noise*, and behold there was a *shaking*, (or trembling) and at this time those ... seeing us tremble and quake at the Word of the Lord, they in scorn in that Day called us *Quakers* (Ellington 1664:7).(5)

The emphasis on quaking was most unusual at this late date and again demonstrates the distinctiveness of Ellington's pamphlet. But the shaking and quaking under the power of the Lord was only further evidence that Quakers were the fulfillment of scripture prophecy.

Ellington continued: 'then as they [Lord's Prophets] continued prophesying upon us, *We dry bones came together, bone to his bone*; This was the beginning of the Lord's People's Meetings' (Ellington 1664:7). The notion that Quakers were the fulfillment of Ezekiel's

vision of the dry bones coming to life was a linkage to the fulfillment of scripture prophecy that was made by no other Quaker writer. The reconstitution of the dry bones which were knit together 'bone with his bone', with sinews and covered with flesh, was equated with the appearance of Quakers in England. Ellington wrote: 'we are the people that this prophesie [of Ezekiel] shall very shortly be fulfilled upon, notwithstanding the Decrees of men to root us out' (Ellington 1664:7), a reference to the repressive *Conventicle Act*.(6)

God had already begun to gather the elect in anticipation of their deliverance. To illustrate this fact Ellington turned to the book of Jeremiah wherein Jeremiah prophesied that the Lord would raise up a righteous Branch from the north and deliver it from bondage (Jeremiah 23:5-8). Jeremiah's prophecy and others mentioning the north were used or alluded to by a number of Quakers who identified the rise of Quakerism in England with the fulfillment of Scripture prophecy (Howgill 1656:19; Fox, *Works* vol. 4:229; Nayler 1653; Dewsbury 1656:10,17).(7) Ellington used Jeremiah's prophecy to demonstrate to Quakers that God's work of judgment, restoration and deliverance *had already begun* in England:

for now is the Lord fulfilling of this Prophesie upon his people, and in this *Northern* Island he hath begun his great work, in bringing up his seed, and leading out of the North Countrey, and from all other Countries where they have been scattered (Ellington 1664:10).

There was a universal dimension to God's work of deliverance which would surpass in scope the deliverance of the '*Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt*' (Ellington 1664:9-10). Quakers were encouraged to lift up their heads and see that their time of deliverance was near.

Quakers were not only divinely recreated creatures who were soon to be delivered from their persecutors. They were divinely recreated creatures who were soon to be the instrument of a universal apocalyptic transformation. They were like an army going forth to battle, only the battle was not one of worldly war and violence. Rather, Quakers were

'an exceeding great Army, having neither *Sword* nor *Spear*, but the *Spirit of the Living God*' (Ellington 1664:7). A pacifist element mixed with militancy was incorporated into the narrative - something which was not uncommon in post-Restoration Quaker writings as well as the writings of other Dissenters (Mullett 1997:90-92).(8) Ellington insisted Quakers were a peaceful people who did not handle swords and spears. They were not interested in worldly war. Yet, they continued to believe in the universal overthrow of external religion. If they would not handle earthly weapons then how were Quakers to grow without impediment throughout the world, with the result that the kingdom of Antichrist would be overthrown? Ellington resolved this problem by matching the army of disarmed Quakers against the well armed army of the godless, saying that God alone would miraculously deliver his people: 'These are they that the Lord will deliver, that have broken their Spears into Pruning-hooks, and their Swords into Sithes, that have learned to war no more' (Ellington 1664:8). The army of the godless might appear to be victorious but just at the moment Antichrist was about to seize victory God would 'overthrow Gog with all his Army; and this is suddenly to come to pass, and the Lord will perform it for his Seeds sake' (Ellington 1664:8).(9) The victory would be 'sudden', imminent and supernatural. God was now the direct instrument of divine wrath and deliverance and Quakers, the true seed of God on earth, were to wait patiently, unarmed and in humility and love for the universal transformation. Or so we might think.

The Hebrew prophet Daniel spoke of a 'stone' (generally interpreted in the Christian era as Christ) cut from a mountain without hands. The stone had apocalyptic significance for it was believed to be the instrument that would overturn the kingdom of Antichrist and fill the whole earth (Daniel 2:41-44; Ellington 1664:8-9). Fox equated the stone with Christ and his work (Fox, *Works* vol. 3:204; 4:292-93; 5:61, 413; 6:276, 301-2, 305, 353-55; 7:204; 8:129; 151, 289). Ellington equated the stone with the Quakers:(10)

And for the comfort of the Suffering Seed of the Lord this day, this I am to declare unto you. *That this is the time that Daniel's Prophesie is now to be fulfilled,*

(though it hath been long a fulfilling) for we are in that time, that *Daniel* saw, *Chap.* 2.41, 42, 43, 44. And the Lord hath by his power cut us out of the mountain without hands, for every hand hath been against us, ever since he cut us forth; *And this stone cut without hands, doth grow, and it must, and will, fill the whole earth,* and now it is at work to *break in pieces* the latter part of the great *Image* (Ellington 1664:8-9).

The stone (Quakers) would break the Image or kingdom of Antichrist in pieces (Daniel 2:34; Ellington 1664:9 where the Image is equated with the kingdom of Antichrist). Now the Quakers, formerly characterized as patiently waiting in humility and love for the divine act of universal transformation, were depicted as about to engage in a very militant act. Was Ellington calling upon Quakers to take up arms? On the contrary, Quakers would not 'fight with a Carnal Sword, but are redeemed out of it' (Ellington (1664:9). They would break into pieces what remained of the Image through the preaching of the everlasting gospel - a post-New Testament revelation concerning the restoration of all things to a *pre-fall paradisiacal state* (not to be confused with Joachim's Third Age of the Spirit), judgment against external religion and the overthrow of the kingdom of Antichrist (Ellington 1664:4, 10, 15; Fox, *Works* vol. 3:268-69; 6:391, 396; 7:114, 228, 268-9, 342; 8:172; Cadbury 1972:36, 55).(11) Ellington was no proponent of worldly war but he did advocate the universal overthrow of external religion through the preaching of the everlasting gospel to the ends of the earth. This was not a new theme in Ellington's writings. In a 1655 pamphlet, *A True Discoverie*, Ellington said that the sword of the Quakers was not 'in their hands' but 'in their mouths, and with it they slay the Nations' (Ellington 1655:6). Preaching the everlasting gospel was a divinely empowered, militant apocalyptic act that was powerful enough to smash the kingdom of Antichrist to pieces (Ellington 1664:10). It was inevitable and it was imminent.(12)

Quakers were Ezekiel's divinely recreated creatures. They were Jeremiah's righteous Branch that would rise from the north. They were Daniel's stone cut from the mountain without hands. And they were to

take comfort in the fact that they were the fulfillment of ancient scripture prophecies. Despite the decrees of men to root them out their day of divine deliverance was near.

The final prophet Ellington turned to in his effort to encourage Quakers and confirm their apocalyptic role in the last days was Jacob Boehme, the Silesian visionary who died in the year of George Fox's birth. There was more than commonality of language between Boehme and Ellington. Ellington sought to link Quakers with the fulfillment of Boehme's prophecies of the lily blossoming in the northern countries. He said that 'what the Lord spake through that Faithful Servant of his Jacob Behme, in the Year 1623, is now near to be fulfilled, as may be read in his Book entituled, *A Christian Information concerning the Last Times*' (Ellington 1664:10). Ellington's reference to the year 1623 was to one particular prophecy about the destruction of Babel - apostate external Christendom - that appeared in the 1649 English translation of some of Boehme's prophecies concerning the last times, collected in the aforementioned work *Mercurius Teutonicus; or a Christian Information Concerning the Last Times* (Boehme 1649:3-4).

Among Boehme's prophecies contained in *Mercurius Teutonicus* were some that used the symbolism of a 'lily', a 'lion', and an 'eagle' which led Keith Thomas to suggest that Ellington attributed the medieval *Prophecy of Thomas Becket* to Boehme (Thomas 1973:468). There is no single prophecy in Boehme's writings that contains the four important prophetic symbols in Becket's prophecy - the lily, the lion, the eagle and the son of man.(13) Throughout his writings Boehme made isolated prophetic references to a lily standing towards the north, or blossoming in the northern countries, or that the time of the lily was at hand.(14) In each case, by Boehme's own account, the lily represented Christ in us, the new birth, or simply the last time.(15) Ellington adopted Boehme's imagery of the lily and linked it to the Quakers. Quakers, he said, were the blossoming of Boehme's 'lily' which was springing forth in the '*North Countrey*' (Ellington 1664:10-11).

How did Ellington link Boehme's prophecy of the blossoming of the lily in a northern land with Quakers? In one instance, Ellington referred to

a Behmenist prophecy which warned that the lily's growth was being threatened 'with the Sectarian Contention of the Learned' (Boehme 1649:14) as if Boehme had foreseen the virulent public attacks against Quakers:

And as it was prophesied of by this Prophet of the Lord, so the Lord hath brought it to pass, and the Lilly is blossomed in this Island, and the Sectarian Contention of the Learned, have done what they can to overthrow this Lilly: as witness the publick Teachers in these Nations, that have writ and printed against the Lilly; as is to be seen in the Book put forth by *George Fox*, and Intituled, *The great Mystery of the Whore unfolded*, wherein 197 of the publick Teachers are confuted, and their Errors condemned, and their mouths stopped to their shame forever, and so the Lilly is become a great tree in this Nation (Ellington 1664:11-12).

Quakers were the lily that blossomed in the north but their growth had been threatened not only by authorities who wanted to drive the divine 'seed' out of the country but by 'publick Teachers' who attacked Quakers. There was an anti-academic tone in Ellington's writing. The sectarian contention of the learned threatened God's work of universal restoration through the Quakers. Yet in spite of public attacks against Quakers they were to find new hope and courage in the fact that Fox's victory over 'the publick Teachers' was evidence that 'the Lilly is become a great Tree in this Nation'. Selective use of Boehme's prophecies, including his scattered statements about the prophetic significance of the lily and public attacks against it, enabled Ellington to link, as part of the divine plan, the hostile state against Quakers and their imminent divine deliverance. Although Ellington was not the only Quaker to endorse Boehme's writings he was the only Quaker to use Boehme's prophecies for the purpose of demonstrating divine approval for the appearance, deliverance and apocalyptic role of Quakers in the last days.(16)

The significance of Boehme's prophetic references to the lily and Ellington's use of them, drew readers' attention to the importance of a

cataclysmic universal apocalyptic event - the destruction of external religion and the victory of inward religion in the last days. For this reason Ellington quoted at length from two of Boehme's prophecies - one that used the symbols of an eagle and a lion, but where the lily was never mentioned (Ellington 1664:11; Boehme 1649:4) and the other which described the conversion of the Turk to true Christianity (Ellington 1664:12; Boehme 1649:37-39). In the first prophecy, which dealt with the destruction of Babel, an oriental beast - correctly identified in Sparrow's marginal notations as the Turk (Boehme 1649:4) - acquired a human face and heart and tore at Babel with its claws (Boehme 1649:4).(17) Boehme's conception of the Turk - who was a popular instrument of divine judgment in the apocalyptic literature of the 16th and 17th centuries - was that of an external and real force which would ruin Babel through worldly war (Boehme 1649:7). Boehme believed that the Turk - poised to pierce the heart of Germany - would soon be converted to true, inward Christianity but until that occurred the Turk was still the infidel, the beast or the 'Rod' of divine judgment who would be used by God to tear down Babel. It is essential to recognize the distinctions in Boehme's mind here. The instrument of divine judgment against external Christendom (Babel) was *not* the lily, those who had already come to experience the work of Christ within. By Boehme's own account the lily was free to wage worldly war but because war was contrary to the true Christian spirit of love and peace the lily would not wage war (Boehme 1649:16-17, 40, 46-7).(18) Rather, the instrument of divine judgment was the still unrepentant Turk.

Boehme used the illustration of the parable of the prodigal son to illustrate the relationship between the tearing down process through the Turk and the final conversion of the Turk to true Christianity. The elder brother 'continued in the Letter' and represented 'Babylonical formal, literal Christendom' which was soon to be destroyed (Boehme 1649:38; Ellington 1664:12). The younger son who returned in humility to his father represented the return to true faith. The former was born after the flesh and the latter was born after the spirit. The latter was the Turk who, after tearing down Babel, would repent and convert to true inward Christianity (Boehme 1649:35-9). The conversion of the Turk

was preceded by the destruction of Babylonical Christianity, which was identified with doctrinal strife, sectarianism and dissension within Christendom - a major theme in Boehme's writings.(19)

Ellington drew some links between Boehme's prophecy of the Turk and the active, apocalyptic role of Quakerism in the process that would imminently lead to the destruction of Babel. But we must not draw too close an analogy. Ellington never explicitly spoke of any kind of worldly war - although the Turk still cast a threatening spectre over Europe in Ellington's time. Boehme's prophecies of the Turk were useful only in demonstrating that the restoration of inward religion was imminent (Boehme 1649:7) as was the judgment that awaited England's rulers and all persecutors of Quakers. All those who forced others to worship, said Ellington, according to 'Mens Precepts' and who 'make cruel laws against their Brethren, who worship God in Spirit & in Truth' belonged to Babylon and soon they would be 'cast out' even as the bond woman was from Abraham (Ellington 1664:13).

Ellington quoted from Boehme's prophecies concerning apocalyptic role of the Turk but he never implied that Quakers would engage in worldly war to bring Babel to ruin. On the contrary, Quakers were to continue to preach the everlasting gospel, which was sufficient to destroy Babel:

and we know what times we live in; and our God hath given us of his *Light, Life, and Power*, and hath called us to be the *First Fruits unto the Lamb*, and to be of that Number that must break in pieces the great Image [Dan. 2:34], and now at last to ingage with the Lamb, to fight with the Dragon, and his Followers, which will be the last battel: for as the Lord hath been pleased to raise his Seed, according as his servants have foretold, and Scriptures have declared, in this Northern Island first, and from hence hath sent his faithful Servants, in these late years, to the outmost parts of the Earth, to preach his *Everlasting Gospel* to the sons of men, and the Lord's Work hath prospered in their hands; *so certainly as he hath begun his great work in this Island, so the Lord will finish it in this Island, and Antichrist shall*

have his mortal blow in this Island first, whereby all nations that hear of it, their hearts shall be struck with fear, to hear what the mighty God hath done for his poor, afflicted People in England. And the Servant of the Lord, J.S. [John Swinton, England's Warning (1664) - in verse], hath declared there shall be such a day of deliverance, as the like was never before it, nor never any shall be after it; and all Friends are to stand still, and to wait upon our God, out of our thoughts, reasonings; and consultations, and all keep in the Faith, for by that we shall conquer all our Enemies, both within and without, Heb. 11.1 for that's our ground of things hoped for, & the evidence of things not seen. And Friends, this I declare, that I perceive such a faith that the Lord hath begotten in his despised People called Quakers, in England, that fear not Banishment, no, nor death itself; and this I find is begotten in thousands that cannot speak much for Truth if the Lord calls them to it, whereby it is evident that they shall have at last the victory, and shall be saved in the Ark, the Light (Ellington 1664:15. Boehme described the Ark as Christ - Boehme 1649:32).

There was a strident apocalyptic tone in Ellington's words - the breaking of the great Image in pieces and Antichrist receiving his mortal blow in England. The line between militancy and violence was not always clearly drawn by apocalyptists. Strident apocalyptic language often led to the taking up of arms, as was the case with Thomas Müntzer and the Peasants' War in 1525. In Ellington's case he did not wish to provoke worldly war, and his - and other Quaker's - militant rhetoric never resulted in widespread Quaker armed rebellion in England. Ellington was clear that Antichrist would receive his mortal blow through the preaching of the everlasting gospel. He differed from Boehme with respect to the *instrument* God would use to destroy Babel.

Finally, Ellington used another of Boehme's prophecies to demonstrate that the lily, or the true people of God, were not to engage in any kind of violent, military action. We have already noted that violence was not a characteristic of the lily in Boehme's writings. Ellington was able to

use Boehme's testimony against the use of violence by the lily or true people of God as yet another prophetic endorsement of Quakerism:

And for all you who do not witness the Lilly brought forth in you, but are ready to ask what this Lilly is, the Author [Boehme] tells you in his Book what it is, and how you may know it. *The Lilly (saith he) will not be found in strife or Wars, but in a friendly, humble, loving Spirit, together with good sound Reason; this will dispel and drive away the smoak of the Devil, and flourish in its time, to the overthrowing of Babel, and the building up of Zion* (Ellington 1664:12; Boehme 1649:40).(20)

The latter part of the quote is misleading since it is not representative of Boehme's views. 'To the overthrowing of Babel, and the building up of Zion' was a marginal annotation by Sparrow which Ellington incorporated into the primary source. Boehme never said that a loving spirit and sound reason would overthrow Babel. In the above quote Boehme was only describing the non-violent characteristics of the lily. The Quaker peace testimony had emerged in 1661, hence it was not unusual for Ellington to affirm it again in his pamphlet. What was distinctive was that in this instance he chose to reaffirm it through the use of a Behmenist prophecy - no other Quaker did this.

In conclusion there are two important aspects of Ellington's pamphlet that have been drawn out in this paper. First, Ellington followed the post-Nayler tendency toward pacifism and conformism(21) while at the same time retaining the strong language of spiritual warfare that continued to be used by George Fox, Edward Burrough (1660), Margaret Fell (1660), John Philly (1664) and later, William Gibson (1671), Thomas Taylor (1672) and Ellis Hookes (1683). Second, Ellington's pamphlet was a rare appeal, among Quakers, to ancient and modern prophecy for the purpose of authenticating the appearance of Quakerism in England. It was a departure, within Quaker ranks, from exclusive reliance on Fox's words and writings as well as prophetic illumination through inner revelation in Quaker meetings and Quaker writings. However, the recourse to non-Quaker revelation was not a

retreat from Fox's emphasis on the primacy of the inner Word. For Ellington, inner illumination was still necessary if scripture prophecies were to be correctly interpreted. Ellington never renounced the essential Quaker belief in the primacy of the inner over the outer Word.

Many Quakers in the 1660s were writing - some in rhyme - about God's imminent vengeance upon the godless and Quakers' imminent divine deliverance from persecution. What made Ellington's writing different from other Quaker writings was his numerical calculations, his appeal to specific scripture prophecies and his use of Behmenist prophecies to comfort, strengthen, encourage and instill hope in a community that was struggling under torturous physical conditions and fighting a difficult spiritual war. The search back beyond Fox for new forms of prophetic authentication to brace convictions was an unusual and distinctive approach in Quaker literature.

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Notes

1. 'Mercurius' was a term Boehme used to symbolize the Word of God or God's messenger. There was an inner and outer aspect to 'Mercurius' - the inner being the Word of God [*Signatura Rerum* (1622)], in Boehme 1956, vol. 6, p. 38:32, pp. 94-95:56, p. 102:22]. Boehme sometimes signed his letters 'Teutonicus'. The subtitle was drawn from Boehme's *Informatorium Novissimorum, oder Unterricht Von den Letzten Zeiten* (1620), in Boehme 1956, vol. 5, pp. 399-440. One expert on the English translators of Boehme's writings was unable to identify the translator and compiler of *Mercurius Teutonicus* (Hutin 1960:38). The *Dictionary of National Biography* identified Sparrow as the probable compiler and translator (*D.N.B.* 13:722) and textual and stylistic evidence - within the opening preface to the reader and the marginal annotations - tends to

- support the latter's view. On the reception of Boehme in England see Smith 1989:185-225. There are some astonishing similarities in language between Boehme and Fox. Read, for example, *Mercurius Teutonicus*:10-11.
2. Further autobiographical information is contained in Ellington 1655:1-2.
 3. For Lilly's autobiography see Lilly (1974). More recent biographies are Geneva (1995) and Parker (1975).
 4. Ellington's use of the term 'Antichrist' or 'kingdom of Antichrist' adhered to the standard interpretation throughout Christian history. The biblical concept applied to nations that opposed God and his chosen people. Antichrist was 'Gog' and his armies (Ezekiel 37, 38); the 'Image' of Daniel 2 and 'Babylon' in Isaiah 21:9; Jeremiah 51:7 and Revelation 14:8; 17:5; 18. Ellington utilized all these terms when speaking of the kingdom of Antichrist. He also adopted Boehme's notion of Babel as apostate, external Christendom.
 5. Braithwaite provided a brief history of the origin and use of the term Quaker and how the term came into vogue as a nickname, since early Friends, as Barclay would later write, trembled 'under the powerful working of the Holy Ghost' (Braithwaite 1981:57).
 6. The *Conventicle Act* (1664) allowed no more than five persons over the age of sixteen to be present at a religious meeting that did not conform with the Church of England liturgy restored by Charles II. Upon a third offense the intransigent party was banished to the colonies for a period of seven years. Return to England before the sentence was completed meant the death penalty. Ellington clearly had the *Conventicle Act* in mind when he spoke of the 'decrees of men to root us out'. This was confirmed later in his pamphlet when he spoke of Quakers so disturbing the authorities that 'they would have them [Quakers] driven out of this *North* Countrey by all means, and if ever they shall return again within seven years, then they must die' (Ellington 1664:10-11).
 7. Compare with Ellington 1655:3 and Jeremiah 50:2-3; 51:47-8.
 8. In 1655 Ellington had already referred to Quakers as the 'Northern Army' that handled no worldly weapons (Ellington 1655:6).
 9. Gog was the prince of Magog who was prophesied of in Ezekiel 37, 38 and Revelation 20 as leading the final revolt of the godless nations at the battle of Armageddon.
 10. Since we are focusing on Ellington's use of prophecy this is not the time or place to pursue the christological implications of his statement that Quakers were the stone cut from the mountain without hands. It is

worth illustrating, however, that his exalted views were not distinctive in Quaker writing. Leading Quakers advocated that the elect were 'not distinct' from Christ, who was also Daniel's 'stone' according to Fox. In 1654 Francis Howgill and Edward Burrough wrote in answer to a pamphlet by Ralph Farmer: 'For the elect is not distinct from the creator, but lives by the dwelling of the Son in him, and with the Son the Father dwells also'. In his *Great Mystery of the Great Whore* (1659) George Fox said 'Doth not the Apostle say, the saints were made partakers of the divine nature? and that God dwells in his saints, and Christ is in them'. In 1667, in response to Lodowick Muggleton's *The Neck of the Quakers Broken* (1663), Fox said that Quakers 'are flesh of his [Christ's] flesh and bone of his bone'. In the same response he said that the 'Being', 'Essence', 'Nature' and 'Power' of Christ was manifest in his saints. Finally, he asked Muggleton: 'Is Christ distinct from his saints? then how come they be of his flesh and bone'? In response to my critics who insist that my case for Quaker belief in the immanence of Christ's flesh and bone is 'without substance' and 'unconvincing' I submit that I stand by the sources. The task is to *interpret* the sources one way or another: the statements may represent the power of self-divinization or they may represent the power of true belief. Whatever approach one takes it is necessary to *interpret* the sources as free as possible from the interference of denominational dogma and apologetic which has tended either to *ignore* difficult sources or *dismiss* certain statements about the immanence of Christ's flesh and bone as uncharacteristic of the whole because they offend certain religious sensibilities. The examples provided above suffice to demonstrate, to the open-minded, that very weighty Quakers said that Quakers were *not distinct* from Christ. Ellington's *use of specific prophecies* to support his own exalted claims that Quakers were Ezekiel's divinely recreated creatures or were Daniel's stone cut from the mountain without hands was unprecedented in Quaker writing. But his exalted view of Quakers was not distinctive in Quaker writing. The above quotes, with references, are discussed at length with fresh interpretations in my next book on Quaker christology, which provides a detailed analysis of the debates between Quakers and their Muggletonian and Puritan opponents.

11. Joachim of Fiore (1135-1202) was a Calabrian abbot who is best known for his tripartite division of history, with the third age being the age of the spirit which would be announced by a God-inspired, spirit illuminated leader and the appearance of the prophetic gift. The third age would be characterized by inner revelation with no human

intermediary and the abolishing of all ceremonies and sacraments. Since Joachim's time many groups and individuals have seen themselves as precursors of his third age of the spirit, often interpreting their function to be super-empowered apostle-prophets heralding the end of the present age and ushering in the new. It is evident that there are similarities between Joachim's third age of the spirit and Quaker ideas about the everlasting gospel. The main distinction is that Quakers preached a *return* to a pre-fall paradisiacal state. The best studies on Joachim are by Marjorie Reeves.

12. The 1661 peace testimony still implied that non-carnal weapons could be used in the battle against evil. This, presumably, would have included the use of militant apocalyptic rhetoric - i.e. the sword 'in the mouth' which would 'slay the Nations'.

13. In an unpublished article I discuss the history and content of the *Prophecy of Thomas Becket* and demonstrate that it was not the prophecy used by Ellington. The *Prophecy of Thomas Becket* was probably written by an English nationalist in the wake of major losses of English Angevin lands on the eve of the outbreak of the Hundred Years War (1338). The prophecy spoke of a period of strife and war which would result in the seizure of the French Crown (lily) by the English king (son of man). The political intent of the prophecy is readily apparent. It is not possible to apply any of Boehme's prophetic statements to the interpretive keys contained in the various manuscript and printed texts of the *Prophecy of Thomas Becket*. Boehme's prophecies followed a strictly religious theme - the destruction of Babel and the victory of inward religion in the last days. Nor was the *lily* a political symbol in Boehme's prophetic statements, although there were obvious political consequences to the overthrow of Babel. Rather, the *lily* was a symbol of inward religion and *non-violent* Christianity. There is nothing to suggest a link between the *Prophecy of Thomas Becket* and Boehme's isolated prophecies of the *lily* - which Ellington used - other than a common use of prophetic symbolism drawn from Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

14. The equivalent German sources in Boehme are provided in the notes that follow: 'Boehme to Carl von Endern' (Advent, 1619), *Epistolae Theosophicae, oder Theosophische Send-Briefe* (1618 bis 1624), in Boehme 1956, vol. 9, *Epist.* 5:11-12. Hereafter cited as *Epist.* In 'Boehme to Gottfried Freudenhammer', (27 Februarii, 1623) Boehme said that from the south a lily would stand toward the north - 'Eine Lilie stehet von Mittag gegen Mitternacht', *Epist.* 42:47. The equivalent is in

Boehme 1649:6. Also 'Boehme to N. von Lubeck' (20 April, 1624), *Epist.* 55:13-14 that a lily would blossom in a northern land ('Jedoch wisset: Dass euch mitternachtigen Landern eine Lilie bluhet'). The equivalent is in Boehme 1649:14. And *De tribus principis* (1619), in Boehme 1956, vol. 2, ch. 17:105. Hereafter cited as *Princ.*

15. 'Boehme to Gottfried Freudenhammer' (17 Oct., 1621), *Epist.* 20:4; *Christophia oder der Weg zu Christo* (1622), in Boehme 1956, vol. 4, ch. 2:46 and *Princ.*, ch. 14:48.

16. Thomas Taylor spoke of Boehme's writings as 'a sweet unfolding of the mystery of God' (quoted in Braithwaite 1981:40).

17. The original source is located in a 'Postscript' to a letter from Boehme to Abraham von Franckenberg, (20 Februarii, 1623) in *Epist.* 41:8-10.

18. Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum* (Boehme 1956, vol. 7, ch. 38:15-17). Hereafter cited as *Myst. Mag.* Like Boehme, Fox maintained that the weapons of God's true people were 'spiritual not carnal' (Fox. *Works* vol. 4:272; 6:411).

19. These passages in *Mercurius Teutonicus* were drawn from *Myst. Mag.* ch. 40:88-95. Ellington quoted Boehme as saying of the Turk, 'That he should very easily come to the Rhine stream, *which now the Turk at this time is near*' (Ellington 1664:11. The italics are Sparrow's marginal annotations in Boehme 1649:7). On occasion, Ellington uncritically incorporated Sparrow's marginal annotations into the primary text. During Boehme's and Ellington's time the Ottoman Turks stood poised to overrun the Habsburg dominions and they were only repulsed at the siege of Vienna in 1683 - curiously, about the same time that the strident apocalyptic tone in Quaker writings ceased.

20. The original is located in Boehme, *Princ.*, ch. 27:34. Other pacifist statements about the lily may be found in *Informatorium Novissimorum*, Part 1:23 and *Myst. Mag.*, ch. 22:73. Boehme's pacifist statements are a stark contrast to the military victory of the King of England over the lily (King of France) in the *Prophecy of Thomas Becket*.

21. I introduced the idea that the Nayler incident was a major watershed in the history of early Quakerism in *New Light on George Fox and Early Quakerism* (San Francisco, 1992), ch. 6.

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Richard Bailey has taught at Queen's University (Kingston), Bishop's University (Quebec) and was a Distinguished Visitor at the University of Calgary (Alberta).

Mailing Address: c/o *Quaker Studies*.