

# QUAKER WORSHIP

*An introductory  
historical study of the  
English Friends' Meeting*

BY

GLADYS WILSON

WITH A FOREWORD BY

T. EDMUND HARVEY

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### AUTHOR'S NOTE

The Meeting for Worship has been for three centuries the focal point of Quaker experience and the source of inspiration for Quaker life and service. In tracing its history we may learn to understand its difficulties, and are challenged to discover for ourselves its glorious possibilities.

This study of Quaker worship was written towards the conclusion of a course at Woodbrooke, and is sent out in glad appreciation of experience shared with the staff and students of 1949-51.

GLADYS WILSON

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## FOREWORD

**I**N the vast library of books on Christian worship there are thousands of volumes by learned theologians and liturgists, and a multitude of humbler works of practical exposition, yet only a few devoted to the history and nature of the worship which for three centuries has lain at the centre of the life of the Religious Society of Friends.

The lack of such books has been a loss to many. The Christian Church as a whole can gain from the experience of even a comparatively small Christian community, while the members of that community need to learn from its history, both for their individual lives and for the development of their common worship.

The nature and history of that worship deserves too to be studied by a wider circle of readers, especially those who have not found as yet their spiritual anchorage. Some of these may discover the fellowship in life and worship which they need: they may have a rich contribution themselves to bring to others as they enter into communion with them in the wide family of the followers of Christ. Three hundred years of Quaker service bear the record of a part of that family history written in the lives of very diverse men and women, yet flowing out from a common worship and a common religious experience.

Thus there are many readers who may be helped by Gladys Wilson's clear and instructive study of the history of

Quaker worship through some ten successive generations. In it we may trace the glow and fire of the pioneers, the development under grievous persecution of an active religious fellowship, its growth and expansion; then the gradual change in life and worship, as a more introspective mystical quietism largely replaced the active earlier evangelism, leading to concentration upon an inward spiritual growth; then we watch the influence towards the close of the eighteenth century of the evangelical revival, with the wide expansion of philanthropic and educational activities accompanying it, followed in the later nineteenth century and thereafter by the impact of modern thought and criticism and of new economic and social movements, the breaking down of the barriers separating Quaker life from the wider community, but together with all the problems and difficulties which this involved, the fresh springing up of outward reaching life, along with an inward renewal of vital spiritual experience, in which the meeting for worship has a central place.

The three centuries of endeavour after Christian discipleship by the Society of Friends have seen many changes; growth and decline, revival and renewal of life, trial and error, but also the resolution of tensions in thought and in human relationships through a common loyalty to the leading of the spirit of truth and love, revealed above all in the light that came and comes to men through Jesus Christ.

These changes are not only reflected in the character of the meeting for worship, but are inseparably connected with it.

*That worship must not be isolated from daily life and its duties, from the needs and troubles, the hopes and aspirations of men. It must reach out for a unity with all who seek to follow the truth and to serve God in serving men; it is centred not on theological theories, which are at their best an imperfect embodiment of what our thought can never completely comprehend, but on a deep inward experience.*

*The illumination, the guidance, the renewal of will and life which we seek in worship have been found at their best where through that worship there has radiated the influence of the spirit of Christ revealed in the life and words and work of Jesus and in the thought and life of his disciples down all the ages; a worship enriched by the unique experience and insight of prophets, historians, and poets given to us in the Bible, and by rays of the same heavenly light which shine in the writings of men of different races and what are held to be other faiths, but whom we may think of as Christ's sheep of another fold.*

*All this should be sought as the living background of our thought and prayer as we enter upon the communion of worship. In such worship silence is vibrant with unheard music. It is no empty negation of thought and speech, but a means to rise beyond them to learn a higher language and share a deeper, wider life.*

T.E.H.

I

'THE TRUE WORSHIP'

'ALL Friends every where, meet together', writes Fox in constant reiteration, rarely thinking to add, in so many words, that the purpose for which they were thus gathered was worship. The fact that he only exceptionally uses the phrase, 'meeting for worship', is an indication, not of his under-estimation of the importance of worship, but of his assumption that worship is a full-time activity for Christians; the importance of the special occasion lay in the corporate experience of communion with God, each individual worshipper knowing what such communion meant in his constant practice of the presence of God. It was this constant practice which Fox was concerned to encourage, as is shown by his frequent repetition of injunctions to 'Wait in the Light', 'Live in the Power', 'Dwell in the Life'; this emphasis on worship as a continuous activity often makes it difficult to be certain whether Fox's references to it apply to individual or to corporate practice, but it is clear that for him there was no dividing line.

The emphasis on worship at all times is sometimes made by Fox as he contrasts the way of 'true worship' with 'the world's worship', the latter being regarded as limited to set times and places: 'Now Friends, who have denied the Worlds Songs and Singing; sing ye in the Spirit, and with Grace, making Melody in your Hearts to the Lord. And ye having denied the World's formal Praying, pray ye always in the Spirit, and watch in it. And ye, that have denied the World's giving of Thanks, and their saying of Grace, and living out of it; do ye in every thing give Thanks to the Lord through Jesus Christ. And ye, that have denied the World's Praising God with their Lips, whilst their Hearts are afar off; do ye always praise the Lord night and day, and from the Rising of the Sun to the Going down of the same praise ye the Lord.\* Here was no negation of the importance of prayer and praise, but rather a new sense of their significance in the life of the awakened Christian.

Fox saw part of his mission to be 'to bring people off from all the world's worships, to know the Spirit of Truth in the inward parts, and to be led thereby; that in it they might worship the Father of spirits, who seeks such to worship him. . . . I was to bring them off from all the world's fellowships, and prayings, and singings, which stood in forms without power; that their fellowship might be in the Holy Ghost, and in the Eternal

\* Ep. 167 (1658).

Spirit of God; that they might pray in the Holy Ghost, and sing in the Spirit, and with the grace that comes by Jesus; making melody in their hearts to the Lord.\* He was deeply convinced that worship must be a spiritual activity: it is an activity of man's spirit reaching towards God, who is a Spirit, and inspired by the Holy Spirit. Seen thus, it has the nature of eternal things, and is not to be tied in time or space, by human planning or by traditional framework.

He found the authority for his conception of worship in the New Testament, and makes many references to various passages about the Spirit, especially to the words of John IV: 'The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.† This, says Fox, is the worship which Christ set up 'above sixteen hundred years since', and thus it must be the way in which Christians ought to worship; 'And so every Man and Woman in the whole World must come to the Spirit and Truth in their own Hearts, by which they must know the God of Truth, who is a Spirit, and to feel the Spirit in their own Hearts, and in the Spirit of Truth to Worship the God of Truth, who is a Spirit. . . . And so in the Spirit and Truth Worship God, who is a Spirit; and this Spirit gives an

\* *Journal I*, p. 37 (1648). † John iv, 23-4, A.V.

Understanding to know God, who is a Spirit, and the Truth, and to know the God of Truth, who is to be worshipped in the Spirit and Truth, who is God blessed for ever.\* This basic conception of worship 'in the Spirit' is supported by other references, mainly from the Epistles: 'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit'; † 'I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.' ‡ With reference to right ministry, Fox quotes: 'Quench not the Spirit', § and he quotes often, as he speaks of the fellowship experienced in meetings: 'For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body', || and, 'Keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace'. ¶ In such references Fox found the authority for what might be termed the mystical aspect of the way of worship developed among Friends; but it had also a prophetic aspect, for it led not only to communion with God but to an intense experience of fellowship and an urge to missionary activity. It was in this aspect that Quaker worship was that of 'primitive Christianity revived', and Fox clearly implies this in his account of worship in 'Gospel-Truth Demonstrated'; he describes the apostles before and at the time of Pentecost, and says: 'Now here was a time of

\* Ep. 260 (1668).

† Eph. vi, 18.

‡ I Cor. xiv, 15.

§ I Thess. v, 19.

|| I Cor. xii, 13.

¶ Eph. iv, 3.

Waiting, here is a time of Receiving, here is a time of Speaking; the Holy Ghost fell upon them, that they spoke the wonderful things of God, and these were they that were gathered together with one Accord. So where two or three are gathered together in the Name of Christ, he is there in the midst of them.\* Fox seems to combine two different conceptions of the Spirit in his thought on worship; a more passive one, of the Spirit as a presence in which true worship takes place, and an active one, of the Spirit as a compelling force inspiring the words spoken and energising the worshippers. Here, in the early days of Quakerism, was the richness of worship in which mystical and prophetic elements were held together in fruitful interplay; the force which thus held them in unity lay in the vigour of new-born Christianity, and it was to lose its strength in later years; but in the first discovery of 'worship in the Spirit' there was no lack of integration of the two sides.

In the Meetings for Worship about which Fox writes, there are clearly-marked characteristics; he lays much emphasis on the importance of silent waiting upon God, and the experience of communion with Him which develops through that; there is less emphasis on vocal ministry, which is only to be given at the Spirit's compulsion, but the intense awareness of fellowship is there, whether it be in words or silence. This 'knowing one

\* *Doctrinals*, p. 92 (1657).

another in the things which are eternal' was obviously an essential element, which made *meeting* for worship an experience for which Friends would endure all sorts of difficulties and persecution, and out of which grew the unity of a society of friends, who might without it have remained isolated seekers. Silent waiting and communion with God represent the more mystical aspect of Quaker worship, based on the ideas derived from Christ's words to the woman at Jacob's well; ministry and fellowship are more closely linked with the experience of the disciples at Pentecost, and the close sense of community of the early Christians. Fox says much about each aspect of the Meeting for Worship, and through his words one can feel the vivid reality of communion and fellowship as known in the early days of Quakerism.

## II

### THE FRIENDS' MEETING IN IDEAL (GEORGE FOX)

**I**N the early days of Quakerism, as today, the most obvious feature distinguishing Friends' Meetings from other forms of worship was their silence, and the emphasis on this seems to have been greater then than now; vocal ministry was only to be given if it were irresistibly inspired by the Spirit, and then might consist

only of a few words, for it was as great a fault 'to go beyond the Spirit's motion' as to 'quench it'—'for, if you do, you will both bring Trouble and Burthens upon your selves and others, and run out, that so you can hardly get in again'.\* Silence was regarded as having, on the whole, a far greater value than words, and this was such a revolutionary conception of worship to most people in the seventeenth century that it was small wonder they looked upon Quaker Meetings with suspicion, disapproval, or outright hostility. Fox himself, though so certain of the rightness of silent worship, occasionally admits that it must be strange to newcomers: 'It is a strange Life to you to come to be Silent, you must come into a new World.'†

In the opening section of his exposition on 'Who are to be Silent, and who to Speak', he quotes many Scriptural references in defence of silence, and obviously assumes that worship 'in the Spirit' must be primarily worship in silence. 'Now mind where the Watching is, and the Praying is, they are in the Light, in that which silences all Flesh, for words in that leads from the Watch. Therefore come to know the watch set before every one of your mouths.'‡ (Fox seems here to be combining two different meanings of the word, 'watch', the second as in 'Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth', § reinforcing

\* Ep. 375 (1682).

† *Doctrinals*, p. 101 (1657).

‡ *Doctrinals*, p. 93 (1657). § Ps. 141, v. 3.

the emphasis on silence which for him is implied in 'Watch and pray').\*

'Keep your Meetings,' he says, 'and ye will feel the Seed of God among you all, tho' never a Word bespoken among you.'† Silence, however, is not merely an absence of words; for Fox it was closely related to stillness and waiting—the necessary conditions for experience of communion with God. In the silence spiritual activity was taking place. Fox frequently writes, 'Wait upon the Lord', a phrase which implies, in its Old Testament usage, an attentive awareness of God, and the readiness to do His will; he often says, too, 'Wait in the Light'.

One of the most frequent themes in Fox's descriptions of worship is 'the Power of God'. 'The Lord God of Power be with you, and keep you. . . . And all live in Peace, in Love, in Life, and in the Power of the Lord God, and keep your Meetings, every one of you waiting in the Power of God upon him; that in it ye may have Unity with God, the Father, and the Son, and one with another.'‡ 'Meet in the Power of God, and in that keep your Meetings; that ye and every one of ye may inherit the Power of God, and so come into your own Inheritances.'§ Fox obviously thought of the Power of God as something each could experience within himself and could recognise in his fellow-worshippers. 'And when

\* Matt. xxvi, 41. † Ep. 77 (1654).

‡ Ep. 66 (1654). § Ep. 147 (1657).

that ye are Met together in the Light, hearken to it, that ye may feel the Power of God in every one of you.\* 'Keep all your Meetings, and know the Power of the Lord God among you all.'† This emphasis on the Power of God is typical of Fox; it comes almost as a refrain through the *Journal*: 'The Power of the Lord was over all'; and as a description of meetings: 'The Lord's Power and Presence was richly manifest in our Meetings.'‡ Indeed, it was experience of the power of God as an almost external force 'coming upon' them which led some to tremble, and which, according to one theory, led to the name 'Quaker'. It is characteristic of religious revivals that there should be this experience of power; it was a feature of early Christianity, and much in early Quakerism derived from a comparable discovery of hitherto unknown power. In their silent meetings, unrestricted by any predetermined framework, there was the fullest opportunity for all to experience and express the Power of God as, in the intensity of their experience, it surged through them.

As Friends waited in the silence, their minds were 'guided up to God', as Fox expressed it. 'Meet together, and in the Measure of God's Spirit wait, that with it all your Minds may be guided up to God, to receive Wisdom from God.'§ Sometimes it is 'the grace of God',

\* Ep. 130 (1656). † Ep. 75 (1654).

‡ Ep. 315 (1675). § Ep. 149 (1657).



and sometimes 'the Light', in which one must wait in order that by it one's mind may be guided up to God. Worship was an exercise demanding a focusing of the mind upon God, as we still know it to be. As the worshippers thus waited, they became aware of the presence of God among them: 'In all your Meetings know and feel the Power, and the Seed... of the Lord God amongst you, over you, and in you; then in that ye will feel the Presence of the Lord God dwelling in the midst of you. And to the Lord your Hearts will be brought, and it will bring you nigh one to another, and to come into sweet Love and Unity, and into Easiness and Open-ness of Heart; and keep you over all that which would stain you, or hurt you, or defile you.\* Here, as in other places, Fox shows how inseparable is experience of fellowship from that of communion with God; the first is a natural corollary of the second. Both were intensely real in the early Quaker Meetings. Fellowship, as known by Fox, will be described later. The experience of communion he sometimes describes in Christ-centred terms: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, saith Christ (that is, in the Power) I am there in the midst of them: In this Meeting, in this Gathering, Christ is felt in the midst. Who feels the Power of Christ, feels Christ, for he is the Power of God.† Another passage, the first part of which is repeated many times with

\* Ep. 104 (1655). † Ep. 186 (1659).

only slight variations, has a similar theme: 'Meet together in the Name of Jesus, whose Name is above every Name, and Gathering is above every Gathering, ... and you Gathering in his Name, where Salvation is; he is your Prophet, your Shepherd, your Bishop, your Priest, in the midst of you, to open to you, and to sanctify you, and to feed you with Life, and to quicken you with Life.\* The phrase, 'meet together in the Name of Jesus', is one which seems to occur more frequently in the later than in the earlier epistles, whilst 'meet in the Light of Christ' occurs most in the earlier epistles; it seems possible that Fox became, either intentionally or unconsciously, more specific in his references to the Christian nature of Quaker worship; 'the Name of Jesus' had a rather more definite implication than 'the Light of Christ'. Sometimes both occur together, as in this passage: 'All your Meetings in every place keep, waiting in the Light, which from Christ doth come, the Saviour of your Souls; that his Presence in the midst ye may all feel, who are gathered together in his Name and Power in his Light (which is his Name) and from the World's Gatherings are turned';‡ here, indeed, Fox identifies 'the Name of Jesus' with 'the Light', which is perhaps permissible if one means by both 'the character of Christ', though it is not clear exactly what Fox has in mind when he makes this sort of identification.

\* Ep. 288 (1672). † Ep. 33 (1653).

So much of Fox's teaching centres on the Light that it is often difficult to be sure whether he is thinking of 'waiting in the Light' as a perpetual attitude or in terms of its particular application to corporate worship. Characteristically, it is often used in the latter sense. 'All Friends every where, Keep your Meetings, waiting in the Light, which from the Lord Jesus Christ doth come; so will ye receive Power from him, and have the refreshing Springs of Life opened to your Souls, and be kept sensible of the tender Mercies of the Lord. And know one another in the Life (ye that be turned to the Light) and in the Power, which comes from the Lord Jesus Christ, who is your Light, who is your Life; that ye may all in the Life see Christ to reign in you, who is the Truth, from whence ye have Light. . . . In which Light as ye wait, ye will come to receive into your Hearts the Word of Faith, which reconciles to God.\*'

'Worship in spirit and truth' thus meant for Fox a meeting together and a waiting upon God in silence and stillness; as the minds and spirits of the worshippers were gathered up to God, they knew Him to be present among them, and felt themselves at one with Him; they knew the Light which was to lead them, and the Power in which they were to follow it, and in this soul-searching experience of communion with God they were drawn deeply and closely into unity with one another.

\* Ep. 105 (1655).

Words were far from essential to this experience, but there were times when they had their place in worship; such words were given by the Spirit, in whom worship was taking place, and might be spoken by anyone who felt the Spirit's movings within him.

Vocal ministry, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was a Pentecostal experience, and Fox draws his best illustration from this: 'Keep your Meetings, and being met together, as you are moved, speak; for they [i.e., the apostles] spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and as the Spirit gave them Utterance: And they prayed with the Spirit, and it helped their Infirmities, for they could not tell what to pray for as they ought: But he that searcheth the Heart, knoweth the Mind of the Spirit that teacheth to pray.\*' (The latter part is taken from Romans viii, 26-7.) As has already been mentioned, Fox lays great emphasis on the need for complete faithfulness in this matter of ministry: 'None go beyond the Measure of the Spirit of God, nor quench it; for where it is quenched, it cannot try things. So if any have any thing upon them to speak, in the Life of God stand up, and speak it, if it be but Two or Three Words, and sit down again.† His most comprehensive advice on ministry in Meetings for Worship is that in Epistle 43. 'Meet together . . . and watch over one another in that which is Eternal, and see every one, that your Words be from the

\* *Doctrinals*, p. 94 (1657).

† Ep. 150 (1657).

Eternal Life: Examine and Search with that which is Eternal, which speaks to that, which is in Prison in others. . . . And all Meet together every where, and in your Meetings wait upon the Lord; and take heed of forming Words, but mind the Power. . . . Wait upon God, for God doth not change, and let all Flesh be silent before the Lord, that the Life may speak in all. . . . And beware of speaking in the Presence of the Lord, except your Words be from the Eternal Life, the Eternal Word of God, else it doth not profit, nor build up, nor edifie.\*

In another passage, Fox shows that even in the early days there was the possibility of human vanity entering into the motives of the minister: 'Neither can ye feel your Words go from you with Joy and Life, that come from the unsanctified and unregenerated Part; for that Part will glory and boast, and vaunt itself, and say, This have I done, and that have I spoken, and not glory in the Lord. So, this satisfies not, and the Spirit in Prison is not refreshed by those things.†

One of the requirements of ministry was that it should 'speak to the condition' of those present, as, indeed, if it were truly inspired by the Spirit, it must do. Friends 'answered that of God' in one another as they met together for worship, as at other times; they 'felt the power of God in one another'. But their unity lay deeper than in the mere giving and receiving between

\* Ep. 43 (1653).

† Ep. 144 (1657).

one and another; it lay in their shared experience of God. They 'knew one another', but it was a knowing not of the mind but of the spirit, and it had the quality of 'that which is eternal'. 'Dwell in Love and Unity one with another, and know one another in the Power of an Endless Life, which doth not change.\* 'Meet together in the Love, Unity, and Peace, and know one another in this Love, that changeth not.† 'Keep your Meetings in the Name of Christ Jesus . . . and know one another in him.‡ In his attempt to express the intimacy of fellowship which grew in the gathered Meeting, Fox achieves a sensitivity of description which brings to us, three centuries away, the glow of its reality: 'Meet together every-where, and keep the Unity of the Spirit, which . . . Baptiseth all into one Body with one Spirit. And being written all in one another's Heart, have all one Voice, and the pure Language of Truth, where, in all plainness of Speech, things may be spoken in Nakedness of Heart one unto another, in the Eternal Unity in one Spirit.§ Elsewhere he speaks of that 'which will knit your Hearts together up to God', || and of their hearts being 'joined together'. 'That which is of God within every one, is that which brings them together to wait upon God, which brings them to Unity, which joins their Hearts together up to God. So as this moves, this is not to be quenched,

\* Ep. 23 (1653).

† Ep. 155 (1657).

‡ Ep. 166 (1658).

§ Ep. 18 (1652).

|| Ep. 43 (1653).

when it moves to pray or speak.\* It seems as though the intimacy of their fellowship and the spoken word had a very close relation to one another; where there was true unity there was little danger of ministry being wrongly given, and where ministry was truly inspired by the Spirit it drew the worshippers into closer unity.

Friends thus came to know what Fox describes as 'the Mystery of the Fellowship'.† 'Keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace; and Worship God in the Spirit and Truth and in that meet in the Truth, in the Power of God . . . in which is the perfect Fellowship, the Gospel-Fellowship, which stands in the Power of God . . . the Worship of God is a perfect Worship, it is in the Truth, in the Spirit.‡ It was a natural fruit of such an experience of fellowship that Friends should have a strong sense of responsibility for one another; this extended far beyond the bounds of the Meeting House, but it had its roots in the gathered Meeting. 'All ye, whom the Lord hath made Over-seers over his Church in your several Places, be faithful to the Lord, and watch over the Flock of Christ with all Diligence; ye which are Strong, watch over the Weak, and stir up that which is Pure one in another; see, that in order all your Meetings be kept.'§ The advice of this last sentence hints at possible difficulties, and there were many, even among so

\* *Doctrinals*, p. 101 (1657). † Ep. 169 (1658).

‡ Ep. 222 (1662). § Ep. 83 (1655).

well-intentioned a company; Fox might, and presumably did, think that his friends were 'called to be saints', but he was bound to accept the fact that they were as yet frail human beings who were far from the fulfilment of their calling. He was an idealist, but a practical one. Hence he writes this sort of caution: 'If any thing be spoken in a Meeting, which ye cannot bear, speak to them concerned betwixt them and you, after the Meeting is ended; for if any of the World be there, it may give Occasion to them to reproach Truth.\* And, more outspoken, 'Friends, Do not Judge one another in Meetings, ye that do minister in the Meetings; for your so doing hath hurt the People, both within and without, and your selves under their Judgment ye have brought. And your Judging one another in the Meetings, hath emboldned others to Quarrel, and Judge you also in the Meetings: And this hath been all out of Order, and the Church-Order also. Now, if ye have anything to say to any, stay, till the Meeting be done, and then speak to them in private between your selves, and do not lay open one another's Weakness; for that is Weakness, and not Wisdom to do so. For your Judging one another in Meetings, hath almost destroyed some Friends, and distracted them: And this is for want of Love, that beareth all things; and therefore let it be amended.†

The other symptom of human frailty against which

\* Ep. 178 (1659). † Ep. 116 (1656).

Fox felt called upon to protest was the tendency to sleepiness in Meetings. 'And Friends, all take heed of Sleeping in Meetings, and Sottishness, and Dulness; for it is an unsavoury thing to see one sit Nodding in a Meeting, and so to lose the Sense of the Lord: . . . and for the Priests People and others, that come into your Meetings, and see you, that come together to Worship God, and to meet together to wait upon him, and to have Fellowship in his Spirit, for you to sit Nodding, it is a shame and an unseemly thing.'\*

'The Priests People and others' found more to criticise in Quaker Meetings than the mere fact of a few who 'sat nodding', and it is in reply to their protests that Fox's most outspoken defence of 'the true worship' is made: 'We need no Mass for to teach us; for the Spirit that gave forth the Scriptures, teacheth us, how to pray, sing, praise, rejoice, honour and worship God, and in what; . . . And we need not your Common-Prayer to teach us, for the Spirit . . . teacheth us, how to pray, sing, fast, and to give thanks, and to praise and worship, and in what; and how to honour and glorifie God, and how to walk before Him and Men. . . . Our Faith, our Church, our Unity is in the Spirit, and our Word at which we Tremble, was in the Beginning, before the Papists Mass, and your Episcopal Common-Prayer . . . and our Unity, Church, and Fellowship will stand, when they are all ended.'† It

\* Ep. 257 (1668). † Ep. 171 (1659).

was the Spirit to whom Friends looked for guidance and inspiration at every point of their worship, being so convinced of the adequacy and rightness of their worship that they freely and gladly abandoned every outward form. This abandonment included the outward sacraments, but even these were not missed, for the spiritual experience to which they are a means was known without the outward elements. Fox, writing of true sacramental experience, says: 'The saints' baptism is with one Spirit into one body. . . the bread which the saints break is the body of Christ and the cup they drink is the blood of Christ.'\*

### III

#### THE FRIENDS' MEETING IN EXPERIENCE (SEVENTEENTH CENTURY)

GEORGE FOX, as we have seen, gave much detailed counsel about the way in which Friends were to meet for worship, and one can, in imagination, stand beside him and look out at the little groups of Quakers making their 'spiritual experiment' in a new way of corporate worship. One understands

\* Quoted in *Beginnings of Quakerism*, p. 138.

something of the idealism which prompted much of his counsel, and senses something of the convincing experience which made him bold to advise and instruct others. But it is to his contemporaries that we must look for confirmation of Fox's experience, and for more detailed information as to the actual nature of Meetings as they knew them. In this varied company, united as they were in intense conviction that they had found the only right way of worship for themselves, there were people of very different personalities, and each had his own particular approach to worship; the experience of one illuminates that of another, and from their writings we derive a much more complete picture of the whole than is possible from those of one man alone. Isaac Penington, with his deeply spiritual, sensitive approach, gives us a vivid sense of the warm fellowship which grew in worship wholly dependent on the Holy Spirit; Robert Barclay underlines this, in his closely-reasoned analytical approach; George Keith seems to be less of the idealist, explaining in more practical terms the experiences which he shared with others; Edward Burrough and Francis Howgill share with us their joy in discovery; these and many others brought to Quakerism a diversity of personality and experience, gave to it a contribution peculiar to themselves, and drew from it experience which again was special to each. Between them they help us to understand what it was they found.

As with Fox, so with the others, there is the assumption that worship is a whole-time activity, a perpetual attitude; as Penn says, 'every Man's a Temple, and every Family a Church, and every Place a Meeting-Place, and every Visit a Meeting'.\* Worship cannot be limited to set times and places, for 'all days are alike holy in the sight of God'; but, nevertheless, 'it is necessary that there be some time set apart for the saints to meet together to wait upon God'† (Barclay). These 'saints' could not find true worship in any of the set forms of their day, but they had no shadow of doubt that they had found it in their own 'silent meetings', however incomprehensibly others might dismiss their worship as empty or superstitious: 'And so we ceased from the teachings of all men . . . and their worships . . . and we became foolies for Christ's sake, that we might become true lie wise.'‡

The accepted authority for the form of worship as developed among Friends was always Christ's teaching that worship must be 'in Spirit and in Truth'. Others developed the theory underlying silent Meetings from this teaching in just the same way as Fox did, and the explanation becomes familiar as one goes through their writings. Barclay points out that this was the only explicit teaching given by Jesus about worship; 'it is both the first, chiefest, and most ample testimony, which

\* *Works*, Vol. II, p. 873 (1696). † *Apology*, p. 250 (1676).

‡ Burrough, *Introd. to Fox's Great Mystery* (1659).

Christ gives us of his Christian worship'.\* Friends thus looked upon Christ's words as an instruction which Christians ought to obey, and were ready to conform to it as literally as they did to other injunctions which seemed to them authoritative; it did not occur to them that there were other possible interpretations besides their own assumption that 'worship in Spirit and Truth' necessarily meant worship mainly in silence. Hence they believed, with Pennington, that 'If we should deny this way of Worship, we should deny Christ and be denied by him, . . . For he himself hath said, that . . . they that worship the Father, must worship him in Spirit and in Truth. . . . He that worshipeth in Spirit and Truth, must first be made Spiritual; and then must wait in silence of the Flesh, for God's Spirit to quicken him unto Spiritual worship.'† It was because they were so deeply convinced that in their form of worship they were obeying Christ's command that Joseph Coale could write with truth, 'the People called Quakers do absent [themselves] from the Publick way of Worship, and Cannot conform thereunto, though they are exposed to great Sufferings because thereof'.‡

Fox's other Scriptural authority, the account of the apostles' meeting at the time of Pentecost, was much more than mere theory in the minds of his contemporaries;

\* *Apology*, p. 270 (1676). † *Works*, II, p. 323 (1671).

‡ *Life*, p. 104 (1665).

aries; for them the experience of Pentecost had been repeated in their own time. It was no abstract parallelism of ideas which put the Friends' Meeting for Worship alongside the apostles' assembly—it was vivid personal experience of the power of the Spirit which made the two seem identical in nature. Edward Burrough, for example, describes Friends' Meetings in Pentecostal terms: 'And while waiting upon the Lord in silence, as often we did for many hours together, with our mindes and hearts toward him, being stayed in the Light of Christ within us, from all thoughts, fleshly motions, and desires, in our diligent waiting and feare of his Name, and hearkning to his word, we received often the pouring down of the spirit upon us, and the gift of Gods holy eternal Spirit as in the dayes of old, and our hearts were made glad, and our tongues loosed, and our mouths opened, and we spake with new tongues as the Lord gave us utterance, and as his spirit led us, which was poured down upon us, on Sons and Daughters, and to us hereby was the deep things of God revealed, and things unutterable was known and made manifest. . . .'\* In another description of a Meeting we read: 'The mighty power of the Lord was made manifest; almost all the room was shaken.'† In the light of this and much similar experience, it was natural that Friends should

\* *Introd. to Fox's Great Mystery* (1659).

† *B.Q.*, p. 76 (quoting Farnsworth) (1653).

assume themselves to be akin to the early Christians, both in the manner of their silent worship and in the ministry which arose both within and beyond 'silent meetings'; Barclay sums up when he asserts that 'the ministry that we have pleaded for, and which also the Lord hath raised up among us is, in all its parts, like the true ministry of the apostles and primitive church'.\*

The fact which is so striking in all the writing of these early Friends is that they really did believe in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, especially in corporate worship. They went to Meeting in expectant faith, ready to wait patiently, sensitive in their response to the Spirit's least movings within them, bold in their dependence on it, and joyous in their certain experience that all this was fully justified by events. Here we see Quaker worship at its best, and realise its marked contrast to the other forms of worship of the day; its basis was an expectation that the Spirit was active here and now, not a recollection that Christ had lived sixteen hundred years before; the 'presentness' of its experience of Christ made the sixteen hundred years seem as nothing, so that Friends 'often said one unto another, with great joy of heart: "What, is the Kingdom of God come to be with men?"' †

It is in the writings of Penington and Barclay that the emphasis upon dependence on the Spirit is most marked, and both are much more explicit about it than is Fox.

\* *Apology*, p. 243 (1676). † Francis Howgill, *B. of D. I.*, p. 18 (1672).

Penington believed that worship should be wholly led and inspired by the Spirit, whether in silence or in ministry; the very act of meeting was to be a response to the Spirit's drawings. The Spirit was to have such absolute control that man's natural capacities were to become as nothing. Here we see the beginnings of the Quietist tendency, despite all the positive value of Penington's understanding of worship. Barclay was similar in his emphasis, though not going quite so far in the direction of Quietism. In the introductory sentences of his chapter on Worship, he draws together the essentials as he sees them: 'All true and acceptable worship to God is offered in the inward and immediate moving and drawing of his own Spirit, which is neither limited to places, times, nor persons. For though we are to worship him always, and continually to fear before him; yet as to the outward signification thereof, in prayers, praises, or preachings, we ought not to do it in our own will, where and when we will; but where and when we are moved thereunto by the stirring and secret inspiration of the Spirit of God in our hearts.'\*

Dependence on the Spirit is the attitude underlying the whole Meeting, and in the first place is experienced in the silence. Penington describes it thus: "This is a great thing to know flesh silenced, to feel the reasoning thoughts and discourses of the fleshly mind stilled, and

\* *Apology*, p. 246 (1676).



the Wisdom, Light and guidance of God's Spirit waited for. For man is to come into the poverty of Self, into the abasedness, into the nothingness, into the silence of his Spirit before the Lord, into the putting off of all his Knowledge, Wisdom, Understanding, Abilities, all that he is, hath done, or can do out of this measure of Life, into which he is to travel, that he may be clothed and filled with the Nature, Spirit, and Power of the Lord.\* In the silence the Spirit 'inwardly nourisheth' and ministers, and his ministry is 'more close and immediate when without words, than when with words'. Yet 'absolutely silent meetings (wherein there is a resolution not to speak) we know not: but we wait on the Lord, either to feel him in words, or in silence of Spirit without words; as he pleaseth.'† As the worshippers wait in silence, they may know the power of God amongst them, 'And in the breakings forth of that Power they may pray, speak, exhort, rebuke, sing or mourn, etc., according as the Spirit teaches, requires, and gives utterance. But if the Spirit do not require to speak and give to utter, then every one is to sit still in his place. . . . ‡ A man must not speak his own words, but the Spirit's words, as and when the Spirit directs.

Barclay has much to say about dependence on the Spirit in ministry. Of worship in general he says, 'As our

\* *Works*, II, p. 256 (before 1679). † *Works*, II, p. 257 (before 1679).

‡ *Works*, II, p. 256 (before 1679).

worship consisteth not in the words, so neither in silence, as silence; but in a holy dependence of the mind upon God: from which dependence silence necessarily follows in the first place, until words can be brought forth, which are from God's Spirit'.\* These words are put into the hearts of the worshippers, inspired by the Spirit, and are in no sense a man's own 'conned and gathered stuff'. Every worshipper is potentially a minister, but only actually becomes so as he is called and led and influenced by the Spirit. Ministers thus ordained are not drawn from any one group of people, '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'.† Many of these, 'labouring and mechanic men, altogether without learning' have been so inspired in their preaching that thousands have been convinced, and even an educated, cultured man like Barclay speaks with complete appreciation of their ministry—'my heart has been often greatly broken and tendered by that virtuous life that proceeded from the powerful ministry of those illiterate men'.‡ His theme throughout the chapter on Ministry is that the Holy Spirit gives the whole and only qualification for it—no learning or other merely human ability can give any such qualification in itself. All men and

\* *Apology*, p. 257 (1676).

† *Apology*, p. 229 (1676).

‡ *Apology*, p. 226 (1676).

women equally may be called and inspired by the Spirit, and it is for each to be obedient to the call when it comes. As they are obedient, so the message given through them reaches the spirits of others. Barclay's conception of right ministry is thus very similar to Fox's; in fact, the only real difference in their approach lies in the much more detailed and analytical treatment of Barclay, as compared with Fox's more direct application of Scriptural quotations.

There is a reminder of Fox's emphasis that worship is a whole-time activity in Barclay's attitude to prayer. He distinguishes between inward prayer, 'the secret turning of the mind towards God', and outward prayer, the bringing forth of 'audible sighs, groans, or words'. 'Inward prayer', he says, 'is necessary at all times',\* and the sincere Christian practises it continually. 'The outward exercise of prayer, as needing a greater and superadded influence and motion of the Spirit', cannot be continually practised, but is more likely to be inspired in those who constantly practise inward prayer, these being more sensitive than others to the movings of the Spirit. 'And indeed, as such who are most diligent have a near access to God, and he taketh most delight to draw them by his Spirit to approach and call upon him, so when many are gathered together in this watchful mind, God doth frequently pour forth the Spirit of prayer among them, and

\* *Apology*, p. 281 (1676).

stir them thereunto, to the edifying and building up of one another in love.'\* Fox seems not to have made such specific reference to vocal prayer in his various counsels, but his own practice of it, as described by Penn, bears out Barclay's claims. 'Above all he excelled in prayer. . . . The most awful, living, reverent frame I ever felt or beheld, I must say, was his in prayer. And truly it was a testimony he knew and lived nearer to the Lord than other men; for they that know Him most, will see most reason to approach him with reverence and fear.†

Although vocal ministry and prayer were the most obvious outward signs of the activity of the Spirit within the Meeting, it was in the silence that much of the most important experiences of worship were known. 'Yea, and we doubt not, but assuredly know, that the meeting may be good and refreshing though from the sitting down to the rising up thereof there hath not been a word outwardly spoken, and yet life may have been known to abound in each particular, and an inward growing up therein and thereby, yea, so as words might have been spoken acceptably, and from the life; yet there being no absolute necessity laid upon any so to do, all might have chosen rather quietly and silently to possess and enjoy the Lord in themselves, . . . ‡ The value attached to silence as against words is indicated by the distinguishing

\* *Apology*, p. 282 (1676). † *Intro. to Fox's Journal*, p. xlvii (1694).

‡ *Apology*, p. 258 (1676).

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name given to Friends' manner of worship—'Silent Meetings'.

George Keith says that at the beginning 'through very necessity, their meetings came to be silent',\* because Friends were 'but very young', and the light and power of God 'had much to work through in them' before they were ready to administer words to others. It is not until a man 'be well rooted and fastened' in the truth himself that he is in a fit condition to minister to others. Keith's assessment of 'the benefit, advantage, and glory of silent meetings' seems to centre particularly on the experience of fellowship which was known in them, which depended on the meeting rather than on the silence; though, it is true, he says: 'Friends are many times willing and desirous to sit down and feed together in silence, upon the heavenly and invisible life, so as to reach unto one another, in the communications of life, and feel the states and conditions of one another therein in silence, and enjoy that secret and hid fellowship together which the world knoweth not'.† Much of his outlook seems to have been similar to Fox's, and to have lacked the mystical approach found so markedly in Penington.

Silence, in the experience of many of the early Friends, was far from comfortable, at least in their first coming to it, for it was the occasion of an 'inward travail

\* *The Benefit, etc. of Silent Meetings* (1670).

† *The Benefit, etc. of Silent Meetings* (1670).

and wrestling' with the evil within. The outcome is a victory of good over evil, of pure over impure; 'an overcoming of the power and spirit of darkness'; but this does not happen without much effort, for this manner of worship is 'very hard at first to the natural man, whose roving imaginations and running worldly desires are not so easily brought to silence'.\* So violent, indeed, may the struggle be that 'every individual will be strongly exercised as in a day of battle, and thereby trembling and a motion of the body will be upon most, if not upon all, . . . and from this the name of Quakers, i.e., Tremblers, was first reproachfully cast upon us'.† This was the work of 'the power of God' breaking forth into a Meeting, 'burning up and beating down all that was contrary to Him';‡ 'that fleshly part, that fleshly understanding, that fleshly wisdom, that fleshly will, which will not bow, is chained down, and kept under by the power of life which God stretcheth forth over it, and subdueth it by'.§ We are reminded in this of Fox's continual reference to 'the power of the Lord', which was vividly known by the early Friends.

It has been stressed that their meetings were held in constant dependence on the Holy Spirit, and the corollary of this was an emptying of the human personality so that there was nothing to hinder the working of the

\* *Apology*, pp. 254 and 256 (1676). † *Apology*, p. 257 (1676).

‡ Burrough (1659). § Penington, *Works*, p. ? (before 1679).

Spirit. The need for this self-negation was assumed in the idea of Quaker worship, but was carried sometimes to extremes, more particularly in the later years of the Quietist period. Rufus Jones finds the tendency to Quietism already clearly developed in Barclay's writings—which he describes as 'charged and loaded with the essential conditions and tendencies of Quietism'.\* It is true that, insofar as Barclay stresses the supremacy of the Spirit in worship, his teaching might be so interpreted; but, at least as regards worship in itself, Penington goes farther in the Quietist direction than Barclay does, and his more mystical approach seems akin to that of the continental Quietists. A quotation given earlier (p. 32) illustrates Penington's belief that man must 'come into the poverty of self'. Barclay says the same sort of thing as he insists that the mind must be freed of its own 'thoughts and imaginations', of its own 'wisdom and will';† but he is not being wholly negative, for he describes worship as 'a holy dependence of the mind upon God',‡ and says in more detail: 'As there are any objects presented to [man's] mind concerning God, or things relating to religion, his soul may be exercised in them without hurt, and to the great profit both of himself and others; because those things have their rise not from his own will, but from God's Spirit; and therefore as in the

\* *S.P.Q.*, *Intro.*, p. xli. † *Apology*, p. 252 (1676).

‡ *Apology*, p. 257 (1676).

arisings and movings of this, his mind is still to be exercised in thinking and meditating, so also in the more obvious acts of preaching and praying. And so it may hence appear we are not against meditation, . . . but we are against the thoughts and imaginations, of the natural man in his own will, from which all errors and heresies concerning the Christian religion in the whole world have proceeded.\*

There are many writers who witness to the benefits derived from silent waiting upon God; health, peace, comfort and refreshment are known by each worshipper as he is faithful. Penington speaks of 'The sweet communion enjoyed, the sweet love flowing, the sweet peace of spirit reaped, . . . the sweet joy and refreshment in the Lord'.† Joseph Coale says, 'we do find health and peace, and spiritual comfort, and true satisfaction in this way in which we now walk with the Lord'. 'We have found great peace and satisfaction to our souls.'‡ George Keith has a passage which vividly describes the experience of some: 'They came to know a being planted and grounded, and rooted and settled and established in the truth, and in the light, and life, and spirit, and power thereof, and so they came to be gathered out of all the tossings, and waverings of mind . . . into stability and steadiness in the truth, which was even as to be delivered

\* *Apology*, p. 263 (1676). † *Works*, p. 2 (before 1679).

‡ *Life* pp. 114-15 (1665).

from a stormy and tempestuous sea, and brought to dry land, and thus also they came to be gathered . . . into the clear and certain manifestation of truth.\* The richness of such experiences was convincing proof of the rightness of this way of worship; small wonder, then, that 'we do choose rather to obey the Lord, that we may have and feel his peace in our hearts, than to obey men to avoid all sufferings'.†

One of the almost child-like reasons given for meeting in silence was that unless people were quiet, they could not hear what God was saying; this included a belief in the necessity for inward silence as well as outward silence, though the first was easier to achieve within the conditions of the second. Outward silence was the necessary environment, insofar as it could be ensured, for those who wanted to listen to God; but inward silence was to be sought too, by the freeing of the mind from all distracting thoughts, and the reaching of the spirit towards peace. This, as has already been explained, was a conscious aim in worship, that each 'being silent, God may speak in him'.‡ Barclay gives some rather delightful analogies, illustrating this point. He describes the pupil who cannot learn anything from his master so long as he insists on talking all the time himself, and the servant who is not ready to hear his king's commands

\* *The Benefits, etc. of Silent Meetings* (1670).

† Joseph Coale, *Life*, p. 115 (1665). ‡ *Apology*, p. 261 (1676).

because he is 'still deafening him with discourse . . . and running to and fro, without any particular and immediate order, to do things that perhaps might be good in themselves, or might have been commanded at other times to others';\* and there is the man busy speaking of a business who does not hear 'one who is quietly whispering into his ear' some vital information about it. And so, by reason and by experience, it is shown that silence is necessary: 'We wait, in silence of the fleshly part, to hear with the new ear what God shall please to speak inwardly in our own hearts, or outwardly through others, who speak with the new tongue which he unlooseth and teacheth to speak.'†

Many of the early Friends wrote of 'the presence in the midst', as did Fox, in terms of joyous awareness. Perhaps this is nowhere more marked than in Francis Howgill's testimony: "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."‡ The experience of presence was the experience of power; it was also the experience of fel-

\* *Apology*, p. 262 (1676).

† Penington, *Works*, p. ? (before 1679).

‡ *B. of D. I.*, p. 17 (1672).

lowship. '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 as a strong bond upon all our spirits, which united us one unto another.'\* 'The unity of the Spirit', 'the bond of peace', and 'membership of one body' are familiar phrases used to describe the fellowship known in worship, as much by other writers as by Fox.

It was this experience which was conclusive proof, for most of them, of the necessity of *meeting* for worship; some of the other experiences of the silent meeting might have been known equally well by the spiritually-minded individual worshipping alone. But insofar as each contributed to others, and all to each, the togetherness of corporate worship was vital. George Keith has an almost mathematical conception of the advantages of meeting: 'For if even but two be together . . . the measure of life in the one, doth after a secret and unspeakable manner, reach unto the measure of life in the other, . . . yea, and the life in the one doth so join and unite its force and strength and virtue unto the other, that every particular feels the strength and virtue of the two-fold measure of life, as it were doubled within themselves, and if they be three thus gathered together, . . . one feels not only the virtue, force and strength of his own particular measure of life, but also the very force and strength of the other two,

\* *B. of D. I.*, p. 18 (1672).

so that his life is as it were strengthened, enlarged and refreshed as in a threefold degree, . . .'\* and so on; on the basis of this sort of calculation, a meeting of several hundreds would have almost explosive power!

Many were the attempts to describe in metaphorical language what actually happened within a Meeting; perhaps one of the most successful is Thomas Story's, for it has within it a sense of movement and growth: 'As the many small springs and streams descending into a proper place and forming a river become more deep and weighty, even so thus meeting with a people gathered of the living God . . . I felt an increase of the same joy of the salvation of God.'† George Keith draws the parallel that many people gathered into a dark place, and each having a candle, have between them a greater light in proportion to their numbers; Barclay uses the same metaphor. Penington has one of the loveliest descriptions of a Meeting: 'The warmth of Life in each Vessel, doth not only warm the particular, but they are like an heap of fresh and living coals, warming one another, insomuch as a great strength, freshness, and vigour of Life flows into all.'‡

Within the Meeting each can give to all, and all to each. It may even happen that an otherwise-unprofitable Meeting is redeemed by the faithfulness of one, through

\* *The Benefits, etc. of Silent Meetings* (1670).

† *B. of D. I.*, p. 37 (1691). ‡ *Works*, II, p. 256 (before 1679).

whose travails life is brought forth in others; 'and such a one is felt by the rest to minister life unto them without words'\*—'unto whom as it were the keys of the Kingdom are given, that [he] may open it unto others'.† The strength of the whole assembly as felt in its influence on an individual is sometimes irresistible. Barclay describes how it may reach one who comes in with a wandering mind or distracted by 'the hurry of outward business';‡ his spirit is 'laid hold of' and the good in him raised up. Or even one who is 'rude and wicked' may be reached, though he came in intending to do mischief; 'by the secret strength and virtue [of the Meeting] the power of darkness in him will be chained down'. There is a more compelling evidence of this reaching power of the gathered Meeting in Barclay's account of his own conviction: '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.'§ Many others were reached in this way, so that Keith could say truly, 'the very silence and silent meetings of friends preached unto them so convincingly, and reached them, that they came both to confess and own the truth'.¶

The advantages of meeting together for worship are

\* *Apology*, p. 255 (1676).

† Keith, *The Benefit, etc. of Silent Meetings* (1670).

‡ *Apology*, p. 254 (1676). § *Apology*, p. 255 (1676).

¶ *The Benefit, etc. of Silent Meetings* (1670).

thus manifold, but it is the experience of fellowship which matters most among them; of this, Friends were in no possible doubt, but they still found it necessary to try and explain themselves to others. So Barclay, with his usual careful logic, writes, "To meet together we think necessary for the people of God; because, so long as we are clothed with this outward tabernacle, there is a necessity to the entertaining of a joint and visible fellowship, and bearing of an outward testimony for God, and seeing of the faces of one another, that we concur with our persons as well as spirits".\* In similar vein, Keith writes: "And though the unity and fellowship of the children of light and truth doth not simply consist in their outward nearness, . . . for that though at never so great an outward distance, their unity remains in that spirit which reacheth over and through all, yet it is certain that even their being together in the outward . . . doth increase and strengthen their unity . . . for that when they are outwardly present, life hath an opportunity to convey itself unto one another, by and through the natural spirit, and the very face of one sharpneth another as Iron doth Iron, for where life is raised in the heart, it hath its image on the very face or countenance, which by a secret virtue reacheth unto others.† As Barclay puts it, the outward meeting is a means to an inward meeting.

William Penn makes his own summary of the reasons

\* *Apology*, p. 249 (1676). † *The Benefit, etc. of Silent Meetings* (1670).

why Friends should meet: 'We meet for a Publick Testimony of Religion and Worship, and for the Edification and Encouragement of those that are yet young in the Truth, and to Call and Gather others to the Knowledge of it, who are yet going astray; and Blessed be God, it is not in Vain, since many are thereby added to the Church, that we hope and believe shall be saved.\* He thus lists three reasons for meeting: to 'bear an outward testimony for God', as Barclay expresses it; to support new members; and as a means of convincing others. There is here rather more of a missionary emphasis than one finds in some comparable writings, the Meeting for Worship itself apparently being regarded as a channel through which those who were 'of the world' might be reached; Penn was writing long after the early days of 'threshing meetings', and at a time when religious toleration had made it much easier for Friends to meet and for others to be attracted to their way of worship.

It is, perhaps, relevant to record the periods at which the various writers quoted were convinced. Edward Burrough, Francis Howgill, Joseph Coale, and Isaac Penington all joined Friends before 1660, in the days of rapid growth and expansion, when Meetings could be held in freedom and with no outward limitations of practice; Burrough wrote the description quoted during this period. George Keith, Robert Barclay, and William

\* *Works*, Vol. II, p. 874 (1696).

Penn were convinced during the years of persecution following the Restoration, Coale and Keith writing during this period, and also Howgill. Barclay wrote the *Apology* in the days of rather precarious freedom which followed. Thomas Story's conviction was not until after the Toleration Act of 1689, and the writings of Penn, quoted earlier, were even later. The emphases peculiar to each must be, to some extent, the result of experience of Quaker worship against the background of the times during which they knew it.

William Charles Braithwaite, summarising the position at the end of 1660, says of the Meeting for Worship that it was 'a unique instrument for spiritual education', 'helping seeking hearts to conscious communion with God', 'training the spiritual faculty and consolidating character'. The educational value of silent Meetings 'lay in the high spiritual results that attended... reflection and meditation, when the issues of right and wrong were weighed in the balance of the sanctuary. Where there was warm fellowship and an earnest seeking after truth, the meetings, alike in their silence and utterance, were times of refreshment and vision, in which Friends had rich communion with one another and with God.\* As has already been emphasised, the early Meetings were often held in silence, their members usually being people of mature spiritual development who rejoiced in the

\* *B.Q.*, pp. 508-11.



power and freedom of their new-found worship. When they were moved to speak, it seems likely that their messages were like those of Fox, often described in his *Journal*, in which 'the Scriptures were opened', 'the everlasting truth declared', and the people 'directed to the Light of Christ and to the Spirit of God in their own hearts'. Many of the early Quakers were powerful preachers, and their addresses must have been effective, whether given to a meeting of 'the world's people' or in the more intimate gatherings of Friends. But, as Braithwaite points out, 'many of the utterances were deficient in positive teaching . . . and the Quaker meetings, with all their vitality, were already showing signs of the weaknesses which developed later'.

It is difficult to form a clear picture of the Meetings as normally held in the later years of the seventeenth century. There are indications, particularly in controversial writings about Quakers, of rather unsatisfactory behaviour: such episodes as singing while someone was preaching, groaning, sleeping, and so on. On the other hand, it is evident that Meetings continued to be centres of power and of warm fellowship, held unflinchingly through periods of intense persecution. There are some indications of an excess of vocal ministry, especially in Meetings in the large towns where many visiting ministers might be present; in 1678 in Bristol, and in 1688 in London, proposals were made for the holding of 're-

tired meetings' in which there would be silence—'in a sense of the benefit of such meetings in the time of our first gathering'.\* One is left with the impression that, after the rich experiences inherent in Quaker worship in its earliest days, the pressure of persecution from without and gradually declining power within provided the conditions in which the inevitable weaknesses and difficulties of professedly Spirit-guided worship became apparent. But where Quakers were still sensitive and faithful to His leadings, the Spirit did not fail them.

## IV

## THE MEETING IN DECLINE (QUIETIST PERIOD)

THOMAS STORY'S analogy of 'the many small springs and streams descending into a proper place and forming a river' was applied to his experience in Quaker worship, but suggests a wider application of the same analogy to the whole process of its history. In the early days abundant life sprang up in individuals, who, in joyous discovery that they were moving in the same direction, became united into a strong, swiftly-flowing stream; as is the way of streams in their upper reaches, it surged forward, pure and clear, unimpeded by obstacles, cutting for itself a new channel through resist-

\* *S.P.Q.*, p. 545.

ant rock, unhesitating in its triumphant flow. But the rushing torrent comes eventually to more level country, its current becomes slower, its flow less certain, and its water more clouded; it may move on steadily for a time, full and quiet, but still powerful. There comes a stage in many rivers, however, when forward movement is almost lost in creeping meanders across a swampy plain; when there is no more power to cut a clear channel; when stagnant pools form in the undisturbed marshes; and when the water, although the same as that of the upper reaches, has become almost too clouded to be identified with it. Perhaps, in the attempt to improve conditions, men may regulate its course by building rigid artificial banks, making the river into a mere canal in which natural movement is almost lost.

This sort of picture seems to illustrate what happened to Quaker worship as it settled down into the almost unbroken silences of its Quietist period; the sense of unhappy awareness that, in spite of its earlier joyous promise, this in fact is what followed, is the same as one looks at both the river and Quakerism. The only hopeful feature lies in the knowledge that rivers, over a long period of time, may be rejuvenated—as, in the light of more recent history, one believes that Quakerism has been.

In spite of its rather depressing nature, there is much to be learnt from the effects of Quietism upon Quaker worship, for it was in large measure a development to

extremes of tendencies native to this form of worship; given a different environment, this development might have been arrested, and some other emphasis have been made instead; there are many inherent tendencies whose development might have been stimulated by different forces at work in the contemporary world. Be that as it may, conditions in eighteenth-century England and America appear to have contributed to the almost imperceptible transition from Quaker worship in its early days, with its expectant faith and warm fellowship, to Quietist worship with its self-absorbed awareness of the inadequacy of the merely human. Early Quaker worship had been almost Pentecostal in the vivid experience of the power of the Holy Spirit, moving men as they were sensitive to it; the more sensitive they became, and the more ready to obey, the richer was the experience of worship. True sensitivity, however, could only be achieved by a concentration of attention upon the power of God to guide, to the forgetfulness of one's human qualities in the awareness of 'that of God'. It could not be achieved by the attempt to cultivate it for its own sake, with the conscious negation of human qualities. It was in this shift of attention from 'the power of the Lord' to the emptiness of man that Quaker worship ceased to be Pentecostal in character, and the moving of the Spirit became largely paralysed.

It is difficult to locate any definite time of change in the

slow transition from worship as known in the early days, before 1700, to the fully-developed Quietist worship of the second half of the eighteenth century. The two are so different as to present many points of contrast, and the means by which the one became the other defies exact definition. The sources of information for the transition period, being mainly personal journals, are coloured by the individual outlooks of their authors, whose experiences of Quaker worship as described are subjective rather than objective. It seems as though the initial experience of Quaker Meetings determined the personal experience of them throughout the life of the individual; those who came to Quakerism before 1700 continued to feel the glow of their first experiences of it, as if warmed by some invisible flame, even whilst others made their first contact with the cooling embers. Three Friends whose writings on worship belong to the transition period are John Bellers (1654-1725), Thomas Story (1670-1742), and Samuel Bownas (1676-1753); all three knew pre-1700 Quakerism, and lived far enough into the eighteenth century to see developments long after the passing of the first generation. John Bellers in his pamphlet, 'Watch unto Prayer',\* stresses the need for constant watchfulness, pointing out that it is not sufficient to turn one's thoughts inward when one arrives at Meeting; the true spiritual worship demands watchful-

\* *John Bellers*, by Ruth Fry, p. 87 (1703).

ness at all times. There is in his writings an emphasis on activity of mind and spirit in true worship, even while one can detect at the same time the rudiments of quietistic tendencies. 'Of Divine Worship', he says: 'This divine worship is the more spiritual, as men's minds are more sequestered and silenced from creatures and imaginations (not dull and sleepily, but) vigorous, and earnestly seeking after, and praying for, a greater purity of soul, and a farther manifestation of God, through the inspiration of inward divine Light';\* similarly, in a later extract: 'The silence of a religious and spiritual worship is not a drowsy, unthinking state of mind, but a sequestering or withdrawing of it from all visible objects and vain imaginations, unto a fervent praying to or praising the invisible omnipresent God in His Light and Love.'† Such descriptions of worship are not far different from those of Robert Barclay and his contemporaries.

Thomas Story looks back to his early experiences, and says, perhaps a little wistfully, 'The Lord gave us glorious times, in the sensible enjoyment of his divine and soul-melting presence, to our general and mutual consolation: for in those days, friends were near the Lord, and one another in him; and the canopy of his love was over us, and we rejoiced together therein, but with holy

\* *John Bellers*, by Ruth Fry, p. 80 (1699).

† *John Bellers*, by Ruth Fry, p. 158 (1718).

fear, and with trembling'.\* 'Our Meetings . . . were frequently broken and melted in silence, as well as under a powerful living ministry by the word.'† This ministry seems to have included 'doctrine, exposition of the Holy Scriptures, reproof, instruction in morals, or whatsoever tends to the conviction of unbelievers, confirmation of the unstable, edification of the church, and body of Christ, and perfecting the sanctified in him'.‡ Thomas Story became a minister and passed through the sequence of experiences at the beginning of his ministry which become so familiar to anyone reading contemporary and later Quaker journals. He thought that the first sentences impressed on him in Meetings were not weighty enough to utter, and so remained silent; he realised his disobedience to divine movings as he passed through a period of spiritual darkness, and resolved to be obedient; his resolve was followed by further enlightenment, but he still could not bring himself to speak; darkness again descended, driving him to a new resolve; this time, as words came to him in Meeting, he stood and spoke one sentence in a scarcely audible voice, and was overwhelmed by the joyous sense of release which resulted.

This sort of experience was typical of Quaker ministers, and one accepts their descriptions of it with sympathetic respect. The danger for Quakerism lay, not in

\* *Life* (1786), p. 68 (1693). † *Life*, p. 53 (1691). ‡ *Life*, p. 70 (1693).

the experiences which in fact were known and treasured by individuals, but in the increasing tendency to make them the test by which the divine appointing of ministers might be recognised. The obvious similarity of many individual experiences was no proof that God had only one way of revealing His purpose, but in the course of time it had the effect of limiting the expectancy with which Quakers looked for divine inspiration and of paralysing their response to any moving which did not fit into the recognised pattern. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth'; its essential nature is lost in human methods of harnessing its power, for an element of resistance to it is introduced which alters the whole relationship of the wind to the objects which would otherwise respond freely to it. The essence of the Spirit, as of the wind, is liberty. Small wonder that, with the general acceptance of what was in effect a separated ministry, the day of Pentecostal experiences in Quaker worship was past; no longer was it even contemplated that *all* might speak 'as the Spirit gave them utterance'. Instead it was assumed, as Samuel Bownas says, that God does not give like gifts to all, and that ministers must be called.

Samuel Bownas, alive as he was in his own spiritual outlook, was very near to the quietistic ideals of ministry as held by Quakers after him. His initial experience was very much like Thomas Story's, and he became a

weighty and valuable minister—at first ‘but short, seldom standing a quarter of an hour’, but soon coming off ‘beyond what I expected by much, preach’d almost an hour, so that I was very cheerful in my spirit after it’.\* He early developed a habit of detailed self-analysis with reference to his ministry, and counsels others thus: ‘Every time you appear in the ministry, when it is over, examine yourselves narrowly, whether you have kept your places, and to your Guide; and consider, whether you have not used superfluous words, that render the matter disagreeable, or such tones or gestures as misbecome the work we are about, always remembering, that the true ministers preach not themselves, but Christ Jesus our Lord.’† A certain amount of self-criticism no doubt had its place, but there is here a suggestion of the beginnings of a ‘professional’ attitude to ministry. Samuel Bownas is concerned to give much practical advice about the methods and seasons of ministry, but his main emphasis is on obedience to the leadings of the Spirit: ‘Inspiration or revelation from God by his Spirit is of absolute necessity to guide a minister in his ministry; . . . we are to wait for both authority and power, that in the Lord’s time we may speak.’‡ ‘As thou beginnest with the Spirit, keep to it in thy going on, and conclude in it, and this will preserve thee from tiring thy

\* *Life*, pp. 11 and 13 (1696). † *Life*, pp. 54–5 (1702).

‡ *Qualifications Necessary to a Gospel Minister*, p. 29 (1750).

brethren, and causing them to wish for thy silence.’\* Even here, the motives for obedience to the Spirit seem to be a little mixed; human judgment as to the external rightness of things stands side by side with the desire to respond to divine inspiration.

The content of ministry, according to Samuel Bownas, could include parables, allegories, the narration of God’s dealings with men in past ages, the recounting of personal experiences of the goodness of God, and expositions on Scriptural passages. He had, in his early days of ministry, had some hesitation about studying the Scriptures, ‘lest I should be tempted to lean upon them’, but it seemed a good practice to study the contexts or words he had quoted in his sermons, and he thus learned to understand more adequately the sources from which he drew his illustrations. The constant use of the Bible by Bownas, and by Fox before him, set an example which was ignored by many of the quietist Quakers who followed them. Bownas is nearest to Quietism in his belief that inspiration can only be rightly received if the individual is empty of all human thoughts: ‘A spiritual minister is, and ought every day to be, like blank paper, when he comes into the assembly of the Lord’s people; . . . his only and sole dependence must be on the gift of the Spirit.’† This means that if he is moved to speak, he

\* *Qualifications Necessary to a Gospel Minister*, p. 107 (1750).

† *Qualifications Necessary to a Gospel Minister*, p. 58 (1750).

must stand up, not knowing what may be given to him to say after his introductory words. This conception of ministry, in which no previous preparation of mind was allowed, and immediate revelation was relied upon absolutely, was fraught with all the dangers which later had such deadly effect upon Quaker worship as a whole.

It is clear that during the first half of the eighteenth century there was life still stirring in Quaker worship, and that men like Thomas Story and Samuel Bownas were inspired throughout their lives with the same spirit as they had known in their early discovery of Quakerism. It is equally clear that the germs of Quietism had become planted in Quaker thought, and were fast developing. To the end of his life, Story speaks of Meetings 'in which truth triumphed gloriously', and Bownas of 'acceptable times', 'all quiet and well'; but sometimes things were only 'middling', or even 'low', as is confirmed by the impression formed by such men as John Pemberton, who in about 1750 found 'lukewarmness prevalent' in some parts.

Having attempted to survey trends in the attitudes of a few individuals during the transition period, we come to an examination of Quaker Meetings as they were in the years of fully-developed Quietism, and as, even today, the stranger sometimes imagines them. The impressions of a non-Quaker, writing in 1821, may perhaps be a good starting-point. 'Reader, would'st thou

know what true peace and quiet mean; would'st thou find a refuge from the noises and clamours of the multitude; would'st thou enjoy at once solitude and society; would'st thou possess the depth of thine own spirit in stillness, without being shut out from the consolatory faces of thy species; would'st thou be alone and yet accompanied; solitary, yet not desolate; singular, yet not without some to keep thee in countenance; a unit in aggregate; a simple in composite:—come with me into a Quakers' Meeting.' 'I have seen faces in their assemblies upon which the dove sate visibly brooding. Others, again, I have watched . . . in which I could possibly detect nothing but a blank inanity. But quiet was in all. . . . Only now and then a trembling, female, generally ancient, voice is heard . . . with a low, buzzing, musical sound, laying out a few words which "she thought might suit the condition of some present", with a quaking diffidence.' 'More frequently the Meeting is broken up without a word having been spoken. But the mind has been fed. You go away with a sermon not made with hands . . . you have bathed with stillness.\*'

Whittier, like Lamb, captures in words the sense of tranquillity of Quaker Meetings:

In calm and cool and silence, once again  
I find my old accustomed place among  
My brethren, where, perchance, no human tongue

\* *Essays of Elia* (1921) pp. 62-7 (1821).

Shall utter words; where never hymn is sung,  
Nor deep-toned organ blown, nor censer swung;  
Nor dim light falling through the pictured pane!  
There, syllabled by silence, let me hear

The still small voice which reached the prophet's ear.\*

It was all still and silent and tranquil; it was worship, as in the old days, in spirit and in truth—only, now, the Spirit was known 'descending like a dove', and the days of the 'rushing mighty wind' were forgotten; in silence they listened for 'the still small voice', deaf to its challenge because unprepared for it: 'What doest thou here? . . . Go. . .'

Many are the individual impressions of Meetings given in journals, and they seem to depend very much on the state of the person concerned, being, on the whole, subjective accounts. Dr. John Rutt, writing between 1753 and 1774, often gives a dismal picture of the state of Meetings which he attended (in Ireland). Stephen Grellet, writing of his early experiences of Meetings in America, gives the impression that Meetings were nearly always silent, with little communication of any sort between the worshippers. Joseph John Gurney, rather differently, says of weekday meetings, 'Their quietness, the seriousness of those Friends who were in the regular habit of attending them, the sweet feeling of unity in our worship, and the liveliness of the ministry

\* *First-day Thoughts*, B. of D. I., p. 50 (1852).

sometimes uttered on these occasions, are all hallowed in my mind and feelings'.\* He looks back upon them as some of the happiest parts of his life. It is clear that his sister Elizabeth, in her earlier days, did not share such sentiments; she and others of the Gurney children found the two-hour Meetings 'long and dismal', and sat impatiently awaiting their end. Obviously Quaker worship, then as now, varied in quality from Meeting to Meeting; obviously one's attitude to it depended very much upon one's own spiritual resources, as must always be true in a form of worship which leaves so much to the individual; with the absence of ministry in Meetings of the Quietist period, the worshipper was left, with no external help beyond 'the atmosphere of worship', to find his own way to communion with God.

The attitude of many Quakers, in matters of religion, was one of extreme self-consciousness; they were so absorbed in analysing their own spiritual states that there was little positive outward-looking. The form of Quietism which developed was scarcely true mysticism, for it was concerned with self-analysis rather than with contemplating God. Hence the worshippers in general did not reach a point of realisation of communion with God or of fellowship with others, in any degree comparable with the joyous experience of early Friends. It is difficult to find biographical material to illuminate this

\* *Memoirs*, p. 35 (1808).

description, for most of those who wrote journals were ministers, and the very fact that each bore a particular responsibility in the Meeting meant a difference in approach from that of the non-minister. Dr. John Rutty gives probably as good an impression as any of the inward experiences of one who scarcely ever ministered, spending much of his time in Meeting on personal meditation and careful scrutiny of his own spiritual progress. In the long silences there was ample opportunity for undisturbed individual devotion: 'many small streams' which flowed, perhaps, parallel to one another, but somehow never joined to form a river.

Silence was the characteristic of most Friends' Meetings, broken by the utterance of a visiting minister if he felt moved to speak, but otherwise almost impregnable. It became, indeed, an end in itself, regarded as 'the loftiest way of worship', to quote Rufus Jones. It was looked upon as 'a supreme method of inward discipline and of spiritual culture'. How different was this conception from that of early Friends, as expressed by Barclay! 'As our worship consisteth not in the words, so neither in silence, as silence. . . .'\* Even Dr. John Rutty bursts out in one place, 'Our almost universal silence is wrong, both as an effect and as a cause: viz., As an effect, of a want of a right preparation of heart, from the abundance whereof the mouth would speak; and as a cause, of more

\* *Apology*, p. 257 (1676).

spiritual stupidity, in withholding those incitements to devotion which speech gives: so that our silence to the present degree resolves into a criminal question.\* He vacillates continually between regretting and extolling silence, and perhaps there were others besides, who, while influenced by the quietistic tendencies of the time, yet had misgivings about their deadening effects on Quakerism. Certainly Joseph John Gurney, years later, shared these misgivings; he makes a full and carefully reasoned argument supporting the practice of silent worship, rather after the manner of Barclay in the *Apology*, but as he considers its application by early Friends, he is driven to the conclusion that 'it is impossible to deny that our present condition is widely different from that of our forefathers. The number of our ministers is comparatively small, and a large proportion of our meetings . . . are generally silent, from their commencement to their close. That this result is chiefly owing to the benumbing influence of the world, and to the want of spiritual life and vigour, there can be little doubt; but the administrations of the Spirit may be materially different at different times; and it is probable that a large proportion of silence in our meetings, may now be meted out by our divine Master, as the "food convenient" for us.†

\* *A Spiritual Diary* (1760).

† *Distinguishing Views, etc. of S. of F.*, p. 315 (1834).



That silence was required by God, whether or not His divine purpose was understandable by the human mind, seemed abundantly evident to the ministers of this period, perplexing though it might be to appoint meetings in apparent obedience to guidance, only to find that one had nothing given to one to say to the assembled company. Catherine Phillips' comment is typical of many: 'The Lord saw meet to disappoint the expectations of the people, and manifest both to them and us, that without him we can do nothing in his service; for neither of us had a word to say to them; but I was concerned in supplication, and was abundantly rewarded, in submitting quietly to this dispensation of divine wisdom.\*' Silence, of course, was inevitable for the Quaker minister, dedicated as he was to obey the immediate requirements of God as revealed to him, if no revelation came. The idea that he must come to Meeting with his mind blank has already been quoted from Samuel Bownas, and was current. The minister was regarded as an oracle of God, divinely appointed, 'called' through some mysterious experience which stamped him as a separated being. There was, consequently, a sort of aura of the supernatural surrounding the minister, especially in the minds of children confronted by some travelling stranger. This was a more effective means of separation of ministry from laity than any mere ritual of ordination

\* *Life*, p. 44.

could have been, and cut to the heart of one of the deepest essentials of Quakerism—the equal sharing of responsibility by all who worship together. In theory it was still true that anyone might be called to the ministry, but in practice it was only a minority who were susceptible to the sort of experience regarded as 'a call', and equal to the awful responsibility so mysteriously laid upon them; the rest of the members were, no doubt, convinced that such requirements were not likely to be made of them, and the psychological effect of their awe of 'divine ordination' may well have been to close their minds and spirits to any such possibility for themselves; the frustration and loss of freedom so caused could account for much of the deadness of Quaker worship at this time. The gravest danger would seem to be, not that those who had nothing to say should remain silent, but that those with the most active minds and spirits should condemn their thoughts as 'creaturely activity', not divinely inspired because not suddenly brought forth in a blank mind. It was those who were susceptible to momentary and inexplicable inspirations who regarded themselves as divinely ordained, and thus, as Rufus Jones points out, 'the itinerant Ministers were drawn almost exclusively from one psychological type. They were all persons of the class to which mystics and prophets belong.\*' Much more could be said about the character and personality of these ministers—women as

\* *L.P.Q.*, p. 227.

well as men, as Friends have always accepted them—and about their way of preaching and the lives they lived. Here we are concerned with their service as it contributed to worship as a whole.

The quality of ministry, judging it from a critical standpoint, was very variable, and on the whole rather indifferent. There were, of course, outstanding figures such as William Savery, of whom a newspaper report said, 'for good sense, fluency, and even eloquence [he] formed a singular and very agreeable contrast to the usual style of religious address existing in that community'\* (i.e., Quakers). Another writer says: 'The Spirit is said to have descended upon him and his hearers in such copious measure that they were reminded of the gathering of the apostles on the day of Pentecost.† Such a comment could so rarely be made of Meetings during the Quietist period that it suggests in William Savery a unique combination of natural ability and sensitivity to the Spirit's leadings; such, in fact, as was evident in many of the early Friends. There is no doubt that God could and did inspire men and women of much less natural ability than William Savery, and that through them others were reached, convinced, and inspired; the Quaker refusal to judge a man's potential use to God in terms of the apparent limitations of the instrument is

\* *Life*, by F. R. Taylor, p. 424 (1798).

† *Life*, by F. R. Taylor, p. 39 (1798).

clearly right; the mistake lay in their inadequate valuation of natural ability as the gift of God.

Ministry in general, then, tended to lack variety and coherence, to be deficient in reasoning and sometimes inaccurate in its Scriptural references; but much of it gained in sincerity what it lacked in quality, and spoke to the conditions of its hearers in a degree out of all proportion to its literary value. Religion might be inadequately taught, but there was a radiance about many of the Quaker ministers which ensured its being 'caught' by many who came in contact with them.

Much of their ministry, as of their forefathers, was based on Biblical themes, and the importance of accurate interpretation was officially recognised, as is indicated by the Advice of 1783 'Against misquoting and misapplying the holy scriptures; and it is desired that all those concerned be frequent in reading them'.\* There seems, however, to have been some uncertainty as to the right use of the Bible, as was described earlier in the case of Samuel Bownas; whereas he concluded, after a period of hesitation, that it was necessary and good for a Quaker minister to study the Bible, others were wary of anything which might savour of that preparation of mind which, in their eyes, was in opposition to the Spirit's unrestricted and immediate revelation. Thomas Clarkson, writing rather in defence of the inadequacy of Quaker

\* *L.P.Q.*, p. 129.

sermons, makes the interesting comment that since Quakers' education was such that all of them could read the Bible for themselves, there was less necessity for its use in Quaker than in other forms of worship, the latter being attended by some who were illiterate and depended on Church teaching for all their Scriptural knowledge.\* Catherine Phillips indicates the extreme view in relation to the reading of other religious books, shared by some others; she says that she read scarcely anything but Scripture after appearing in the ministry (and little besides religious books before) 'that I might not minister from what I had gathered from religious writings; but might receive the arguments I was enabled to advance on behalf of the truth, by the immediate revelation of the Holy Spirit'.†

During the period of most markedly Quietist tendencies, the most frequent emphasis in ministry was 'Be still and know', with the underlying assumption that man, in his weakness and depravity, was not worthy to offer anything to God; he could only humbly submit to the divine will. Even within this period, however, and increasingly towards the mid-eighteenth century, individual ministers brought into the silent meetings their evangelical message. William Savery, we are told, preached mostly from New Testament texts; some of his sermons, it is interesting to find, plead for Church

\* *Portraiture of Quakerism*, II, pp. 284-5. † *Life*, p. 19.

unity and harmony on the basis of the love of Christ, and for putting an end to war. Mary Dudley preached the doctrine of universal and free grace, and the divinity of Jesus. Stephen Grellet 'was led to dwell on the sinfulness of sin, the uncertainty of life, the awfulness of eternity and the marvellous love and mercy of Him who tasted death for all men, that all might live, and whose light hath shined in every heart'.\*

The evangelical point of view was, perhaps, best expressed by Joseph John Gurney, who, to quote Rufus Jones, 'was one of the most persuasive preachers in the entire history of the Society', and who, 'without knowing or intending it, was throughout his life subtly transforming the Society into which he was born',† producing an evangelicalised Quakerism fundamentally unlike the original Quakerism which he believed he was perpetuating. At the end of his defence of silent worship, he makes clear 'the deep value which I feel for a living gospel ministry', and appeals to the young, who may be called to this service; 'May this blessed work of the Lord's anointing go nobly forward! . . . Let us pray the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest'.‡ The obvious change as this evangelical emphasis increased was in the content of ministry, which

\* *Memorials*, Philadelphia Y.M. (1851-68), pp. 37-8.

† *L.P.Q.*, p. 504.

‡ *Distinguishing Views, etc., of S. of F.*, p. 323 (1834).

now became similar to that familiar in other quarters, Methodist and elsewhere. The less obvious change was in the use made of silence, which now became an opportunity for meditation on the redemptive work of Christ; the sense of unworthiness and sin, strong in Quietist Quakerism, was coupled with a new emphasis on the gospel message. Side by side with this, and inseparable from it, came an increasing interest in Bible study, and the regular reading of the Bible by individuals and in families outside the Meeting hours. Joseph John Gurney stresses the importance of this and of private prayer, and dismisses the old idea that the mind should be blank as one begins to worship; instead, he says, it must be fixed on God, who may instruct in various ways, and often does so through the recalling of Scripture passages, already made familiar by study.

At almost the same time as Joseph John Gurney was expressing the views summarised above, an anonymous 'friend of the Friends' was publishing collections of Quaker sermons (much against the will of some, at least, of the ministers concerned). The introduction added makes some interesting comments on the failings of Quaker worship. The author thinks Quakers are incorrect in classing prophesying, preaching, and teaching together indiscriminately, and assuming for them all the Scriptural authority attaching to immediate revelation. He remarks that a commonplace exhortation may

claim this authority, whereas an able exposition of the gospel is put aside as not necessarily being immediately inspired. One of the effects of this insistence on immediate revelation by the Holy Spirit, he says, is that 'while some well-intentioned individuals, of more zeal and earnestness, than ability and sound judgment, injudiciously take upon themselves the office of teacher, preacher, or prophet, the Society is in danger of being deprived of the services of many pious and talented, but diffident, members, who are withheld by the consciousness that they cannot arrogate to themselves so high an authority for their services'.\* He believes that silent worship requires rigorous mental discipline, which is impossible for the *vacant* mind, and suggests the need for teaching which will lead to the right use of silence. The neglect of Scripture in Meetings has, he says, led to inaccurate quotation in sermons and other worse effects. The necessity of more teaching was gradually being realised by some Friends, for instance, Elizabeth Fry: 'I frequently fear for [the babes in Christ] that more external aid is wanted, though I see not how it is to be given.'†

John Stephenson Rowntree, in his essay of 1859, makes the fullest survey of any, thus far, of the causes of the decline of Quakerism, including those inherent in its form of worship. He agrees with those quoted above in

\* *Discourses* (1836). † Quoted in *Quakerism Past and Present*, p. 30.

the opinion that Bible-reading and the teaching of Christian truth have been neglected, with grave effects. He recalls the fact that, in the early days, there was a very large number of ministers, which soon decreased, until there were comparatively few; the reason for this decrease he finds in the very high claim made for a ministry of immediate revelation, almost putting itself on a level with Hebrew prophecy. He quotes a document from Bristol and Somerset Quarterly Meeting, 1856: 'We think there has been too great a tendency . . . to restrict the exercise of spiritual gifts to the services of acknowledged ministers, and that a disposition to look for *extraordinary revelations* has led to a disregard of that all-pervading influence by which the natural powers of the mind might have been sanctified to the Lord's service.\* This has led to the neglect of the gifts of many who might have much to give in ministry.

He finds a variety of reasons for the poor quality of ministry. There is, first, the disparagement of intellectual attainments as of value to ministers; 'head knowledge' alone, he agrees, cannot make a minister, but the consecration of intellectual power in ministry is thrice blessed (as, for example, in a man like Paul). Secondly, sermons must be unpremeditated, according to accepted Quaker belief, but, he says, the Spirit can guide in advance as well as in Meeting; there is a strange anomaly in the fact

\* Quoted in *Quakerism Past and Present*, p. 35.

that 'the body of Christians professing the greatest jealousy of any attempt to limit the operations of the Holy Spirit, should, nevertheless, itself have fixed such very narrow bounds within which the divine direction is to be exerted on the minds of its ministers'.\* Other reasons for poor ministry include the neglect of teaching, of prayer, and of Bible reading.

He believes that the recording of ministers has probably led to a decrease in ministry, because the requirements associated with it have meant real limitations—in contrast to the early days when anyone was at liberty to speak as a minister in Meetings.

John Stephenson Rowntree's conclusions are readily acceptable as sane and true, after a study of the conditions for which he was trying to identify reasons and suggest remedies; he was essentially practical. There is more to be said, however, about the deeper spiritual attitudes which found expression in Quaker worship. As has already been stressed, this is a form of worship depending very much upon the individual worshippers who, together, form each Meeting, contributing to it or receiving from it according to their spiritual resources and needs. The contrast of Quietist worship with that of early Quakerism is one which reveals a change of attitude in individuals. At the extreme of their Quietist period, Quakers had lost their rich conception of the

\* *Quakerism Past and Present*, p. 37.

worth of man, and were instead obsessed by his ruined, fallen state; they had lost their vivid sense of having a universal message, and had become a timid, exclusive, peculiar people, too busy nurturing their own souls to be concerned in saving other people's; the positive mysticism of the early days had become negative mysticism, and the real prophetic element had largely disappeared. Gone was the expectant and triumphant faith which made Friends meet together with joyous disregard of consequences, and prepared them for the powerful workings of the Spirit in their midst; the warm glow of fellowship which made *meeting* a richer experience than any solitary worship could be; the glad, full sharing of responsibility of each for all and all for each, whether expressed in silence or in ministry. There was, instead, a sense of duty which took Quakers to Meeting, which they hoped would be quiet and peaceable; an introspective and solitary approach to God; and the assumption that ministers would preach if a message were given, but that otherwise silence would remain unbroken.

Early Friends, in glad realisation of the presentness of God, had waited upon Him; later ones, aware rather of their own unworthiness, were waiting for Him. An external uniformity had taken the place of inner togetherness.

The central reason for this change of attitude seems to lie in the shift of attention from God to oneself, and from other people to oneself. So long as the emphasis is as Fox

made it, 'Meet together, and wait upon the Lord' . . . 'know one another in that which is eternal', worship is rich and the worshippers grow in spirit. When the emphasis focuses upon oneself, the Quaker Meeting ceases to be true worship and is only in a limited sense a meeting.

Revival was sorely needed, and the insights of many Friends suggested ways and means of bringing it about, as we have seen. The fundamental need, however, was for a change of emphasis, and this came, for many, through the evangelical awakening of the nineteenth century. Once again, the love of God became central to religious thought, and led to a positive witness to others. The outreaching love of their fellow-men, which had driven early Friends forth into their world in untiring missionary endeavour, stirred to life again; indeed, it had never been wholly dormant, for even in the period of least outward activity, there had been individual Friends whose intense caring for humanity had inspired their struggle against slavery, and for improved conditions in prisons, mental hospitals, and elsewhere. This deep concern for all sorts and conditions of men had burned in the spirits of such Friends as John Woolman and Elizabeth Fry, and an increasing number of others came to share it. Beneath the still, silent waters of Quietism the currents of true religion had not ceased to move, and as new channels were cut the stream surged forward again with renewed energy.

## MODERN IDEALS FOR QUAKER WORSHIP

**I**N the consideration of George Fox's conception of worship it seemed natural to think of it as consisting of four aspects: silence, communion, ministry, and fellowship. It was shown how Fox visualised these elements as inseparable from one another. Silence was the means by which Friends became aware of the presence of God, the right environment for that awareness, and the natural consequence of a deep experience of communion. Silence, and the communion of each worshipper with God as known in the silence, represented the mystical aspect of Quaker worship. As Friends realised their nearness to God, they knew also a nearness to one another, and their intense awareness of fellowship might find expression in words; conversely, words, arising from the silence of communion, might draw the worshippers into unity; thus ministry and fellowship were intimately inter-connected, and represented the prophetic aspect of Quaker worship. Each of these elements was an integral part of 'Worship in the Spirit' as Fox envisaged it and as it was known both in his own experience and in that of contemporary Friends.

Just as the worship of early Friends could be considered as consisting of four aspects, so that of the

Quietist period seemed to suggest a consideration, in turn, of the worshipper, silence, the minister, and ministry. In the accident of the contrasted emphasis thus made is suggested the much more individualistic attitude of later Friends in worship; their self-consciousness has already been mentioned, and their concentration of attention on their own spiritual states rather than on God or their fellow-men. It was not by chance that communion and fellowship were not here considered as vital elements in Quietist worship, for communion had become an inward experience, known by an individual for himself, but spoken of but little, and fellowship had ceased to be so warm and intimate. The obvious contrasts between early Quaker and Quietist Quaker worship, as also the subtler ones, indicated by the four-fold bases of consideration used here, have already been discussed.

Early Quaker worship was both mystical and prophetic in type, and held the richness of much that was best in both. Quietist worship too often included a negative mysticism, emptied of joyous discovery of reality in religion, and a belief in the prophetic nature of ministry which tended to isolate it from the general experience of the worshipping group. The mystical and prophetic elements, imperfectly developed, were also imperfectly held together, so that neither the Meeting as such nor its members formed a deeply integrated whole.

These two strands, varying from time to time in their

relationship one to the other, have continued to form what John Wilhelm Rowntree calls 'the golden thread of worship', and different individuals vary as to which they find most vital; it is illuminating to compare the emphases of Caroline Stephen and John Wilhelm Rowntree as two fairly modern interpreters of Quaker worship. Caroline Stephen was a mystic by nature, John Wilhelm Rowntree a prophet; and, incidentally, they also represent convinced Friends and birthright Friends respectively.

Caroline Stephen's first experience of a Quaker Meeting was in 1872. She came to it, seeking what she had failed to find in Anglican worship. Her impressions indicate that Quaker worship had reached a healthier state by 1872 than had been the case earlier in the century, although to outward appearances it was little different: 'I found myself one of a small company of silent worshippers, who were content to sit down together without words, that each one might feel after and draw near to the Divine Presence, unhindered at least, if not helped, by any human utterance. Utterance I knew was free, should the words be given; and before the meeting was over, a sentence or two were uttered in great simplicity by an old and apparently untaught man, rising in his place amongst the rest of us. . . . My whole soul was filled with the unutterable peace of the undisturbed opportunity for communion with God—with the sense

that at last I had found a place where I might, without the faintest suspicion of insincerity, join with others in simply seeking His presence. To sit down in silence could at least pledge me to nothing; it might open to me (as it did that morning) the very gate of heaven. And since that day, Friends' meetings have indeed been to me the greatest of outward helps to a fuller and fuller entrance into the spirit from which they have sprung; the place of the most soul-subduing, faith-restoring, strengthening and peaceful communion, in feeding upon the bread of life, that I have ever known.\* This description is, clearly, written by one with a deep appreciation of and sympathy with the mystical nature of Quaker worship.

Like Fox and other early Friends, Caroline Stephen thought of worship as a whole-time activity: 'Our worship does not begin when we sit down together in our public assemblies, nor end when we leave them. The worship in spirit and in truth is in no way limited by time and place.† She sees Quaker worship as the natural result of full recognition of the reality of divine inspiration; for her the practice of silence and the belief in inspiration are vitally connected—'How can we listen if we do not cease to speak?‡ She is fully sensitive to the value of corporate silence, knowing in it the sense of

\* *Quaker Strongholds*, p. 4. † *Quaker Strongholds*, p. 66.

‡ *Quaker Strongholds*, p. 59.



God's presence and the experience of fellowship: 'We meet in order to kindle in each other the flame of true worship.\* She is strong in her support of the Quaker witness against outward observances and a paid ministry, believing that the division into clergy and laity is not in accordance with Christ's teaching and that the only Christian priesthood spoken of in the New Testament is the 'royal priesthood' of all believers. So strongly, indeed, does she believe in the ideal of a free ministry, that she says, 'Our faithfulness to it is being severely tested by modern conditions; and upon that faithfulness our very life as a Society must, I believe, depend'.† She sees ministry as a responsibility laid upon all. In all this Caroline Stephen is fully in line with early Quaker beliefs.

Her mystical conception of worship is to some extent reminiscent of Quietist ideas, but has a more positive emphasis. It is clearly recognisable in her description of a Quaker Meeting, already quoted. In a passage elsewhere she says: 'In the united stillness of a truly "gathered" meeting there is a power known only by experience, and mysterious even when most familiar. There are perhaps few things which more readily flow "from vessel to vessel" than quietness. . . . And it is out of the depths of this stillness that there do arise at times spoken words which, springing from the very source of

\* *Quaker Strongholds*, p. 64. † *Quaker Strongholds*, p. 110.

prayer, have something of the power of prayer.\* There is something of the Quietist theory in her suggestion that a 'wise passiveness' is necessary if we are to be channels for divinely given utterance, but she passes beyond Quietism as she writes, 'the result we look for is the fruit of a devout intelligence, first purified, and then swayed, by the immediate action of divine power'.†

Caroline Stephen found in Quaker Meetings a refuge in an age of questioning. The religious problems which, for her, were continually stirred up by the recital of the Anglican liturgy, could be transcended in the silence of a Quaker Meeting. She was always ready to understand that others might find their spiritual home elsewhere, but at the same time she believed that there were many who, if they did but know it, could find in Quakerism the answer to their needs.

John Wilhelm Rowntree, a younger contemporary of Caroline Stephen, had a completely different religious background, and yet he, too, came to his deep convictions after a period of dissatisfaction and seeking. During this time, he writes: 'I want that we should strike deeper than we do in meeting. I cannot feel that meeting is, as it should be, the focus of our spiritual struggles—the glowing centre of our life as a church. Often for instance meeting is a blank to me. . . . This I know, too, is the case of many others. . . . I know too well how skin-deep

\* *Light Arising*, p. 68-9. † *Quaker Strongholds*, p. 62.

worship is with very many of us young Friends.\* His early doubts were succeeded by a passionate faith in Quakerism, inspired by a penetrating understanding of what it really was. He, more deliberately than Caroline Stephen, went back to early Quaker history for his facts. As the result of his study he could assert: 'Fox had the courage to be logical. Other churches profess belief in inward guidance, but they dare not found their constitution upon their belief.'† Quaker worship 'has its roots in the early practice, or rather in that which underlay the early freedom of the Corinthian Church, namely, the Gospel teaching of the inward kingdom. It is no mere asceticism as some suppose, no mere denial of the place of art and ritual and of all the rich accessories of public worship. It is rather an assertion of an inward truth so rich that by its side all accessories are poor.‡ Particularly with regard to ministry did John Wilhelm Rowntree find the true Quaker conception in his study of early days: 'The underlying principle of their worship was the responsibility and the priesthood of each worshipper, and his immediate dependence upon the Spirit of God.'§

He shared with John Stephenson Rowntree a deep concern at the devastating effect of Quietist views of inspiration, through which the ideal of a truly free minis-

\* *Essays and Addresses*, p. xv. † *Essays and Addresses*, p. 101 (1902-3).

‡ *Essays and Addresses*, p. 99 (1902-3).

§ *Essays and Addresses*, p. 98 (1902-3).

try had been all but lost. He saw in the American pastoral system evidence of the failure of free ministry there, and his grief at such failure spurred him to action, if by any means he could help to avert a like catastrophe in English Quakerism. Constantly he emphasised that ministry demands a combination of deep spiritual experience, informed minds, and intelligent outlook. The minister must be dedicated, body, mind, and spirit, to his task. He must prepare himself as adequately as does a minister of any other church. But the responsibility does not rest upon the selected few—in accepting the sacred burden of a free ministry, we lay it upon every member of the Society of Friends. . . . We demand more of our members than almost any other church, and we must adopt special measures to qualify them.\* These special measures, he suggested, should include the training of children in Quaker schools, the teaching of young people who did not go to these or after they had left, and the preparation of adults—all with a view to the production of a powerful ministry. It was in large measure as part of his concern for the preparation of ministers that first summer schools, and then Woodbrooke, were initiated.

There is little need to point out the tremendous difference between John Wilhelm Rowntree's conception of ministry and that of the Quietists. He understood the true nature of prophecy as they never did; the

\* *Essays and Addresses*, p. 124 (1899).

guidance of God which operates through a man's mind as well as through his spirit; His demand for dedication, not abdication, of personality in His service. By his own whole-hearted commitment John Wilhelm Rowntree demonstrated the truth of what he taught.

Although they were in many ways so different in their approach to Quakerism, Caroline Stephen and John Wilhelm Rowntree arrived at the same conclusions as to what was essential, re-stating for their own time the truths discovered by early Friends. Both saw worship as a deep inward experience, independent of outward accessories. Both knew the uniting power of fellowship which proved beyond doubt that the inward experience could be shared. Both believed intensely in the vital importance of the free ministry to the survival of the Society of Friends, the true 'priesthood of all believers' which meant responsibility equally borne by all Friends. Both were deeply convinced Quakers, with a sense of mission both within and beyond the Society, seeking to awaken others to the full significance of their profession and to reach those who were yet seeking such truth as could be found in Quakerism. They represent the spirit of revival which, through many who shared their vision, was transforming the feeble Quakerism of Quietist days into a stronger and healthier way of religion.

The concern of many forward-looking Friends was

expressed in detail in the London Yearly Meeting on Ministry and Oversight of 1899, and from this an epistle was sent out to Meetings and individual Friends. This embodied a careful examination of Worship and Ministry as they should and could be practised. The Meeting for Worship was seen as the central feature of Quaker church life, the means of nourishing its own members and of uttering the Quaker message to the world. 'Such a meeting is both the loftiest and truest form of congregational worship . . . but our meetings too often fall far below our ideal, and dishonour the nobility of the truth which we profess.\* There is emphasis on what Gladstone called 'the work of worship': 'True worship is intensely active. It consists in offering ourselves to God—body, mind, and soul—for the doing of His will. We have a gift to bring to Him and not only a grace to receive. . . . An active attitude of soul is of the very essence of a good meeting.' Our Meetings exist, not for our own spiritual luxury, but 'in order that the power of the Spirit may break forth to the awakening and conversion of souls, the refreshment and inspiration of disciples for the service of God, and the enrichment of their Christian characters.'

'We shall hunger after a living waiting upon God and a heart-searching ministry, which, as they are experienced, will crowd out all merely dead silence and un-

\* *Epistle on Worship and Ministry, 1899.*

anointed utterance.' The epistle appeals for faithfulness in ministry, and reminds younger Friends of their responsibility, especially in keeping others in touch with the needs of the day. The emphasis on preparation of heart and mind is here, as in the writings of individuals. A minister is called to 'give himself to his ministry'—to consecrate to it his best powers of mind and body as well as of soul. Preparation includes study, and social and personal fellowship with others ('Their needs are part of the inspiration of the minister'); it calls for consecration of heart, discipline of character, equipment of mind, and understanding of men. The minister should 'devote every faculty to the service of Christ'. But, having said all that, the responsibility is not to be left to those specially called, for 'we have all a ministry; for we are all members one of another, bound to rise or to fall together; and stronger even than the solidarity of the human race is the solidarity of the gathered Church'.

This epistle thus put before Friends the ideals of worship and ministry which many were seeing anew to be of the essence of true Quakerism, and expressed them in terms suitable to their own times. Seventeenth century Quaker worship was not a historical freak; it had indeed been 'true worship', and truth is eternal. Revival depended on fresh vision, on the faith and hope of many who saw Quakerism as it could be. We, fifty years later, share their ideals, but are yet far from realising them ade-

quately in practice. Indeed, as one reads on into the writings of the present century, it is with the continuing sense of discovering ideals which yet wait for full realisation. John Wilhelm Rowntree and his contemporaries spoke as prophets in their own day, telling forth what might be in a Quakerism true to its highest calling: they speak as prophets still.

Again and again since, Friends have been reminded of the true meaning of 'the priesthood of believers' and of the urgent need for dedication of heart and mind to a ministry which is no less a vocation because it should be the responsibility of all. 'Do not forget, dear Friends, that to every one of you is given a share of responsibility for the worship and the ministry in our meetings, whether your part be in silence or through the spoken word.\*' 'God calls each one to the service of the meeting.† Each comes with his own particular experience—experience in which there may be good and evil, joy and suffering; there is no part of human experience which cannot, in the hands of God, be used to help others. Each comes with his own particular personality and gifts—gifts as varied as those which Paul described in the members of the early church. The Meeting is 'a fellowship, an organic whole, a body of Christ with many members, vital with spiritual gifts bestowed on each several part which are to be used by each part for the

\* *Advices on Ministry.* † *General Advices.*

building-up of the whole'.\* The Meeting is to be a gathering of dedicated personalities, each with the true priestly function of being himself a mediator between God and men; he will hold his fellows before God in prayer, and will wait expectantly for the Spirit's leading to a ministry of words or of silence. 'True ministry . . . is prompted and put forth by the Spirit of God, acting through the fellowship of the congregation',† and it is only as the whole group is gathered into communion that the spoken word has its full and right inspiration. Thus all share the responsibility for vocal ministry, both by being sensitive to the leadings of the Spirit for themselves and by their contribution to the living silence out of which others may receive such leadings. In such an atmosphere it will be unlikely that the wrong words will be spoken, and if they are they can be received in thankfulness for whatever is good and in tenderness to the rest.

Some may know the guidance of God through 'the earthquake', 'the wind', and 'the fire', but to others it comes as a still small voice, and it is those whose whole lives are lived in sensitivity to the leadings of the Spirit who are most faithful to it at the special occasion of the Meeting. 'Preparation of heart and mind' involves the dedication of both in every sphere of life. More particularly, it involves their fullest activity in the study of

\* *The Function of Vocal Ministry* (1903).

† *Ministry and our Meetings for Worship* (1911).

the Bible and in deep understanding of men. It may be right for some to look upon ministry as a vocation to which they are particularly called, and to prepare for it deliberately before Meeting, always knowing that they must be humble and sensitive enough to obey the leading of the Spirit faithfully when the occasion of possible speaking comes.

Such ideals as these for Quaker worship have been expressed repeatedly through the past fifty years, and we hold them still. Our accepted principles for worship have remained the same; our practice has changed to some extent, in that the nature of vocal ministry and the balance of words and silence have become different. Until 1924, Friends with a special gift in vocal ministry were recognised as Ministers and recorded as such by the Society. The cessation of 'recording' was partly the result of a desire that the responsibility for ministry should be more widely shared among Friends in general, and a recognition that it was already so shared to some extent in practice. The hopes of those who supported this change of practice appear to have been realised, in that more Friends do take part in vocal ministry now than formerly; but it has meant that most of their contributions are shorter than those of the earlier 'Ministers', and that there is rarely any ministry in Meetings today which could accurately be described as preaching and little that could be called exposition. There is much that is

meditative, a sharing of thoughts which may be of real help to others and is rightly given so long as it is truly part of the worship of God and not merely an appreciation of nature or of human qualities. Equally familiar is the ministry which consists of comments on international affairs or social evils; here again it would seem right only if it is a true part of religious worship.

In dispensing with a separated ministry, we are taking upon ourselves, individually, the functions of preacher, priest, and pastor; all this is implied in John Wilhelm Rowntree's words, 'We demand more of our members than almost any other church', and in T. Edmund Harvey's, 'The Society is a fellowship where there is no layman, all of whose members are clergy'.\* Such a claim can only be justified in so far as the quality of life, spiritual and social, of each member is equal to the demands which he ought rightly to be meeting. There is, however, another side to all this; the natural fruit of spiritual experience is a desire to express by outward words and deeds something of what we have learnt in the times of communion; for some, the sense of freedom and the opportunity to express themselves in ministry make the Quaker Meeting a place of unlimited scope for spiritual growth after earlier restrictions within the ordinary pattern of church membership. Responsibility and freedom are opposite sides of the same coin and it

\* *Silence and Worship*, p. 60.

depends upon which side we look at whether we think in terms of treasure or of cost.

'The golden thread of worship', as described earlier, could be regarded as consisting of two strands twisted together, the mystical and the prophetic. Quaker worship ideally holds both together in full development, but in fact one or the other has been dominant at different periods. It is difficult to assess the relative importance of the two in Quakerism today, but one feels that it should be possible for the mystical and the prophetic to be developed fully and held together in more perfect harmony now than at any time in the past. A knowledge of history should make us aware of the dangers of either extreme. We are free from the limitations of Calvinistic thought, Puritan outlook, and lack of understanding of human personality. We are free to worship as we will, unrestricted by persecution from without or by a 'hedge' planted from within. We are free to develop mind as well as spirit. According to the degree of our freedom, so is the degree of our responsibility—a responsibility which involves personal dedication, as was emphasised again in Yearly Meeting, 1951: 'Our Society will be weak within, and unattractive to those who are seeking what we ought to have to share, unless we regain that magnetic power that comes from complete commitment to God.'

## 'WORSHIP IN THE SPIRIT'

FOR early Friends the accepted authority for their manner of worship was the oft-repeated saying of Jesus, 'God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth'. Most Friends today would feel that an isolated Biblical text is no sufficient authority for their mode of worship. They worship in the way which proves itself to be closest to their ideals for worship, in which they find spiritual reality for themselves. They worship thus because they believe that man and God can meet in the silence, and that the Spirit of God is present to guide thoughts and words, and to bring all into unity.

Religious history shows an alternation between worship depending on external authorities and that depending upon the guidance of the Spirit. The conception of spirit evolved gradually during Old Testament times, and reached its culmination in Christ's description of God as Spirit and in the identification of the Spirit as known in the disciples' experience with the Spirit of Jesus. The whole teaching of Jesus led to a conception of the essential inwardness of religion, in contrast to the religion of Judaism with all its complicated external structure. It was natural that the worship of the early Christians should lack external form, for the reality of their

inward experience of communion with Christ, and the fact of the coming of the Holy Spirit with its power to guide them, made any outward framework unnecessary.

With the passing of the age of enthusiasm, an age of ecclesiastical organisation established Christian worship in set patterns, and worship which allowed for the liberty of the Spirit was almost forgotten. It survived as an ideal among individuals through centuries of externalism, to be re-discovered by isolated groups during the post-Reformation period. Some of these groups, worshipping in silence and without external programme, made unhesitating response to the message of George Fox, interpreting in similar terms the significance of 'Worship in the Spirit'. Geoffrey Nuttall has shown\* how Quakerism can be considered as the logical development of the movement towards increasing liberty in things of the spirit. In the succeeding two centuries Quakerism itself became formalised and the real liberty of the Spirit was in general lost; this loss is most complete in the American pastoral meetings of this century.

It is easy to trace in this sequence of development parallels between Quakerism and Christianity as a whole. Both began in sharp contrast to the ecclesiastical structures of their day; both were inspired in their early days by the powerful working of the Spirit; in both the age of enthusiasm was followed by an age of discipline

\* *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience.*

and formalism. Parallels there certainly are, but not necessarily identities. It seems better to think of Quakerism as simplified Christianity than as primitive Christianity revived, for it has grown out of a different soil in a different environment. In reaching towards the essentials of worship and laying aside the developed forms of other Christian worship, Quakers have discovered the simplicity which is beyond complexity, but it is a simplicity which is the richer for the complexity which preceded it. With simplicity came the re-birth of the liberty of the Spirit.

The sequence of experience from complex to simple worship was known by all who became Quakers in the early days; they brought with them mature spirits and well-stored minds—much as the early Christians had brought to Christianity the fruits of their Jewish upbringing. This same sequence of experience has been known since by all who have come to Quakerism from other forms of Christianity; they have discovered in Quaker worship a hitherto unknown dependence upon the guidance of the Spirit. Perhaps they are more appreciative now than were their forebears of their debt to these other Christian bodies, for Friends today are becoming more aware of their privileges and responsibilities as members of the wider Christian fellowship.

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