

LEARNING TO BE QUAKER:
SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
AMONG EARLY FRIENDS

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ABSTRACT

The theology and lifestyle that grew from Friends' transforming experience of 'primitive Christianity revived' differed from the dominant culture, exacting a high cost. Relying on early Friends' writing, this article examines how this new paradigm was transmitted. Friends summarized the basis of their faith with the phrase 'Christ is come to teach his people himself' (Benson 1968: 36; 1976: 3; Cooper 1990: 2; Freiday 1984: 4; Grundy 2002b: 11-13, 15, 17). In the 1650s and 1660s most people who became Friends were first worked on internally by the Holy Spirit. When they heard a Quaker preach, the words reached to the witness of God already working in them. This was often followed with some intense personal ministry. There might be no more contact until a different Friend came through the area and clinched the conviction. It was always clear that new Friends, as well as more experienced ones, were to be taken to the feet of Christ and left there to learn from the Teacher himself.

The broad statements of early Quaker faith made in this article should be familiar to students of Quaker history and theology. A sampling of secondary references is included for readers who would like to browse more widely. Many others could be added.

KEYWORDS

Early Quakers, spiritual direction, Gospel Order, Inward Teacher, Quaker practice, Ranterism

Early Friends described what they experienced, and what they were offering to others, as 'primitive Christianity revived' (Barbour and Roberts 1973: 463-65; Cooper 1990: 2; Russell 1979: 20-26). They felt they were disciples of the Living Christ, analogous to those who gathered around Jesus of Nazareth or who experienced the power of the risen Christ in the early days of Christianity before the church became institutionalized and corrupted by its accommodation to the Roman Empire. This was not a matter of correct dogma but of transformed hearts. It was less

about right belief than it was about right action, which they understood flowed naturally from their new relationship to God through Christ resurrected in their hearts (Barbour and Roberts 1973: 20-26, 52-53, 353-58; Benson 1968: 19-22, 29-32; 1981: 48-54; Moore 2000: 6, 75, 144; Russell 1979: 46-54; Steere 1984: 28-29). Early Friends felt they had moved into a new paradigm, a new way of being in the world. They described this as Gospel Order, of living in God's kingdom as it was breaking through into seventeenth-century England (Benson 1968: 35; 1976: 22; Braithwaite 1981: 130-34; Cooper 1990: 12-17; Freiday 1984: 7-10; Grundy 2002b: 2, 15; Gwyn 1986: 57-58, 73-75; 1995: 102; Kenworthy 1987: 9, 17-18; Moore 2000: 60-75, 215; Wilson 1993: 3-13). Naturally newcomers had to learn about this new paradigm and how to live in it (Cronk 1991).

When people wanted to join Friends, they did not seem to have been catechized or quizzed on doctrinal points. Instead Friends looked at the new people's behavior. Had they taken up the cross of obedience to God's will, as demonstrated by a new life of integrity? Were their lives witnessing to the way Friends understood God's Kingdom functioned (Abbott 2003: 171-72; Brayshaw 1946: 122-33; Moore 2000: 115-28; Steere 1984: 9)? Were they living in Gospel Order instead of going along with the 'world's' ways (Benson 1968: 23-53; Pickvance 1978: 24-25, 27; Wilson 1993: 163-75)? If these new people were worshipping with Friends and using plain language, refusing to take oaths or pay tithes, and in other ways testifying with their daily lives what God was teaching them, then Friends owned (considered) them as one of them (Braithwaite 1981: 48-50, 136-41, 144; Cooper 1990: 99-111; Garman *et al.* 1996: 2; Gwyn 1995: 113-21; Punshon 1987: 11-19; Russell 1979: 51-58).

METHOD: LEARNING FROM THE INWARD GUIDE

How did Friends transmit all of this to seekers and attenders? Repeatedly George Fox and others described their method as leading people to Christ and leaving them there. The Friends' gospel was often summed up as 'Christ is come to teach his people himself' (Barbour and Roberts 1973: 466-67; Benson 1968: 36; 1976: 3; Braithwaite 1981: 47, 88; Cooper 1990: 2; Freiday 1984: 4; Gwyn 1986: 60, 63-65; 1995: 98, 132; Nickalls 1952: 34-35; Russell 1979: 48, 52). Note the verbs: 'is come'—now—and for the purpose of teaching. This requires a teacher/pupil relationship with the Inward Christ, a stance of teachability. It implies the metaphor of a classroom: that help be given by one student to another within a close-knit, loving, non-competitive school. Friends were the pupils, not the Teacher (Benson 1968: 43; Lacey 1992: 258-72; Grundy 2002a: 9).

In large part the movement spread through the preaching of itinerant ministers who settled (established) new little groups of worshippers, but did not remain among them to lead or counsel them and/or direct their spiritual growth. The ministering Friend did not set him- or herself up as the expert to impart a body of knowledge to the learners. Rather they demonstrated through their outward behavior their own experience of transformation, and directed listeners to the Seed or Witness of Christ in their own hearts (Abbott *et al.* 2003: 293-94; Bacon 1994: 1-3, 5-6; Barbour and

Roberts 1973: 14-16; Braithwaite 1981: 68-77, 94-97, 111-16, 122-25, 142-45, 153-240; Brayshaw 1946: 74-82; Garman *et al.* 1996: 1; Gwyn 1995: 132-33, 146-47, 150; Russell 1979: 73-78; Steere 1984: 10-11). Therefore, references to indoctrination, or what might be called religious education or spiritual direction, are sparse or even non-existent in seventeenth-century Quaker journals. On the other hand, references to spiritual friendships, what we might understand as mentoring, and nurture abound (Bacon 1994: 8-9; Larson 1999: 121-22; Moore 2000: 207)

The entire process can be summarized in the experience of Thomas Thompson. As a child he had been prepared inwardly by God, but then as a teenager he had drifted away. He heard Fox's message directing people to the Light of Christ in their consciences to guide them to God, and he paid such close attention to it that his neighbors remarked how changed he was. But when God told him to use plain language, he resisted. Then Thompson went to hear William Dewsbury and afterwards exulted, 'Oh! how was my soul refreshed, and the witness for God reached in my heart'. Within a month he had become a Quaker minister (Hodgson 1881: 51-56).

We will look at each of the steps that Thompson took, as mirrored in the experience of other early Friends. This will give us an outline of the seventeenth-century religious education of a nascent Quaker.

PREREQUISITE TO BECOMING QUAKER

The prerequisite to learning to become a Friend was an internal struggle, a divine discontent, a hunger that could not be assuaged (Moore 2000: 115). For many it was a condition that had been with them since childhood. Mary Penington wrote of her lonely search for a right relation with God, her hunger for righteousness, her desperate desire to engage in true prayer. As a child of ten or eleven she heard a sermon about true prayer, which could only be done by saints and not by sinners. Mary remembered later:

My mind was deeply exercised about this thing... [A]nd in great distress I flung myself on the bed, and oppressedly cried out, 'Lord, what is prayer?'

This exercise continued so on my mind, that at night, when I used to read a prayer out of a book, I could only weep, and remain in trouble... I had none to reveal my distress unto, or advise with; so, secretly bore a great burden a long time (Penney 1992: 19, 21).

Frequently seventeenth-century Friends recorded that when there was no one around from whom they could get solid spiritual guidance, God taught them directly through the Light of Christ within their own hearts. One day, upon hearing distressing news, Mary went to her room, 'and shutting the door, kneeled down and poured out my soul to the Lord in a very vehement manner. I was wonderfully melted and eased, and felt peace and acceptance with the Lord: and that this was true prayer, which I had never before been acquainted with' (Penney 1992: 22).

The most famous example is George Fox who sought in vain for a community of God's people whom he could join. It was only after he came to the point of despair because nobody across the range of Civil War England could respond to his spiritual

angst that he heard a voice which told him 'there is one even Christ Jesus that can speak to thy condition' (Kolp 1991: 1-84; Nickalls 1952: 11). Similar experiences were recorded by John Richardson, William Dewsbury, and George Whitehead (Hodgson 1881: 45-47, 62; Walton n.d.: 21-26). First they entered a period of desperate, whole-hearted searching, then God taught them, directly and inwardly. They seemed to need to experience thirst before they could drink the Living Water. After that they sought out and joined with others to whom God was teaching the same things.

REACHED BY SPOKEN WORDS

For the great majority of early Friends, the experience of lonely inward struggle with occasional divine openings and consolations, was modified by the catalytic effect of a Quaker preaching in a (usually) public meeting. Francis Howgill is a good example. As a recognized Seeker preacher, he was the featured speaker at the chapel at Firbank. When he was done he joined the crowd to hear George Fox preach outside. He was reached and convicted by Fox's words (Hodgson 1881: 60).

Edward Burrough is another example. As a teen he became discontented with the religion of his neighborhood, and God taught him inwardly. But then he began to enjoy discoursing with the most learned priests, and ignored the inner voice. He met George Fox at Underbarrow in June 1652, and argued with him. But Edward's heart was 'touched and convicted' ([Anonymous] 1890: 10). He then became a powerful minister in the fledgling movement.

Gilbert Latey heard Edward Burrough in 1654, '...and being directed to the Light of Christ in himself, and not consulting with flesh and blood, he gave up to the leadings of the Holy Spirit, greatly rejoicing that he had found his soul's beloved...' (Walton n.d.: 36).

Barbara Blaugdone summarized the process:

In my Youth and Tender Years, I feared the Lord, and was afraid to offend Him; and zealous and diligent in the Profession I was in, and sought the Lord earnestly, although I knew not where to find him, until I was directed by Friends that came from the North, *John Audland* and *John Camm* by Name, whose Behaviour and Deportments were such, that it preached before ever they opened their Mouths; and it was then revealed to me, That they had the Everlasting Gospel to Preach in this City: ...and they directed my Mind unto the Light of Christ, therein to wait, which I was diligent to do, and found the Vertue of it; and as the Evil was made manifest, I departed from it, and willingly took up the Cross, and yielded Obedience unto it, in plainness of Speech and in my Habit (Garman *et al.* 1996: 275).

Public meetings could be fairly raucous with interruptions and arguments (Ambler 2001: 187-88; Moore 2000: 148-50). Sometimes a meeting for worship—although also public, but with a different purpose and character—would provide the entrance into the possibility of transformation. God was at work in John Banks' heart before he heard of Friends. But at his first meeting for worship, he wrote later, the Lord's power seized on him and he was 'smitten to the ground'. Two Friends raised him, and one, 'touched with a sense of my condition', offered words of help and encouragement (Walton n.d.: 45-46).

Not all new Friends were moved by public meetings. Sometimes they were spoken to by an individual Friend (Braithwaite 1981: 75). Richard Davies of northern Wales was reached by the words of a poor itinerant Quaker, Morgan Evans, who, seeing that he had 'reached to the witness of God' in Davies, exhorted him 'to take heed to that light that shined' in his heart, which would show him his vain thoughts, reprove him in secret for every idle word and action, and open the scriptures to him. He told Davies of the 'inward work, and the operation of God's Holy Spirit upon the soul', which would teach him to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to 'live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world'. The man then left, and Davies did not know where to turn for outward advice and counsel. So he asked God, and God taught him. Time and again Davies speaks of his loneliness and lack of a spiritual friend or guide, and his reliance on God and the steady sure help he received from the Spirit. Never having attended a meeting for worship, or met any other Friends, Davies waited until he could get off work at Christmas, and walked 18 miles to Shrewsbury to meet with Friends he had heard were there. After several days of meetings and personal conversations, he returned home greatly refreshed and strengthened (Davies 1877: 10-11, 14, 18, 21-22, 24-25, 30-31).

Thomas Ellwood and his family visited the Peningtons where they heard Edward Burrough speak. Ellwood wrote that 'I drank in his words with desire, for they not only answered my understanding, but warmed my heart with a certain heat, which I had not till then felt from the ministry of any man'. The next morning, as they took their leave, Edward Burrough said 'a few words to each of us severally, according to the sense he had of our several conditions' (Ellwood n.d.: 23).

If we understand spiritual guidance to be one person helping another to deepen her or his relationship with God (Barry and Connolly n.d.: ix, 5, 6, 8), then all these examples show how early Friends through public preaching, smaller group sessions, and face-to-face conversations encouraged people to turn to God's Spirit within them. The crucial work was done by God; the Quaker 'director' showed them where to look and how to listen, and encouraged them to obey the instructions they received. They did not hover over them, but turned them back to the True Teacher.

Although it is clear that Christ's Spirit can and did guide the lonely individual, once these individuals had experienced the Light's convicting and saving power at work within them, they were empowered by their changed lives, as well as by their words, to assist the Spirit in reaching and changing others. Davies' initial encounter with the itinerant Friend, Morgan Evans, resulted in his visit with another young man, David Davies (no relation), who was soon convinced (Davies 1877: 26). For some six years after his conviction at a meeting for worship, John Banks studied in 'the school of Christ', making no mention of human teachers. At the end of that time he was prepared to teach others, and he did (Walton n.d.: 49). As Edward Burrough explained, 'Being prepared of the Lord, and having received power from on high, we went forth as commanded by the Lord... With flesh and blood, or any creature we consulted not, nor took counsel of men, but of the Lord alone...' ([Anonymous] 1890: 15).

However that may be in terms of where they felt the ultimate instruction came from, early Friends gave and received considerable support. A letter from Quaker

missionaries in London described in June 1654 how they looked to Friends from the North who might confirm their faith and strengthen their hands in upholding the testimonies of Truth. In the midst of the triumphant campaign in Bristol, Edward Burrough and Francis Howgill wrote to Margaret Fell that 'one hour with George Fox would be great joy to us'. They wrote of being able to strengthen by their labors the newly convinced, who were growing in grace ([Anonymous] 1890: 31, 56). Surely this was the work of spiritual guidance and nurture, although seventeenth-century Friends did not use those terms.

Friends, inspired by the same Spirit that directed Paul and others to send epistles to struggling new churches, engaged in a massive correspondence (Ambler 2001: 188; Barbour and Roberts 1973: 544-58; Moore 2000: 22, 25-27, 208-09, 230; Steere 1984: 24). Friends wrote to share news, ask for assistance, and perhaps most often, to encourage, admonish, and uphold one another. Many are familiar with George Fox's letter to Oliver Cromwell's daughter, Lady Claypoole, or Robert Barclay's to Elizabeth, the Princess Palatine of the Rhine (Braithwaite 1979: 446). There are several excellent collections of George Fox's pastoral epistles (Jones 1989; Sharman 1980: 1). In the darkest days of persecution, Fox held up the vision of the coming victory of Christ's Way that sustained Friends through their terrible ordeal (Sharman 1980: 76). More frequently, perhaps, Fox's letters stressed the need to stay low and close to the Guide (Jones 1989; Sharman 1980).

Sometimes the first emotional flush of finding a Friend who provided the longed-for catalyst for an individual's relationship with God through the Christ Within brought a rash of emotional words addressed to the Friend. The first letter by Richard Hubberthorne starts with what Hugh Barbour and Arthur Roberts describe as the almost embarrassing 'personal adulation of the Spirit within Fox' which was 'typical of many such letters'. But in his later description of his convincement (written in February 1654) Hubberthorne gives all credit to God and makes no mention of human assistance (Barbour and Roberts 1973: 156-60; Braithwaite 1981: 104-06). What this seeming discrepancy shows, I think, is that although the individual Friendly 'catalyst' was important for the growth of the new Friend, mature reflection gave all the credit to God. Friends acknowledged the grace that prepared the soul of the new person, and the grace that directed the words of the Quaker preacher, so that the two worked together to bring forth a new birth.

Another example is Thomas Ellwood, who later referred to Edward Burrough as the one 'by whose ministry I had been called to the knowledge of the Truth' and 'the immediate instrument of my convincement'. But he also wrote of the work of the Light shining within his own darkness, being given a new inward law of the spirit of Christ Jesus, and of being taught the path in which to walk. The winter he was kept a semi-prisoner by his disapproving father, Ellwood wrote later of 'having none to converse with, none to unbosom myself unto, none to ask counsel of, none to seek relief from, but the Lord alone, who yet was more than all. And yet the company and society of faithful and judicious Friends would, I thought, have been very welcome, as well as helpful to me in my spiritual travel' (Ellwood n.d.: 26, 27, 28, 60).

WITHHOLDING SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Relatively soon the excesses of enthusiasm and overwrought language were seen as an embarrassment (Moore 2000: 77-79). But even before that time seasoned Friends were already making efforts to disentangle their personal selves from the message and work of God.

Sometimes a mature Friend was so tuned to the necessity of dependence on God that he deliberately withheld human aid. For example, early in his spiritual journey, when Thomas Ellwood and Edward Burrough had an opportunity to ride together, Ellwood eagerly anticipated a heartfelt talk. He recounted,

Yet I was somewhat disappointed in my expectation; for I had hoped he would have given me both opportunity and encouragement to have opened myself to him, and to have poured forth my complaints, fears, doubts, and questionings into his bosom. But he, being sensible that I was truly reached, and that the witness of God was raised, and the work of God rightly begun in me, chose to leave me to the guidance of the Good Spirit in myself, the Counsellor that could resolve all doubts, that I might not have any dependence on man. Wherefore, although he was naturally of an open and free temper and carriage, and was afterwards always very familiar and affectionately kind to me, yet at this time he kept himself somewhat reserved, and showed only common kindness to me (Ellwood n.d.: 45).

This deliberate withholding of human nurture seems to fly in the face of all that spiritual direction is called to do. But the real purpose of Quakerism was to bring people into obedience to Christ Within (Ambler 2001: 176-77, 196-97; Moore 2000: 86, 219; Steere 1984: 15, 18-19). Therefore, to be sensitive when that ferment was underway, and to back off and leave the work to the Expert, weaning the newcomer from dependence on a human director, was the mark of true spiritual guidance (Clement 2004: 13-14).

Gil Skidmore has kindly brought to my attention a case where an over-eager Quaker minister pushed too hard. Josiah Langdale, brought up in the established church but seeking for a 'people of God', took work as a ploughman with Quakers David Milner and his wife. The Milners were very careful not to influence Josiah in any way other than by their exemplary lives, as they knew that Josiah had been told by his family and local priest that Quakers used witchcraft to convert people. But then they were visited by the wife's brother, a Quaker minister:

...my dame's brother Timothy Towse being come to see her, the family invited me to go with them to Meeting... Timothy pressed hard for my going, and said a stranger was to be there who had travelled in America. (It was that good man and prophet of the Lord, James Dickinson.)

In further discourse Timothy said, 'Let us go to this', so I got ready, but not very willingly... [A] fear attended me as we went lest I should be drawn out of the right way and be deceived, and so great was my fear on this hand that I got little good by that Meeting. Yet the people in it I loved. They appeared solid and grave, and sat with reverence upon their minds, like a people worshipping God in spirit.

And as the Friend was speaking some at times wept, which affected my heart, for I loved tenderness. And although I did love tenderness and brokenness of heart, yet having heard much ill of the Quakers I was afraid to join with them, and laboured to

withstand the power that wrought amongst them, lest I should be deluded. And so the good was shut out that otherwise I might have received... (Skidmore 1999: 11-12).

Finally, at the invitation of his mistress, Josiah attended the meeting at which he was convinced. But she only asked him to escort her because her husband was elsewhere; she put no pressure on him to actually attend the meeting. Allowing the Spirit to work within Josiah, in God's own time, was the effective method, rather than trying to force a conversion through human will power.

HUMAN DIRECTION UNDER IMMEDIATE DIVINE INSTRUCTION

Quaker journals and tradition are full of stories of a minister speaking the exact words that a troubled individual needed to hear. A good example from early Friends is the experience of an aged woman of Long Lane, Borough (London), about 1720, who was asked how she became a Friend:

Now Friends, I will tell you how I was convinced. I was a young lass at that time in Dorsetshire, when George Fox came into that country; and he having appointed a meeting to which the people generally flocked, I went among the rest; and in going along the road, this query arose in my mind: 'What is it that condemns me when I do evil, and justifies me when I do well? What is it?' In this state I went to the meeting, which was large. George Fox rose with these words: 'Who art thou that quierest in thy mind, What is it I feel which condemneth me when I do evil, and justifieth me when I do well? I will tell thee. Lo! He that formed the mountains and created the winds, and declareth unto man what are his thoughts, that maketh the morning darkness and treadeth upon the high places of the earth; the Lord, the Lord of Hosts is his name. It is He, by his Spirit, that condemneth thee for evil, and justifieth thee when thou does well. Keep under its dictates, and He will be thy preserver to the end'. To which she added, 'It was truth, the very truth, and I have never departed from it' (London Yearly Meeting 1960: #14).

Joan Vokins wrote of her long years of seeking for God's way and how to follow it,

not knowing the sufficiency of the engrafted Word of God's Grace that is able to save: But when I followed its counsel, I found it sufficient to bring good to me, out of great afflictions, beyond my expectation; and then could I plead no excuse, knowing that unto the Lord Jesus (who has brought great things to pass) I must give my account... and God by his Spirit shewed me, he abhorred my self-righteousness; and let me see that in him was Righteousness, Life and Power; and then I was sensible that he is the Light of the World, that enlightens every one that comes into the World; and that it was striving with me from my Youth, which was before ever I heard the name *Quaker*... But the Lord in his own due time answered my weary Soul, and made known more and more of the way of his Truth and People, and at length sent some of his Messengers, as Instruments in his Hand, for my Encouragement and Confirmation... (Garman 1996 *et al.*: 257-58).

Vokins did not even bother giving the names of the Friends who came to her, giving total credit to God, whose instruments she understood them to be.

The dependence of the Quaker director (if we may use that somewhat anachronistic term) on instruction from God in the work of spiritual direction was a crucial

part of Friends' spiritual guidance. At times the specific guidance by the Spirit was explicitly seen. For example, Humphrey Bache had given into the temptation to follow the example of his fellow government agents, and had embezzled from the customs department. Bache came to believe that this was wrong, and stopped doing it, but he still had no inner peace. Then George Fox was led to speak to him. Bache recorded:

The Lord reached down His right arm of power, touched my heart with His grace, and made me willing to submit to His will, and give up the sum of money I had received unjustly. Waiting in the Light, this was made plain to me... So I was made free by the power of the Lord, and did give back at the excise office, London, one hundred and sixty pounds. Then I felt the truth of the words George Fox spake to me: 'He that confesseth, and forsaketh his sin, shall find mercy'; —for much ease, peace, and refreshment, I received into my soul (Hodgson 1881: 89).

Another example of direct 'interference', as it were, by the Spirit, is William Edmundson, probably the first Friend to settle in Ireland. While he was on business at a fair in Antrim, he received an inward instruction that 'this is the way', and he was to 'walk in it' even if he did not understand why. On the way home the Spirit let him know that his shop was in danger of being robbed that night, but that he was to go back towards Clough. When he prayed for direction regarding this disturbing sense, he was assured that the same power which required that he go to Clough would preserve his property from harm. So Edmundson went to Clough and checked into an inn. Unbeknownst to him, two Quaker women ministers were also staying there. Anne Gough, a delicate woman, had been thoroughly exhausted and discouraged from struggling on foot through the bogs and cold rain of Ireland. Edmundson was able to minister to her, encouraging and strengthening her. The next day he took her to his home to recuperate. When they reached his house, he learned that the attempted burglary the previous evening had been thwarted because the large front window had crashed so loudly that the family woke and chased the would-be thief (Hodgson 1881: 78-79).

The example of Fox speaking to Bache, and Edmundson to Gough, can be multiplied hundreds of times in the written and oral memories of the Religious Society of Friends. This is the Quaker model of spiritual nurture and instruction. It is Spirit led. The Spirit instructs the more experienced Friend whom to seek out and what words to use. The Spirit also prepares the person in need of help to receive the words. It does not necessarily follow, however, that therefore Friends should not or did not prepare themselves to be better tools for the Spirit's use, or that Friends could not ask each other for help. What early Friends sought to develop were structures loose enough for the winds of the Spirit to blow through, but tight enough to provide support.

HOW TO LEARN QUAKER PRACTICE

Although the theology was clear, the praxis growing out of it was the critical determining factor of whether or not someone had become a Quaker. It was inconceivable that people could accept the theology and not have their lives radically

reordered. It was equally inconceivable that people could maintain Friends' witness without having experienced the inward transformation that the theology described. The faith and practice were inseparable sides of the same coin (Ambler 2001: 114-15, 192-94, 197-200; Boulding 2004: 20-31; Punshon 1990).

How early Friends learned the marks of outward behavior associated with being Children of the Light was the same as how they learned the faith. They paid close attention to the witness of Christ within their own hearts and consciences, and obeyed its pricks and nudges. This inward instruction and increasing obedience was encouraged by other Friends (Grundy 2002b: 6, 8-9).

For example, Thomas Thompson felt inwardly instructed to take up plain language. Because of the high social cost he at first rebelled. Then a human encouraged him, and he managed to take up this particular cross (Hodgson 1881: 54).

Perhaps a more dramatic example is Thomas Lurting learning about the peace testimony in the midst of a battle. He was first mate on a British man-of-war in the mid-1650s. One of the soldiers on the ship had met Quakers and become convinced. Soon a few other men on board joined him, and in time Lurting stopped persecuting and joined them, too. They had not heard about the peace testimony, and although the crew called them Quakers, only one of them had ever met with Friends. Other than refusing to take any plunder, they participated valiantly in 'many desperate engagements'. When Lurting's ship was ordered to go to Barcelona,

...the station assigned her was to lie against a castle and batter it, and one corner of the castle firing into the ship, Thomas Lurting was for beating down that part... Accordingly, he (being stripped to the waist,) went into the forecastle and levelled the guns, but said, 'Fire not, till I go out and see where the shot lights, that we may level higher or lower'; but as he came out of the door, suddenly the thought ran through him, 'what if now thou killest a man?' This struck him as a thunderbolt, and... immediately putting on his clothes, he walked on the deck, as though he had not seen a gun fired ([Anonymous] 1888).

The Yorkshire butcher, Luke Cock, described his experience as his inward Guide bringing one thing after another into his consciousness of what was required of him as a Friend—in his metaphor, the path or lane which he was to travel. He makes no mention of human instruction or advice. I will quote this at some length because he was an ordinary man, not sophisticated or well educated:

I remember when I first met my Guide. He led me into a very large and cross one, where I was to speak the truth from my heart—and before I used to swear and lie too for gain. 'Nay, then' said I to my Guide, 'I mun leave Thee here: if Thou leads me up that lane, I can never follow: I'se be ruined of this butchering trade, if I mun't lie for gain'. Here I left my Guide, and was filled with sorrow, and went back to the Weeping Cross: and I said, if I could find my good Guide again, I'll follow Him, lead me whither He will. So here I found my Guide again, and began to follow Him up this lane and tell the truth from my heart. I had been nought but beggary and poverty before; and now I began to thrive at my trade, and got to the end of this lane, though with some difficulty.

But now my Guide began to lead me up another lane, harder than the first, which was to bear my testimony using the plain language. This was very hard; yet I said to my

Guide, 'Take my feeble pace, and I'll follow Thee as fast as I can. Don't outstretch me, I pray Thee'. So by degrees I got up there.

But now I was led up the third lane: it was harder still, to bear my testimony against tithes—my wife not being convinced. I said to my Guide, 'Nay, I doubt I never can follow up here: but don't leave me: take my pace, I pray Thee, for I mun rest me'. So I tarried here a great while, till my wife cried 'We'se all be ruined: what is thee ganging stark mad to follow t'silly Quakers?' Here I struggled and cried, and begged my Guide to stay and take my pace: and presently my wife was convinced. 'Well', she says, 'now follow the Guide, let come what will. The Lord has done abundance for us: we will trust in Him'. Nay, now, I thought, I'll to my Guide again, now go on, I'll follow Thee truly; so I got to the end of this lane cheerfully (London Yearly Meeting 1960: #42).

Quaker journals are full of the struggles of Friends to turn away from the ways of the world into greater, more faithful obedience to the Light of Christ. Mary Penington struggled against joining the despised Quakers, which meant giving up the affirmations of her associates in upper class society. But when she did,

oh! The joy that filled my soul in the first meeting ever held in our house at Chalfont... It was then the Lord enabled me to worship Him in that which was undoubtedly his own, and give up my whole strength, yea, to swim in the life which overcame me that day... I could say, 'This is it which I have longed and waited for, and feared I never should have experienced' (Penney 1992: 45).

SPREADING THE WORD

Once Friends had experienced the powerful searching of the Light, and had been empowered to make necessary changes in their lives, many of them were led to share their experiences with others. They, too, became ministers, often traveling to spread the word. This was not an easy assignment, especially for women or uneducated men, all of whom had been taught by the dominant culture that their place was to be silent before those it defined as their betters (Booy 2004; Larson 1999; Moore 2000; Skidmore 2003). As Luke Cock described the culminating 'lane' of having to tell others what God had done in his life, that is, to become a minister, he wrote: 'my Guide led me up another lane, more difficult than any of the former, which was to bear testimony to that Hand that had done all this for me. This was a hard one: I thought I must never see the end of it. I was eleven years all but one month in it' (London Yearly Meeting 1959: #42).

RANTERISM

One of the difficulties of this kind of Spirit-directed faith and practice is that it is dependent upon human discernment. Not everyone who spoke glowingly of hearing and following the Spirit was led to the chaste lives of integrity that early Friends believed were demanded of them by God (Braithwaite 1981: 22, 69-70, 181, 392, 546; Brayshaw 1946: 136, 171-72; Ingle 1994: 55-56, 65; Moore 2000: 76).

Discernment is an art, rather than a science, and requires humility and teachability—the same attributes that were required for successful learning directly from the

Inward Christ (Ambler 2001: 76, 194; Hamm 2003: 99-100; Loring 1992: 67-116; Morley 1993; Steere 1984: 42-43, 46-47). But since these are internal stances rather than measurable outward behaviors, it was not easy to convince non-believers that one person was a Ranter and another one a true Friend. Ultimately the only external test was behavior. Friends relied on Jesus' injunction that by their fruits they shall be known. As they felt themselves gathered to be a people for the purpose of demonstrating the nature of life under the direct guidance of Christ, of God's kingdom on earth, then it was of paramount importance to make sure that anyone who was not upholding this lifestyle be disassociated with publicly.

CONCLUSIONS

Early Friends had transformative experiences that moved them from the paradigm of the dominant culture, which they called the 'world', into a radically different one they termed 'Gospel Order'. Many of them were led to tell others about the inward peace and joy they had found (even in the face of bitter persecution). Because the spiritual discovery of early Friends was that 'Christ is come to teach his people himself', then it followed that the way to teach others was to direct them to this Inward Teacher. The method was public preaching that called people off from the 'world's' religious practices and into a place of paying attention to the still small voice within. People who had been reached by the public messages were then invited to additional conversations, and to meetings for worship.

Quaker instruction to new converts in the early days seems to have been understood as being under the direct guidance of Christ. Christ was understood to prepare the hearts, to create the hunger. Christ was understood to send out the ministers to preach or to speak specific words to a given individual. Christ was understood to continue teaching and guiding both new and more experienced Friends in the ways they were to behave so as to witness to the ways of God's kingdom. It was an apocalyptic, empowered, prophetic, galvanizing movement.

Not everyone who claimed to be under direct divine guidance behaved the way Friends expected, so they spent considerable effort differentiating and distancing themselves from Ranters. The way Spirit-led people tell which of the competing inner voices is divine and should be obeyed is discernment. It became a critical tool for Friends in the conduct of their corporate life as well as in their personal decision-making. The subject of discernment, however, is beyond the scope of this article.

There was an explicit expectation that one's outward life would be changed to match one's new inward relationship with God. The specifically Quaker behaviors of plain speech, refusal of hat honor, oaths, and tithes, and the peace testimony, among others, were part of the witness Friends felt they were called to offer the world. These counter-cultural behaviors were learned inwardly and reinforced by other Friends. In time Friends became institutionalized and structures hardened, and the outward behaviors somehow became detached from an inward spiritual transformation.

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