

Durham Friends Meeting

## “Quakerism 101”

A short course for interested members and attenders  
Introducing the history and principle elements of Quakerism.

# Class I

## Experience of Early Friends and The Light Within

In this session, we will consider:

1. The Experience of Early Friends  
Historic Background  
Principle Personages
2. The Light Within as a fundamental Quaker concept  
The Universalist impulse  
Christian Theology as interpreted by early Friends
3. Early Quaker Development and Organization

To prepare for class, please read the following short essays and excerpts. (Downloading and bringing them to class for reference is suggested.)

If you are inclined, you may also wish to read the first four chapters of John Punshon’s book *Portrait in Grey* (available in the Meeting library or in bookstores) which provides a nice 100-page introduction to the origins of Quakerism and its early years.

JBH

# The Experience of Early Friends

By Andrew Wright

2005

## Historical Context

The world of the early Friends was in the midst of radical change. The Renaissance in Europe had strengthened the role of science and reason in the Western world. The individual's power to understand and make sense of reality on their own was challenging the authority of the Catholic Church. Until recently there had been only one church in Western Europe. Martin Luther's "95 Theses" that critiqued the Catholic Church is generally seen as the beginning of the Reformation when western Christianity splintered into a plethora of various "protestant" churches.

In order to fully understand the significance of the Reformation we must realize that political authority and religious authority were very closely aligned at this time in history. Political authority was used to enforce religious orthodoxy as well as to punish those who expressed unconventional views. Meditating on the intensity of feeling that many have today about issues like abortion or gay/ lesbian rights or end of life issues might begin to help us to understand the intensity of feeling that people experienced around religious issues during the Reformation. Many people felt like only the triumph of their religious group could secure their right to religious expression or save them from persecution. The notion of separation of church and state only began to become a possibility much later.

## The English Reformation and Civil War

In England, the reformation developed a little later than in Germany and in a slightly different way. In 1534, King Henry VIII declared the Church of England independent of the Roman Catholic papacy and hierarchy. The Church of England then flip-flopped back and forth between Catholicism and Protestantism for more than 100 years as different Monarchs ruled the country. Eventually Protestantism came to control England.

Puritanism (one theological trend of Protestantism) grew in popularity during the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and early 17<sup>th</sup> century. By 1640, civil war had broken-out between the Monarchists who supported the Church of England and the Parliamentarians who supported "dissenting" churches and preachers (most were Puritans). Many future Quakers were soldiers (and preachers) in the Parliamentary army.

In 1645 Oliver Cromwell led the Parliamentarians to victory over the Monarchists and overthrew King Charles I. In the succeeding 15 years several things happened. For a time, various religious groups were tolerated and many different understandings of Puritanism arose. Also there were several attempts to form some type of parliamentary form of church order and government that could govern England. The notion of separation of church and state still was not prevalent so it was difficult for any one form of Puritanism to unite the country. As one faction after another tried to wield power over others, the Puritan movement became more and more radical.

## The Puritan Revolution

The basic position of Puritanism was that the church (and the government) should be purified of all that was not part of the earliest Christian church. Many talked of "primitive Christianity revived". As the Bible had become available to people in their native languages, it became obvious that much in the Catholic Church had not been part of the original Christian church. All that had been added on to the church was often seen as "apostasy" or as Satan's attempt to mess with the church. The church needed to subtract-out all that was "apostasy".

As this movement progressed and became more radicalized, more and more was subtracted-out. Here is Howard Brinton's account of this development of Puritanism:

"The Puritans set out to 'purify' the inherited religion of extraneous elements which had been added in the course of its history, but there was a wide difference of opinion as to how far such purification could or should be carried. The first Puritans subtracted the Pope, the Mass, images and five of the seven sacraments, thus creating the Church of England. Presbyterianism, which was the second wave of Puritanism, originating in Calvin, subtracted the rule of bishops and substituted the authority of presbyters or elders. For this they found sound precedent in the New Testament. Then came the more radical Independents or Congregationalists, who subtracted the centralized form of church government which had not existed in New Testament times and substituted a decentralized and more democratic procedure. The Baptists were still more radical. They

subtracted infant baptism and made church membership dependent on conversion and the gift of the Spirit as described in the New Testament.” (Friends for 350 Years, p.13)

As one can note above, one aspect of this subtraction was simplification of church ritual. Probably the more important underlying movement, though, is the shift in terms of to whom or what people gave religious authority. This shift moved from pope to church hierarchy to local elders/ ministers to scripture to Holy Spirit. As this happened, the notion of one church that was also the government became less and less viable.

As one group came in and out of favor and political power, they became labeled by others as “apostasy”. This factionalism and rhetoric eventually became so bad that it was impossible to form a government that could rule the country. As a result, Cromwell’s army kept the peace and ruled in most parts without any real parliament overseeing it. Eventually, this factionalism led to the re-establishment of the Monarchy and in 1660 Charles II became king.

## **George Fox**

George Fox was born in 1624 and was raised by Puritan parents. He was a young man during the height of the civil war in England, but he played no role in it. At this time he was wandering the countryside in England, reading the Bible inside and out, and pressing anyone who would talk to him for answers to inward questions. He struggled extensively with despair because he felt he could not live a righteous life. He found the preachers of his day, who encouraged him to accept his sinful and imperfect nature, to be “poor comforters”. He continued to search the Bible and his own inner conscience for an answer to his despair.

As the Puritan revolution progressed and radicalized, many began to distrust any religious authority and any ritual expression of the gospel. It seemed to them that none of the existing alternatives were faithful to the life and teachings of Jesus. It also seemed to them that all religious ritual seemed hollow and empty. Some of these people (called Ranters) began to give up their search of the Truth and rather spent their energy mocking Truth and drinking, etc. Others called themselves Seekers and simply sat in silence in their meetings, waiting for a deeper Truth to be revealed.

Fox had discovered within himself a Voice or a Light or a Guide that began to teach him and bring him into a new life that brought him out of his despair. He had many names for this direct and unmediated experience of the Divine. He then began to feel led by this Light Within to preach about it. The message he preached was simple – that Christ had come to teach his people himself. George Fox had nothing to teach others, except to direct them to the Living Christ within themselves.

This message – that Christ had come and that he was available to all in their own inner conscience – had a profound resonance to many of those radical puritans who had begun to distrust any outward religious authority or ritual. Fox’s message helped them to find what they were looking for: an inward spiritual authority that could give their lives meaning and order.

During the late 1640s and 1650s, Fox continued to travel the countryside, going from town to town, but now he carried a message. Local preachers and ministers began to dread Fox’s visits as he often disrupted their services or drew parishioners away from their churches. On several occasions it was claimed that Fox convinced whole gatherings of people of his message in just one sermon. Within a few years, Fox had begun to draw together a community of people who waited on the guidance of the Christ Within to lead them in all aspects of life – from worship to the conduct of business to outward testimonies to the world.

# Early Quaker Leadership

By John Hunter

1/2008

One of the outstanding features of early Quakerism was its shared leadership. Based on the doctrine of the Light Within, anyone could potentially rise to leadership. Wealth, rank, education, or political connection were, in terms of the developing practice of Friends, no longer principal elements in attaining leadership, and men and women of varied backgrounds rose to prominence in the Society of Friends. This is not to say that leadership squabbles, personality conflicts, or power struggles did not exist among early Friends\*, but in comparison to the political/religious society from which Quakerism sprang, leadership was remarkably egalitarian.

It is difficult to choose only a handful of early notable Quakers. After listing a few obvious names (George Fox, Margaret Fell, William Penn, etc.) it becomes immediately obvious that there were many others who may have been almost equally important to the early development of Quakerism for reasons that may have escaped us modern readers of history. The “Valiant 60” (a old term re-popularized in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Elfrida Vipont in her book of the same name) is a reference to at least 60 of such early “Publishers of Truth” (traveling ministers preaching Quakerism often at great personal peril) but there were surely more who might have been on the list -and, technically, Robert Barclay, William Penn, and Mary Dyer are not. That said, here follows a bit about nine notable early Quakers from whose lives we can glean somewhat of what the early Quakers experienced. (Another partial list of notable early Quakers follows for those who may wish to research further.)

## **George Fox** (1624 – 1691)

There can be no question that George Fox was the principal leader and progenitor of Quakerism. His combination of charisma, principled resolve, spiritual insight, encyclopedic knowledge of the Bible, political savvy, courage, outspokenness, powerful speaking and writing ability, organizational skills, and his stamina and personal endurance made him the natural leader to form a new sect. Even in periods when he was absent either in prison, traveling to the new world, or in those times when he consciously tried to retire from direct leadership, his counsel or opinion still carried much “weight” and was heeded by those in positions to make decision on behalf of Friends. Fox tirelessly traveled among Friends holding meetings and wrote hundreds of letters of admonishment and encouragement to individuals and groups. One can not help but note the parallels to the model of St Paul in a time when Friends were consciously speaking of primitive Christianity revived.

## **Margaret Fell** (1614 – 1702)

Margaret Fell is often called the “Mother of Quakerism.” This title is earned on account of numerous aspects of her critically important leadership on behalf of early Quakers. Margaret Fell was one of George Fox’s early converts and she opened her home (Swarthmoor Hall) to serve as an unofficial “headquarters” and she kept the books and supervised finances for the fledgling Quaker movement. Because she was one of the few early Friends who was well positioned in society by birth, she was often able to intercede in proceedings against Quakers (even to the King) although her rank did not keep her from having her property confiscated and several times being thrown into prison herself. Margaret Fell was a prolific letter writer whose output supported Friends far and wide and she also produced a seminal pamphlet laying out the scriptural basis for women being authorized to speak and preach. After the death of her husband, she later married George Fox and the two worked as a team supporting and organizing the Quaker movement. While history records her household as a very loving environment, Margaret Fell was also a pillar of strength outliving two husbands and years of imprisonment to actively work again to organize Quakerism well into her eighties.

### **James Nayler (1617 – 1660)**

After serving in the army, James Nayler had a religious experience and gave up his possessions to begin spiritual seeking. He met George Fox in 1652 and soon became the one of the most prominent Quaker evangelists. He was a skilled theological debater and writer of tracts and many considered the charismatic Nayler to be the true leader of the Quakers, especially in times when George Fox was imprisoned. He attracted a loyal and enthusiastic following of a group of women (which alarmed Fox and others) and was talked by these followers into staging a reenactment of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. He was accused of blasphemy and tried before Parliament and sentenced to torture and a long prison term. This was a seminal incident in the development of Quakerism as it forced Fox and other Quaker leaders to more clearly define organizational lines of authority and discipline as a counterbalance to unchecked reliance on the "Christ Within" especially in cases where mental instability may have been involved. Nayler emerged from prison a broken man. He died within a year after being beaten and robbed, but not before issuing his oft quoted words of love and forgiveness on his death bed.

### **Elizabeth Hooton (1600 – 1672)**

There is debate as to whether, in 1647, it was George Fox who converted Elizabeth Hooton or the other way around. This was in the later period of Fox's "seeking" and he may have sought out the older Elizabeth Hooton based on her outspoken views as a Baptist. In any case, in her early 50s she became the first woman Quaker preacher and she was powerful and relentless in spreading the Quaker message which resulted in numerous imprisonments. She traveled to Boston in 1662 to visit Quakers, but was beaten and left in the woods to starve. She managed to return to England to find her property confiscated and decided to petition the King by camping out in the court, preaching to and befriending various soldiers and courtiers (who tolerated her presence), and badgering the king at every opportunity until he accepted her written petition and gave her a letter authorizing her to visit in Boston and receive good treatment. She returned to Boston where the king's letter was ignored, was severely beaten, imprisoned, and again left in the woods in winter to die of starvation. Again, now in her mid 60s, she managed to walk out and returned to England. After more years of preaching and imprisonments, she joined Fox on a voyage to the new world to encourage Quakers. She died peacefully in Barbados.

### **Isaac Penington (the younger) (1617 – 1679)**

Son of Isaac Penington, (Puritan) Lord Mayor of London (who later died as a prisoner in the Tower of London), Isaac Penington came to Quakerism in 1658. His father denounced him but was the recipient of touching letters in return. He and his wife Mary (whose daughter became William Penn's wife) gave up their privilege to dedicate themselves to the new movement. Isaac frequently traveled with George Fox, James Nayler, Robert Barclay, and others. A prodigious writer, his first (posthumously) published (Quaker) works were over 1,400 pages. Leonard Kenworthy comments, "Isaac Penington became an expert in inward experience and mysticism, whose greatest contributions came through his public ministry, his remarkable letters, and his many publications. He was the literary and mystical interpreter of the new movement." Half of his 22 Quaker years were spent in prison in horrific conditions. At his death he was widely eulogized as a gentle and loving soul who harbored no ill will for anyone, even his persecutors.

### **Mary Dyer (1611 – 1660)**

Emigrating with her husband as part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1635, Mary Dyer sided with the Antinomian Anne Hutchinson and was banished to Rhode Island in 1638. Upon hearing George Fox preach she converted to Quakerism on a visit to England in 1652 where she became a traveling Quaker preacher for 5 years. She returned to Boston in 1658 to protest the new law banning Quakers and was twice arrested and banished from the Colony. She returned in 1659 to attempt to visit Friends imprisoned in Boston where she was imprisoned and sentenced to death along with two male Quaker companions. The men were hanged but upon having her hands and feet bound and the noose around her neck, she was reprieved (by pre-arrangement through appeals by her husband, son, and governors of Connecticut and Nova Scotia) and sent back to Rhode Island. However she felt that she could not conscientiously accept such a reprieve and returned on 1660 where Governor Endicott had her hanged and as such became a martyr and symbol of religious freedom. Her statue is on the statehouse grounds at Boston (with additional castings at Friends Center in Philadelphia and at Earlham College.)

### **Mary Fisher (1633 – 1698)**

Mary Fisher converted to Quakerism about 1651 and began to preach. She was imprisoned in York and stripped and flogged in Cambridge in 1653 for preaching to students. In 1655 she felt led to travel to the new world but upon arriving in Boston she was not allowed off of the ship while her belongings were searched resulting in the burning of her books. She was then imprisoned, stripped, searched for signs of witchcraft and sent back to Barbados. Back in England by 1657, she felt led to go to Turkey to share her religious views with the Sultan. She traveled with other Friends to near east, but they were forced back to Venice. She went on alone and gained an audience with the Sultan of Turkey where she was received kindly and she returned feeling that her mission had been a success. Mary Fisher was married in England to a Quaker ship captain and bore three children. After her husband's death, she re-married and immigrated in 1682 to Charleston where she and later her granddaughter were active Quakers.

### **William Penn (1644 – 1718)**

Born into a wealthy family, William Penn was a widely traveled and brilliant student who mastered 4 languages and read the ancients in the original tongue and became a champion of democracy and fair dealing. He came to Quakerism in 1667 through conviction by an old university friend, much to the displeasure of his father. Arrested several times for preaching the Quaker message, at his trial he won a landmark case in English jurisprudence establishing the right of a jury to make independent decisions. He also authored many books and tracts of which several are still in print. Penn is most well known as the founder of Pennsylvania and who based its government on progressive ideals gleaned from his wide travels and studies and supported by his Quaker convictions. Hallmarks included fair dealing with native Americans, equality for women, human rights, and true freedom of religion. Pennsylvania was the only colony to originally have a constitution, which subsequently became a conceptual model for the United States constitution and democratic governments world wide.

### **Robert Barclay (1648 – 1690)**

A Scot from a landed Calvinist family, Robert Barclay was highly educated in religion and theology having studied in Paris at a Catholic institution and as a convinced Quaker (1667) he was thereby educationally quite unusual. After his conviction he began to write a series of defenses of Quakerism, the “Apology” being the third. It is this “Barclay’s Apology,” a systematic defense of Quaker theology, for which he is best known in academic circles and among Friends. Although dealing in arcane theological argument (originally written in Latin), Barclay defends the Quaker notion of the Inner Light as the essential experiential fact for Christians superior to even the Scriptures. Barclay traveled with George Fox and William Penn on several expeditions to Europe and spent three days with Princess Palatine in 1676. While he was imprisoned several times for his writing and speaking, Barclay was able to cultivate a relationship with James II and was involved in the New Jersey land grants along with William Penn serving for a time as governor.

### **Other Notable Early Quakers**

Edward Burrough  
Richard Farnsworth  
Francis Howgill  
Mary Howgill  
Richard Hubberthorne  
John Perrot\*  
John Story\*  
George Whitehead  
John Wilkinson\*

\*These three Johns each became involved in controversial Quaker politics. John Perrot was a principal in the Hat controversy, while Wilkinson and Story have their names attached to a controversy involving Quaker organizational discipline.

# The Light Within

By Andrew Wright

In Light to Live by, Rex Ambler claims that Fox's preaching and writings really described a process or a way of meditation, rather than a set of dogma or beliefs. This was very different than any of the other expressions of Puritanism. Rather than try to convince his hearers of a particular view of the world, Fox tried to convince them to direct their attention to a particular inward experience of God. Fox believed if his hearers would do this, their lives would be radically transformed and they would be able to participate in bringing about the kingdom of God on earth.

The Light was not a metaphor for early Friends, rather it was something real that they encountered. When they settled into their silent worship, they found that there was a Light that illuminated and revealed things to them. It might show them the Truth about some issue of their life or it might uncover the shallow and unreliable beliefs on which they organized their lives. But each time that they brought their lives before God in inner quiet, they found that the Light Within revealed more to them.

This Light was not based on thinking about things or any other subjective type of experience. They believed it to be an objective reality that transcended their individual experience, but spoke inwardly in some sort of intuitive and direct language to the individual soul.

The Light went beyond simply showing one the Truth about their current life because it continued in one's life and helped one to find their way into new life. In other words, first the Light revealed Truth to those who waited on it. Then the Light gave Power to overcome any darkness that existed in the individual's life.

## Fox and the Bible

George Fox knew the Bible thoroughly and could quote it at length. He also probably believed that it was inspired by the Holy Spirit. And, yet, he felt that the Bible was secondary to one's direct experience of God. He believed that many of his day misinterpreted it and so he said that one must read the scriptures "in the Spirit that gave forth the scripture" if one is to understand it correctly. He also described the Bible as "the words of God", but not the "Word of God" for there was only one "Word of God" and that was the Living Christ or "the Light Within".

Both claiming that the Bible was not the "Word of God" as well as claiming that Christ was within them were basis for persecution of Quakers at various times in the seventeenth century. Both the Church of England as well as other Puritans labeled early Friends as heretics.

## Development of Quaker Discipline

Many critics of Quakerism at the beginnings as well as today doubt that it is reliable to trust so completely on this inward and seemingly individual experience of the Light Within. It seems that this might lead us to an extreme individualism or to fanaticism. (There are many today who do horrible things in the world and justify their actions by claiming that God has spoken to them or told them to do these things.)

Early Friends had to ask this question of themselves when in 1655 James Nayler, a very charismatic and central leader, rode in to Bristol on a donkey, re-enacting Jesus' ride into Jerusalem. Many people (including many Friends) thought that Nayler's actions were blasphemous (or at least irresponsible) because it appeared that he was claiming to be the Second Coming of Christ. He had not consulted with other Friends before taking this action and it ended-up causing an increase in the amount of persecution that Friends suffered.

This and other events challenged Friends to ask themselves how such leadings and other Truth that the Light Within revealed to them should be tested in order to know that these insights were reliable and surely of Divine origin. Friends began to feel that it was necessary to have some means of providing accountability and discipline for each other as they came to experience the Light Within change their lives more and more.

What they developed might be described as a series of concentric circles that represent wider and wider experiences of community. The first circle might represent Friends that one is close to and intimate with, the next might represent the monthly meeting, the next would be the quarterly meeting, then the yearly meeting, finally the wider fellowship of Quakers. The individual is accountable for their understanding of the Truth to each of these circles of community. It is believed that whatever the Light reveals to the individual will be consistent with what the Light reveals to others. Ever wider circles of community then provide the discipline for the faith, rather than doctrine or a literal reading of the Bible or the judgment of a hierarchy of clergy. The community helps the individual to test the insights of the Light by using reason, scripture, concrete experience of life, and traditions. The Light, though, is clearly understood to be of primary importance, while the above tests are understood to be of secondary importance.

# One Tree, Many Branches: Christian and Universalist Traditions Within Quakerism

By Kent Wicker  
with Bob Passmore

2006

Universalism refers to the claim of Friends that the Divine Light is a universal experience or, in other words, that the Light Within has been and continues to be available to all people, in all times, and all cultural experiences. Most Friends would agree that Quakerism is based upon the notion that there is a universal Divine Truth greater than any particular human expression of that Truth, whether through scripture, liturgy, sacrament, or image. Indeed, Quaker love of simplicity tends to sweep away all of these cultural and traditional religious superficialities in its attempt to experience that Truth and its guidance as fully and directly as possible. We try to live simply, we meet in plain meetinghouses, and historically we have even maintained a special sort of plain dress and plain speech – all in an attempt to circumvent ingrained cultural assumptions and habits that are less focused on that Divine experience.

Yet, no matter how skeptical Quakers have been of culture, language, scripture or worship, we are not able to go without such things completely! Nor have Quakers been reluctant to name the Truth as they saw it. Fox, Fell, Naylor, Barclay and other early Friends had very clear notions of what was right and what was wrong, and they weren't shy about sharing them. These fundamental Quaker notions are grounded in the Protestant Christianity of 17<sup>th</sup> century Britain; they assume its values and make full (albeit selective) use of its language.

Quakerism, then, is founded on a paradox: we focus our lives on an Inward Light that is beyond anything we can express -- yet in the real world, we cannot fully discern, share, test or follow our leadings without specific words and concepts. Living a life focused on the ineffable, universal Divine, ironically, seems to require particular disciplines and practices in our daily lives. Therefore, Quakerism has always had both its universalist aspects, and its more specific aspects. And, since Quakerism is a form of Protestant Christianity, these more specific aspects have tended to reflect the values, assumptions and language of Protestant Christianity.

A tension between these poles has always animated Quakerism. Many are comfortable with a faith which is *both* Christian and universalist; others believe that the more specifically Christian aspects can get in the way of the universal aspects. One way to explore this tension is to look at the following quote from George Fox:

Now the Lord God hath opened to me by His invisible power how that every man was enlightened by the divine Light of Christ: and I saw it shine through all, and that they that believed in it came out of condemnation and came to the Light of Life, and became the children of it, but they that hated it, and did not believe in it, were condemned by it, though they made a profession of Christ. (1648)

One can identify three “Friendly” ways of interpreting this quote:

1) One possible evangelical Quaker reading:

Jesus Christ is the one Truth, whose love and redemption are available to all universally. Even those who never heard the name of Jesus – say, people from Old Testament times or people of other faiths – can still know Christ inwardly. However, the teachings of other religious faiths are not equal to Christianity: “the Light Within” is simply another term for Jesus in his role as Christ or Savior. Once someone who has been faithful without “the Word” hears about Christ, she should accept Christ as her Savior.

2) One possible “conservative” Quaker reading:

There are many paths to the Truth: Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Native American spirituality, etc. are all equally valid expressions of this one universal Truth. Quakerism is a specifically Christian expression of this Truth, based upon the notion that the Christ and the Light Within are one and the same. We can learn much from these other faiths, but we cannot grasp the full power of Quakerism without its more specific – and therefore Christian -- language and practices. Without such a foundation

of understanding, what is distinctively valuable about the Quaker faith dissipates into something so vague it cannot be fully practiced or passed on to others.

3) One possible liberal Quaker reading:

“The Light Within” is just one way of expressing a direct experience with the Divine that is common to all religious traditions, a universal spiritual reality that crosses all religious boundaries. Therefore, it is possible to be a Buddhist Quaker or Jewish Quaker. There is a great deal to be gained from being part of a religious community that is so diverse because we can learn from the perspectives and traditions of others.

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### Early Friends’ Quotations

Compiled by Kent Wicker 10/06  
Edited By John Hunter 1/08

Many of the quotes below have become iconic among Quakers. Friends will instantly recognize: “This I knew Experimentally.”, “We are all thieves.”, and “There is a spirit...” as they are often quoted in the modern day (Fox, Fell, and Nayler respectively.) Below follows a selection of quotations from early Friends in which you will find these famous phrases and more. They are organized topically and give insight into the theology, experience, thinking, and early organization of Friends.

JH

#### Fox’s account of his seeking (“Pure religion”, see also “Openings”)

But as I had forsaken all the priests, so I left the separate preachers also, and those called the most experienced people; for I saw there was none among them all that could speak to my condition. And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, or 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; for all are concluded under sin, and shut up in unbelief as I had been, that Jesus Christ might have the pre-eminence, who enlightens, and gives grace, and faith, and power. Thus, when God doth work, who shall let [prevent] it? And this I knew experimentally.

George Fox - *Journal* 1647 (Date of reported experience. J. was first published in 1694)

Excerpt from Chapter I (compare Nickalls ed., p11)

Rufus Jones ed. Is on-line at: [http://www.ccel.org/ccel/fox\\_g/autobio.titlepage.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/fox_g/autobio.titlepage.html)

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So I went about a mile till I came into the town, and as soon as I came within the town the word of the Lord came unto me to cry, “Woe unto the bloody city of Lichfield!”; so I went up and down the streets crying... As I went down the town there ran like a channel of blood down the streets, and the market place was like a pool of blood....

And when I had done, I considered why I should go and cry against that city and call it a bloody city...

George Fox - *Journal* (1651)

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Now was I come up in spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God. All things were new, and all the creation gave another smell to me than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but pureness, and innocency, and righteousness, being renewed up into the image of God by Christ Jesus, so that I saw I was come up to the state of Adam which he was in before he fell... Great things did the Lord lead me into, and wonderful depths were opened unto me, beyond what can by words be declared; but as people come into

subjection to the spirit of God, and grow up in the image and power of the Almighty, they may receive the Word of wisdom, that opens all things, and come to know the hidden unity in the Eternal Being...

Now I was sent to turn people from darkness to the light that they might receive Christ Jesus, for to as many as should receive him in his light, I saw that he would give power to become the sons of God, which I had obtained by receiving Christ. And I was to direct people to the Spirit that gave forth the Scriptures, by which they might be led into all Truth, and so up to Christ and God, as they had been who gave them forth...

And I was to bring people off from all the world's religions, which are vain, that they might know the pure religion, and might visit the fatherless, the widows and the strangers, and keep themselves from the spots of the world. And then there would not be so many beggars, the sight of whom often grieved my heart, to see so much hard-heartedness amongst them that professed the name of Christ....

And I was to bring people off from Jewish ceremonies, and from heathenish fables, and from men's inventions and windy doctrines, by which they blowed the people about this way and the other way, from sect to sect; and all their beggarly rudiments, with their schools and colleges for making ministers of Christ, who are indeed ministers of their own making but not of Christ's; and from all their images and crosses, and sprinkling of infants, with all their holy days (so called) and all their vain traditions, which they had gotten up since the apostles' days....

George Fox - *Journal* (1648?)

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### **Continuing revelation**

[The Scriptures] are only a declaration of the fountain, and not the fountain itself, therefore they are not to be esteemed the principal ground of all truth, and knowledge, nor yet the adequate primary rule of faith and manners.

Robert Barclay, 1676

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Bishop: Do you compare our Common Prayer-Book to Nebuchadnezzar's *image*?

J.R.: Yes I do: that was his image, and this is thine...

Bishop: Do you own the Trinity?

J.R.: I don't remember such a word in the holy scriptures... But I would soberly ask thee, since the scriptures say, the heavens cannot contain him [God]; and he is incomprehensible, by what person or likeness canst thou comprehend the Almighty?

John Roberts, c. 1683.

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We are... minding altogether outward things, neglecting the inward work of almighty God in our hearts, if we can but frame according to outward prescriptions and orders, and deny eating and drinking without neighbors... [According to this outward, prescriptive system,] we must look at no colours, nor make anything that is changeable colours as the hills are, nor sell them, nor wear them: but we must be all in one dress and one colour.

This is a silly poor gospel! It is more fit for us to be covered with God's eternal Spirit, and clothed with his eternal Light, which leads us and guides us into righteousness, and to live righteously and justly and holily in the present evil world.

Margaret Fell Fox, c.1700

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### **Convincement (compare to "conversion")**

All my religion was but the hearing of the ear, the believing and talking of a God and Christ in heaven or a place at a distance, I knew not where. Oh, how gracious was the Lord to me in carrying me to Judge Fell's to see the wonders of His power and wisdom, *a family walking in the fear of the Lord*, conversing daily with Him, crucified to the world and living only to God. I was so confounded, all my knowledge and wisdom became folly;

my mouth was stopped, my conscience convinced and the secrets of my heart were made manifest, and that Lord was discovered to be near, whom I ignorantly worshipped.

Anthony Pearson, 1653. Pearson (1628-1666) was a frequent visitor at Swarthmoor Hall, the household of Margaret Fell (1614-1702). This passage reflects the influence of Fell and her household on Pearson. (Cited in London YM Christian Faith & Practice, 1959, #17)

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### Openings

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. And I went back into Nottinghamshire, and there the Lord shewed me that the natures of those things which were hurtful without, were within in the hearts and minds of wicked men... And 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. And in that also I saw the infinite love of God; and I had great openings.

G. Fox, Journal, 1647

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Now the Lord God hath opened to me by his invisible power how that every man was enlightened by the divine light of Christ; and I saw it shine through all, and that they that believed in it came out of condemnation and came to the light of life and became the children of it, but they that hated it, and did not believe in it, were condemned by it, though they made a profession of Christ. This I saw in the pure openings of the Light without the help of any man, neither did I then know where to find it in the Scriptures; though afterwards, searching the Scriptures, I found it.

G. Fox, Journal, 1648

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And so he [Fox] went on and said, How 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, etc. And I stood up in my pew, and I 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 Light and has walked in the Light, and what thou speakest is it inwardly from God?"

This opened me so that it cut me to the heart; and then I saw clearly we were all wrong. So I sat me 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." So that served me, that I cannot well tell what he spake afterwards; but he went on in declaring against the false prophets and priests and deceivers of the people."

Margaret Fell Fox, 1652

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### Covenant of Peace

My time being nearly out of being committed six months to the House of Correction, they filled the House of Correction with persons that they had taken up to be soldiers: and then they would have had me to be captain of them to go forth to Worcester fight and the soldiers cried they would have none but me. So the keeper of the House of Correction was commanded to bring me up before the Commissioners and soldiers in the market place; and there they proffered me that preferment because of my virtue [n. meaning *valour*], as they said, with many

other compliments, and 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 rise, from the lust according to James's doctrine [n. James, iv. 1]. 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. And they said they offered it in love and kindness to me because of my virtue, and such like <flattering words they used>, and I told them if that were their love and kindness I trampled it under my feet. <Then their rage got up and they said, 'Take him away gaoler, and cast him into the dungeon amongst the rogues and felons'; which they then did and put me into the dungeon amongst thirty felons in a lousy, stinking low place in the ground without any bed. Here they kept me <a close prisoner> almost a half year, unless it were at times; and sometimes they would let me walk in the garden, for they had a belief of me that I would not go away.

George Fox, 1651

Fox's Journal, Nickalls ed., Chap. III, pp. 64-65.

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### **The "Lamb's War"**

As they war not against men's persons, so their weapons are not carnal nor hurtful to any of the creation; for the Lamb comes not to destroy men's lives nor the work of God, and therefore at his appearance in his subjects he puts spiritual weapons into their hearts and hands; their armor is the light, their sword the Spirit of the Father and the Son, their shield is faith and patience, their paths are prepared with the gospel of peace and good-will towards all the creation of God; their breastplate is righteousness and holiness to God, their minds are girded with godliness, and they are covered with salvation, and they are taught with truth. And thus the Lamb in them, and they in him, go out in judgment and righteousness to make war with his enemies, conquering and to conquer. Not as the prince of this world in his subjects, with whips and prisons, tortures and torments on the bodies of creatures, to kill and to destroy men's lives, who are deceived, and so become his enemies; but he goes forth in the power of the Spirit with the Word of Truth to pass judgment upon the head of the Serpent which does deceive and bewitch the world.

(Nayler, James. "The Lamb's War Against the Man of Sin," reprinted in *Early Quaker Writings 1650-1700*. Hugh Barbour and Arthur O. Roberts, Eds. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1973, pp. 106-7. Cited by Gene Hillman, <http://www.quaker.org/quest/issue7-6-hillman01.htm>)

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### **"There is a spirit..."**

(This is from the deathbed testimony dictated by James Nayler in 1660 at the age of 44 after he was robbed and severely beaten. Its context is also relevant to the fact that many Friends, including George Fox, never became reconciled with him following his actions in 1655 and subsequent torture and imprisonment.)

There is a spirit which I feel, that delights to do no evil, nor to avenge any wrong, but delights to endure all things in hope to enjoy its own in the end. Its hope is to outlive all wrath and contention, and to weary out all exaltation and cruelty, or whatever is of a nature contrary to itself. It sees to the end of all temptations. As it bears no evil in itself, so it conceives none in thought to any other: if it be betrayed, it bears it; for its ground and spring are the mercies and forgiveness of God. Its crown is meekness, its life is everlasting love unfeigned, and takes its kingdom with entreaty, and not with contention, and keeps it by lowliness of mind. In God alone it can rejoice, though none else regard it, or can own its life. It is conceived in sorrow, and brought forth without any to pity it; nor doth it murmur at grief, and oppression. It never rejoiceth but through sufferings; for with the world's joy it is murdered. I found it alone, being forsaken. I have fellowship therein with them who lived in dens, and desolate places of the earth, who through death obtained this resurrection, and eternal holy life.

Thou wast with me when I fled from the face of mine enemies: then didst Thou warn me in the night: Thou carriedst me in Thy power into the hiding-place Thou hadst prepared for me: there Thou coveredst me with Thy Hand that in time Thou mightst bring me forth a rock before all the world. When I was weak Thou stayedst me with Thy Hand, that in Thy time Thou mightst present me to the world in Thy strength in which I stand, and cannot be moved. Praise the Lord, O my soul. Let this be written for those that come after. Praise the Lord.

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### **Gospel order, Discipline**

*In "Gospel Order", Sandra Cronk reflects on "mutual accountability as an internal dynamic to keep gospel order strong within the Quaker community", following the one-on-one admonition in Matthew 18. Noting that "One cannot enter this process without being acutely aware on one's own faults" she cites Pennington who writes in one of his letters as follows:*

I have heard that thou hast somewhat against W.R., ...; this thou oughtst seriously to weigh and consider; that thy path and walking herein, may be right and straight before the Lord. Is the thing, or are the things, which thou hast against him, fully so, as thou apprehendest? Hast thou seen evil in him, or to break forth from him? and hast thou considered *him* therein, and dealt with him, as if it had been thy own case? Hast thou pitied him, mourned over him, cried to the Lord for him, and in tender love and meekness of spirit, laid the thing before him? ... If thou hast proceeded thus, thou hast proceeded tenderly and orderly, according to the law of brotherly love; ... But, if thou hast let in any hardness of spirit, or hard reasonings against him..., the witness of God will not justify thee in that.

From *Letters of Isaac Pennington*  
As quoted in Sandra Cronk, *Gospel Order* (p. 24): *A Quaker Understanding of Faithful Church Community*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet 297, 1991.

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You may see how the Apostle, after he had convinced people, brought them into the Order of the Gospel. The Jews, after they came out of Egypt, they were brought into the Order of the law of God. And as Christians come to believe in Christ, then they are come into the Order of the Gospel.

So, as I was first moved of the Lord God, to go up and down the nation to preach the Gospel, then after the Lord moved me to go up and down to exhort and unite, that all people might come into the possession of the Gospel, and the Order of it, which is the Power of God... by which all things are upheld and ordered to the Glory of God.

So, this was the spiritual Order of the Gospel, which the Apostle in Spirit beheld... in whom their waking should be, to wit, in Christ, the spiritual and heavenly Man; and not to walk in old Adam, who was without this spiritual, heavenly Gospel Order, which it is the duty of all Christians to walk in.... It is said in Psalm 37:23, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord:, that is, by his Power and Spirit."

George Fox, Epistle 313

[Concerning the above from Fox, Lloyd Lee Wilson provides this comment:

The Quaker understanding of gospel order stems from an understanding of Christ's role as the restorer of the original relationship between the Creator and creation. By this view, Christ reconciled creation with the Creator, and by so doing enabled everyone who believes in Christ to enter into a new relationship with God. It was (and is) the responsibility of Christians to live in this gospel order, both out of the desire to do God's will, from the joy that being in that right relationship brings, and as a testimony to the rest of the world about the gospel.]

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### **Conduct**

*This statement comes in George Fox's letter to ministers which he sent in 1656 when he was in prison in Launceston in Cornwall. It was written down for him by Ann Downer (1624-1686) who had walked from London to help him. Later she was a very influential Friend in the women's meetings in London. (See <http://quakersfp.live.poptech.coop/qfp/chap19/19.19.html> - 19.32)*

*This is the concluding paragraph:*

Bring all into the worship of God. Plough up the fallow ground... And none are ploughed up but he who comes to the principle of God in him which he hath transgressed. Then he doth service to God; then the planting and the watering and the increase from God cometh. So the ministers of the Spirit must minister to the Spirit that is transgressed and in prison, which hath been in captivity in every one; whereby with the same Spirit people must be led out of captivity up to God, the Father of spirits, and do service to him and have unity with him, with the Scriptures and with one another. And this is the word of the Lord God to you all, and a charge to you all in the presence of the living God: be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.

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### **Belief v Practice**

I realized that in trying to understand what (early Friends) said and did I had to give up the idea that what held it all together was some idea! I had been unable to find any belief that early Quakers held in common as the basis for their faith, not even the belief that there was “that of God” in everyone. To them “that of God” in people represented not a belief but an experience, the experience of light within themselves in the first instance, and then an experience of the divine source in others as they opened their hearts to them. So the basis of early Quaker faith and life was something very immediate, personal and practical. They turned in meditation to the divine source of life within them and then lived their lives simply in response to that. This was not a belief but a practice, and it was surprisingly simple.

Rex Ambler. *Light to Live by: An Exploration in Quaker Spirituality*, London: Quaker Books., 2002, pp. 14-15)

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And oh, how sweet and pleasant it is to the truly spiritual eye to see several sorts of believers, several forms of Christians in the school of Christ, every one learning their own lesson, performing their own peculiar service, and knowing, owning, and loving one another in their several places and different performances to their Master... For this is the true ground of love and unity, not that such a man walks and does just as I do, but because I feel the same Spirit and Life in him, and that he walks in his rank, in his own order, in his proper way and place of subjection to that; and this is far more pleasing to me than if he walked just in that track wherein I walk.

Isaac Penington, *The Works of Isaac Penington: A Minister of the Gospel in the Society of Friends: Including His Collected Letters, Vol. 1.*  
Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 1681/1995

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Dearly Beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all, with the measure of light which is pure and holy, may be guided and so in the light walking and abiding, these may be fulfilled in the spirit, not the letter, for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

“Letter from the Meeting of Elders at Balby,” 1656

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Christians ought to be distinguished by their likeness to Christ, and not their notions of Christ.

William Penn, “An Address to Protestants of all Persuasions...” (1679).  
*Select Works of William Penn, vol. 3, London: William Phillips, 1825, p. 83*

## Discussion in the First Durham Meeting Q-101 Class

In our first meeting for this series of “Quakerism-101” classes we may be discussing some of the following questions. Can you locate relevant material pertaining to these questions in the selections above?

1. What conditions existed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to promote the “Quaker Explosion”?
2. Early Quakers clearly considered themselves Christians. What about their early message gave rise to their persecution by the dominant Christian culture?
3. What were some points of early Quaker Christian theology that interest you -and why?
4. What is your understanding of “The Light Within”? How has it shown to be important in your life?
5. Which of the early Quakers profiled do you find most interesting? -convincing? -likable?
6. Is Universalism important to you? How far back can you trace its roots in your life (or not?)
7. What first brought you to Quakerism? Can you see any connections to early Friends and their times? How does this history speak to you personally?
8. What are your favorite early Quaker quotations and why?

### Other Possible Topics for Discussion

“Wearing Your Sword as Long as You Can”  
Plain Speech and Plain Dress  
The Hat Controversy  
From soldiers in Cromwell’s army to Pacifists  
Wilkinson–Story Controversy  
Early Quaker demographics and the extent of persecution

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### Some Other Resources for Further Study (available on the Web)

Quaker Heritage Press [www.qhpress.org/](http://www.qhpress.org/)

Journal of George Fox <http://www.strecorsoc.org/gfox/title.html>

Origins of Plain Speech [www.quaker.ca/cfriend/2001-Mar/CF-MAR-2001-korp.pdf](http://www.quaker.ca/cfriend/2001-Mar/CF-MAR-2001-korp.pdf)