From http://www.pym.org/faith-and-practice/historical-introduction/1-beginnings-1652-1689/

1 Beginnings 1652-1689

The Religious Society of Friends arose in England in the middle of the seventeenth century. This was a time of turbulence and change in both religion and politics. In the established Church of England, great emphasis was placed upon outward ceremony; there, and in such dissenting churches as the Baptists and Presbyterians, religious faith was also generally identified with the authority of the Bible or the acceptance of a formal creed. Many individuals, however, became increasingly dissatisfied with ceremonies and creeds, and broke away from these churches. Singly or in small groups, they turned inward in search of a religion of personal experience and direct communion with God.

George Fox (1624 – 1691) was one of these seekers. Even as a child, he was serious and thoughtful, often pondering the Scriptures and engaging in solitary reflection. At age nineteen, after being urged to engage in conduct that violated his religious scruples, he decided to leave home in order to seek spiritual direction. For four years he wandered through the English midlands and as far south as London. Though he consulted various ministers and professors (that is, professing Christians), none could give rest to his troubled soul. Finally, as he recorded in his Journal,

> *…when all my hopes in [Christian ministers and professors] and in all men was 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. …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 so, in 1647, at the age of twenty-three, George Fox began to preach.

His basic message was simple enough: first,

that his own dramatic and life-changing experience of a direct, unmediated revelation from God confirmed the possibility of a religion of personal experience and direct communion with God, a religion of continuing revelation instead of a closed, written canon; and second, that this same possibility was available to every person. Fox's message, combined with his charismatic personality, soon attracted a small group of women and men who joined him in spreading the "good news" that "Christ has come to teach His people himself." These first "publishers of Truth" believed the good news to be a revival of primitive Christianity rather than a new gospel. Gradually, Fox and his associates began to enlist others in this revival; and in 1652, Fox persuaded many of the Westmorland Seekers, a numerous and already well-established religious movement, to become Friends (or Friends of Truth), as his followers called themselves, or Quakers, as they came to be called by others. Also in 1652, with the permission of Judge Fell, Fox and Margaret Fell turned Swarthmoor Hall, the Fells' home, into the headquarters for the infant Religious Society of Friends. These two events—the absorption of the Westmorland Seekers into the Quaker movement, and the establishment of a home base—warrant the choice of 1652 as the birth-time of the Religious Society of Friends.

While many religious dissenters who welcomed Fox's message of direct communion and continuing revelation became Friends, those persons who were committed to the Church of England or to other churches regarded his message as unwelcome, heretical, and treasonable. It was unwelcome, since Fox and some of his followers often invaded and disrupted the church services of others. It was heretical, since the idea of continuing revelation displaced the church and even the Scriptures as finally authoritative. It was treasonable, since those who embraced this idea also refused to acknowledge the authority of the state (with its established church) as taking precedence over the authority of individual conscience, and consequently refused to take any oath of allegiance to the state and to pay tithes towards the maintenance of the Anglican Church. Accordingly, the meetings of early Quakers were frequently disrupted by angry mobs, their meetinghouses were vandalized and burned, and they were themselves subjected to imprisonment and cruel treatment by officials of the state. Such persecution continued until 1689 and the so-called Glorious Revolution, when a Toleration Act was adopted that gave legal sanction to the principle of religious liberty. (Some restrictions on rights continued, however, into the

19th century.) Yet, like the early Christian church, the Quaker movement gained more adherents despite—or because of—the persecution. Some historians claim that the Quakers constituted ten percent of the British population by the end of the seventeenth century.

This combination of persecution and expansion yielded several important consequences. First, the Quakers' sense of themselves as a distinct people with a divine mission became stronger. Their refusal to take oaths under any circumstances, to serve in the army, to take off their hats to persons in authority, to use formal speech (the plural "you" when speaking to one's so-called betters), and to dress like the "world's people" all date from this period. Unlike other dissenters, they insisted on holding their meetings publicly in spite of persecution, and thus began earning their reputation for scrupulous honesty. (The fact that Quaker merchants adopted a fixed price system significantly enhanced this reputation.)

Second, though unwilling to formulate any explicit creed or profession of faith, the early Friends were more than willing to engage in religious controversy and to defend their basic beliefs. Thus began the publication of numerous books and tracts intended to explain and justify Quaker principles. Undoubtedly, Robert Barclay's ***Apology*** (first published in Latin in 1676 and then in English in 1678) was the most theologically sophisticated of these books. Both Margaret Fell and George Fox wrote pamphlets defending a woman's right to preach and prophesy, one of the more controversial of basic Quaker beliefs.

Third, the early Friends realized that their movement required at least some kind of institutional structure: to provide material assistance and emotional support for those being persecuted, and also to nurture and discipline the individual and group life of its adherents. Thus was initiated, at Fox's urging, the bottom-up system of monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings. Though this system has often seemed undisciplined to non-Friends, it has given stability and continuity to our Religious Society. Separate men's and women's meetings for business were established as another institutional innovation. The latter afforded opportunities for women to exercise administrative and decision-making skills that were not generally available to them in the larger society.

During this initial period of Quakerism, Friends were not only engaged in sharing their "good news" with others in England. They also went to countries on the continent of Europe and in the Near

East. Mary Fisher, for instance, was one of six Friends who undertook a mission to Turkey, but was the only one to be received by the Sultan in 1658. Of particular importance were the missions to the British colonies in North America and the West Indies. And under the leadership of William Penn (1644 – 1718), Quaker colonies were established in West Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Friends first came to New England as early as 1656, just four years after the birth of their religious society. In Massachusetts, the Quaker missionaries were imprisoned, tortured, and expelled; four of them were put to death between 1659 and 1661, including Mary Dyer, whose statue is near the entrance of Friends Center at 1515 Cherry St. in Philadelphia. In the more tolerant Rhode Island, however, they were not only permitted to proselytize but also to settle. Meetings for worship were soon formed, and the first yearly meeting to be established was held in 1661, though meetings for business were apparently not held until some ten years later.

Quakers began to settle in the Delaware Valley in 1675, following the purchase of land near the present city of Burlington, New (then West) Jersey by two Friends. In 1681, Charles II repaid a sizable debt to the estate of William Penn's father by granting to Penn the land to the west of the Delaware River. The King named this land Pennsylvania in honor of Admiral Penn. William Penn intended to establish there a veritable "holy experiment"—an enlightened proprietorship based on New Testament principles and with liberty of conscience guaranteed.

Unfortunately, Penn's tenure as proprietor of his colony was frequently marked by conflict, and things only worsened when his sons came to power. Perhaps the most lasting vestige of Penn's "holy experiment" is a form of creative tension. Penn's political practice was by no means consistent with his theory, nor was his theory of governance adequately developed. Then as now, the tension between practice and theory, social engagement and mystical illumination, yielded as much heat as light. And yet the underlying principles of Penn's vision are as pertinent as ever: participatory decision making, religious liberty, justice as fair dealing with one's neighbors (the Native Americans, for instance), non-violent resistance rather than military defense, and the abolition of oaths.

From http://www.pym.org/faith-and-practice/extracts-from-the-writings-of-friends/belief/

Belief

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1).

Introduction

Quakers have traditionally been wary of creedal statements as limiting our understanding of God. Friends of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting have further avoided prescribed declarations of faith and statements of essential truths as hindrances to communication with the Divine.

The rejection of creeds does not imply the absence of doctrine or statements of belief. From the earliest times of our society, individual Friends, as well as small groups of Friends and Friends' Meetings, have issued written statements of their beliefs to the world. Among the doctrines finding wide acceptance by Friends are a universal saving light and continuing revelation. The selections that follow explore these and other beliefs widely shared among Friends.

• • •

2

There is a time of preaching faith towards God; and there is a time to be brought to God.
—George Fox, 1657

4

Sing and rejoice, ye children of the day and of the light; for the Lord is at work in this thick night of darkness that may be felt. And truth doth flourish as the rose, and the lilies do grow among the thorns, and the plants atop of the hills, and upon them the lambs do skip and play. And never heed the tempests nor the storms, floods nor rains, for the seed Christ is over all, and doth reign. And so be of good faith and valiant for the truth; for the truth can live in the jails.
—George Fox, 1663

6

Now the Lord God opened to me by his invisible power that every man was enlightened by the divine light of Christ, and I saw it

shine through all; and they that believed in it came out of condemnation 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. For I saw in that Light and Spirit which was before Scripture was given forth… that all must come to that Spirit, if they would know God, or Christ, or the Scriptures aright.
—George Fox, 1648

7

We do not want you to copy or imitate us. We want to be like a ship that has crossed the ocean, leaving a wake of foam which soon fades away. We want you to follow the Spirit, which we have sought to follow, but which must be sought anew in every generation.
—Anonymous

8

True godliness don't turn men out of the world, but enables them better to live in it and excites their endeavors to mend it; not hide their candle under a bushel, but set it upon a table in a candlestick.
—William Penn, 1668

9

Why gad you abroad? Why trim you yourselves with the saints' words, when you are ignorant of the life? Return, return to Him … who is the Light of the World…. Return home to within, sweep your houses all; the groat is there, the little leaven is there, the grain of mustard-seed you will see, which the Kingdom of God is like;…and here you will see your Teacher not removed into a corner, but present when you are upon your beds and about your labour, convincing, instructing, leading, correcting, judging, and giving peace to all that love and follow Him.
—Francis Howgill, 1656

10

If you would know God, and worship and serve God as you should do, you must come to the means He has ordained and given for that purpose. Some seek it in books, some in learned men, but

what they look for is in themselves, yet they overlook it. The voice is too still, the Seed too small, and the Light shineth in darkness…. The woman that lost her silver found it at home after she had lighted her candle and swept her house. Do you so too, and you shall find what Pilate wanted to know, viz., Truth. The Light of Christ within, who is the Light of the world, and so a light to you that tells you the truth of your condition, leads all that take heed unto it out of darkness into God's marvelous light; for light grows upon the obedient.
—William Penn, 1694

11

The humble, meek, merciful, just, pious, and devout souls are everywhere of one religion; and when death has taken off the mask, they will know one another though the divers liveries they wear here makes them strangers.
—William Penn, 1693

12

And, when thy children ask thee any questions of this nature, "What God is; where he dwells; or whether he sees them in the dark"—do not reject it; but wait to feel somewhat of God raised in thee, which is able to judge whether the question be put forth in sensibility or in vanity; and which can give thee an advantage of stirring the good, and reaching to that, which is to be raised both in young and old, to live to the praise of him who raiseth it.
—Isaac Penington, 1665

13

We do distinguish betwixt the certain knowledge of God and the uncertain, betwixt the spiritual knowledge and the literal, the saving heart-knowledge and the soaring airy head-knowledge. The last, we confess, may be by divers ways obtained; but the first, by no other way than the inward immediate manifestation and revelation of God's Spirit, shining in and upon the heart, enlightening and opening the understanding.
—Robert Barclay, 1678

14

There may be members therefore of this catholic church both among heathen, Turks, Jews, and all the several sorts of Christians, men and women of integrity and simplicity of heart, who, though

blinded in some things in their understanding and perhaps burdened with the superstitions and formality of the several sects in which they are engrossed, yet being upright in their hearts before the Lord, chiefly aiming and labouring to be delivered from iniquity, and living to follow righteousness, are by the secret touches of this holy light in their souls enlivened and quickened, thereby secretly united to God and there—through become true members of this catholic church.
—Robert Barclay, 1678

16

There is a spirit which I feel that delights to do no evil, nor to revenge 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 thoughts to any other. If it were betrayed, it bears it, for its ground and spring is the mercies and forgiveness of God. Its crown is meekness, its life is everlasting love unfeigned; it 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's 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 in the earth, who through death obtained this resurrection and eternal holy life.
—James Nayler, 1660

39

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 showed me that the natures of those things, which were hurtful without were within, in the hearts and minds of wicked men. The natures of dogs, swine, vipers, of Sodom and Egypt, Pharoah, Cain, Esau, etc. The natures of these I saw within, though people had been looking without. 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.
—George Fox, 1647

From http://neym.org/faith-practice/part-1/chapter-2/prophetic-movement

The Prophetic Movement (1652–1690)

Character of Early Quakerism in England

The great outburst of prophetic passion that swept through the northern counties of Puritan England in the mid-seventeenth century carried with it, as on the forward wall of a tidal flood, the utter conviction that the world could know directly and immediately the power of Christ's love and the light of his truth. This conviction invariably sprang from a direct, personal experience. George Fox, probably the most charismatic and certainly the most influential of the founding members of the Quaker movement, discovered in 1647, after a prolonged and intensive search, that no priest or preacher could speak to his condition: "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."

This direct experience and others like it became the living center of the Quaker movement that grew up around the teachings and dynamic personality of George Fox in the early 1650's. In their thirst after righteousness and in their eagerness to engage the world with God's truth, the early Quakers believed they were called on to be prophets to their age. Like the Hebrew and Christian prophets by whose example they consciously molded their lives, they experienced God as a living, energizing power, spurring them to confront the corruption of existing social and ecclesiastical institutions and to form communities of believers committed to doing God's will in the world.

The prophetic character of the Quaker movement was evident from its beginnings. For many years, it had no membership requirements at all, but instead let the experience of God's intervention in the lives of its participants be their common bond. Like other such movements, it expected a life of moral perfection to

be a sign of true conversion. It applied the principles of equality in its affairs, recognizing from the outset the equal responsibilities of men and women. It encouraged mutual aid as a sign of true discipleship in Christ. It rejected all outward sacraments and priestly orders, depending instead upon the inward power of Christ's example to guide the lives of its followers. In general, the Quaker movement looked to the early Christian Church for examples of dynamic organization and loving community and saw itself not as a new sect but as "primitive Christianity revived."

This prophetic vision was soon carried abroad in every direction. Borne by the "Publishers of Truth," as many early Friends called themselves, the Quaker movement spread south to London and into the southern counties of England, west into Ireland, and almost immediately thereafter across the seas into Holland, Germany, France, and the American colonies. The Quakers who arrived in Puritan New England in 1656, only four years after George Fox began his public ministry, were thus participants in one of those remarkable outpourings of spiritual energy that from time to time have revitalized the Christian faith.

Missions to New England: Persecutions and Toleration

It was this vision of a primitive, prophetic Christianity that Mary Fisher and Ann Austin, the first Quakers to arrive in New England, brought to Puritan Boston in July 1656. They had taken up, as would dozens and then hundreds of others in the next several decades, Fox's exhortation to "plough up the fallow ground" and to be examples everywhere. "Then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one; whereby in them ye may be a blessing, and make the witness of God in them to bless you."

The first Quaker penetration of the Puritan colonies was carried out by a handful of courageous Publishers undismayed by the cruel persecutions to which they were often subjected. Ann Austin and Mary Fisher had been seized by the Puritan authorities on arrival, stripped and searched for marks of witchcraft, and kept sealed in a windowless prison for five weeks until they could be shipped back to Barbados. Had it not been for the intervention of Nicholas Upsall, a Boston innkeeper who later became a convert to the Quaker movement, they might well have starved to death.

The persecutions encountered by the Quakers varied in degree

from colony to colony and from time to time, but they were the most ferocious and unrelenting in Massachusetts, particularly in Boston. The Puritan leaders of the Massachusetts colony saw the Quakers as subverters of a holy experiment and as disrupters of civic peace. From their very first appearance, therefore, the Puritans burned their books, locked them up in prison, whipped them, cut off the ears of several who defied them, and in desperation hanged four of them William Robinson, Marmaduke Stevenson, Mary Dyer, and William Leddra on Boston Common for returning after being banished. This treatment only increased the resolve of the growing Quaker community to show the Puritans that God's will could not be denied. Wenlock Christison, the last Quaker to be sentenced to death in Boston, told his Puritan persecutors in 1661: "Do not think to weary out the living God by taking away the lives of his servants." (J. Besse, ***A Collection of the Sufferings***, II, 223.)

By contrast, the experience of the Quaker ministry in Rhode Island was peaceful and unusually fruitful. Within months after the arrival of the first Quakers on the Woodhouse in August 1657, there were numerous conversions in Newport and Portsmouth. Very soon the whole of Rhode Island became a base for Quaker missions to other parts of New England, a fact that so troubled the neighboring colonies that they tried to persuade Rhode Island to rid itself of its "notorious heretics." The colony refused to comply, affirming once more that "freedom of conscience we still prize as the greatest happiness that man can possess in this world." (***Records of the Colony of Rhode Island***, I, 378-380.)

Although nowhere else in New England did the Quaker movement prosper as it did in Rhode Island, it continued to grow throughout the late 1650's and 1660's, especially in those places where the soil had been prepared by other groups searching for a more inward spiritual life than that offered by established Puritanism. At Sandwich and Falmouth on Cape Cod and to the north of Boston in Salem were gathered some of the earliest groups of Quaker converts. Within a few years, southeastern Massachusetts was dotted with Quaker meetings, important Quaker settlements were established on Long Island, and Quaker Publishers were pushing north to Dover and Portsmouth in New Hampshire and across the Piscataqua River into Maine. Even in Boston itself, there were some forty or fifty Friends when the persecutions came to a temporary halt in 1665. Thus by 1671, scarcely fifteen years after the arrival of the first Quakers in New England, the movement had

grown so rapidly that George Fox decided to visit this flowering in the New World.

The Visit of George Fox (1672-1673)

The visit of George Fox to Newport, Rhode Island, in May 1672, was a major event, not only for New England Friends but for other people of spiritual sensibility as well. They came from all corners of the New England colonies and from all conditions and persuasions to witness for themselves the power of his celebrated ministry. Some, like Roger Williams, the aged founder of the Providence Plantation, sought to debate with Fox directly; others, called Ranters by their opponents, persisted in disturbing the spirit of worship with their disputations.

How to deal with these disruptive voices was a perplexing problem. Opponents of the Quakers did not want to share in the silent waiting for Truth but sought instead to impose their "high notions" on the apparently captive audiences before them. Fox's response to their disruptions was to demonstrate how the power of the Lord could be brought over all. In meeting after meeting, he showed how the spiritual integrity of silent worship could be secured through the gathered awareness of God's presence. Out of this awareness could come a spiritual unity and coherence strong enough, he demonstrated, to deal with the most compelling distractions.

This demonstration of spiritual unity was George Fox's greatest legacy to New England Friends, and it was perhaps most powerfully experienced during Yearly Meeting at Newport in June 1672. "When it was ended," Fox wrote in his Journal, "it was hard for Friends to part, for the glorious power of the Lord which was over all his blessed Truth and Life flowing amongst them had so knit and united them together that they spent two days of taking leave of one another and Friends went away being mightily filled with the presence and power of the Lord."

Organizing for the Future

George Fox was equally concerned with the practical arrangements of Friends' affairs in the New World. Ever since he arrived in Barbados, he had urged Friends to take greater care with the details of organization, because he saw that such arrangements contributed to the integrity and stability of the community that was

growing larger and more complex all the time.

Undoubtedly, the most important of these practical arrangements was the monthly meeting for business. Because some members of the early Quaker movement, many of them followers of John Perrot, had begun asserting that the spontaneous development of the individual's spiritual life took priority over all else, Fox recognized that the community of believers would disintegrate into individualistic fragments if it did not find a spiritual basis for the conduct of its own affairs. Thus he urged New England Friends to establish men's and women's monthly meetings so that Friends could seek together under divine guidance the "well-ordering and managing" of their practical affairs.

The establishment of these monthly meetings proved to be a major development in the history of Quakerism, because it was through them that the prophetic movement of the seventeenth century evolved into the religious society of the eighteenth century. Whereas many similar movements disappeared with the passing, of their founding inspiration, the Quaker movement survived the quieting of its prophetic passion. In large part, this was due to the care its founding spirits took to build a practical as well as a spiritual foundation.