

Quaker Spirituality

Selected Writings

EDITED AND INTRODUCED BY
DOUGLAS V. STEERE

PREFACE BY
ELIZABETH GRAY VINING



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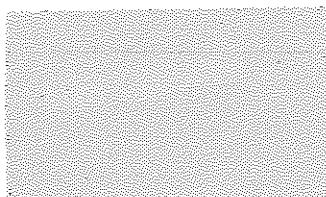
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CONTENTS

PREFACE	ix
FOREWORD	xi
INTRODUCTION	1
Abridgment of THE JOURNAL OF GEORGE FOX	57
A Selection of Passages from THE EPISTLES OF GEORGE FOX	127
Selections from THE LETTERS OF ISAAC PENINGTON	137
Abridgment of THE JOURNAL OF JOHN WOOLMAN	159
Selections from QUAKER STRONGHOLDS by Caroline Stephen	239
Selections from THE WRITINGS OF RUFUS M. JONES	259
Selections from THE WRITINGS OF THOMAS R. KELLY	287
BIBLIOGRAPHY	317
INDEXES	321

Editor of this Volume

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Professor Steere joined the Religious Society of Friends as a convinced member in 1932 and has been intimately connected with the life of the Quakers both in the United States and abroad for almost half a century. For fifteen years he was on the Board of Managers of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and has been on missions for AFSC in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Dr. Steere was the Clerk of the Worship and Ministry Meeting of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting from 1944-1947. One of the founders of Pendle Hill (a Quaker center for religious and social studies), he was the chairman of the board for sixteen years. He also served as the Quaker Observer for three sessions of Vatican Council II and at the Anglican Lambeth Conference in London in 1968.

Dr. Steere has also been the chairman of the Friends World Committee (1964-1970), president of the American Theological Society (1945-1946), and Harry Emerson Fosdick Guest Professor at Union Theological Seminary (1961-1962). In 1967 he drew together a colloquium of Zen masters and Christian spiritual leaders in Japan and a similar group of Hindus and Christians in India. His books include an early translation from the Danish of Søren Kierkegaard's *Purity of Heart; Prayer and Worship; On Beginning from Within; Doors into Life; Time to Spare; Friends Work in Africa* (with Dorothy Steere); *On Listening to Another* (British title: *Where Words Come From*); *Work and Contemplation; Dimensions of Prayer; Spiritual Counsels and Letters of Baron Friedrich von Hügel*; and *God's Irregular: Arthur Shearly Cripps*.

Author of the Preface

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PREFACE

QUAKERISM—as Douglas V. Steere so clearly explains in the Introduction to this volume—is a multifaceted faith and requires for its presentation the writings of more than one of its interpreters over the three hundred years of its existence. Depending on the direct leadings of the Spirit, as well as on the Bible and the writings of articulate Quakers, the faith of the Society of Friends is not static but moves with the development of scientific and psychological as well as religious thought and inspiration. It has accumulated a body of writings of contemporary, historical, and orthodox interest. To present Quakerism in a single volume it is necessary to include the insights of more than one generation of Friends.

In relation to their short history—three hundred years—and their small numbers, Friends have produced an extraordinary amount of religious and spiritual writings, many of which—including, for example, John Woolman's *Journal*, Thomas Kelly's *Testament of Devotion*, Rufus Jones's many devotional books, and Douglas Steere's own books on prayer—have moved out of the sectarian orbit into the realm of religious classics, valued by many who have no further interest in Quakerism itself.

No other modern Friend is so well qualified as Douglas Steere to make this selection or to write the Introduction that opens up Quaker thought and practice and explains its varying elements, its ways of worship and action. Out of a formidable mass of material he has gathered a selection that is illuminating, interesting, and inspiring. His own years of studying and interpreting Quakerism, of teaching philosophy in Haverford College as successor to Rufus Jones; his numerous books, which include *On Beginning from Within*, *On Being Present Where You Are*, and *Work and Contemplation*; his innovative

PREFACE

energy in drawing together religious leaders in colloquia that included Catholics, Buddhists, Hindus, Protestants, and Quakers; his wide experience in conducting retreats, all make him uniquely well qualified to gather together in one volume a number of Quaker writers whose work reveals the breadth as well as the depth, the variety and the underlying unity of these three hundred years of Quaker expression and dedication.

No living Friends are included in this anthology, which begins with George Fox, the founder, and ends with Thomas Kelly. Fortunately Douglas Steere himself, by his interesting and lively, as well as scholarly, Introduction and his informative paragraphs about the writers included is assured of his rightful place among the interpreters of Quakerism past and present.

FOREWORD

IN MANY of the volumes of this series on Western spirituality, a single classic has been chosen and if it has not been written in English it has been freshly translated with interpretative notes. In this single volume on Quaker spirituality it seemed best to select half a dozen sources from the three centuries of Quaker witness in order to share the changes, the variety, and yet the deep underlying togetherness that is embedded in the spirituality of the Quakers.

The journals of George Fox and of John Woolman have been drawn at greater length than the other selections included here. This has been done because they are critically important windows both to the heart of Quaker spirituality and to the scene in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries into which this spirituality came.

Isaac Penington's seventeenth-century letters, many of which were written from prison, are essentially letters of spiritual direction. In the late nineteenth century, Caroline Stephen, coming into the Society of Friends in middle life, brought a fresh and not uncritical eye to the spiritual climate that drew her to the Quakers. Rufus Jones grew up in a deeply rooted Quaker family in rural Maine and became the most impressive Quaker leader of the first half of our own century. Thomas Kelly burst into full spiritual strength between 1937 and his early death in 1941. Both of these men are our own contemporaries and speak freshly to our time.

The ever repeated miracle of the corporate meeting for worship on the basis of silence and obedience, which keeps reappearing in most of these selections, is a means of nurturing the interior life that should not be considered a monopoly of the Quakers. It belongs to the treasury of Christian spirituality where all may have access to its

FOREWORD

use. The witness in these selections to the Quaker faith in the personal and corporate guidance of the Holy Spirit is another accented treasure, and the accompanying fearless carrying out of "concerns" is a further aspect of Quaker spirituality, which these selections portray. Closely linked to them are the Quaker testimonies of simplicity, integrity, and opposition to violence as well as their long and continuing concern for the humane treatment of prisoners, the mentally disturbed, and those of other races. The vast simplification of the existing ecclesiastical structures that is mirrored in the plainness practiced in Quaker worship turns out to be a hidden query to their fellow Christians that is seldom absent from any of these selections.

We live in a rare moment of openness in our varied religious traditions and this very venture of collecting for our use this feast of Western spiritual classics is one of the rich gifts of our time.

I have been greatly helped, guided, and encouraged in this whole undertaking by Richard Payne and Caroline Whiting. Professor Edwin Bronner of Haverford College has given me immense help out of his vast treasury of knowledge of Quaker history and has rescued me at several critical points. In Britain I have been able to consult with Edward Milligan, Maurice Creasy, Hugh Doncaster, Roger Wilson, and Elfrida Vipont Foulds, and in the United States with Edwin Bronner, Hugh Barbour, and Canby Jones about the selections they thought should be included. Canby Jones has shared his favorite Epistles of George Fox with me. Mildred Hargreaves has typed the selections in her usual matchless way and Dorothy Steere has helped me at every point of the way and has edited and typed my own Introduction to the selections. My thanks to them all is a frail exchange for their caring kindness.

INTRODUCTION

I was touched when the Paulist Press suggested to me that in this fascinating series of specimens of Western spirituality they were drawn to invite the preparation of a volume on the spirituality of the Quakers. I doubt if they realized just how individualist Quakers are and how unlikely it would be that any one of us could satisfy our fellow religionists in what we might present under that intriguing title of "Quaker Spirituality".

When President Chaim Weizmann of the new state of Israel came to the United States very soon after his inauguration in order to thank Harry Truman for his almost instant recognition of the new state, it is reported that he found President Truman very depressed. He kept repeating to him that no matter what he did, some section of the American people were always criticizing him. President Weizmann finally is reported to have said to him, "President Truman, do you think that you are criticized? You ought to be in Israel. You, sir, here in the United States are the President of two hundred million American Citizens, but in Israel I am the President of a million presidents!" Quakers and Jews have much common ground in their individualism.

Bearing in mind this rugged individualism in the Quaker spirit, I would like from the outset to identify the point of vantage from which I have chosen the Quaker authors and the selections from their writings for inclusion in this volume. I am not a birthright Quaker but became a Friend "by convincement" some fifty years ago. I came, at that time, into the classical, unprogrammed, nonpastoral, silent-meeting-for-worship type of Quakerism that marked the first two centuries of its life. It is still this form that is practiced in Britain, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Southern Africa, Europe, and in a good deal of the Atlantic region of the United States as well as in a number of college and university communities in the United States and Canada. It is this form of Quaker spirituality that this collection of selections will seek to present and to interpret.

It is important to note, however, that since just after the

INTRODUCTION

middle of the nineteenth century, the unique pattern of worship and ministry that will be described in these selections has been altered by a large group of American Quakers. The changes have included the appointment of paid pastors and the conducting of the season of worship in a way that, apart from a brief period of silence and the absence of the sacraments, would differ very little from that of any plain and simple Protestant service. The same Wesleyan evangelical wind that drew these American Friends to make these changes also encouraged a missionary outreach that established groups in Kenya, Burundi, Cuba, Mexico, Guatemala, Bolivia, Peru, Taiwan, China, India, Palestine, and Alaska. This revised form of ministry and worship has also been shared with these missionary congregations. The Quaker heritage of the experiential response to the interior Guide and the Quaker testimonies on war and social concern have continued, however, and the Friends World Committee for Consultation has done much to keep Friends of all species in touch with each other.

Altogether there are only about two hundred thousand Quakers in the world today, with three-fifths of them living in America. I used to tell my Roman Catholic friends at Vatican Council II that, numerically at least, the Quakers did not constitute any very serious threat to their company of well over half a billion souls! One old Quaker is said to have asked another, "Friend, does thee think there will be any other than Quakers in heaven?" To which his fellow-Quaker replied, "Well, if there aren't, it would hardly pay to keep the place open."

One more thing I should add: that in making these selections from this company of Quakers who have lived in and by the more ancient and classical form of Quaker practice, I have not drawn on the writings of any who are presently living.

THE very term "spirituality" is a little awesome to Quakers. Gerald Heard, who was a distinguished religious thinker in the middle years of this century, once wrote a little book entitled *Training for the Life of the Spirit*. An old Quaker who had read the book, when asked his opinion of its worth, replied that it seemed to him too much like "straining for the life of the spirit." When it comes to the technique of prayer, Augustine's word always returns in which he says, "We come to God by love and not by navigation," and Madame

INTRODUCTION

de Chantal when asked for a method of prayer replied that the best method is to have none! Quakers find it hard not to look with suspicion on talk about the interior life and about the practices that nurture it.

However understandable this shyness may be with its attempt to avoid the pharisaical display of their alleged virtue, which in our generation they know to be greatly exaggerated, the plain fact is that they do possess a spirituality of their own. They do possess testimonies that they seek to embody; they do have a deep faith in divine guidance and in the concerns that often spring from it; they do have practices that enhance discernment; they do have a unique form of corporate worship on the basis of silence and obedience; they do have a special form of vocal ministry and a unique way of conducting their meeting for business and of arriving at decisions—to mention only a few of the more important aspects of their spirituality that I hope may be shareable.

One of the first things that the Quakers would accent is that revelation is still going on. In the autumn of 1963 at an early meeting of the second session of Vatican Council II, Cardinal Suenens of Belgium rose to criticize what he insisted was a serious omission in the draft of the schema before the council that dealt with the nature of the Church. In the entire schema, Cardinal Suenens complained, he found no mention of the charisms (the gifts, the holy nudges) that often come in the course of the services of the Church, not only to bishops or to priests, but to lay members of the congregation. He declared that no schema on the Church could ever be complete that did not freely acknowledge these charisms as an integral part of the very Church itself. Cardinal Suenens urged the commission to correct this grievous omission.

Soon afterward, Cardinal Ruffini, of Palmero, Sicily, rose to speak. He deplored the suggestion that Cardinal Suenens had made and said that he fervently hoped that the commission would reject it. He went on to say that at one time he had himself been a professor of the New Testament and he knew full well that in the book of Acts there were instances of charisms, gifts of guidance, being given by the Holy Spirit and obeyed by their receivers, who were often of modest station. He quickly added, however, that this was in the Apostolic period! Now, he warned, the Canon of Scripture is closed and the Apostolic Age is over. Now the Holy Spirit speaks through the Magisterium of the Church! He concluded by saying that if the

INTRODUCTION

commission were to revise the schema to encourage the acknowledgement of charisms that might come to the laity, the Church would eventually be drowned in a tidal wave of subjectivity!

Happily, in my judgment at least, the commission accepted the suggestion of Cardinal Suenens. But Cardinal Ruffini with his usual clarity had raised a most searching question. Is the Apostolic Age really over? Does the Holy Spirit still speak to ordinary people? Is the guidance of the Holy Spirit still operative? Is all revelation concluded? It is at this point that an account of Quaker spirituality and its presuppositions might comfortably begin.

The Religious Society of Friends was first drawn together in the middle of the seventeenth century in Britain at the period when the sharp Civil War had resulted in a victory for the parliamentary forces under Cromwell. It was a time of immense spiritual and political ferment, and if modern democracy can be said to have had a moment when its true spiritual roots were most visible, this 1650 period in Britain might well be chosen. Perhaps this can best be illustrated by the fierce debates that took place within the ranks of Cromwell's army over the rights of the "commonest he" in the realm. These rights were grounded in the fact that every man was regarded as a possible vehicle of the Holy Spirit, of the voice of the living God speaking to the time, and a favorite text of the Bible was the one that refers to the soul of man as "the candlestick of the Lord." Both the spiritual and political implications of such a time may be seen most clearly in noting the way in which Oliver Cromwell, the supreme general of the Commonwealth army, gave instructions to his own aides that they must never deny access to any common soldier who wished to see him, for Cromwell feared that God might be speaking to him through that ordinary man and that if he did not listen to him the Lord might cast him off.

While the revolutionary political implications of this spiritual view of man and of man's freedom to worship God in any pattern he was inwardly drawn to follow were already implicitly there in 1650, it was four hard decades before they were seriously implemented in both the religious and political fields, and by this time the Quakers were estimated in Britain and the colonies to number at least 75,000.

It was in this climate and precisely at this seething mid-point of seventeenth-century Britain that George Fox drew this Quaker

INTRODUCTION

movement together. The saint or the prophet who so often is responsible for such a movement is never completely detached from his time, for he seems to have been sent to speak to it. But he cannot speak to it unless he is himself inwardly identified with it and has a message for it, a message that speaks out of a ground that in the sting of its rebuke as well as in the appeal of its vision is seen as coming from something universal that is beyond the contemporary situation and yet is intensely relevant to it.

George Fox was such a man. A leather worker and a shepherd with little formal education, this man of the people, after long and fruitless searching in the formal religion of his time, had a series of profound mystical experiences that refocused his life and gave him his sense of mission. His own discovery of the living Christ within and his repeated experience of the inward tendering of the Holy Spirit which are movingly recorded in his *Journal* brought him into a whole new relationship with his fellow creatures and with creation.

After these years of searching, during which one professional clergyman after another had failed him and even the dissenting groups whom he sought out could not meet his needs, George Fox had a great opening that came to him from within. An old Philadelphia friend of mine, Dr. William Sullivan, once asked, "Have you ever had a moment of awe and glory that has cloven your life asunder and put it together again forever different than it was before?" Fox's *Journal* describes this opening of his as precisely such an experience: "When all my hopes in them and in all men were gone so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell me 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 with joy. Then the Lord did let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition . . . that Jesus Christ might have the preeminence, who enlightens and gives grace and faith, and power. Thus when God doth work who shall prevent it? *And this I knew experimentally.*"¹ This last line is an important one for understanding the spirituality of the Quakers. Fox continued in this *Journal*: "Now I was brought up in spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God. All things were new and all the creation gave another smell under me than before, beyond what words can utter."²

1. George Fox, *Journal*, ed. J. Nickalls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), p. 11.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

INTRODUCTION

His conversion was continuous and his *Journal* in 1647 is sprinkled with flashes of fresh insight: "I saw 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!"³ "I was taken up in the love of God so that I could not but admire the greatness of his love." He was shown that "all was done by Christ."⁴

Fox had in the first years of his ministry spent a time in prison and had kindled a small but devoted following, but it was in the North in 1652 that Quakerism surged forward to become a really significant movement.

It would not be accurate to say in an unqualified way that George Fox "founded" the Quaker movement. He was in its beginnings the gatherer of a large number of able "seekers," who were especially strong in the less-developed part of England. These seekers were not easy with the religious institutions of that period and many had already withdrawn from them completely and had come to meet together often in silent worship. They longed for a fresh, authentic, vastly simplified and dynamic Christian movement into which they could pour their lives. After paying due notice to the important role that these seekers played in furnishing so many leaders of the early Quaker movement, there can, however, be no denying the words of Geoffrey Nuttall when he says of Fox that "nothing can rob him of the glory of having founded Quakerism, and of having done it alone by the sheer force of his personality and of faith in his mission."⁵

In his journeys over Britain, Fox preached and described the transforming mercies of the interior Christ in the hearts of men and women and bid them to listen within for the "Christ who has come to teach his people himself" and having listened and found, to obey him. He encouraged them as a corporate group to sit together in the silence, to open themselves to the gathering power of the spirit of Christ, to experience the power of the inward quickening that had marked the primitive Christian community, and to experience it as a reality that was not alone historic but was an event that could take place here and now among ordinary men and women in mid-seventeenth-century Britain. It could give them power to carry out this

3. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

5. *Ibid.*, p. xxv.

INTRODUCTION

revolution of fellowship and love with which first-century Christianity was charged.

There was no formal membership in the first years of the Quaker movement. The spirituality of those who cared to meet together was to participate inwardly as well as outwardly in the corporate meetings for worship and to live out in daily life what was laid on them in the silence, to follow the testimonies and to be willing to suffer the persecutions that almost instantly rose against them.

Francis Howgill, one of the earliest companions of Fox, has left us a classic statement of the way George Fox was received when, with this loose fellowship of radical Christians still in embryo, he moved through the North of England and by his kindling messages spoke to the hearts of those scattered bands of seekers in the Westmoreland and Lancaster regions:

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 desire after the living powerful presence of God than was among many in that day who ran into heaps and forms that 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

INTRODUCTION

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?"⁶

It was in this season that Fox, in 1652, climbed Pendle Hill in Lancashire. There he had a vision of a great people waiting to be gathered. Now with many able seekers and with others, both young men and young women, prepared to put their lives at the disposal of this utterly plain and simple Christian fellowship, George Fox at last felt the throb of an unstoppable spiritual movement.

It was on this same visit to the North in June 1652 that George Fox first met Margaret Fell, the wife of a deeply respected judge, Thomas Fell, at Swarthmoor Hall, their ample home near Ulverston, in Lancashire. She attended several of George Fox's meetings in the neighboring village of Ulverston and in the course of his powerful ministry she was pierced by his question, "You will say, Christ saith this and the Apostles say this, but what canst *thou* say? Art *thou* a child of Light and hast thou walked in the Light, and what thou speakest, is it inwardly from God?" For twenty years she had been a seeker and in these meetings she was found. Her husband, Thomas Fell, never joined the Friends, but he warmly approved of them and shielded them where he could from the regional persecutions that swiftly began.

Judge Fell gave his ready permission to Margaret Fell in opening their home to this movement. Margaret Fell, whom Geoffrey Nuttall in his introduction to George Fox's *Journal* calls "the fervent and lion-hearted woman" (whom some years after Judge Fell's death Fox was to marry), swiftly became the spiritual mother of the early Friends' fellowship and Swarthmoor Hall became its informal capital.

Out of the depths of this new fellowship there emerged from the thousands of largely ordinary country people a number of inward callings, "concerns," to leave their farms and shops for longer or shorter journeys. Traveling in pairs, they felt called to share these

6. Francis Howgill, "Testimony Concerning Edward Burroughs," in *Works of Edward Burroughs* (London: William Warwick, 1662). Pages unnumbered but found on fourth page of the Testimony.

INTRODUCTION

fresh discoveries of inward renewal that had come to them. Today we call this first group of emissaries "The Valiant Sixty." Their journeys took them all over Britain including Scotland, Wales, and Ireland and as far afield as Constantinople, Rome, Malta, and the Barbary Coast. Later others went to the continent, especially to the Netherlands and to the Palatinate and the northwestern parts of Germany as well as to Barbados and Jamaica in the Caribbean and even to the wildernesses of the American continent that were opening to colonists in that period.

Margaret Fell raised the ample Kendal Fund to give help where needed for this travel and for the support of families of Friends who had been imprisoned in the early persecutions that had begun to swell even in the Commonwealth period.

Certainly in the beginning there is much evidence that Fox meant for the movement to be no more than a radical goad and a stripping and simplifying as well as a quickening and interiorizing of the Christian spiritual life of Britain. He had discovered the Seed of God, the living Christ, the fire of the Holy Spirit within, and it had come to him not by the liturgy, or the faithful reading of the Bible (which he knew almost by heart), or by sermons, or by singing and reading aloud set prayers in handsome stone churches. He seemed to have meant at the outset to turn his fellow-countrymen to the Christ within their own hearts and not to be bent on founding some new sect.

Isaac Penington, who came into the Quaker movement at the close of the Commonwealth period, witnesses with great clarity that he had no sense of leaving the Christian life behind but that he came into Quakerism to have it intensified: to have an *experience of* rather than a mere *knowledge about* the transforming power of Christ within. Penington writes, "We, who are reproachfully by many called Quakers, are (for the most part) a people who have much and long sought after the Lord, and after an experimental knowledge of these truths which are testified of and related in the Holy Scriptures. . . . We sought not after a new Christ, or a new Spirit, or new doctrines concerning Christ or his Spirit: but to know Christ so as to receive life from him; and to live in him in the life and spirit received from him; this has been the single aim and desire of our souls."⁷

7. Isaac Penington, *Works of Isaac Penington*, vol. 4 Sherwood, N.Y.: David Henton, 1863), p. 419.

INTRODUCTION

For though the Lord had reached the pure Seed of life in men, and had quickened my soul thereby; yet I knew not how to turn to the Seed, and abide in the Seed, and to hold my knowledge and life there; but was still striving to live and know (and comprehend and practice) in a part above the Seed; and there the enemy was still too hard for me, and did often deprive me of the benefit of the right use of what the Lord had wrought in me and freely bestowed upon me.⁸

Truly Friends I have not lost anything that I ever had, or acknowledged of God in the days of my former profession, by believing in the Light which God hath now revealed in me, but have it still with me, and in greater clearness and plainness and fuller demonstration than I then had it; but that of the flesh which mixed with it, and hindered it from being rightly serviceable to the Lord and fully comfortable to me, that the Lord hath been removing by his searching light, and by the demonstration of his Spirit and power.⁹

In an age of the rediscovery of the infinite worth of the "commonest he," George Fox and his followers invited men and women of all conditions into the freedom of a new corporate fellowship. There, without the authority of an infallible Church or an infallible Bible or the ever-present authority of a paid clergy, those in this fellowship might gather together in meetings on the basis of silence and obedience in order to assist each other in coming into the presence of Christ within, and where they might come to "know each other in that which is eternal."

In the churches of Fox's day in Britain, it was at least legally permissible at the end of a service for an attender to give some short message or ask a question of the clergyman. The young Fox, clad in his leather breeches, as he moved from town to town, is reported in his *Journal* to have been frequently inwardly drawn to brave the hostility of what he called a "steeplehouse" and to take on the clergyman, with often devastating consequences both to the clergyman's authority and to Fox's bodily welfare. After these verbal encounters, almost inevita-

8. *Ibid.*, p. 63

9. *Ibid.*, p. 421.

INTRODUCTION

bly the furious church wardens, assisted by many in the congregation, all but tore Fox limb from limb as they ousted him from the church and often beat him or put him in the stocks or drove him out of the town's boundary, threatening to kill him if he returned.

The book of Acts in the New Testament describes frequent occasions where early apostles, who were burning with their passionate desire to share their experience of Christ's immediate presence in the Holy Spirit, were seized, beaten, and imprisoned by both religious and civil authorities, who felt threatened by their growing strength. Fox and his Valiant Sixty, in all of the fervor of their sharing of their inner discovery, stirred up a similar reaction. Neither the Old Testament prophets nor the New Testament apostles seem to have been deterred in the least by this kind of reception, and Fox was no exception. For all of his "bad manners" and the official Church's hostility, which these visits may have provoked, the plausibility of Fox's message and that of his companions touched many parishioners at the very quick, and swelled the ranks of the early Quaker movement.

This persecution, which first brought hundreds and later thousands of Quakers into sizable terms in the stinking jails of that period and often included "praemuniring"—which involved government seizure of their land, their livestock, their houses, and even the very contents of their houses, compelled the Friends to set up some structures in order to support the sufferings of their own members. In this way what had begun as a movement of Christian quickening that was meant to be widely shared was, within a decade, forced into becoming a separate group of its own. The Meeting for Sufferings, which still meets each month in London and considers the urgent physical and social needs of sufferers all over the world, began at this time as a means of looking after the sufferers within the Society of Friends itself.

From the very outset, the Quaker movement was made up of laymen and had no place in its ranks for salaried, academically trained clergymen, which it designated "a hireling ministry." Men and women shared in full equality all of the rights and privileges of the group. The form of the Quaker worship was so simple that it could take place anywhere: in private homes, in a kitchen, in a barn, or later in an unadorned building, which may be the best way to describe a Quaker meetinghouse. The group sat together waiting on God to gather them inwardly, and all shared in the responsibility for