

# George Fox *speaks*

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George Fox is one of the great spiritual leaders of all times. His name is most closely associated with the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), which he founded, but he belongs not only to Quakerdom, but to Christendom.

Fox was a typical 17th century seeker (1624-1691) until he had an experience of God. Then he became a prophetic leader, speaking to the conditions of thousands of spiritual seekers in many parts of the world. To them he brought a message of that of God within every human being which makes direct and immediate contact with Him possible, when men, women, and children are sensitive to their Inner Voice. The recognition of this relationship between the God within and the God without, radically changed men's attitudes towards war, towards other races, towards handicapped people, towards education, towards worship, and other phases of life.

Originally Fox had intended merely to reform the existing church, to revive primitive Christianity. Soon, however, it became advisable to organize his followers into Christian cells, fellowships, societies of friends. Eventually he became the organizer as well as the prophet of Quakerism.

In the pages that follow, George Fox speaks to us today as he spoke to men, women, and children in the turbulent 17th-century England in which he lived.

## ON HIS EARLY YEARS, HIS SPIRITUAL SEARCH AND THE DISCOVERY . . .

"I was born in the month called July, 1624, at Drayton-in-the-Clay (Fenny Drayton). My father's name was Christopher Fox; he was by profession a weaver, an honest man; and there was a seed of God in him. The neighbors called him Righteous Christer. My mother was an upright woman . . . of the stock of the martyrs."

"When I came to eleven years of age, I knew pureness and righteousness; for while a child I was taught how to walk to be kept pure. The Lord taught me to be faithful in all things, and to act faithfully two ways, viz., inwardly to God, and outwardly to man; and to keep to Yea and Nay in all things."

In 1643 he left home to travel up and down the country, consulting those who might feed his spiritual hunger. Of these "professors" (those who professed religion) he said, "I saw that there was none among them all that could speak to my condition."

"And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do; then, oh! then I heard a voice which said, '*There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition*'; and when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy. . . . and this I knew experientially."

"Then the Lord led me gently along, and let me see His love, which was endless and eternal, surpassing all the knowledge that men have in the natural state, or can get by history or books; and that love let me see myself, as I was without Him."

## **ON CHRIST . . .**

“It was judged there were above a thousand people, amongst whom I declared God’s everlasting truth and word of life freely and largely, for about the space of three hours, directing all to the Spirit of God in themselves that they . . . might all come to know Christ to be their teacher to instruct them, their counsellor to direct them, their shepherd to feed them, their bishop to oversee them; and might know their bodies to be prepared, sanctified, and made fit temples for God and Christ to dwell in.”

## **ON THE BIBLE . . .**

“I saw how people read the Scriptures without a right sense of them, and without duly applying them to their own states . . . they read these things and applied them to others, but they did not turn in to find the truth of these things in themselves.”

“I told him that all Christendom (so called) possessed the Scriptures, but wanted the power and Spirit that they had who gave forth the Scriptures, and that was the reason they were not in fellowship with the Son, or with the Father, or with the Scriptures, or one with another.”

## **ON THE SACRAMENTS . . .**

“ . . . to know a Fellowship with Christ in His Death and Sufferings, is above the fellowship of bread and wine, which will have an end; but the Fellowship in the gospel and Holy Spirit hath no end.”

“I told him the one baptism by the one Spirit into the one body we owned; but to throw a little water on a child’s face, and say that was baptising and christening it, there was no Scripture for that.”

## ON THE INWARD LIGHT OF CHRIST . . .

“Christ, who had enlightened me, gave me His light to believe in. . .”

“John . . . bore witness to the light of Christ; the great heavenly prophet hath enlightened every man that cometh into the world withal; that they may believe in it, become the children of the light, and so have the light of life.”

“ . . . I was commanded to turn people to that inward light, spirit, and grace, by which all might know their salvation, and their way to God; even that divine Spirit which would lead them into all Truth, and which I infallibly knew would never deceive any.”

## ON THE SPIRIT OF EVANGELISM . . .

“ . . . the lives and conversations of Friends did preach. . .”

“As we travelled through the country, preaching repentance to the people, the Lord said unto me, if that I did but set up one in the same spirit that the prophets and apostles were in that give forth the Scriptures, he or she should shake the country in their profession ten miles around them.”

“Let all the nations hear the sound by word and writing. Spare no place, spare no tongue nor pen, but be obedient to the Lord God; go through the world and be valiant for the Truth upon earth; tread and trample all that is contrary under . . . Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.”

## ON THE MEETING FOR WORSHIP . . .

“And 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 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. . .”

“Perceiving the other Friends that were with me to be full of the power and word of the Lord, I stepped down, giving way for them to declare what they had from the Lord unto the people.”

“And then the Lord's power came so over them all, and answered the witness of God in them, that they were bound by the power of God; and a glorious, powerful meeting we had, and His power went over all, and the minds of the people were turned by the Spirit of God in them to God, and to Christ their Teacher.”

## ON THE MEETING FOR BUSINESS . . .

Writing of the reasons for the establishment of monthly meetings for business, he said:

“That so all the family of God, *women as well as men*, might know, possess, perform and discharge their offices and services in the house of God, whereby the poor might be better taken care of and looked after, and the younger instructed, informed and taught in the way of God; the loose and disorderly reprov'd and admonish'd in the fear of the Lord; the clearness of persons propounding marriage more closely and strictly inquired into, in the wisdom of God, and all the members of the spiritual body, the Church, might watch over and be helpful to each other in love.”

## ON TESTING TIMES . . .

“Though there be shakings in the world, the Lord’s power is over all, and His Kingdom cannot be shaken.”

“I saw also that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love which flowed over the ocean of darkness. In that also I saw the infinite love of God. . . .”

“And, Friends, though ye may have been convinced, and have tasted of the power, and felt the Light; yet afterwards ye may feel a winter storm, tempest and hail, frost and cold, and temptations in the wilderness. Be patient and still in the power and in the light that doth convince you, to keep your minds to God; in that be quiet, that ye may come to the summer, that your flight be not in the winter. For if ye sit still in the patience, which overcomes in the power of God, there will be no flying.”

## ON THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST . . .

“While I was in prison here, the Baptists and Fifth-monarchy men prophesied that this year Christ should come and reign upon the earth a thousand years. And they looked upon this reign to be outward, when He was come inwardly in the hearts of His people, to reign and rule there, and these professors would not thus receive Him. So they failed in their prophecy and expectation, and had not possession of Him. But Christ is come, and doth dwell in the hearts of His people and reign there. Thousands, at the door of whose hearts He hath been knocking, have opened to Him, and He is come, and doth sup with them and they with Him; the heavenly supper with the heavenly and spiritual Man.”

## ON EDUCATION . . .

"I advised the setting up of a school . . . for teaching children; and also a women's school . . . for instructing young lassies and maidens in whatsoever things were civil and useful in the creation."

## ON TAKING OATHS . . .

"Then said the judge to me, 'Will you take the oath of allegiance, George Fox?', I said, 'I never took an oath in my life, nor any covenant or engagement.' 'Well,' said he, 'will you swear or not?' I answered, 'I am a Christian, and Christ commands me not to swear, and so does the apostle James, and whether I should obey God or man, do thou judge.'"

## ON WAR . . .

" . . . they offered me the preferment (as they called it), asking me if I would take up arms for the Commonwealth against Charles Stuart? I told them I knew from whence all wars arose, even from the lust, according to James' doctrine; and that I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars."

" . . . I was moved of the Lord to write a paper 'To the Protector by the Name of Oliver Cromwell,' wherein I did . . . deny the wearing or drawing of a carnal sword, or any other outward weapon, against him or any man; and that I was sent of God to stand a witness against all violence, and against the works of darkness; and to turn people from darkness to light; and to bring them from the occasion of war and fighting to the peaceable gospel. . . ."

## ON CONCERN FOR OTHERS . . .

"In the morning I went out . . . and as I was walking upon the top of the bank there were several poor people, travellers, asking relief, who I saw were in necessity; and they gave them nothing, but said they were cheats. It grieved me to see such hard-heartedness amongst professors; so, when they were gone in to their breakfast, I ran after the poor people about a quarter of a mile, and gave them some money."

" . . . when they (the justices and captains) understood the business Friends met about, and saw their books and accounts of collections for relief of the poor, how we took care one county to help another, and to help our Friends beyond the seas, and provide for our poor that none of them should be chargeable to their parishes, etc., the justices and officers confessed we did their work, and passed away peaceably and lovingly, commending Friends' practices."

"Now it was a time of great suffering; and many Friends being in prisons, many other Friends were moved to go to the Parliament, to offer up themselves to lie in the same dungeons where their friends lay, that they that were in prison might go out, and not perish in the stinking jails."

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