

Section 7 - The Beginnings

Submission Draft

Friends began as a religious movement in England in the 1640s, a time of great religious and political ferment. Early Friends experienced the Light of Christ as an inward and spiritual power that reordered their lives. This revelation found fertile ground in scattered groups of religious seekers throughout the country, igniting explosive growth in numbers and a prophetic challenge to the established social order. These quotations express the powerful spiritual experiences of early Friends in their own words.

George Fox (England, 1624-1691)

And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, Oh, then, I heard a voice which said, 'There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition,' and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy. Then the Lord did let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give him all the glory ... that Jesus Christ might have the pre-eminence ... and this I knew experimentally.

[And continuing] ... My desires after the Lord grew stronger, and zeal in the pure knowledge of God and of Christ alone, without the help of any man, book, or writing. . . . And then the Lord did gently lead me along, and did let me see his love, which was endless and eternal . . . and that love let me see myself as I was without him. . . . (*Journal, 1647*)

Yet I was under great temptations sometimes, and my inward sufferings were heavy; but I could find none to open my condition to but the Lord alone, unto whom I cried night and day. I went back into Nottinghamshire, and there the Lord showed me that the natures of those things, which were hurtful without, were within, in the hearts and minds of wicked men. . . . I cried to the Lord, saying, "Why should I be thus, seeing I was never addicted to commit those evils?" and the Lord answered, "That it was needful I should have a sense of all conditions, how else should I speak to all conditions!" and in this I saw the infinite love of God.

I saw, also, that there was an ocean of darkness and death; but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. In that also I saw the infinite love of God, and I had great openings. (*Journal, 1647*)

So the keeper of the House of Correction [at Derby] was commanded to bring me up before the Commissioners and soldiers in the marketplace ... and there they ... asked me if I would not take up arms for the Commonwealth against the King. But I told them I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars, and I knew from whence all wars did arise, from the lust according to James's doctrine. Still they courted me to accept of their offer and thought that I did but compliment with them. But I told them I was come into the covenant of peace which was before wars and strifes were. (*Journal*, 1651)

Sarah Blackborow (England, flor. 1650s – 1660s)

Wisdom hath uttered forth her voice to you, but the eye and ear which is abroad, waiting upon the sound of words without you, is that which keeps you from your Teacher within you; and this is the reason that in all your seeking you have found nothing; such as your seeking is, such is your finding. . . . Therefore. . . come out of the many things; there's but one thing needful [see Luke 10:40-42], keep to it. . . that into my Mother's house you may come, and into the chamber of her that conceived me, where you may embrace, and be embraced, of my dearly beloved one [see Song of Sol. 3:1-4]. Love is his name, Love is his nature, Love is his life. (quoted in *Hidden in Plain Sight*, p. 52)

Isaac Penington (England, 1616–1679)

Be no more than God hath made thee. Give over thine own willing; give over thine own running; give over thine own desiring to know or to be any thing, and sink down to the seed which God sows in the heart, and let that grow in thee, and be in thee, and breathe in thee, and act in thee, and thou shalt find by sweet experience that the Lord knows that, and loves and owns that, and will lead it to the inheritance of life, which is his portion. And as thou takest up the cross to thyself, and sufferest that to overspread and become a yoke over thee, thou shalt become renewed, and enjoy life, and the everlasting inheritance in that. (*Some Directions to the Panting Soul*, 1661)

The end of words (even of Christ's own directions in the days of His flesh) is to turn men to the holy life and power from whence the words came. (*Works*, 1784, Vol. 3, p. 378)

But some may desire to know what I have at last met with. I answer, "I have met with the Seed." Understand that word, and thou wilt be satisfied and inquire no further. I have met with my God, I have met with my Saviour, and he hast not been present with me without his salvation, but I have felt the healings dropped upon my soul from under his wings. I have met with the true knowledge, the knowledge of life ... I have met with the Seed's Father, and in the Seed I have felt him my Father ... I have met with the Seed's faith, which hath done and doth that which the faith of man can never do. I have met with the true birth, with the birth which is heir of the

Kingdom ... I have met with the true peace, the true righteousness, the true holiness, the true rest of the soul, the everlasting habitation which the redeemed dwell in; and I know all these to be true, ... and am capable of no doubt, dispute, or reasoning in my mind about them. (*An account of his Spiritual Travel*, 1667. quoted in *Friends Intelligencer and Journal*, v. 57, p.22, 1/13/1900)

Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another; and not laying accusations one against another; but praying for one another, and helping one another up with a tender hand. (*Letters*, Letter LII, 1667)

Francis Howgill (England, 1618-1669)

The Lord of Heaven and earth we found to be near at hand, and, as we waited upon him in pure silence, our minds out of all things, his heavenly presence appeared in our assemblies, when there was no language, tongue or speech from any creature. The Kingdom of Heaven did gather us and catch us all, as in a net, and His heavenly power at one time drew many hundreds to land. We came to know a place to stand in and what to wait in; and the Lord appeared daily to us, to our astonishment, amazement and great admiration, insomuch that we often said one unto another with great joy of heart: ‘What, is the Kingdom of God come to be with men?’ . . . And from that day forward, our hearts were knit unto the Lord and one unto another in true and fervent love, in the covenant of Life with God. (1663, quoted in *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 1908. Francis Howgill’s *Testimony*, in the preface to Edward Burrough’s *Works*, 1672)

Mary Penington (England, 1623–1682)

Oh! The joy that filled my soul in the first meeting ever held in our house at Chalfont. To this day I have a fresh remembrance of it. It was then the Lord enabled me to worship him in that which was undoubtedly his own, and give up my whole strength, yea, to swim in the life which overcame me that day. . . for I could say, ‘This is it which I have longed and waited for, and feared I never should have experienced.’ (*Experiences in the Life of Mary Penington*, p. 45)

Elizabeth Bathurst (England, c. 1655-1685)

The Seed, or Grace of God, is small in its first Appearance, even as the Morning Light; but as it is given Heed to, and obeyed, it will increase in Brightness, till it shine in the Soul, like the Sun in the Firmament at its Noon-day Height. *Truth’s Vindication*,
<https://books.google.com/books/reader?id=ZOReAAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&pg=GBS.PR11>

Robert Barclay (Scotland, 1648-1690)

Not by strength of arguments or by a particular disquisition of each doctrine, and convincement of my understanding thereby, came [I] to receive and bear witness of the Truth, but by being secretly reached by [the] Life. For, when I came into the silent assemblies of God's people, I felt a secret power among them, which touched my heart; and as I gave way unto it I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up; and so I became thus knit and united unto them, hungering more and more after the increase of this power and life whereby I might feel myself perfectly redeemed; and indeed this is the surest way to become a Christian; to whom afterwards the knowledge and understanding of principles will not be wanting, but will grow up so much as is needful as the natural fruit of this good root, and such a knowledge will not be barren nor unfruitful. (*Quaker Faith and Practice*, 19:21)

Margaret Fell (England, 1614-1702)

And so [George Fox] went on, and said, "That Christ was the Light of the world, and lighteth every man that cometh into the world; and that by this light they might be gathered to God," &c. I stood up in my pew, and wondered at his doctrine, for I had never heard such before. And then he went on, and opened the scriptures, and said, "The scriptures were the prophets' words, and Christ's and the apostles' words, and what, as they spoke, they enjoyed and possessed, and had it from the Lord": and said, "Then what had any to do with the scriptures, but as they came to the Spirit that gave them forth? You will say, 'Christ saith this, and the apostles say this;' but what canst thou say? Art thou a child of the Light, and hast thou walked in the Light, and what thou speakest, is it inwardly from God?" &c. This opened me so, that it cut me to the heart; and then I saw clearly we were all wrong. So I sat down in my pew again, and cried bitterly: and I cried in my spirit to the Lord, "We are all thieves; we are all thieves; we have taken the scriptures in words, and know nothing of them in ourselves." ("The testimony of Margaret Fox concerning her late husband," from *The Journal of George Fox*, 1694.)

We are a people that follow after those things that make for peace, love and unity; it is our desire that others' feet may walk in the same, and do deny and bear our testimony against all strife and wars and contentions ("A Declaration and an Information from Us, the People Called Quakers ...," 1660, reprinted in Wallace, T.H.S., *A Sincere and constant Love: An Introduction to the work of Margaret Fell*, Friends United Press, 1992, p. 54. Also accessible at <http://www.qhpress.org/quakerpages/qwhp/mf2king.htm>

Mary Dyer (England, 1611-1660)

[Boston Common, 1660:] Then Mary Dyer was brought forth, and with a band of soldiers led through the town, the drums being beaten before and behind her, and so continued that none

might hear her speak all the way to the place of execution, which was about a mile. Thus guarded, she came to the gallows, and being gone up the ladder, some said to her, that, if she would return [home] she might come down and save her life. To which she replied, "Nay, I cannot, for in obedience to the will of the Lord I came, and in His will I abide faithful to death." ... Then one mentioned she should have said, she had been in Paradise. To which she answered, "Yea, I have been in Paradise these several days." Thus Mary Dyer departed this life, a constant and faithful martyr of Christ, having been twice led to death, which the first time she expected with an entire resignation of mind to the will of God, and now suffered with Christian fortitude, being raised above the fear of death through a blessed hope and glorious assurance of eternal life and immortality. (Besse, Joseph, *A Collection of the sufferings of the people called Quakers*, 1753, vol. 2, pp. 206-207)

William Penn (England, 1644-1718)

True godliness don't turn men out of the world, but enables them to live better in it, and excites their endeavours to mend it; not hide their candle under a bushel, but set it upon a table in a candlestick. (*No Cross, No Crown*, ch. 5, section 12, 1682)