

CHAPTER 2

Faith and Thought

Basic Principles

Declarations of Faith 1. While we as Friends do not have a formal creed as a basis of membership, it has seemed wise from time to time to make some declaration of the fundamentals of our faith. Such a declaration was the letter of George Fox to the Governor of Barbados, which is included in Part III of this volume. A more extended statement was “The Declaration of Faith” issued by the Richmond Conference of 1887, also included in Part III. We desire at this time to call our own membership to a deeper religious life, a greater consecration of heart and will to God, and a more positive loyalty to the faith for which so many of our forerunners suffered and died.

Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Holy Scriptures 2. We reaffirm the statements of the above documents which gather up and express the central truth with regard to the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Scriptures, for which we stand now as in the past; and we urge all our members to refresh their minds by a careful reading of these documents. Additional statements are contained in paragraphs following.

Meaning of Salvation 3. Because of the universally recognized fact of sin, there is need for repentance and salvation which bring deliverance from sin and the possession of spiritual life. This comes through a personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, who through His love and sacrifice draws men to Him. Conviction of sin is awakened by the operation of the Holy Spirit, causing the soul to feel its need for reconciliation with God. Men thus come into newness of life and are saved from the power of sin to righteousness as they yield their lives to Him in loving and loyal

obedience. Their sonship to God becomes an actual reality, a transformation that may be wrought without any human agency or ceremony, since their entire spiritual life springs from the direct relation of their souls with a living and present God and cooperation with Him. Though adults may consciously and deliberately yield to evil impulses necessitating repentance, it does not follow in the views of Friends that guilt is imputed to infants. Jesus said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God." The Christian nurture of children is the highest privilege and most sacred duty of both the Christian home and the church.

The Living Presence

4. Friends give special emphasis to the vital principle that man's salvation and higher life are personal matters between the individual soul and God.

They recall that primitive Christianity was a spiritual society in which all members were priests and held direct communion with God. From the birth of the Quaker movement, Friends have regarded Christianity as essentially an experience and a way of life based on that experience. George Fox, in describing the great spiritual transformation of his early life, declares, "And this I knew experimentally." Isaac Penington gives as his testimony, "My heart said, 'This is He whom I waited for and sought after from my childhood . . . I have met with my God, I have met with my Saviour!'" Robert Barclay says, "I have felt a power that touched my heart and as I gave way to it I felt the evil in me weakening and the good raised up." This intimate fellowship with God, the consciousness of Christ as a living presence, has run through the whole history of Quakerism as a warm, life-giving stream. A life led by the Holy Spirit is the logical outcome of a faith based upon belief in a direct, personal approach to God. Nothing is more certain than that God is still speaking to men as He did in ancient time. His Spirit guides and controls the surrendered life, makes sensitive the conscience, illumines the mind, and strengthens the will. The Christian's constant and supreme business is obedience to Him.

The Light of Christ

5. From the earliest days of their history there are frequent references in the writings of Friends to the belief that there is in the human soul a Light which

is of divine origin and which makes man capable of response to moral and spiritual influences. It is this divine quality that enables him to

develop the awareness of moral distinctions and obligations known as conscience, and inspires him to live, struggle, and suffer for the achievement of what ought to be. It gives man preeminence over the natural world, raises him above his physical nature, gives him divine potentialities, and makes it possible for him to experience the joys and satisfactions of the abundant life through acceptance of an obedience to Jesus Christ. It is this spiritual endowment that enables him to advance beyond the narrow bounds of self toward the Christian ideals of goodness and love, and to respond to the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. George Fox often called this principle the “Seed of God,” “that of God in everyone,” or “the Light within.” William Penn called it “the great principle of God in man, the root and spring of divine substance.” Robert Barclay described it as “a real, spiritual substance” or “a divine bestowal.” It is “that something we cannot call less than divine and universal for it links up with the eternal realities, and with our fellow men of whatever race or creed. It may be hidden or warped by ignorance or pride or self-will or prejudice, but it cannot be wholly lost, for it is part of that which makes us essentially men, made in the divine image, and having within us boundless possibilities of life in God.”¹

Divine–Human Relationship 6. The emphasis placed by Friends upon the foregoing principles is the source of their special testimonies and activities. Since all men are potentially temples of God, all personality is sacred; men everywhere are the object of His special concern and so are of immeasurable worth. This doctrine of the dignity of man permeates all human associations and is the basis of true democracy; it rests on the divine–human relationship and works through all aspects of life. As man yields himself to divine guidance, he becomes an active partner with God in the extension of His kingdom. It is the light of God within that gives a burning sense of mission and inspires the ideal of universal brotherhood. In the realization of this spiritual fellowship and divine guidance Friends labor for the alleviation of human suffering; for the intellectual, moral, and spiritual elevation of mankind; and for purified and exalted citizenship. It is an essential part of the faith that a man should be in truth what

¹London Yearly Meeting, *Faith and Practice* (1960), 120.

he professed in word. The underlying principle of life and action for individuals, and also for society, is transformation through the power of God and implicit obedience to His revealed will.

For more implicit and extended statements of belief, reference is made to those officially recognized at various times, especially the “Epistle addressed by George Fox and others to the Governor of Barbados in 1671,” the “Declaration of Faith issued by the Richmond Conference in 1887” and “Essential Truths,” adopted in 1902 by the Five Years Meeting.

Ideals of Worship

Meaning of Worship

1. It has been said of the early Friends in America that the meeting for worship was the heart of the Quaker system, because it was in this meeting that they experienced a fresh sense of God. In such a gathering the Quaker method is extremely simple. No intermediary, ritual, or ceremony is required. Words are not essential. God does not need to be brought near for –

“Closer is He than breathing and
nearer than hands and feet.”

It is the human mind and heart that need to be adjusted and made conscious of His presence. And as the sincere worshiper waits in silent meditation, or voices prayer or praise, he experiences this fresh sense of God and, with it, a renewal of spiritual strength in communion with God and with his fellow worshipers.

Meeting for Worship

2. In such a setting the whole meeting becomes a listening post for divine intimations and revelations. Vocal prayer gathers up the aspirations and needs of all the group. Hymns and spiritual songs, sung with the spirit and with the understanding, are not only appropriate but become the normal and helpful expression of faith, hope, and love toward God and in praise of Christ, the Savior of mankind. And the minister speaks with freedom and power; his message, whether conceived in previous meditation and prayer or given by the immediate operation of the Spirit on his mind, will be fresh, illuminating, and uplifting. He will be able to draw on the resources of past experience and study as well as to interpret helpfully the present manifestations of God’s will and word.

Friends and the Sacraments

Ceremonial Rites 1. “The external sacramental practices which prevailed in the churches of the seventeenth century seemed to George Fox to have little inner meaning and but slender spiritual significance. They seemed to him, eager as he was to preserve only vital functions, part of the deadwood of the ‘wilderness’ period of the Church’s life. He took the attitude which St. Paul had taken toward circumcision and which Martin Luther had taken a century before toward ‘Sacred works.’ But he had no thought of omitting or underestimating the Spiritual reality for which the outward sacraments stood.”¹

The Inward Experience 2. As a result Friends have never observed outward communion or baptism, the two sacraments which are practiced by most Protestant churches. In these, as in many other matters, the Friends prefer the inward rather than the outward. We believe deeply in the spiritual reality behind these forms. John the Baptist, speaking of Jesus, said, “I indeed baptize you with water: but He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost” (Mark 1:8). It is the inward experience, not the outward rite, that has seemed to Friends important. Instead of observing the Lord’s Supper once a week or once a month, Friends feel that every time of worship ought to be a time of deep communion with the Divine. The words of Revelation 3:20 refer to this deeper communion which is possible without the use of bread and wine: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with me.”

Friends do not, however, belittle the reverent and spiritual use of the sacraments when they are a part of vital worship. They simply do not themselves feel the need for them.

The Scriptures

Scriptures and Inspiration 1. “The Canon of Scripture may be closed, but the inspiration of the Holy Spirit has not ceased. We believe that there is no literature in the world where the revelation of God is given so fully as in our New Testament

¹Rufus M. Jones, *The Faith and Practice of the Quakers*, p. 72 ff.

Scriptures We feel them to be inspired, because they inspire us; we go to them for guidance because as we read them we feel our eyes are being opened and our spirits kindled. We search them because ‘They are they that testify of me.’ It is the living Christ we want to find, the eternal revealer of the will of God. It is the spirit behind the letter that we need.”¹

Scriptures and Revelation 2. The Holy Scriptures were given by the inspiration of God and are the divinely authorized record of the moral principles and doctrines of Christianity. In them, as interpreted and unfolded by the Holy Spirit, is an ever fresh and unfailing source of spiritual truth for the proper guidance of life and practice. Their value lies in their witness to the nature and purpose of God, their account of the message and mission of Jesus Christ, and their teachings as to salvation, the way of life, and eternal destiny. In the Scriptures is found the record both of man’s search for God and of God’s revelation to man. Through numerous spiritual pioneers the illumination moves from the beginnings of history to “The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” The Scriptures are an inheritance of all who through the centuries have found strength and guidance in the inspired wisdom of this storehouse of spiritual experience.

Search the Scriptures 3. The chief objective of the Bible student should be to grasp spiritual truths and teachings as vital and life-giving realities rather than to regard them as matters only for intellectual or doctrinal discussion. He should accept with appreciation all fresh light thrown upon the biblical records but should remain assured that the spiritual strength which he receives from such study comes from a living communion with Him of whom the records tell. They are an inexhaustible treasury of spiritual truth, fitted to the needs and problems of each age as it reinterprets and appropriates the message for its own time. Their words are words of life because they testify of Him who is Life. “In keeping them there is great reward.”

Barclay on the Scriptures 4. Of the Scriptures the Quaker apologist, Robert Barclay, writes: “God hath seen meet that herein we

¹ Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*.

should see as in a looking-glass the conditions and experiences of the saints of old, that, finding our experiences to answer theirs, we might thereby be the more confirmed and comforted, and our hopes of obtaining the same end strengthened. This is the great work of the Scriptures, and their service to us, that we may witness them fulfilled in us, and so discern the stamp of God's Spirit and ways upon them, by the inward acquaintance we have with the same spirit and work in our hearts."

Spiritual Gifts

Gifts and the Kingdom 1. In fulfillment of the promise given to Joel, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh," the Heavenly Father in His wisdom has bestowed a diversity of gifts upon His children for the building up of His kingdom. Recognizing the inherent spiritual capacity of all men and the work of grace that is shared by all believers, Friends cherish these manifold endowments and desire to bring each to full development, that the whole body may be fitly framed together by that which each member supplies.

Endowments for Service 2. These spiritual endowments include: sensitiveness to human need and suffering; efficiency in ministering thereto; intuitive power of religious insight; the personality and language to communicate religious truth and enthusiasm; sympathy, intelligence, and optimism in personal counsel; comprehension of broad social problems; constructive guidance in public affairs; power of dedicated self-expression in writing and teaching, and the skillful exercise of the creative arts of invention, painting, sculpture, and music.

Gift of the Ministry 3. Friends hold in special esteem the gift qualifying for the ministry. They do not ordain ministers, but as the gift develops and obedience to the Holy Spirit is manifest, they recognize the gift and encourage its training and exercise. There is a variety of ministries: evangelism; exposition and teaching of the gospel truths; engaging in prayer and in praise; exhortation and encouragement; speaking to states and conditions; and pastoral care. No sharp line of distinction can be drawn between the different types of ministry; all may be cultivated and developed by prayerful study and close observation of human need.