

William Penn's Holy Experiment

The Quakers of Pennsylvania

The Quakers

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Religious Viewpoint

- Founded in England in the 17th century by George Fox, the Quakers believed that God dwells in each person, that there is an inner light that guides us.
- Authority was to be found, not in the Bible or church hierarchy, but in the voice of the heart, which is God's voice.
- The purpose of a religious gathering (called a meeting with God) was to commune jointly, in silence, with the indwelling spirit.
- Quaker ideals included equality, social justice, peace, stewardship, integrity and simplicity.

The Quaker Journal

- Our knowledge of Quaker religious ideas comes principally from Quaker journals.
- The Quaker journal, like that of the Puritans, was a special form of autobiography.
- It recorded God's presence in the world.
 - The Puritan journal, however, was introspective and led to self examination. (It tried to answer the question, "Am I saved?")
 - The Quaker one was written for publication. It had a strong social emphasis in its concern with successful living in the community.

From: Perspectives in American Literature

The Format of the Quaker Journal

- Divine revelations in childhood
- Uneasiness over youthful frivolity
- Period of search and conflict
- Convincement [Persuasion]
- Conversion
- Seasons of discouragement
- Entrance into the ministry
- Adoption of plain dress, plain speech, and simple living
- Curtailment of business
- Advocacy of social reform

From: Perspectives in American Literature

John Woolman's Journal

- Few journals contain all these stages. Woolman's autobiography is a classic record of all the stages.
 - Jonathan Edwards offered mysticism and heaven (an other-worldly reading experience)
 - Ben Franklin offered a pattern of utilitarian living (a practical reading experience)
 - John Woolman offered mystical insight and compassionate humanism (an other-worldly and practical reading experience)

From: Perspectives in American Literature

Inner Light: 18th Century Account

- "I . . . was early convinced in my mind that true religion consisted in an inward life, wherein the heart does love and reverence God the Creator, and learns to exercise true justice and goodness . . . toward all men . . ."

– The Journal of John Woolman (1774)

Inner Light: Recent Accounts

- In every human soul there is implanted a certain element of God's own spirit and divine energy. . . . [It is] in the words of John "the Light that enlighteneth **every man** who comes into the world." – *Inner Light*, Mary K. Blackmar
- According to [the doctrine of the Inner Life], God reveals God's life, truth, and love to every human being of every race and religion, directly, without the requirement of any intermediary such as church, priest, or sacred book. – *What Do Quakers Believe?*

Voice of the Heart: 18th Century Accounts

- We were taught by renewed experience to labour for an inward stillness; at no time to seek for words, but to live in the spirit of truth, and utter that to the people which truth opened in us.
– The Journal of John Woolman (1774)
- As our worship consisted not in words so neither in silences as silence, but in a holy dependence of the mind upon God . . . until words can be brought forth which are from God's spirit.
– Robert Barclay as quoted in What Do Quakers Believe?

Voice of the Heart: Recent Account

- The Quakers believe that no first hand knowledge of God is possible except through that which is **experienced**, or inwardly revealed to the individual human being through the working of God's quickening spirit.

— *Inner Light*, Mary K. Blackmar

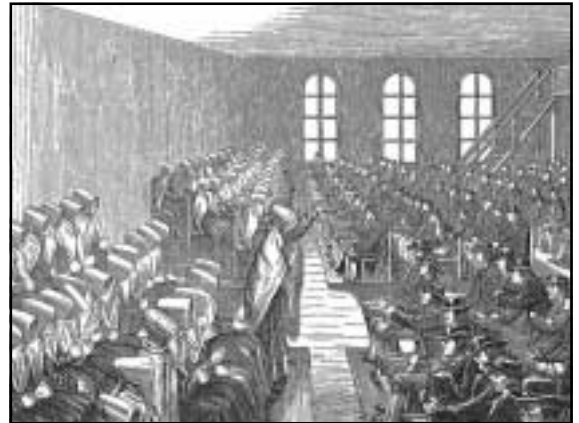
The Meeting: 18th Century Accounts

- One day, being under a strong exercise of spirit, I stood up and said some words in a meeting; but not keeping close to the divine opening, I said more than was required of me.

— *The Journal of John Woolman* (1774)

- For 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.

— Robert Barclay as quoted in *What Do Quakers Believe?*



The Meeting: Recent Account (1)

- The worshipers sit in silence, each endeavoring to commune with the Divine Presence in the midst and ready to express to the meeting any message which may arise in the mind as being clearly intended for the meeting as a whole. — *What Do Quakers Believe?*





The Meeting: Recent Account (2a)

- The experience of Joe Taylor, winner of the Nobel Prize in physics: One Sunday morning at worship, Joe came bouncing in the door – there is no other word to describe his energy. He sat down next to me and we settled into the quiet of unprogrammed worship. As we sat there, I could *feel* how excited Joe was about something – he was literally quivering with barely-suppressed excitement. The whole bench was shaking/quaking.

The Meeting: Recent Account (2b)

- After a few minutes, Joe stood up and told the group about the discovery he and one of his students had made the night before. I didn't understand how important the discovery was at the time, but I remember the heart of Joe's message. To him *all* scientific discovery is also a religious discovery. There is no conflict between science and religion. Our knowledge of God is made larger with every discovery we make about the world. – Joe Taylor's Searching

Quaker Ideals: 18th Century Account

- **Simplicity:** A way of life free from much entanglement appeared best for me, though the income might be small.
- **Social Justice:** With people who lived in ease on the hard labour of their slaves, I felt uneasy. . . . as I looked to the Lord, he inclined my heart to His testimony. I told the man that I believed the practice of continuing slavery to this people was not right.

– The Journal of John Woolman (1774)

Quaker Ideals: Recent Account

- **Simplicity:** Friends seek wholeness and harmony in the various aspects of our lives. We strive to limit the material circumstances of our lives in order to open the way to divine leadings.
- **Social Justice:** We seek both to bring to light and to counteract or expunge structures, institutions, language and thought processes that subtly support discrimination and exploitation.

– What Do Quakers Believe?

Simplicity: The Quaker Wedding Service

- In an atmosphere of quiet and reverence during the period of worship, the couple rise. Taking each other by the hand, they make their promises.
- When the couple are seated again, the marriage certificate is brought for them to sign. Then someone assigned to do so reads the certificate aloud. The meeting then continues
- The meeting closes by shaking of hands. All present are asked to sign the wedding certificate as witnesses to the marriage. – Quaker Wedding Practices



Lifestyle

- In lifestyle, the Quakers closely resembled the Puritans.
 - They lived and worshipped as a strongly communal people.
 - They insisted upon living orderly lives of thrift and self denial.
 - They believed that every person had a calling from God to lead a productive life of work.
- These habits helped make them prosperous merchants.

The Calling: 18th Century Account

- This is John Woolman's account of his calling to the trade of tailor: I believed the hand of Providence pointed out this business for me, and I was taught to be content with it, though I felt at times a disposition that would have sought for something greater; but through the revelation of Jesus Christ I had seen the happiness of humility, and . . . my soul was so environed with heavenly light and consolation that things were made easy to me which had been otherwise.

– *The Journal of John Woolman (1774)*

The Calling: Recent Account

- For me, the calling has always been part of my relationship with God. Far from being instantaneous, the calling had a curious beginning even before I was saved. It grew as I grew in faith: as I became a Christian, as I served in the church, as I studied in seminary, as I pastored my first church. I look back at that evening at Anderson University in March of 1990 as the day when God removed all my doubts. There is now no turning back. – Louis R. Herchenroeder, *Friends United Meeting: Quaker Life*

Practices

- Quakers believed that they could achieve a state of perfection in this life.
- This meant applying the Sermon on the Mount in the most literal sense.
 - They aided the poor.
 - They were the first to attack slavery.
 - They believed in complete equality between men and women.
- Their belief in equality led to:
 - Plain clothes and plain language
 - Refusal to show deference by removing their hats, bowing, or other conventional manners.

Perfection: 18th Century Account

- George Fox saw himself return to the state of Adam before the fall. He wrote in his journal: Now I was come up in spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God. All things were new . . . I knew nothing but pureness, and innocency, and righteousness, being renewed up into the image of God by Christ Jesus, so that . . . I was come up to the state of Adam which he was in before he fell. – As quoted in *Quakers and the Lamb's War*

Perfection: Recent Account

- In some basic theological positions Quakerism comes closer to Roman Catholicism than to Protestantism. The Quaker rejects the classical Lutheran view of human nature as totally depraved as a result of original sin. Most Quakers would uphold the inherent goodness of human beings. They believe that perfection and freedom from sin are possible in this life. The founder of the Society of Friends early preached against the Calvinist doctrine of predestination; Quakerism denies that God has divided humanity into the elect and the damned.

– *The Quakers, or Our Neighbors, The Friends*

Practices (cont.)

- They refused to bear arms or to provide tax support for war activities.
- They kept peace with the Indians through honest and opening dealings.
- They established fixed prices to escape unpleasant haggling and bargaining.
- They initiated programs of prison reform and nonviolent care of the mentally ill.

William Penn

- Early Life
- Conversion
- Religious Leader



Early Life

- William Penn was born in London in 1644. His father, Sir William Penn, was an admiral in the British navy.
- Even as a child, William was religiously inclined.
 - He rebelled against his father's Anglicanism
 - He followed the Puritans
 - He was expelled from Cambridge in 1662 for his views
- For a time, he led the life of a young aristocrat.
 - He traveled.
 - He studied law.
 - He fought in naval battles.
 - He put down a mutiny on his father's Irish estates.
 - He experienced the horrors of the Great Plague.

Conversion

- In 1666, he converted to the Society of Friends (the Quakers).
- The Quakers (mostly poor and illiterate) thus acquired a prominent member of the educated aristocracy.
 - He provided the literary talent, political contacts, and legal skill to fight for the Quaker's religious freedom.
 - For many years, he produced pamphlets, tracts, and books:
 - Attacking the persecution of the Quakers
 - Calling for religious freedom
 - Explaining the Quaker faith

Religious Leader

- Throughout the 1660's and 1670's, Penn was in and out of English jails.
 - He successfully argued cases in defense of religious liberties.
 - He undertook missionary journeys to Holland and Germany.
 - He made lasting friendships that would help later in the growth of Pennsylvania.
- In 1681, Penn secured from the king the proprietary grant of Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania

- Proprietorship
- Governor v. Legislature
- Prosperity
- Unexpected Results



Proprietorship

- When Penn acquired his grant, he began a promotional campaign throughout northern Europe. He had much to offer.
 - His “Frame of Government” made provision for an assembly and a council which were both elective.
 - Civil rights, including religious liberty, were guaranteed to all.
 - Land was offered at fixed prices, with an annual quitrent thereafter.

Governor v. Legislature

- Penn assumed incorrectly that:
 - Social custom would make wealthy men the majority in the legislature.
 - Quaker unity would bind them in loyalty to his leadership.
- He was sadly disillusioned.
 - As governor, he was constantly battling with the legislature. Quakers, as it turned out, did not make peaceful legislators.
 - There were times when he sought, in despair, to sell his proprietorship.

Prosperity

- Despite its political turbulence, Pennsylvania was extremely prosperous.
 - Its rich farmlands attracted settlers who produced abundant food for export.
 - Experienced merchants from London and the colonies quickly settled in Philadelphia.
 - By the mid-18th century, Philadelphia was the third most important commercial city in the British empire, after London and Bristol.

Unexpected Results

- The Quakers had thought themselves headed in one direction and found themselves going in another.
 - A frugal people, they worked hard and became wealthy.
 - Believers in equality, their success created an aristocracy.
 - They expected Quaker unity, but found themselves divided.
 - Their focus on religious freedom brought swarms of Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Catholics into Pennsylvania and reduced them to a minority.

Withdrawal from Politics

- Pacifism
- Concessions
- The French and Indian War
- Withdrawal



Pacifism

- The most serious problem facing the Quakers was created by their pacifism.
 - During the numerous wars of this era, Pennsylvania authorities refused to provide funds or soldiers.
 - In following the Biblical precept “Thou shalt not kill,” did they have the right to endanger the lives of non-Quakers?

Concessions

- In light of this dilemma, it is understandable that all but one of the deputy governors who ruled the colony in Penn's absence was carefully chosen from among non-Quakers. Such men were free to make compromises that Quakers could not.
- In the long run, Quakers found that they had made so many concessions – in business, government, education, social relations, and even dress and recreation – that their very existence seemed doomed.

French and Indian War

- When in this frame of mind, the Quakers were faced by the greatest of all military challenges: the French and Indian War.
- Their dilemma had become irresolvable.
 - If they remained participants in the government, they would have to pay for and support a war.
 - This they could not do.

Withdrawal

- In 1756, the Quakers withdrew almost entirely from public life.
 - They became an isolated “special people” cut off from the main current of American life.
 - Their attention was directed to private philanthropy instead of public office.
- Even in the American Revolution, they remained peaceful.
 - Because of that, they were accused of being Tories.
 - But they stood their ground and remained faithful to their ideals.

Sources

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