

Pink Dandelion

'And the new Man was made'

The transformation of humanity in the early Quaker movement

In dit artikel bespreekt Ben Pink Dandelion hoe het idee van de nieuwe mens zich heeft geuit in religieus utopisme. Aan de hand van citaten uit de vroegste Quakerbronnen bewijst hij dat deze nieuwe religie bij haar vestiging in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika bewust een nieuwe mens wilde creëren.

Religious Utopianism, particularly in the Christian tradition, typically connects with a heightened sense of eschatological imperative. In other words, it may be related to a strong sense that the end times are approaching and that the elect need to be ready and waiting. This was true of the Ephrata community in Pennsylvania where adherents slept only a few hours each night and ate very little so as not to miss Christ who would come again like 'a thief in the night' (1 Thessalonians 5:2) and because in heaven God neither sleeps nor eats. Alternatively utopianism can be linked to a sense of continuing to wait for the end times but as a group with a sense of a new covenant with God. An example of this latter type would be the Shakers or, more formally, the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing. Their celibate communitarian communities modelled an utopian existence as part of their sense of particular relationship to God. This was a worldly version of heaven whilst awaiting the divine one. Albert Schweitzer famously commented that the history of Christianity has been about the delay of the *parousia*, or second coming, and, of course, over time, groups move between styles of waiting and types of eschatological understanding. This article is about the Quaker movement, who began in England in the 1650s as a group expecting the culmination of the end times in the near future, but who later adapted the thinking behind their practices to match their sense that they needed to continue to wait. In all of these religious experiments, personal change accompanies organisational ideology. What is interesting about the early Quaker case is that this change comes from God,

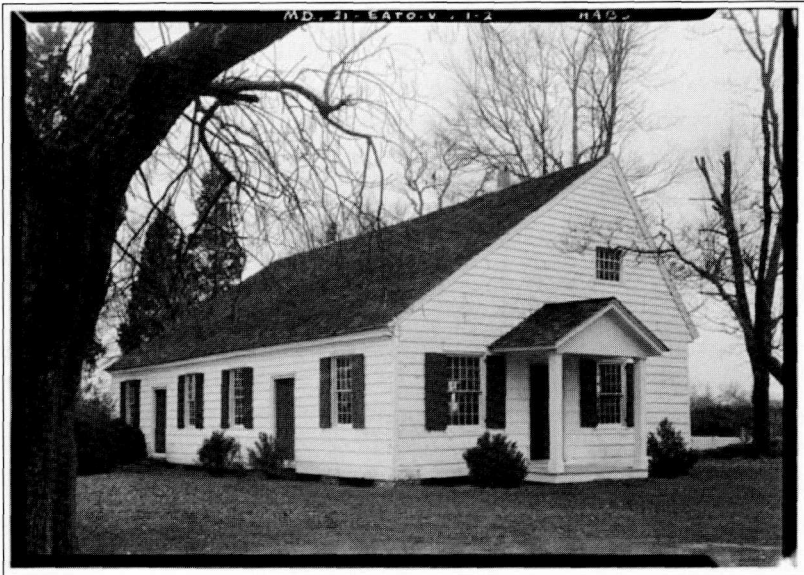


George Fox

with no human agency involved. What we have here is a sense of transformation enacted by God so that Quakers could truly feel themselves as God's chosen people, taken up by God into a new spiritual state. This article focuses on the nature of the transformation experience experienced by early Friends (as Quakers were also called) and the consequent sense of being separated from the rest of humanity. Not only were new men and women made, but they were then qualitatively different from the unmade.

George Fox is generally credited with being the key founder of the movement although the leadership of the early Quakers was rich in its depth and breadth

and certainly contributed to its success. Fox was born in Leicestershire in 1624 and grew up in Fenny Drayton in a parish noted for its radical thinking. Ever since Henry VIII's political reformation of 1534, the pressure to more fully reform the national church had mounted and in the 1640s, the parliamentary war against Charles I was seen by many to be the war that would bring radical religious settlement. There was no agreement on what this would consist of, but everything seemed possible and there was vigorous and optimistic debate over what the new church would emphasise and how it would be structured. Ultimately, the Republic (1649 – 1660) would not deliver the radical settlement so many hoped for and indeed, the success of the Quaker movement was helped by the need for a renewed sense of hope in the 1650s. In the 1640s, Fox was part of this great seeking after Truth, part of the widespread search for a new and authentic dispensation to replace the corrupt and apostate church. Aged nineteen, he left his apprenticeship, spent a year with his Baptist Uncle in London, and visited some of the army camps where the most radical religious ideas were circulating. He had already come to see that the national church idea that ministers needed to be educated at Oxford or Cambridge was wrong, but he also found that the independent



Old Third Haven Meetinghouse, Washington Street, Easton, Talbot County, Maryland (Library of Congress Washington, USA, cat.nr. HABS MD-703)

ministers were not giving him the answers he sought. At a very low point, in 1647, with nothing and no-one to help him, he underwent a first transforming experience.

'Now after I had received that opening from the Lord that to be bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not sufficient to fit a man to be a minister of Christ, I regarded the priests less and looked more after the dissenting people... As I had forsaken all the priests, so I left the separate preachers also, and those called the most experienced people; for I saw there was none among them all that could speak to my condition. When all my hopes in them [dissenters] 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. Then the Lord did let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give him all the glory; for all are concluded under sin, and shut up in unbelief as I had been, that Jesus Christ might have the preeminence who enlightens, and gives grace, and faith, and power. Thus, when God doth work who shall let [i.e. hinder] it? And this I knew experimentally.'¹

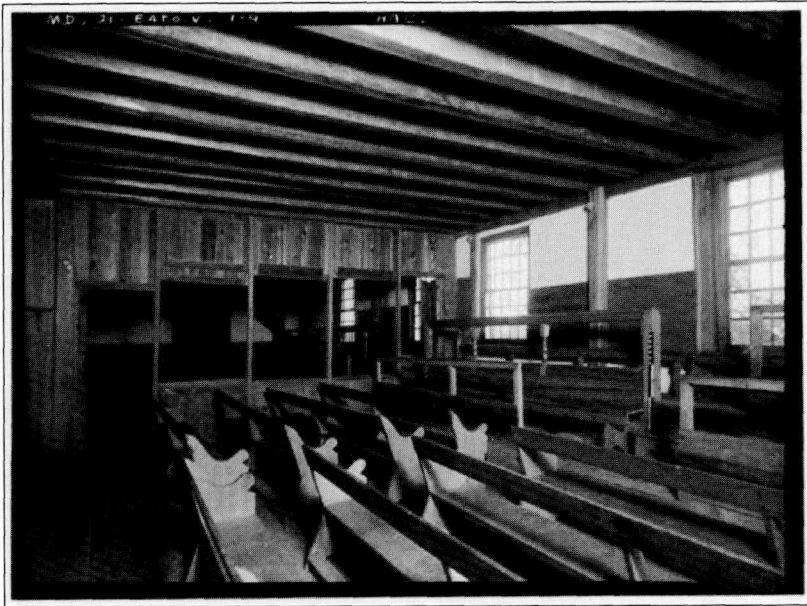
1 George Fox, *Journal of George Fox* (Cambridge 1952) 11.

In other words: he found God speaking to him directly, inwardly. He saw that no one had been able to help him because God needed to work directly with humanity without mediation by text or minister. This was not an optional experience but the foundation of true spirituality, of primitive Christianity revived, and of the new dispensation. Critically, it was not simply an experience for Fox, but it was available to everyone – Fox immediately saw it as an universal possibility and necessity. Equally, the duality between inward (authentic) and outward (apostate) was very quickly drawn. He had nothing outwardly to help him because the outward could not help him, only the inward. This experience was foundational for Fox's sense of right relationship with God and for the Quaker movement as it became established in the following five years. Indeed, the sense of direct encounter with the divine has remained foundational for Quakerism throughout its history. In 1648, Fox underwent a second experience.

'Now I was come up in spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God. All things were new, and all creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but pureness, and innocency, and righteousness, being renewed up into the image of God by Christ Jesus, so that I say I was come up to the state of Adam which he was in before he fell . . . But I was immediately taken up in spirit to see into another or more steadfast state than Adam's in innocency, even into a state in Christ Jesus that should never fall.'²

Here, with the reference to the flaming sword of Genesis 3 and mention of the Fall, we can see Fox's understanding that he had returned to an Edenic state. However, in Scriptural terms, this was not about going back in time, but about the end of time imploding on the present. This paradisaical theology related not only to Genesis but more importantly to Revelation. Fox's sense that he had achieved a sense of perfection, 'a state in Christ Jesus' was about the faithful being connected with God as Christ is, children of God, co-agents with God, the true church called as a vanguard to help all of humanity realise heaven on earth. This inward encounter with Christ was the experience of the unfolding second coming for early Friends and they read their experience and the signs of the times around them very much in terms of the book of Revelation and the coming of the New Jerusalem. Their communion was inward, after Revelation 3:20 ('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 him with me'). They had no need of

² Ibidem, 27.



Interior Quaker Meetinghouse (Historic Buildings Survey, card MD0771)

anachronistic and outward rites designed to help humanity wait faithfully until the time of the second coming – Christ had come again, to the Quakers, and soon would to everyone. This was a sense of unfolding end time, of realising eschatology. Quakers used Jeremiah extensively to talk about the new inward covenant written on their hearts.

‘Behold, the days come saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jeremiah 31: 31-34).’

Quakers had no need of ministers, all were part of the priesthood. Their worship was based in silence (Revelation 8: 1 talks of half an hour of silence

in heaven after the breaking of the seventh seal). They lived as if they were in the end times.

The experience Fox underwent was replicated for many other early Quakers and the narratives of these experiences became widely circulated and followed a similar pattern. We can identify six key stages in early Friends' narratives of their 'convincement' or conviction. Convincement was about a) a powerful in-breaking of God, b) a sense of conviction of sin, c) a choice, repentance, and d) being born again into perfection, or a measure of perfection. These stages are clear in the case of Francis Howgill, one of the other early Quaker leaders.

'My eyes were opened, and all the things that I had ever done were brought to remembrance and the ark of the testament was opened, and there was thunder and lightning and great hail. (a) And then the trumpet of the Lord was sounded, and then nothing but war and rumor of war, and the dreadful power of the Lord fell on me: plague, and pestilence, and famine, and earthquake, and fear and terror, for the sights I saw with my eyes: and that which I heard with my ears, sorrow and pain. And in the morning I wished it had been evening, and in the evening I wished it had been morning and I had no rest, but trouble on every side. (b) And all that ever I had done was judged and condemned, all things were accursed; whether I did eat, or drink, or restrain, I was accursed. Then the lions suffered hunger, and the seals were opened, and seven thunders uttered their voices . . . I became a perfect fool, and knew nothing, as a man distracted; all was overturned, and I suffered loss of all. In all that I ever did, I saw it was in the accursed nature. (c) And then something in me cried: 'Just and true is his judgement!' My mouth was stopped, I dared not make mention of his name, I knew not God. And as I bore the indignation of the Lord, something rejoiced, the serpent's head began to be bruised, and the witnesses which were slain were raised . . . (d) And as I did give up all to judgement, the captive came forth out of prison and rejoiced, and my heart was filled with joy. I came to see him whom I had pierced, and my heart as broken, and the blood of the prophets I saw slain, and a great lamentation. Then I saw the cross of Christ, and stood in it, and the enmity slain on it. And the new man was made . . . the holy law of God was revealed unto me and written on my heart.'³

Ultimately, this experience would lead to e) the convinced gathering together and not carrying on life as before (Howgill talks in another passage of the new Quakers being 'gathered as in a net'), and in the years which followed,

3 Hugh Barbour and Arthur Roberts, *Early Quaker Writings 1650–1700* (Wallingford 2004) 173–74.

f) calling 'the world' towards a new mode of religious experience, i.e. mission (Quakers became the most successful sect of the 1650s in Britain and numbered possibly 80,000 by 1660). The reference to Jeremiah 31:31-34 and the new inward covenant in Howgill's account is clear, as it is to Job 7: 4, with Howgill wishing time away.

Howgill is made anew, not out of his own strength or his own desires, but refined by God, as and when God bids. Quaker preaching was about turning away from apostate forms of worship, and from 'profession without possession', i.e. empty notions, but they could not offer others transformation, only the hope and example of it. Transformation lay with God.

This was not an easy experience and for Isaac Penington, the initial experience of intimacy was too great:

'And indeed at last (when my nature was almost spent, and the pit of despair was even closing its mouth upon me) mercy sprang, and deliverance came, and the Lord my God owned me, and sealed his love unto me, and light sprang within me, which made not only the Scriptures, but the very outward creatures glorious in my eye, so that every thing was sweet and pleasant and light-some round about me. But soon I felt, that this estate was too high and glorious for me, and was not able to abide in it, it so overcame my natural spirits; wherefore, blessing the name of the Lord for his great goodness to me, I prayed unto him to take that from me which I was not able to bear, and to give me such a proportion of his light and presence, as was suitable to my present state, and might fit me for his service. Whereupon this was presently removed from me . . .'⁴

Later, his full conviction was equally distressing:

' . . . I was smitten, broken, and distressed by the Lord, confounded in my worship, confounded in my knowledge, stripped of all in one day . . . and was matter of amazement to all that beheld me. I lay open and naked to all that would inquire of me, and strive to search out what might be the cause the Lord should deal so with me . . . My soul remembereth the wormwood and gall, the exceeding bitterness of that state, and is still humbled in me the remembrance of it before the Lord. Oh how I did wish with Job, that I might come before him, and bowingly plead with him; for indeed I had no sense of any guilt upon me, but was sick of love towards him, and as one violently rent from the bosom of his beloved! Oh, how gladly would I have

4 Isaac Penington, *The Works of Isaac Penington. A minister of the gospel in the Society of Friends* Vol. III., (Glenside, 1996) 101.

met with death! For I was weary all the day long, and afraid of the night, and weary also of the night-season, and afraid of the ensuing day. I remember my grievous and bitter mournings to the lord; how often did I say, O Lord, why hast thou forsaken me? Why hast thou broken me to pieces? I had no delight but thee, no desire after any but thee. My heart was bent wholly to serve thee and thou hast even fitted me (as appeared to my sense) by many deep exercises and experiences for thy service; why dost thou make me thus miserable? . . . In this condition I wandered up and down from mountain to hill, from one sort to another, with a cry in my spirit, Can ye tell news of my beloved? Where doth he dwell? Where doth he appear?⁵

Penington was later still led out of this state by an inward sense of the holy power of the Lord falling upon him. In both instances of Penington's experience, and with Fox too, regeneration comes after a period of deep despair. Again, we have the references to Job and the wishing of time away.

The forms and practices that Quakers became famous for, the use of plain dress and plain speech (only using 'thee' and 'thou' instead of the polite form 'you' came as a consequence of this experience, although in time unconvinced converts would adopt them whilst they waited for their transformation as symbol of their commitment to the new dispensation). In this sense, ideology emerged out of experience for the early Quakers, and was constructed retrospectively. The first systematic Quaker theology did not appear until 1676.

Some of the reason for the delay lies with the depth of the experience these first Friends claimed. They shared their experience, not a theory. But it also lay in a wariness over carnality and worldliness in the very first period of the movement which lasted until the restoration of the monarchy. We find very clear signals that these transformed Friends felt themselves taken out of 'the world' (a pejorative term for anything not Quaker) as part of their new intimacy with God.

The relationship between early Quaker teaching and the book of Revelation brought with it New Jerusalem imagery. Fox wrote:

' . . . I saw the state of the city New Jerusalem, which come out of heaven . . . which the professors had looked upon to be like an outward city or some town that had come out of the elements . . . The spiritual reign of Christ Jesus in this great city . . . is within the light, the city of the living God . . . so here is the city within the light [where] there is no place or language, but there his voice may be heard. The gate stands open night and day that all may come in here . . . Without the city are dogs [Rev 22:15] . . . within this city, here

5 Ibidem, 102.



Quaakers vergadering: *fronti nolla fides*. The Quakers Meeting (Library of Congress Washington, USA, cat.nr. LC-USZ62-5808)

is light, here is life, here is the heavenly bread and blood of the Lamb to eat and drink of I am just in the city. Oh the heavenly Jerusalem, the bride is come down, the marriage of the lamb that must go over all the false cities that have gotten up since the apostles' days This true city is come down since the apostles' days and is coming down from God All that are within the light of Christ and his faith . . . and within the Spirit and the Holy Ghost that Christ and the apostles and prophets were in . . . all that come to this heavenly city, New Jerusalem, that is above the old [and] which is the mother of all true Christians . . . must come to the truth and light in their hearts . . . if they come to be members of this city . . . and so grafted into [Christ Jesus (see Romans 11:17-24)] that they might bring forth heavenly fruit to the heavenly Father that has begotten them and drawn them unto Christ.⁶

This is an account of a vision. However, at times, it seems that some early Friends really felt themselves somewhere else, in a separated space whilst still operating in this world. In his tract, *A Trumpet Sounded Forth Out of Zion*,

6 Douglas Gwyn, *Apocalypse of the Word. The life and message of George Fox 1624-1690* (Richmond 1986) 199-200.

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Edward Burrough is clear of a separation between how he is known by 'the world' and who he really is. The authorship is attributed to 'one whose name is truly known by the children of the same birth, but unknown to the world, though by it called Edward Burrough'. Further into the tract, in a piece addressed to other Quakers, Burrough writes:

'To all you who are in the light of eternal life, which doth comprehend the world, who are born from above, of the immortal word which doth live for ever, who are not of the world . . . who are not known to the world (though by it scornfully called Quakers) even you doth the Lord also remember with everlasting kindness, and infinite love, of whose beginning and End there is none, and whose height, depth, measure and limit cannot be found out; for you hath he chosen above all the Families of the Earth, to place his Name among, and to establish his everlasting Covenant . . .'⁷

Burrough is suggesting that Quakers are those 'born from above' and 'not of the world'. Such sentiment resonates with the following passage from Revelation.

'Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name (Revelation 3:12)'.

It also resonates with the passage from Isaiah 65:15 where it is prophesized that God will 'call his servants by another name.' The following excerpt is from a letter written from Fox to Oliver Cromwell prior to their meeting in 1654.

'I (who am of the world called George ffox) doe deny the carrying or drawing of any carnall sword against any, or against thee Oliver Cromwell or any man in the presence of the (lord god) I declare it (God is my wittnesse, by whom I am moved to give this forth for truthes sake, from him whom the world called George ffox who is the son of God) and who is sent to stand A wittnesse against all violence . . . my kingdom is not of this world, therefore with Carnal weapons I do not fight. Ff. G. who is of the world called George ffox who A new name hath which the world knowes not.

7 Edward Burrough, *A Trumpet Sounded Forth Out of Sion* (1656) 33.

Wee are wittnesses of this testimony whose names in the flesh is Thomas Aldam. Robert Creven.⁸

The duality of 'the world' and of God's kingdom is clear. Friends were known by their outward worldly names in the world but truly only known, and known by their new name, by God. Again, the outward is insignificant contrasted with a higher inward state.

Quakers depicted themselves as un-natural, non-worldly, and inhabiting a space centred on God and the inward, rather than the outwardly and creaturely. Fox's dying words included: 'I am glad I was here . . .'⁹ suggests a dualistic attitude between 'here' and 'I'. As Burrough wrote:

'While waiting upon the Lord in silence, as often as we did for many hours together, with our minds and hearts towards him, being stayed in the light of Christ within us from all thoughts, fleshly motions and desires, we received often the pouring down of the spirit upon us, and our hearts were made glad and our tongues loosened, and our mouths opened, and we spake with new tongues, as the Lord gave us utterance, and his spirit led us, which was poured upon us, as sons and daughters, and to us hereby was the deep things of God revealed, and things unutterable was known and made manifest.'¹⁰

In this Quaker experience, Quakers were remodelled and given new tongues. Scholars note that Friends were charged with a distinctive style of speaking, and that somehow they sought to transcend their outward circumstances.

It is clear then that the first Quakers underwent transforming experiences in which their old lives were left behind, and through which, born anew, they were taken into a renewed spiritual intimacy with God, freed from sin and temptation, all of their lives and concerns dedicated to realising the kingdom of heaven on earth. It was an utopian expression and one that in time would need to be modified to cope with the growth of the movement and the increasing delay between vision and full realisation. However, as above, the sense of direct encounter has remained central to Quakerism through to this day, as has the sense that God chooses when to act in the human life. Unlike political idealism, this appeal to what lies

8 George Fox, *The Journal of George Fox* (Cambridge 1911) 161 – 162.

9 Idem, *The Journal of George Fox* (London 1891) 505.

10 Idem, *The Great Mistry of the Great Whore Unfolded* (London 1659) prelim.

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beyond the material also means the loss of personal control, both necessarily, but ultimately as an ideal in itself.