

Chapter 19

Openings

In this chapter we tell the story of the origins of our Religious Society. The experiences, insights and ‘openings’ of Friends in the seventeenth century set out the framework and purpose of the Society and give an authoritative point of reference. But it is not just history, even though it is historical, for the openings also set a direction and point into the future.

At a time of political and religious turmoil, early Friends as a people were gathered, guided and ordered by God. From their experience of the immediacy of the presence of Christ sprang the form of worship and the way of life which became the distinctive testimonies of Friends, and which were upheld with courage in the face of great persecution. From the need to make provision for those suffering and the need to set boundaries to individual behaviour, came the insights into ‘Gospel Order’ and the setting up of meetings for church affairs which were also meetings for discipline.

As we look at these openings – both beginnings and insights – we are not telling a full history. We are telling those parts of the story which explain and illuminate the identity of our yearly meeting as it is now, as it interprets its origins in the Light now given to it, and as it is called by the same Inward Teacher to find, in differing times and circumstances, the same Truth.

A GATHERED PEOPLE

- 19.01 *George Fox (1624-1691) was born in Fenny Drayton in Leicestershire. As a young man he was shocked by the failure of those who professed themselves to be Christians (professors) to live up to their Christian standards.*

When I came towards nineteen years of age, I being upon business at a fair, one of my cousins, whose name was Bradford, being a professor and having another professor with him, came to me and asked me to drink part of a jug of beer with them, and I, being thirsty, went in with them, for I loved any that had a sense of good,

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or that did seek after the Lord. And when we had drunk a glass apiece, they began to drink healths and called for more drink, agreeing together that he that would not drink should pay all. I was grieved that any that made profession of religion should offer to do so. They grieved me very much, having never had such a thing put to me before by any sort of people; wherefore I rose up to be gone, and putting my hand into my pocket, I took out a groat and laid it down upon the table before them and said, 'If it be so, I'll leave you'. So I went away; and when I had done what business I had to do, I returned home, but did not go to bed that night, nor could not sleep, but sometimes walked up and down, and sometimes prayed and cried to the Lord, who said unto me, 'Thou seest how young people go together into vanity and old people into the earth; and thou must forsake all, both young and old, and keep out of all, and be as a stranger unto all'. Then, at the command of God, on the 9th day of the Seventh Month [September], 1643, I left my relations and broke off all familiarity or fellowship with young or old.

Journal, 1643

- 19.02 *This disillusionment drove George Fox from home in search of spiritual help, and during the next four years he turned without success to one person after another.*

Now after I had received that opening from the Lord that to be bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not sufficient to fit a man to be a minister of Christ, I regarded the priests less and looked more after the dissenting people... 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, 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; 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 [ie hinder] it? And this I knew experimentally.

Journal, 1647

- 19.03 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.

Journal, 1647

- 19.04 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.

Journal, 1648

- 19.05 *During the next three or four years, George Fox travelled through the East Midlands, and the East and West Ridings of Yorkshire and encountered religious groups of several kinds. In one group at Mansfield he met the former Baptist preacher Elizabeth Hooton (1600?-1672): 'a tender people and a very tender woman', he wrote later in his Journal. She was among his first 'convincements' and was the first woman to play a prominent part in the movement, suffering much in the Quaker cause, both in Britain and overseas. (A part of his testimony concerning her is to be found at 18.02.)*

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Elsenhire, George Fox met others who would prove to be significant. Late in 1651 William Densbury (1621-1688) described his own spiritual state as follows:

About the time when I was eight years of age, of my natural birth, the Word of the Lord came unto me. 'I created thee for my glory, an account thou must give to Me for all thy words and actions done in the body', which word enlightened my heart and opened the book of conscience in me... Then I ceased from my vain conversation ... and began to read the Scriptures and books, and mourn and pray to a God I knew not where he was... They said he was above the skies, calling it Heaven, but I felt the hand of the Lord within me, executing justice upon the wicked in me, and what way ever I turned to seek him in observations, thither the flaming sword turned ... to keep the way of the tree of life and executed the righteous justice of God upon me.

Then it pleased the Lord to order my friends to put me to keep the sheep, where I was retired from company, so my mind was kept in my mournful estate, where my great ease was in mourning to a God I knew not... [But] I could find no peace in that worship of God the world hath set up, as in receiving the bread and wine, which they told me was the seals of the covenant... Then I durst join no more in their practice in singing David's conditions, which they called Psalms, for the light in my conscience let me see the evil of my heart, that I was not in David's condition.

There was much speaking of God, but I met with none that could tell me what God had done for their souls, in redeeming them from the body of sin which I groaned under, and [which] separated me from the presence of God.

19.06 *In 1652, George Fox journeyed towards the north-west:*

As we went I spied a great high hill called Pendle Hill, and I went on the top of it with much ado, it was so steep; but I was moved of the Lord to go atop of it; and when I came atop of it I saw Lancashire sea; and there atop of the hill I was moved to sound the day of the Lord; and the Lord let me see atop of the hill in what places he had a great people to be gathered.

- 19.07 *George Fox found the 'great people' to the north in and about Sedbergh and Preston Patrick. Journeying on from there he came to Swarthmoor Hall near Ulverston, the home of Thomas Fell (1598-1658) and his wife Margaret (1614-1702). She later described his visit:*

In the year 1652 it pleased the Lord to draw him [George Fox] toward us... My then husband, Thomas Fell, was not at home at that time, but gone the Welsh circuit, being one of the Judges of Assize, and our house [Swarthmoor Hall] being a place open to entertain ministers and religious people at, one of George Fox his friends brought him hither, where he stayed all night. And the next day, being a lecture or a fast-day, he went to Ulverston steeplehouse, but came not in till people were gathered; I and my children had been a long time there before. And when they were singing before the sermon, he came in; and when they had done singing, he stood up upon his seat or form and desired that he might have liberty to speak. And he that was in the pulpit said he might. And the first words that he spoke were as followeth: 'He is not a Jew that is one outward, neither is that circumcision which is outward, but he is a Jew that is one inward, and that is circumcision which is of the heart'. And so he 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 hast 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'... I saw it was the truth, and I could not deny it; and I did as the apostle saith, I 'received the truth in the love of it'. And it was opened to me so clear that I had never a tittle

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in my heart against it; but I desired the Lord that I might be kept in it, and then I desired no greater portion.

1694

- 19.08 *Francis Howgill (1618-1669), one of the Westmorland Seekers, described the sense of communion engendered among these early Friends:*

[We] were reckoned, in the north part of England, even as the outcasts of Israel, and as men destitute of the great knowledge, which some seemed to enjoy; yet there was more sincerity and true love amongst us and desires after the living powerful presence of God than was among many in that day who ran into heaps and forms but left the cross behind them. God out of his everlasting love did appear unto us, according to the desire of our hearts, who longed after him; when we had turned aside from hireling-shepherds' tents, we found him whom our souls loved; and God, out of his great love and great mercy, sent one unto us, a man of God, one of ten thousand, to instruct us in the way of God more perfectly; which testimony reached unto all our consciences and entered into the inmost part of our hearts, which drove us to a narrow search, and to a diligent inquisition concerning our state, through the Light of Christ Jesus. 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 nor 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 will he take up his tabernacle among the sons of men, as he did of old? Shall we, that were reckoned as the outcasts of Israel, have this honour of glory communicated amongst us, which were but men of small parts and of little abilities, in respect of many others, as amongst 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; and that was a strong obligation or bond upon all our spirits, which united us one unto another. We met together in the unity of the Spirit, and of

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the bond of peace, treading down under our feet all reasoning about religion. And holy resolutions were kindled in our hearts as a fire which the Life kindled in us to serve the Lord while we had a being, and mightily did the Word of God grow amongst us, and the desires of many were after the Name of the Lord. O happy day! O blessed day! the memorial of which can never pass out of my mind. And thus the Lord, in short, did form us to be a people for his praise in our generation.

- 19.09 *In 1653 James Nayler (1617?-1660), in his examination before the justices at Appleby, described the experience that led to his throwing in his lot with Friends:*

I was at the plough, meditating on the things of God, and suddenly I heard a voice saying unto me, 'Get thee out from thy kindred, and from thy father's house'. And I had a promise given with it, whereupon I did exceedingly rejoice that I had heard the voice of that God which I had professed from a child, but had never known him... And when I came at home I gave up my estate, cast out my money; but not being obedient in going forth, the wrath of God was upon me, so that I was made a wonder to all, and none thought I would have lived. But after I was made willing, I began to make some preparation, as apparel and other necessaries, not knowing whither I should go. But shortly afterwards going a gate-ward with a friend from my own house, having on an old suit, without any money, having neither taken leave of wife or children, not thinking then of any journey, I was commanded to go into the west, not knowing whither I should go, nor what I was to do there. But when I had been there a little while, I had given me what I was to declare. And ever since I have remained not knowing today what I was to do tomorrow... [The promise was] that God would be with me, which promise I find made good every day.

- 19.10 *Elizabeth Halhead was married to the much travelled, much imprisoned Friend Miles Halhead (1614?-pre 1681). Before she too became a Quaker she is reputed to have said, I would to God I had married a drunkard, I might have found him at the alehouse; but I cannot tell where to find my husband. Faithfulness to God's call was not convenient, and the cost was often borne by families.*

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- 19.11 *James Nayler became a leader amongst Friends, but in 1656 was sent to trial on a charge of blasphemy after entering Bristol on horseback whilst his followers spread garments before him and cried out, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Israel'. He steadily maintained that 'he denied James Nayler to be Christ, but Christ was in him'. He was severely punished and imprisoned. Reflecting on his experiences he wrote:*

The lower God doth bring me, and the nearer to himself, the more doth this Love and Tenderness spring and spread towards the poor, simple and despised ones, who are poor in spirit, meek and lowly Suffering Lambs, and with those I choose to suffer, and do suffer, wherever they are found.

- 19.12 *In 1659 he sought to be reconciled with George Fox, from whom he had become estranged, but was rebuffed. William Dewsbury was at last instrumental in bringing a reconciliation, and James Nayler resumed his Quaker service, 'living in great self-denial and very jealous of himself'.*

In 1660, after his release, he set out on foot for the north, intending to go home to his wife and children. On the way, he was robbed and bound, and found towards evening in a field. He was taken to a Friend's house near King's Ripton, where he died. These were some of his last words:

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 be 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.

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- 19.13 *From the north the new movement had in 1654 spread to London and the south. Among the converts were Mary Penington (1625?-1682), widow of Sir William Springett. Before she had heard of Quakers she had been uneasy about having her infant daughter 'sprinkled'. In 1654 she married Isaac Penington, and they found peace in worship with Friends, though still 'exercised against taking up the cross to the language, fashions, customs, titles, honour, and esteem in the world'. We know of her feelings from her Experiences which she compiled between 1660 and 1680:*

My relations made this cross very heavy; but as at length I happily gave up, divested of reasonings, not consulting how to provide for the flesh, I received the strength to attend the meetings of these despised people which I never intended to meddle with, but found truly of the Lord, and my heart owned them. I longed to be one of them, and minded not the cost or pain; but judged it would be well worth my utmost cost and pain to witness such a change as I saw in them – such power over their corruptions. I had heard objected against them, that they wrought not miracles; but I said that they did great miracles, in that they turned them that were in the world and the fellowship of it, from all such things. Thus, by taking up the cross, I received strength against many things which I had thought impossible to deny; but many tears did I shed, and bitterness of soul did I experience, before I came thither; and often cried out: 'I shall one day fall by the overpowering of the enemy'. But 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. Oh! long had I desired to worship him with acceptance, and lift up my hands without doubting, which I witnessed that day in that assembly. I acknowledged his great mercy and wonderful kindness; for I could say, 'This is it which I have longed and waited for, and feared I never should have experienced'.

- 19.14 *Isaac Penington (1616-1679) wrote:*

At last, after all my distresses, wanderings and sore travails, I met with some writings of this people called Quakers, which I cast a slight eye upon and disdained, as falling very short of that wisdom, light, life and power, which I had been longing for and searching after... After a long time, I was invited to hear one of them (as I had

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been often, they in tender love pitying me and feeling my want of that which they possessed)... When I came, I felt the presence and power of the Most High among them, and words of truth from the Spirit of truth reaching to my heart and conscience, opening my state as in the presence of the Lord. Yea, I did not only feel words and demonstrations from without, but I felt the dead quickened, the seed raised; insomuch as my heart, in the certainty of light and clearness of true sense, said: 'This is he; this is he; there is no other; this is he whom I have waited for and sought after from my childhood, who was always near me, and had often begotten life in my heart, but I knew him not distinctly, nor how to receive him or dwell with him'.

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 hath not been present with me without his Salvation, but I have felt the healings drop upon my soul from under his wings. I have met with the Seed's Father, and in the Seed I have felt him my Father; there I have read his nature, his love, his compassions, his tenderness, which have melted, overcome and changed my heart before him.

What shall I say? 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.

- 19.15 *Isaac and Mary Penington were friends of the Ellwood family and Thomas Ellwood (1639-1713) first experienced Quaker worship at their home. He here describes his second meeting for worship:*

I had a desire to go to another meeting of the Quakers, and bid my father's man inquire if there was any in the country thereabouts. He thereupon told me he had heard at Isaac Penington's that there was to be a meeting at High Wycombe on Thursday next. Thither therefore I went, though it was seven miles from me, and, that I might be rather thought to go out a-coursing than to a meeting, I let my greyhound run by my horse-side. Being come to the house ... I saw the people sitting together in an outer room, wherefore I stept in and sat down on the first void seat, the end of a bench just within the door, having my sword by my side and black clothes on, which

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drew some eyes upon me. It was not long ere one stood up and spake, whom I was afterwards well acquainted with (his name was Samuel Thornton), and what he spake was very suitable and of good service to me; for it reached home, as if it had been directed to me.

As soon as ever the meeting was ended and the people began to rise, I, being next the door, stept out quickly and, hastening to my inn, took horse immediately homewards; and, so far as I remember, my having been gone was not taken notice of by my father.

This latter meeting was like the clinching of a nail, confirming and fastening in my mind those good principles which had sunk into me at the former... And now I saw that, although I had been in a great degree preserved from the common immoralities and gross pollutions of the world, yet the spirit of the world had hitherto ruled in me and led me into pride, flattery, vanity and superfluity, all which was naught. I found there were many plants growing in me which were not of the Heavenly Father's planting, and that all these, of whatever sort or kind they were or how specious soever they might appear, must be plucked up.

Now also did I receive a new law, an inward law superadded to the outward – the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus – which wrought in me against all evil, not only in deed and in word, but even in thought also, so that everything was brought to judgment and judgment passed upon them all. So that I could not any longer go on in my former ways and course of life, for when I did judgment took hold upon me for it.

So that here began to be a way cast up before me to walk in, a direct and plain way, so plain that a wayfaring man how weak and simple soever ... could not err while he continued to walk in it; the error coming by his going out of it. And this way, with respect to me, I saw was that measure of Divine Light which was manifested in me, by which the evil of my doings, which I was to put away and to cease from, was discovered to me.

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- 19.16 *Commitment, however, involved not only attendance at worship, but also acceptance of those testimonies that had come to be held by Quakers as a whole. Thomas Ellwood soon found his new convictions put to the test:*

A knot of my old acquaintance [at Oxford], espying me, came to me. One of these was a scholar in his gown, another a surgeon of that city... When they were come up to me, they all saluted me, after the usual manner, putting off their hats and bowing, and saying, 'Your humble Servant, Sir', expecting no doubt the same from me. But when they saw me stand still, not moving my cap, nor bowing my knee, in way of congee to them, they were amazed, and looked first one upon another, then upon me, and then one upon another again for a while, without a word speaking. At length, the surgeon ... clapping his hand in a familiar way upon my shoulder and smiling on me said, 'What, Tom, a Quaker!' To which I readily, and cheerfully answered, 'Yes, a Quaker.' And as the words passed out of my mouth I felt joy spring in my heart, for I rejoiced that I had not been drawn out by them into a compliance with them, and that I had strength and boldness given me to confess myself to be one of that despised people.

1659

- 19.17 *From 1655 the movement spread to mainland Europe, the West Indies, and the mainland of North America. Marmaduke Stevenson here describes his call to service:*

In the beginning of the year 1655, I was at the plough in the east parts of Yorkshire in Old England, near the place where my outward being was; and, as I walked after the plough, I was filled with the love and presence of the living God, which did ravish my heart when I felt it, for it did increase and abound in me like a living stream, so did the life and love of God run through me like precious ointment giving a pleasant smell, which made me to stand still. And, as I stood a little still, with my heart and mind stayed upon the Lord, the word of the Lord came to me in a still, small voice, which I did hear perfectly, saying to me in the secret of my heart and conscience, 'I have ordained thee a prophet unto the nations', and, at the hearing of the word of the Lord, I was put to a stand, seeing that I was but a child for such a weighty matter. So, at the time appointed, Barbados was set before me, unto which I was required of the Lord to go and

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leave my dear and loving wife and tender children; for the Lord said unto me, immediately by His Spirit, that He would be as an husband to my wife and as a father to my children, and they should not want in my absence, for He would provide for them when I was gone. And I believed the Lord would perform what he had spoken... So, in obedience to the living God, I made preparation to pass to Barbados in the Fourth Month [June] 1658. So, after some time that I had been on the said island in the service of God, I heard that New England had made a law to put the servants of the living God to death if they returned after they were sentenced away, which did come near me at that time; and, as I considered the thing and pondered it in my heart, immediately came the word of the Lord unto me, saying, 'Thou knowest not but that thou mayst go thither.'

But I kept this word in my heart and did not declare it to any until the time appointed. So, after that, a vessel was made ready for Rhode Island, which I passed in. So, after a little time that I had been there, visiting the seed which the Lord had blessed, the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Go to Boston with thy brother William Robinson', and at His command I was obedient and gave up to His will, that so His work and service may be accomplished. For He had said unto me that He had a great work for me to do, which is now come to pass. And, for yielding obedience to and for obeying the voice and command of the everlasting God, which created heaven and earth and the fountain of waters, do I, with my dear brother, suffer outward bonds near unto death.

And this is given forth to be upon record, that all people may know who hear it, that we came not in our own wills but in the will of God. Given forth by me, who am known to men by the name of Marmaduke Stevenson, but have a new name given me, which the world knows not of, written in the book of life.

- 19.18 *The Massachusetts legislature had enacted that every Quaker within its jurisdiction should be banished on pain of death. In June 1659 William Robinson, Mary Dyer and Marmaduke Stevenson came into the colony 'Boston's bloody laws to try'. They were banished but returned and were condemned to death. The two men were hanged.*

Mary Dyer was reprieved and again banished but she returned once more in May 1660. This time there was no reprieve:

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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 that 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.

After Mary Dyer's death a member of the General Court uttered one of those bitter scoffs which prove the truest of all epitaphs: She did hang as a flag for others to take example by.

A GUIDED PEOPLE

The experience of being gathered by God leads into the experience of being guided by God. This was not just the experience of individuals, important though this is. The key to the development of Quakerism is the understanding of corporate guidance which tests and informs individual leadings. At the heart of this is the meeting for worship where Christ, the Inward Light, is present and is met. Fox often wrote that Christ has come to teach his people himself. From this teaching comes Quaker faith and practice.

- 19.19 *Thomas Camm (1641-1707) recalled a meeting of the Westmorland Seekers at Preston Patrick in 1652:*

Thither George Fox went, being accompanied with John Audland and John Camm. John Audland would have had George Fox to have gone into the place or pew where usually he or the preacher did sit, but he refused, and took a back seat near the door, and John Camm sat down by him, where he sat silent waiting upon God

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about half an hour, in which time of silence Francis Howgill seemed uneasy, and pulled out his Bible and opened it, and stood up several times, sitting down again and closing his book, a dread and fear being upon him that he durst not begin to preach. After the said silence and waiting, George Fox stood up in the mighty power of God, and in the demonstration thereof was his mouth opened to preach Christ Jesus, the light of life and the way to God, and saviour of all that believe and obey him, which was delivered in that power and authority that most of the auditory, which were several hundreds, were effectually reached to the heart, and convinced of the Truth that very day, for it was the day of God's power. A notable day indeed never to be forgotten by me, Thomas Camm, ... I being then present at that meeting, a school boy but about 12 years of age.

19.20 *Edward Burrough (1632 or 1633-1663) wrote:*

While waiting upon the Lord in silence, as often we did for many hours together, with our minds and hearts toward him, being stayed in the light of Christ within us from all thoughts, fleshly motions and desires, we received often the pouring down of the spirit upon us, and our hearts were made glad and our tongues loosened, and our mouths opened, and we spake with new tongues, as the Lord gave us utterance, and his spirit led us, which was poured upon sons and daughters.

19.21 *Robert Barclay (1648-1690), who wrote the first systematic exposition of Quaker theology, shows how knowledge comes from worship:*

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

A guided people

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.

- 19.22 *From this experience of worship comes the Quaker understanding of the church as being formed and led by the spirit. George Fox wrote:*

We need no mass for to teach us, and we need not your common prayer, for the Spirit that gave forth the scriptures teacheth us how to pray, sing, fast, and to give thanks... The true faith changeth not, which is the gift of God, and a mystery held in a pure conscience... Our faith, our church, our unity in the Spirit, and our Word, at which we tremble, was in the beginning before your church-made faiths, and our unity, church and fellowship will stand when they are all ended.

- 19.23 *Robert Barclay wrote:*

In a true church of Christ gathered together by God, not only into the belief of the principles of Truth but also into the power, life and Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God is the orderer, ruler and governor, as in each particular, so in the general. And when they assemble together to wait upon God, and worship and adore him; then such as the Spirit sets apart for the ministry, by its divine power and influence opening their mouths ... these are thus ordained of God and admitted into the ministry; and their brethren cannot but hear them, and receive them. And so this is not monopolised by a certain kind of men, as the clergy ... and the rest to be despised, as laity; but it is left to the free gift of God to choose any whom he sees meet thereunto, whether rich or poor, servant or master, young or old, yea male or female.

- 19.24 *Friends related that understanding of their faith to the scriptures, but they grounded their faith on the Spirit which had given forth the scriptures. George Fox at Nottingham in 1649 was listening to a minister who told the people*

that the scriptures were the touchstone and judge by which they were to try all doctrines, religions, and opinions, and to end controversy. Now the Lord's power was so mighty upon me, and so strong in me, that I could not hold, but was made to cry out and say,

'Oh, no, it is not the scriptures', and was commanded to tell them God did not dwell in temples made with hands. But I told them what it was, namely, the Holy Spirit, by which the holy men of God gave forth the scriptures, whereby opinions, religions and judgments were to be tried; for it led into all Truth, and so gave the knowledge of all Truth.

It is significant that Fox, after justifying women's meetings by abundant quotation from scripture, concluded with the words: If there was no scripture ... Christ is sufficient.

The Light

The Inward Light is the light of Christ. It is a universal Light, which can be known by anyone, of either sex, of any age, of whatever religion.

- 19.25 *Women were to play a full part in the life of the church alongside men. Elizabeth Bathurst (1655?-1685) wrote in 'The sayings of women ... in several places of the Scriptures:*

We find many renowned women recorded in the Old Testament, who had received a talent of wisdom and spiritual understanding from the Lord. As good stewards thereof they improved and employed the same to the praise and glory of God ... as male and female are made one in Christ Jesus, so women receive an office in the Truth as well as men. And they have a stewardship and must give account of their stewardship to their Lord, as well as the men. Therefore they ought to be faithful to God and valiant for his Truth upon the earth, that so they may receive the reward of righteousness.

1683

- 19.26 *The Light was seen in children. George Fox recalled his experience when in 1653 he was imprisoned in Carlisle:*

And whilst I was in the dungeon a little boy, one James Parnell, about fifteen years old, came to me, and he was convinced and came to be a very fine minister of the word of life, and turned many to Christ.

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See also 19.35 on the faithfulness of children

- 19.27 *Mary Fisher (1623?-1698), after travelling to preach to the Great Turk, testified to this universal Light:*

Now returned into England ... have I borne my testimony for the Lord before the king unto whom I was sent, and he was very noble unto me and so were all that were about him ... they do dread the name of God, many of them... There is a royal seed amongst them which in time God will raise. They are more near Truth than many nations; there is a love begot in me towards them which is endless, but this is my hope concerning them, that he who hath raised me to love them more than many others will also raise his seed in them unto which my love is. Nevertheless, though they be called Turks, the seed of them is near unto God, and their kindness hath in some measure been shown towards his servants.

- 19.28 *William Penn (1644-1718) was a politician, a courtier, a theologian, a prolific writer and the founder of the colony of Pennsylvania. In 1693 he wrote:*

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. This world is a form; our bodies are forms; and no visible acts of devotion can be without forms. But yet the less form in religion the better, since God is a Spirit; for the more mental our worship, the more adequate to the nature of God; the more silent, the more suitable to the language of a Spirit.

- 19.29 *The Light leads to holiness. George Fox wrote:*

So as man and woman come again to God, and are renewed up into his image, righteousness and holiness by Christ, thereby they come up into the Paradise of God, the state which man was in before he fell, and into a higher state than that, to sit down in Christ that never fell.

- 19.30 *Isaac Penington expressed it in different language:*

19: Openings

The sum and substance of true religion doth not stand in getting a notion of Christ's righteousness, but in feeling the power of endless life, receiving the power, and being changed by the power. And where Christ is, there is his righteousness.

19.31 *And in a general epistle of 1667 George Fox wrote:*

They that offered in the Jews' temple were to wear the holy garments. So are you to do that are the true Christians, and are called a royal priesthood. What! are all true Christians priests? Yes. What! are women priests? Yes, women priests. And can men and women offer sacrifices without they wear the holy garments? No. What are the holy garments men and women must wear? The fine linen and they must go in white. What! is this the priest's surplice? Nay ... it is the righteousness of Christ, which is the righteousness of the saints, this is the royal garment of the royal priesthood, which everyone must put on, men and women.

19.32 *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. George Fox wrote:*

Friends,

In the power of life and wisdom, and dread of the Lord God of life, and heaven, and earth, dwell; that in the wisdom of God over all ye may be preserved, and be a terror to all the adversaries of God, and a dread, answering that of God in them all, spreading the Truth abroad, awakening the witness, confounding deceit, gathering up out of transgression into the life, the covenant of light and peace with God.

Let all nations hear the word by sound or writing. Spare no place, spare not tongue nor pen, but be obedient to the Lord God and go through the world and be valiant for the Truth upon earth; tread and trample all that is contrary under.

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Keep in the wisdom of God that spreads over all the earth, the wisdom of the creation, that is pure. Live in it; that is the word of the Lord God to you all, do not abuse it; and keep down and low; and take heed of false joys that will change.

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.

The testimonies

The experience of Friends was that the Light led them into an understanding of the Christian life and the way it was to be lived. We express the principles they discovered in terms such as Truth, Equality, Simplicity, and Peace. However, these are not abstract qualities, but vital principles of life. Early Friends expressed them in the ways of action which they called the testimonies, and for which they were prepared to suffer and to die.

19.33 *Yet William Densbury could say:*

For this I can say, I ... joyfully entered prisons as palaces, telling mine enemies to hold me there as long as they could: and in the prisonhouse I sung praises to my God, and esteemed the bolts and locks put upon me as jewels, and in the Name of the eternal God I always got the victory, for they could keep me there no longer than the determined time of my God.

If any one has received any good or benefit through this vessel, called William Dewsbury, give God the glory; I'll have none, I'll have none, I'll have none.

1688

Truth

'Truth' is a complex concept; sometimes the word is used for God, sometimes for the conviction that arises from worship, sometimes for the way of life.

- 19.34 *Witnessing to Truth involved the keeping up of public meetings for worship, whatever the penalties involved. In 1675, during a time of great persecution, a 'solemn general meeting of many faithful friends and brethren', issued the following advice:*

It hath been our care and practice from the beginning that an open testimony for the Lord should be borne and a public standard for truth and righteousness upheld in the power and Spirit of God by our open and known meetings, ... so it is our advice and judgment that all Friends gathered in the name of Jesus keep up these public testimonies in their respective places, and not decline, forsake or remove their public assemblies, because of times of suffering as worldly, fearful and politic professors have done because of informers and the like persecutors; for such practices are not consistent with the nobility of the truth and therefore not to be owned in the Church of Christ.

- 19.35 *In Bristol in 1682:*

On the 7th of the month called July, they dispersed the meeting which then consisted chiefly of children; for the men and women being generally in prison, the children kept up their meetings regularly, and with a remarkable gravity and composure: it was surprising to see the manly courage and constancy with which some of the boys behaved on this occasion, keeping close to meetings in the absence of their parents, and undergoing on that account many abuses with patience... On the 30th, in the afternoon, about fifty-five were at the meeting, when Helliard, with a twisted whalebone-stock,

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beat many of them unmercifully, striking them violent blows on their heads, necks and faces, few of them escaping without some marks of his fury...

He also [on 13 August] sent eleven boys and four girls to Bridewell, till a Friend engaged for their appearance next day before the deputy mayor, who endeavoured both by persuasions and threats to make them promise to come at no more meetings; but the children in that respect were unmoveable: wherefore they were sent to Bridewell again, Helliar, to terrify them, charging the keeper to provide a new cat of ninetails against next morning. Next day at the Tolzey he urged the justices to have them corrected, but could not prevail. The boys and girls were mostly from ten to twelve years of age. Their names were Samuel Gibbon, William Miller, Joseph James, Elias Osborne, Tabitha Jones, Jonathan Jones, William Fry, Joseph Watkins, Rachel Mears, William Day, Samuel Watkins, James Randy, Martha Watkins, Martha James and James Wheeler.

- 19.36 *Witnessing to Truth also involved preaching. Katherine Evans (d 1692) and Sarah Chevers were imprisoned for three years in the prison of the Inquisition in Malta, for their preaching.*

And in the greatest of our afflictions we could not say in our hearts, 'Father, would thou hadst not brought us here!' but cried mightily to our God for power to carry us through whatsoever should be inflicted upon us, that the Truth of our God might not suffer through our weakness. And the Lord did hear us ... and carried us on with all boldness, and made our foreheads as flint ... that whensoever we were brought forth upon trial, all fear was taken away, that we stood as iron gates.

1662

- 19.37 *Friends also saw Truth as demanding honest, simple speech, and a refusal to acknowledge double standards by taking oaths. George Fox wrote:*

They gave me the book to swear on, and the book saith, Swear not at all: But I told them, if they could prove that after Christ Jesus and his apostles had forbidden men to swear, they had allowed it, I would swear. Thus I said, and my allegiance lies in truth and

19: Openings

faithfulness, not in swearing, and so should all your allegiance lie, if you did well. I do not deny swearing upon some account, and own it upon others, but I deny it, because Christ and the apostle have said, I should not swear at all.

- 19.38 *Margaret Fell was imprisoned and was made liable to lose all her property for her refusal to take an oath of loyalty to the king.*

The same justices sent for me to Ulverston, where they were sitting, and when I came there they asked me several questions, and seemed to be offended at me for keeping a meeting at my house, and said, They would tender me the oath of allegiance. I answered, They knew I could not swear, and why should they send for me from my own house, when I was about my lawful occasions, to ensnare me, what had I done? They said, If I would not keep meetings at my house, they would not tender me the oath. I told them I should not deny my faith and principles for any thing they could do against me, and while it pleaseth the Lord to let me have an house, I would endeavour to worship him in it. So they caused the oath to be read, and tendered it to me, and when I refused it, telling them, I could not swear for conscience-sake, Christ Jesus having forbid it, they made a *mittimus*, and committed me prisoner to Lancaster Castle, and there George Fox and I remained prisoners until next assizes, and they indicted us upon the statute for denying the oath of allegiance, for they tendered it to both of us again at the assizes, and the indictments were found against us.

So they passed sentence of Præmunire upon me which was that I should be out of the King's protection and forfeit all my estate, real and personal, to the King and imprisonment during life. But the great God of heaven and earth supported my spirit under this severe sentence, that I was not terrified but gave this answer to Judge Turner, who gave the sentence, 'Although I am out of the King's protection, I am not out of the protection of the Almighty God'.

1664

See also Oaths and affirmation 20.48-20.53

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Equality

- 19.39 *From Truth sprang the testimonies that indicated equality between people. Brigflatts Friends wrote about Gervase Benson (c 1604-1679):*

And the said Gervase became greatly serviceable upon many accounts for the promotion of Truth, labouring in the work of the gospel of which he was made an able minister, appointing meetings in fresh places... And many were convinced by his ministry, which was sound and weighty, and his conversation answerable, being an example of humility in all things, notwithstanding the height and glory of the world that he had a great share of, so that none (scarce) was more plain in apparel and furniture of his house, conforming to the simplicity of the Truth, and in testimony against all the vain titles of the world that his former station might have given him. He generally styled himself husbandman, notwithstanding that he had been a colonel, a justice of peace, mayor of Kendal, and was commissary in the archdeaconry of Richmond before the late domestic wars, yet as an humble disciple of Christ, downed those things.

- 19.40 *Thomas Ellwood committed himself to being a Quaker when he declined to return 'the vain salutations of the world'. He maintained the testimony against hat honour, and the testimony to plain language:*

The sight of my hat upon my head made [my father] presently forget that I was that son of his, whom he had so lately lamented as lost; and his passion of grief turning into anger, he could not contain himself; but running upon me, with both his hands, first violently snatcht off my hat, and threw it away; then giving me some buffets on my head, he said, Sirrah, get you up to your chamber...

But as this hat-honour (as it was accounted) was grown to be a great idol, in those times more especially, so the Lord was pleased to engage his servants in a steady testimony against it, what suffering soever was brought upon them for it. And though some, who have been called into the Lord's vineyard at latter hours, and since the heat of that day hath been much over, may be apt to account this testimony a small thing to suffer so much upon, as some have done, not only to beating, but to fines, and long and hard imprisonments;

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yet they who, in those times, were faithfully exercised in and under it, durst not despise the day of small things; as knowing that he who should do so, would not be thought worthy to be concerned in higher testimonies...

But whenever I had occasion to speak to my father, though I had no hat now to offend him, yet my language did as much; for I durst not say 'You' to him; but 'Thou', or 'Thee', as the occasion required, and then would he be sure to fall on me with his fists.

See also 15.20 Gravestones, 19.25, 19.31 & 20.27-20.36

Simplicity

- 19.41 *Plainness of dress also sprang from following Truth. Joan Vokins (d 1690) wrote to her children in 1686:*

Be careful and take heed that you do not stain the testimony of Truth that you have received, by wearing of needless things and following the world's fashions in your clothing and attire, but remember how I have bred you up.

- 19.42 *It brought with it difficulties. Thomas Chalkeley (1675-1741) recalled his experience in the 1680s:*

When between eight and ten years of age, my father and mother sent me near two miles to school, to Richard Scoryer, in the suburbs of London. I went mostly by myself to school; and many and various were the exercises I went through, by beatings and stonings along the streets, being distinguished to the people (by the badge of plainness which my parents put upon me) of what profession I was; divers telling me, 'Twas no more sin to kill me, than it was to kill a dog'.

- 19.43 *A letter from Isaac Penington in 1665 re-echoes Thomas Ellwood's reminder that we must not despise 'the day of small things' (Zech 4:10):*

Do not look for such great matters to begin with; but be content to be a child, and let the Father proportion out daily to thee what light,

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what power, what exercises, what straits, what fears, what troubles he sees fit for thee; and do thou bow before him continually in humility of heart... Thou must join in with the beginnings of life, and be exercised with the day of small things, before thou meet with the great things, wherein is the clearness and satisfaction of the soul. The rest is at noonday; but the travels begin at the breakings of day, wherein are but glimmerings or little light, wherein the discovery of good and evil are not so manifest and certain; yet there must the traveller begin and travel; and in his faithful travels ... the light will break in upon him more and more.

- 19.44 *As with any other testimony, there was always the danger of degenerating into legalism, a preoccupation with outward detail rather than the inner springs of action. Late in her life, Margaret Fox urged Friends to stand fast in that liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free (Gal 5:1). See 20.30-20.31 for examples of Margaret Fox's advice.*

See also 20.27-20.36

Peace

- 19.45 *The conviction came to one Friend after another that war was inconsistent with Truth. William Densbury wrote:*

At that time did the wars begin in this nation, and the men called ministers cried, 'Curse ye Meroz, because they went not forth to help the Lord against the mighty'. Then I was willing to give my body to death, in obedience to my God, to free my soul from sin, and I joined with that little remnant which said they fought for the gospel, but I found no rest to my soul amongst them. And the word of the Lord came unto me and said, 'Put up thy sword into thy scabbard; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my children fight', which word enlightened my heart and discovered the mystery of iniquity, and that the Kingdom of Christ was within, and the enemies was within, and was spiritual, and my weapons against them must be spiritual, the power of God. Then I could no longer fight with a carnal weapon against a carnal man, and returned to my outward calling, and my will was brought in subjection for the Lord to do with me what his will was.

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- 19.46 *In June 1660 Margaret Fell delivered to Charles II a paper directed to the king and both houses of parliament making clear the corporate testimony of Friends 'against all strife and wars':*

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 that come from the lusts that war in the members, that war in the soul, which we wait for, and watch for in all people, and love and desire the good of all... Treason, treachery, and false dealing we do utterly deny; false dealing, surmising, or plotting against any creature upon the face of the earth, and speak the truth in plainness, and singleness of heart.

See 24.04 for the corporate version of this testimony

- 19.47 *Corporate testimony depends on individual faithfulness. An individual will be faithful through a recognition of the testimony and a searching of the heart to see what steps are required. The following anecdote depends on oral tradition, but it has played so large a part in Quaker thinking that it is included here:*

When William Penn was convinced of the principles of Friends, and became a frequent attendant at their meetings, he did not immediately relinquish his gay apparel; it is even said that he wore a sword, as was then customary among men of rank and fashion. Being one day in company with George Fox, he asked his advice concerning it, saying that he might, perhaps, appear singular among Friends, but his sword had once been the means of saving his life without injuring his antagonist, and moreover, that Christ had said, 'He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.' George Fox answered, 'I advise thee to wear it as long as thou canst.' Not long after this they met again, when William had no sword, and George said to him, 'William, where is thy sword?' 'Oh!' said he, 'I have taken thy advice; I wore it as long as I could.'

Samuel Janney, 1852

See also chapter 24 Our peace testimony

- 19.48 *A Testimony of William Penn concerning early Friends:*

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They were changed men themselves before they went about to change others. Their hearts were rent as well as their garments, and they knew the power and work of God upon them... And as they freely received what they had to say from the Lord, so they freely administered it to others. The bent and stress of their ministry was conversion to God, regeneration and holiness, not schemes of doctrines and verbal creeds or new forms of worship, but a leaving off in religion the superfluous and reducing the ceremonious and formal part, and pressing earnestly the substantial, the necessary and profitable part, as all upon a serious reflection must and do acknowledge.

1694

AN ORDERED PEOPLE

The danger for any spirit-inspired religion is individualism carried to excess. In the seventeenth century, this was seen amongst those called Ranters. Friends, too, ran this risk. What preserved them was the discovery of 'gospel-order', the setting up of meetings for church affairs where individual insight was tested against the insight of the gathered group. A series of meetings for church affairs, some local, some regional or national, had developed from 1654 onwards, though it was during the years 1667-1669 that George Fox journeyed throughout the country, creating from a series of ad-hoc meetings a regular structure of monthly and quarterly meetings as part of a yearly meeting for the whole nation.

- 19.49 All the men's monthly meetings were settled in the glorious order of the gospel, and that all in the power of God might seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and might cherish the good and reprove the evil.

George Fox, 1668

- 19.50 *A system grew up where by and large men and women Friends held separate meetings for church affairs, a practice which continued until the end of the nineteenth century. Some meetings were held jointly, and some Friends objected to the existence of women's meetings altogether. George Fox defended them:*

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For man and woman were helpsmeet in the image of God ... in the dominion before they fell; but after the Fall ... the man was to rule over his wife; but in the restoration by Christ, into the image of God ... in that they are helpsmeet, man and woman, as they were in before the Fall.

- 19.51 *The type of business dealt with by such meetings had already been established. George Fox described the general meeting at Skipton in April 1660, attended by Friends 'out of most parts of the nation':*

And justices and captains had come to break up this meeting, but when they saw Friends' books and accounts of collections concerning the poor, how that we did take care one county to help another, and to provide for our poor that none of them should be chargeable to their parishes, etc, and took care to help Friends beyond the seas, the justices and officers were made to confess that we did their work and Friends desired them to come and sit with them then. And so they passed away lovingly and commended Friends' practice.

- 19.52 *In 1659 the Box Meeting of women Friends was set up in London. George Fox wrote:*

And when I came to Gerard Roberts' house about 8 in the morning there came in Sarah Blackbury to complain to me of the poor and how many poor Friends was in want. And the Lord had showed me what I should do in his eternal power and wisdom. So I spoke to her to bid about 60 women to meet me about the 1st hour in the afternoon at the sign of the Helmet at a Friend's house, and they did so accordingly: such as were sensible women of the Lord's truth and fearing God. And what the Lord had opened unto me I declared unto them concerning their having a meeting once a week every second-day, that they might see and inquire into the necessity of all Friends who was sick and weak and who was in wants, or widows and fatherless in the city and suburbs.

- 19.53 *The sense of responsibility for one another might lead to unexpected paths, as is shown by the letter of 1662 to the mayor and sheriffs of London, signed by thirty Friends concerned for the seven-score Quakers then imprisoned in Newgate:*

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And if no other way can be found for their relief, if they may not have the liberty to follow their occasions for some weeks, or until such time as you shall call for them, which we desire on their behalfs, and are here already to give our words, that they shall become prisoners again as you shall appoint them: And if no other way can be found, then we, a certain number of us, do present our bodies to you, offering them freely to relieve our afflicted and oppressed brethren, and are ready to go into their places, and to suffer, as prisoners in their room, for your security, that so many of the poorest of them, as we are here, may have their liberty to go about their needful occasions, whether it be for some weeks, or until you shall call for them, as you see meet in your wisdom. All which we do in humility of heart, and sincerity of our minds, and in the fear of God, and love to our brethren, that they may not perish in prison, and in love to you, that innocent blood and oppression may not come upon you, but be prevented from ever being charged against you.

- 19.54 *Rebecca Travers (1609?-1688), writing to George and Margaret Fox in 1676, commented on the situation as she then saw it:*

The ancient love among some of the brethren waxes cold, and self love and the too much love of this world stains our pristine glory, when it was said, even by our enemies, they so love one another that we shall never be able to break them. The women's meetings are accompanied with the power and presence of the Lord as ever – our service great, and our supply faileth not.

- 19.55 *A letter 'From the women Friends in London' in 1674 described the tasks of women's meetings:*

Dear sisters ... our services are: to visit the sick and the prisoners that suffer for the testimony of Jesus ... relieving the poor, making provision for the needy, aged and weak, that are incapable of work; a due consideration for the widows, and care taken for the fatherless children and poor orphans ... for their education ... and putting them out to trades... Also the elder women exhorting the younger in all sobriety, modesty in apparel, and subjection to truth ... and to stop tatlors and false reports and all such things as tend to division amongst us, following those things which make for peace and

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reconciliation and union; also admonishing such maids and widows as may be in danger ... either to marry with unbelievers or to go to the priest to be married ... that we may answer our duty herein, we meet every Second-day ... that none may stand idle ... for our services still increase many ways. But chiefly our work is, to help the helpless in all cases, according to our abilities.

- 19.56 *Both men's and women's meetings had a share in the oversight of marriage, great care being taken that all was in good order before the couple were liberated for their marriage. In 1688 the Women's Yearly Meeting at York issued A testimony for the Lord and his Truth:*

Friends, be not concerned in reference to marriage, out of God's fear, but first wait to know your Maker to become your husband and the bridegroom of your souls... O Friends! This state is happy, and blessed are they that attain it and live in it; the Lord is not unmindful of them, but in his own time, if he see it good for them, can provide meet-helps for them. Then will your marriage be honourable, being orderly accomplished with the assent of parents and the unity of Friends and an honour to God and comfort to your own souls.

- 19.57 *Wiltshire Quarterly Meeting in 1678 set down advice on the conduct of meetings for church affairs:*

For the preservation of love, concord and a good decorum in this meeting, 'tis earnestly desired that all business that comes before it be managed with gravity and moderation, in much love and Amity, without reflections or retorting, which is but reasonable as well as comely, since we have no other obligation upon each other but love, which is the very bond of our society: and therein to serve the Truth and one another; having an eye single to it, ready to sacrifice every private interest to that of Truth, and the good of the whole community.

Wherefore let whatsoever is offered, be mildly proposed, and so left with some pause, that the meeting may have opportunity to weigh the matter, and have a right sense of it, that there may be a unanimity and joint concurrence of the whole. And if anything be controverted that it be in coolness of Spirit calmly debated, each offering their reasons and sense, their assent, or dissent, and so leave

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it without striving. And also that but one speak at once, and the rest hear. And that private debates and discourses be avoided, and all attend the present business of the Meeting. So will things be carried on sweetly as becomes us, to our comfort: and love and unity be increased: and we better serve Truth and our Society.

- 19.58 *This practical advice must be seen in the context of Friends' sense of the corporate guidance of God: Friends are not to meet as people upon town or parish business but are to wait upon the Lord. Thus the named officer of the meeting was not to preside but to record, to be a clerk. William Penn wrote in 1694:*

In these solemn assemblies for the church's service, there is no one presides among them after the manner of the assemblies of other people; Christ only being their president, as he is pleased to appear in life and wisdom in any one or more of them; to whom, whatever be their capacity or degree, the rest adhere with a firm unity, not of authority, but conviction, which is the divine authority and way of Christ's power and spirit in his people: making good his blessed promise, that he would be in the midst of his, where and whenever they were met together in his name, even to the end of the world.

See also 2.85-2.92 Meetings for church affairs & chapter 3 General counsel on church affairs

A CONTINUING STORY

- 19.59 *Before the end of the seventeenth century, most of the early Friends, the 'First Publishers of Truth', had died. Convincements continued, but there was also a new generation of Friends, children of the early Quakers. William Penn addressed them:*

And now, as for you, that are the children of God's people, a great concern is upon my spirit for your good: and often are my knees bowed to the God of your fathers for you, that you may come to be partakers of the same divine life and power, that has been the glory of this day; that a generation you may be to God, an holy nation, and a peculiar people, zealous of good works, when all our heads are laid in the dust.

19: Openings

O! you young men and women, let it not suffice you, that you are the children of the people of the Lord; you must also be born again, if you will inherit the kingdom of God.

Wherefore, O ye young men and women, look to the rock of your fathers: there is no other God but him, no other Light but his, no other grace but his, nor Spirit but his, to convince you, quicken, and comfort you; to lead, guide, and preserve you to God's everlasting kingdom. So will you be possessors as well as professors of the truth, embracing it, not only by education, but judgment and conviction; from a sense begotten in your souls, through the operation of the eternal Spirit and power of God in your hearts ... that, as I said before, a generation you may be to God, holding up the profession of the blessed truth in the life and power of it.

19.60 *Samuel Bownas (1676-1753) was one of these second generation Friends. The incident he here recounts took place in 1696 when he was about twenty years old. He later became a travelling minister.*

Now to return to my apprenticeship, I had a very kind, loving master and mistress, and I had meat enough and work enough but had little consideration about religion nor any taste thereof. On First-days I frequented meetings and the greater part of my time I slept, but took no account of preaching nor received any other benefit, than being there kept me out of bad company, which indeed is a very great service to youth ... but one First-day, being at meeting [at Brigflatts, near Sedbergh], a young woman named Anne Wilson was there and preached: she was very zealous and fixing my eye upon her, she with a great zeal pointed her finger at me uttering these words with much power, viz: 'A traditional Quaker; thou comest to meeting as thou went from it, and goes from it as thou came to it but art no better for thy coming; what wilt thou do in the end?' This was so pat to my then condition that like Saul I was smitten to the ground as it might be said, but turning my thoughts inwards, in secret I cried, 'Lord, what shall I do to help it?' And a voice as it were spoke in my heart, saying 'Look unto me, and I will help thee'...

I saw by experience wherein my shortness had been in being contented and easy with a form of truth and religion, which I had only by education, being brought up in plainness of both habit and

A continuing story

speech; but all this though very good in its place, did not make me a true Christian; I was but a traditional Quaker, and that by education only and not from the Scriptures because they were a book sealed to me. And I now saw plainly that education though never so carefully administered would not do the work ... there was no other way but this, viz by the Spirit of Christ alone (John 10:1-3), to attain to true faith, which works by love and gives victory over our infirmities and evil deeds, working such a change in us that we can in truth from experience say we are born from above.

By 1700 our yearly meeting had become a settled organisation, with established procedures and an expected way of life. Friends were able to worship freely, though still barred from the English universities and from political life. They were becoming 'a peculiar people', marked out by their dress and speech, yet their separateness from the surrounding culture may have helped them to preserve testimonies such as the practice of the equality of women with men.

The eighteenth century saw a 'Quietist' period, when completely silent meetings became normal. In the nineteenth century there was an evangelical revival, with a heavy dependence on the scriptures literally interpreted. Throughout these periods also there was a steady growth in social concern for the poor, for prisoners, for slaves; a steadfast adherence to testimonies against war and tithes; and many examples of individual and corporate faithfulness, of lives lived in the light of the gospel.

During the second half of the nineteenth century educational opportunities opened up for Friends, for women as well as men. Many of the outward marks of the testimonies, such as plain dress, began to fall into disuse. In the last decade of the century two major events occurred which shaped the yearly meeting as it now is. In 1895 the Manchester Conference introduced liberal theology into the yearly meeting's thinking and led to mechanisms for educating the yearly meeting in its own tradition. In 1896 the Yearly Meeting decided that its men's and women's meetings should meet together and that women should be admitted into membership of Meeting for Sufferings.

Since then the yearly meeting has changed from comprising mostly those born into the Society to being largely made up of newcomers. For all of us there is still a need to be 'convinced', to make the tradition our own, so that we may know the same divine life and power, and open our lives to the same transforming Truth.

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19.61 The Truth is one and the same always, and though ages and generations pass away, and one generation goes and another comes, yet the word and power and spirit of the living God endures for ever, and is the same and never changes.

Margaret Fell