

SOURCES OF UNIVERSALISM IN QUAKER THOUGHT

Passages from “Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries”
by Rufus Jones

Selected and condensed

by

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“Quakerism is no isolated or sporadic religious phenomenon. It is deeply rooted in a far wider movement that had been accumulating volume and power for more than a century before George Fox became a ‘prophet’ of it to the English people.”

This quotation is taken from Rufus Jones’ book ‘*Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries*’ selected passages from which provide material for this pamphlet. The whole book has a deeply mystical flavour which is admirably reflected in the passages selected. They illustrate the sources from which modern Quaker universalism has developed. Words have occasionally been altered, or added or omitted to ensure clarity of sense.

HANS DENCK

Hans Denck is the earliest exponent in the sixteenth century of a fresh and unique type of religion, deeply influenced by the mystics of a former time, but even more profoundly moulded by the new humanistic conceptions of man’s real nature.

There are few biographical details of Denck’s life available. In 1522 he was appointed Director of St. Sebald’s School in Nuremberg which was then the foremost seat of learning in that city, a great centre of classical humanistic studies. During the first period of his life he was closely identified with the Lutheran movement, but he soon aligned himself with the radical tendencies, which at this period were championed in Nuremberg by Thomas Munzer. It was Munzer’s teaching of the living Voice of God in the soul, of the Word which God Himself speaks in the deeps of man’s heart, that won Hans Denck to the new and perilous cause. He was himself sane, clear-minded, modest, sincere, far-removed from fanaticism, and eager only to find a form of religion which would fit the eternal nature of things on the one hand, and the true nature of man on the other - man, I mean, as the Humanist conceived him. We must now turn to the little books of this persecuted and homeless Humanist to see what his religious teaching really was, and to discover the

foundation principle which lay at the root of all the endeavours of this period to launch a Christianity grounded primarily on the fundamental nature of man.

The fundamental fact of man's nature for Denck is personal *freedom*. He begins with man as he knows him - a sadly marred and hampered being, but still possessed of a potentially Divine nature, and capable of co-operating, by inward choices and decisions with the ceaseless effort of God to win him completely to Himself. His little book, '*What does it mean when the Scripture says God does and works Good and Evil*', is throughout a protest against the idea of "election", which, he says, involves "a limitation of the Love of God", and it is a penetrating account of the way in which a man by his free choices makes his eternal destiny. "God has given free will to men that they may choose for themselves, either the good or the bad." "God," he says again, "forces no one, for love cannot compel, and God's service is, therefore, a thing of complete freedom."

It is freedom, too, which explains the fact of sin. God ordains no one to sin. All the sin and moral evil of the world have come from our own evil choices and purposes. "The thing which hinders and has always hindered is that our wills are different from God's will. God never seeks Himself in His willing - we do. There is no other way to blessedness than to lose one's self-will." The whole problem of salvation for him is to bring about such a transformation in man that sin ceases, and the least thing thought, said, or done out of harmony with the will of God becomes bitter and painful to the soul.

Not only is there a power of free choice in the soul; there is as well an elemental hunger in man which pushes him Godward. There is, he says, a witness in every man. If a man will keep still and listen he will hear what the Spirit witnesses within him. Not only in *us* but in the heathen and in Jews this witness is given, and men might be preached to outwardly forever without perceiving, if they did not have this witness in their own hearts. The Light shines, the invisible Word of God is uttered in the hearts of all men who come into the world. He who turns to this Divine, spiritual reality, which is one with God, and obeys it and loves its leading has already found God and has come to himself. "All who are saved," he says, "are of one spirit with God, and he who is foremost in love is the foremost of those who are saved."

But salvation is from beginning to end a life-process and can in no way be separated from character and personal attitude of will. "He who depends on the merit of Christ," he says, "and yet continues in a fleshly, wicked life, regards Christ precisely as in former times the heathen held their gods." He insists that no one can be "called righteous" or be "counted righteous" until he actually *is* righteous. Nothing can be "imputed" to a man which is not ethically and morally present as a living feature of his character and conduct. No one can know *Christ as a means of salvation* unless he follows Him in his life.

Having reached the insight that salvation is entirely an affair of the spirit, Denck loosened his hold upon the external things. Sacraments and ceremonies dropped to a lower level for him as things of no importance. "Ceremonies," he writes, "in themselves are not sin, but whoever supposes that he can attain to life either by baptism or by partaking of bread, is still in superstition." He appeals to Christians to stop quarrelling over these outward and secondary matters, and to make religion consist of love to neighbour.

He does not belittle or undervalue the Scriptures - he took the precious time out of his brief life to help to translate the Prophets into German - but he wants to make the fact forever plain that men are saved or lost as they say *yes* or *no* to a Light and Word within themselves. "The Holy Scriptures," he writes, "I consider above every human treasure, but not so high as the Word of God which is living, for it is God Himself, Spirit and no letter, written without pen or paper so that it can never be destroyed. For that reason, salvation is

not bound up with the Scriptures, because it is impossible for the Scriptures to make good a bad heart, even though it may be a learned one." *To love God alone and to hate everything that hinders love* is a principle which, Denck believes, will fulfil all law, ancient or modern.

Such were the ideas which this young radical reformer tried to teach his age. His task, which was destined to be hard and painful, which was in his lifetime doomed to failure, was not self-chosen. "I opened my mouth," he says, "against my will and I am speaking to the world because God impels me so that I cannot keep silent. God has called me out and stationed me at my post, and He knows whether good will come of it or not."

BUNDERLIN AND ENTFELDER

The study of Denck has furnished the main outlines of the type of Christianity which a little group of men, sometimes called "Enthusiasts", and sometimes called "Spirituals", but in reality sixteenth-century Quakers, proclaimed in the opening period of the Reformation. They differed fundamentally from Luther in their conception of salvation and in their basis of authority. The inner circle of "Spirituals" was never numerically large. The men, however, who composed it had a very sure grasp of a few definite, central truths to which they were dedicated. They did not endeavour to organize a sect because it was a deeply settled idea with them all, that the true Church is invisible. It is a communion of saints, including those of all centuries who have heard and obeyed the divine inner Word.

The two men whose views we are about to study, are hardly even "names" to the world today. Their little books lie buried in a forgotten past, though the ideas which they promulgated never really died, but were quick and powerful in the formation of the inner life of the religious societies of the English Commonwealth.

Johann Bunderlin, like his inspirer Denck, was a scholar. He understood Hebrew; he knew the Church Fathers in both Greek and Latin. Bunderlin's religious contribution is preserved in three little books, the central ideas of which I shall give in condensed form and largely in my own words, though I have faithfully endeavoured to render him fairly.

Bunderlin held that all external means in religion are to awaken the mind and to direct it to the inward Word. In the infant period of the race God has used the symbol and picture book. The supreme instance of the divine pictorial method was the sending of Christ to reveal God visibly. But no one must content himself with Christ historically known. That is to make an idol of Him. His death as an outward historical fact does not save us; it is the supreme expression of His limitless love and the complete dedication of His spirit in self-giving, and it is effective for our salvation only when it draws us into a similar way of living.

God is training us for a time when picture-book methods will be no longer needed, but all men will live by the inward Word in their own hearts. The written word will always serve as a norm and standard, but the true spiritual goal of life is the formation of a rightly fashioned will. Ceremonies and sacraments do not belong to the religion of the Spirit. Christ's baptism cleanses from sin not with water but with the burning fire of love.

Christian Entfelder, like his teacher Bunderlin, held that everything that concerns religion occurs in the realm of the soul. In every age, and in every land, the inner Word of God, the Voice of the Spirit speaking within, clarifying the mind and training the spiritual perceptions by a progressive experience, has made for itself a chosen people. This is the true church. There is, however, through the ages a steady ripening, a gradual and progressive onward movement of the spiritual process. "He who thinks that he has all the

fruit when strawberries are ripe forgets that grapes are still to come.”

Externals of every type - written Scriptures, even the doings and sufferings of Christ - are only pointers to bring the soul to the living Word within. There is no salvation possible without being buried with Christ in a death to self-will and without rising with Him in joy and peace and victory. Those who have this Sabbath-peace within themselves will give up constructing theological systems, will stop building the Church out of baptism and the supper – “only clay-plastered walls” at best, and they will found the Church instead upon the true sacramental power of the inward Spirit of God. Here, then, in the sixteenth century there appeared a little group of men who proposed that Christianity should be conceived and practised as a *way of living* - nothing more nor less. They rejected theological language root and branch. They seem to have begun afresh with the life and message of Jesus Christ without ever dreaming that all the theological world will unite to stamp out their “pestilent heresy”.

Instead of beginning with the presupposition of original sin, they quietly assert that goodness is at least as “original” as badness. They assert as the ineradicable testimony of their own consciousness that human choices between Light and Darkness are the things which save a man - and this salvation is possible in a pagan, in a Jew, in a Turk even, as well as in a man who says paternosters. They reject all the scholastic accounts of Christ’s metaphysical nature, they will not use the term Trinity. In an age which settled back upon the Scriptures as the only basis for authority in religious faith and practice, they boldly challenged that course as only legalism and scribism in a new dress. They insisted that the Eternal Spirit who had been educating the race from its birth, is a real Presence in the deeps of men’s consciousness, and is ceaselessly voicing Himself there as a living Word whom it is life to obey and death to disregard.

SEBASTIAN FRANCK

Sebastian Franck (b.1499) is one of the most interesting of German Reformers, a man of heroic spirit and a path-breaking genius. No person, however great a genius he may be, can get wholly free from the intellectual climate and the social ideals of his period, but occasionally a man appears who seems to be far ahead of his age. Sebastian Franck was a man of this sort. He was extraordinarily unfettered by medieval inheritance, and he would be able to adjust himself with perfect ease to the spirit and ideas of the modern world if he could be dropped forward into it. Sometime before 1530, Franck had come into intimate connection with Denck, Bunderlin, Schwenckfeld, and other contemporary leaders of the “Spiritual” movement, and their influence upon him was profound.

Franck’s *Book of the Ages* unfolds his conception of the spiritual history of the race, under the tuition of the Divine Word. At the beginning are patriarchs living in the dawn of the world under the guidance of inward vision, and at the end are saints and heretics, whom Franck finds among all races, following the same inward Light, now after the ages grown clearer, and sufficient for those who will patiently and faithfully heed it. “We ought always in all matters to notice what God says *in us* and never to think, or act, against our conscience. Let everyone weigh and test Scripture to see how it fits his own heart. If it is against his conscience and the Word within his own soul, then be sure he had not reached the right meaning, for the Scriptures must give witness *to* the Spirit, never against it.”

This book naturally aroused a storm of opposition, and for the years immediately following, Franck was never secure in any city. He supported himself and his family, now by the humble occupation of soap-boiler, now by working in a printing-house, only asking that he

“might not be forced to bury the talent which God had given him.”

It was Franck’s primary idea that there is a divine element in the very structure of the soul, which is the starting point of all spiritual progress, and the eternal basis of the soul’s salvation. He names this inward endowment by many names. It is the Word of God, the Power of God, Spirit, Mind of Christ, the inward Light. “The inward Light,” Franck says in the *Paradoxa*, “is nothing else than the Word of God, God Himself, by whom all things were made and by whom all men are enlightened.” This deep ground of inner reality is in every person. This Word is eternal and has been the moral and spiritual guide of all peoples in all ages.

Franck always comes back to *experience* as his basis of religion. But “experience” with him does not mean visions and raptures. Ecstasies furnish no ideas or ideals to live by. As fast as the life comes under the sway of the “kingdom of conscience” and a solid moral character is formed, the inner guidance of the Word of God becomes more reliable. Not only must all spiritual experience be subject to the moral test, it must further be tested by the Light of God in other men, and by the *spirit of the Scripture*.

The invisible Church forms the central loyalty of Franck’s fervent soul. “The true Church,” he writes, “is not a separate mass of people, not a particular sect to be pointed out with the finger; it is rather a spiritual and invisible body, seen with the spiritual eye. It is the assembly and communion of all truly God-fearing, good-hearted persons in the world, bound together by the Holy Spirit and the bonds of love. This church the Spirit is building through the ages and in all lands. “Love is the one mark and badge of Fellowship in it.” No outward forms of any sort seem to him necessary for membership in this true Church. “The Kingdom of God is neither prince nor peasant, food nor drink, hat nor coat, here nor there, yesterday nor to-morrow, baptism nor circumcision, nor anything whatever that is eternal but peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, unalloyed love out of a pure heart and good conscience and an unfeigned faith.”

In a letter he says, “I am fully convinced that, after the death of the apostles, the external Church of Christ vanished from the earth, and for these past fourteen hundred years there has existed no true external Church and no efficacious sacraments.”

Franck's valuation of Scripture fits perfectly into this religion of the inward life and the invisible Church. The essential Word of God is the divine revelation in the soul of man. It is the *prius* of all Scripture and it is the key to the spiritual meaning of all Scripture. To substitute Scripture for the self-revealing Spirit is to put the dead letter in the place of the living Word, the horn-pane Lantern in place of the Light. Franck insists that, from its inherent nature, a written Scripture cannot be the final authority in religion: (a) It is outward, while the seat of religion is in the soul; (b) It is transitory and shifting, for language is always in process of change, and written words have different meanings to different ages and in different countries, while for a permanent religion there must be a living, eternal Word that fits all ages, lands, and conditions; (c) Scripture is full of mystery, contradiction, and paradox; (d) Scripture at best brings only knowledge. It lacks the power to deliver from the sin which it describes. No amount of “ink, paper, and letters”, can make a man good, since religion is not knowledge but a way of living. Franck pushes back through “the ink, paper, and letters of Scripture” to the Spirit and Truth which these great writings reveal.

Sin means, for Franck, the *free choice* of something for one’s private and particular self in place of life-aims that fulfil the good of the whole. It is not inherited, it is self-chosen. We do not sin and fall because Adam did; we sin and fall because we are human and finite, as he was.

This will be sufficient to show the character of the religion of this lonely man. He was too remote from the currents of evangelical Christianity to impress the common people, and he was too radical a thinker to lead even the scholars who had become liberated from tradition by their humanistic studies and by historical insight.

CASPAR SCHWENCKFELD

Caspar Schwenckfeld was born of a noble family in Lower Silesia, in 1489. He always remembered that it was the trumpet call of Luther which had summoned him to a new life, and he always carried in his long exile - an exile for which Luther was largely responsible - a beautiful respect and appreciation of the man who had first turned him to a knowledge of the truth.

Luther's final break with the spiritual Reformer of Silesia was primarily occasioned by Schwenckfeld's teaching on the meaning and value of the Lord's Supper. Schwenckfeld's position had culminated in a suspension of the celebration of the Lord's Supper - the so-called *Stillstand* - until a right understanding of it according to the will of the Lord should be revealed. The immediate effect of his position was such a collision with Luther that Schwenckfeld's mission in Silesia became impossible. He went in 1529 into voluntary exile, never to return. For thirty years he was a wanderer, but he could thank his Lord Christ, as he did, for granting him an inward freedom, and for bringing him into "His castle of Peace". We must now turn to a study of his type of Christianity, as it appears in his life and writings.

All spiritual service (Schwenckfeld held) arises through the definite call and commission of God, and the persons so called and commissioned are rightly prepared for their service, not by election and ordination, but by inward compulsion and illumination. Schwenckfeld has returned, as far as with his limited historical insight he knew how to do it, to the ideal of the primitive Apostolic Church.

It was his ideal purpose to promote the formation of little groups of spiritual Christians which should live in the land in quietness. He saw clearly that no true Reformation could be carried through by edicts. To this work of building up little scattered societies under the headship of Christ, he dedicated his years in exile. The public records of Augsburg reveal the existence, during Schwenckfeld's life, of a remarkable group of these quiet, spiritual worshippers in that city. Their leaders were men of menial occupations. Under the inspiration they received from the writings of Schwenckfeld they formed "a little meeting" - in every respect like a seventeenth-century Quaker meeting - in their own homes, meeting about in turn, discarding all use of sacraments, and waiting on God for edification rather than on public preaching. They objected to any form of religious exercise which did not spring directly out of the inward ministry of the Word of God.

Schwenckfeld's books and tracts found eager readers and transmitters. Even so early as 1551, an English writer mentions the "Schwengfeldianes". One of the most obvious signs of his influence in the seventeenth century appears in the "Collegiants" of Holland and the corresponding societies of "Seekers" in England. The cardinal principle of these groups in both countries was the belief that the visible Church had become apostate. Therefore those who held this view, were waiting and seeking for the appearing of a new apostolic commission, for the fresh outpouring of God's Spirit on men, and for the refounding of the Church.

“We ask,” Schwenckfeld writes, “where in the world to-day there is gathered together an external Church of the apostolic form and type.” And yet scattered everywhere throughout the world - even in Turkey and Calcutta - God has, he says, His own faithful people, known only to Him, who live Christ-like and holy lives. But the time is coming when once more there will be a completely reformed Church of Christ. In the interim let the chosen children of God, he writes, rejoice that their salvation rests neither in an external Church, nor in the external use of sacraments, nor in any external thing.

SEBASTIAN CASTELLIO

There were serious and impressive attempts to give the Reformation a totally different course from the one it finally took in history, and these attempts, defeated by the sweep of the main current, became submerged and their heroic leaders became forgotten. Sebastian Castellio is one of these submerged venturers. But after the long and silent flow of years the world has come up to his position.

He was born in a little French village in the year 1515. Sometime during his college period he came under the influence of the divine and simple Christ of the Gospels, whom the most serious of the Humanists had rediscovered, and to whom Castellio now dedicated the central loyalty of his soul. At twenty-five years of age, now a splendid classical scholar, Castellio went to Strasbourg to share the task of the Reformers. In 1541 Calvin summoned Castellio to help him, and made him Principal of the College of Geneva, which Calvin planned to make one of the foremost seats of Greek learning and one of the most illuminating centres for the study of the Scriptures.

In the course of his studies Castellio found himself compelled to take the position that the “Song of Solomon” was an ancient love poem, and that the traditional interpretation of it as a revelation of the true relation between Christ and the Church was a strained and unnatural interpretation. He also felt that as a scholar he could not with intellectual honesty agree with the statement in the Catechism that “Christ descended into Hell”. Calvin challenged both of these positions.

Calvin made it impossible for him to continue in Geneva his work as an honest scholar. To remain meant that he must surrender his right of independent judgment, he must cease to follow the line of emancipated scholarship, he must adjust his conscience to fit the ideas that were coming to be counted orthodox in the circle of the Reformed faith. He went into voluntary exile where he might think and speak as he saw the truth. For ten years (1545-1555) he lived with his large family in pitiable poverty. He fished with a boathook for driftwood along the shores of the Rhine. Every moment that could be saved went into the Herculean task to which he had dedicated himself - the complete translation of the Bible into both Latin and French.

In the Preface of his Latin Bible he boldly insists that the Reformation shall champion the principle of *free conscience*, and shall wage its battles with spiritual weapons alone. The only enemies of our faith, he says, are vices, and vices can be conquered only by virtues. The Christ who said if they strike you on one cheek turn the other, has called us to the spiritual task of instructing men in the truth, and that work can never be put into the hands of an executioner!

Two years after this appeal to the new Protestantism to make the great venture of spreading its truth by love and persuasion, there came from Geneva the decisive answer in the burning of Servetus, followed by the famous *Defence*, written mainly by Calvin. One month later, a

brief Latin work appeared in favour of toleration. The Preface was beyond doubt written by Castellio. This preface is one of the mother documents on freedom of conscience.

“Christ asked *us* to put on the white robes of a pure and holy life, but what occupies our thought? We dispute not only of the way to Christ, but of His relation to God the Father, of the Trinity, of predestination, of free will, of the nature of God, of angels, of the condition of the soul after death - of a multitude of matters that are not essential for salvation.”

He describes “an honest follower of Christ who believes in God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, and who wants to do His will, but cannot see that will just as others about him see it.” “I ask you whether Christ, who forgave those who went astray, and commanded His followers to forgive until seventy times seven, Christ who is the final Judge of us all, if He were here, would command a person like that to be killed!” . . . “O Christ” he cries out, “doest Thou see and approve these things? Hast Thou become a totally different person from what Thou wert? When Thou wert on earth, nothing could be more gentle and kind, more ready to suffer injuries. Thou wert like a sheep dumb before the shearers. Beaten, spat upon, mocked, crowned with thorns, crucified between thieves, Thou didst pray for those who injured Thee. Hast Thou changed to this? Art Thou now so cruel and contrary to Thyself? Dost Thou command that those who do not understand Thy ordinances and commandments as those over us require, should be drowned, or drawn and quartered, and burned at the stake!”

Calvin, who recognized the hand of Castellio in this defence of freedom of thought, proceeded to demolish him in a Reply. In his answer to this Reply, Castellio declares, “I do not defend Servitus. I have never read his books. Calvin burned them together with their author. I do not want to burn Calvin or to burn his book. I am only going to *answer* it.” All the sects, he reminds the great Reformer, claim to be founded on the Word of God. They all believe that their religion is true. Calvin says that his is *the only true one*. Each of the others says that his is the only true one. Calvin says that they are wrong. He makes himself (by what right I do not know) the judge and sovereign arbiter. He claims that he has on his side the sure evidence of the Word of God. Then why does he write so many books to prove what is evident? The truth is surely not evident to those who die denying that it is truth! Calvin asks how doctrine is to be guarded if heretics are not to be punished. “Doctrine,” cries Castellio, “Christ’s doctrine means loving one’s enemies, returning good for evil, having a pure heart and a hunger and thirst for righteousness. *You* may return to Moses if you will, but for us others, Christ has come.”

Love, he constantly insists, is the supreme badge of any true Christianity, and the traits of the beatitudes in a person’s life are a surer evidence that he belongs in Christ’s family, than is the fact that he holds current opinions on obscure questions of belief. “There is no doubt about the worth of forgiveness, of patience, of pity, of kindness, and of obedience to duty. Why leave these sure things and quarrel over inscrutable mysteries?”

“There are, I know,” he says, “persons who insist that we should believe even against reason. It is however, the worst of errors, and it is laid upon me to fight it. I may not be able to exterminate the monster, but I hope to give it such a blow that it will know it has been hit. Let no one think that he is doing wrong in using his mental faculties. It is our proper way at arriving at the truth.”

There have been, Castellio holds, progressive stages in the Divine education of the race. The mark of advance is always found in the progress from law and letter to spirit, from outward ceremonies to inward experience. The written word of God is the garment of the Divine Thought which is the real Word of God. Only the person who has in himself the illumination of the same Spirit that gave the original revelation can see through the garment

of the letter to the eternal message. Within us, as image of God, there is a Divine Reason, which existed before books, before rites, before the foundation of the world, and will exist after books and rites have vanished, and the world has gone to wreck. It was by this that Jesus Christ lived and taught us how to live. This Reason is in all ages the right investigator and interpreter of Truth, even though time changes outward things and written texts grow corrupt.

Castellio was not a theologian of the Reformation type. The time was not ready for him but he did his day's work with loyalty, sincerity, and bravery, and seen in perspective is worthy to be honoured as a hero and a saint.

COORNHERT AND THE COLLEGIANTS

One of the earliest Dutch exponents of this type of spiritual religion which we have been studying as a by-product of the Reformation in Germany, was Dirck Volckertsz Coornhert. He was born in Amsterdam in 1522. A keen desire to go back to the original sources of religious truth and to read the New Testament and the Fathers in their own tongue induced him to learn Greek and Latin after he was thirty years of age. He undertook the translation of great masterpieces, such as Erasmus' *Paraphrases of the New Testament*. He was throughout his life deeply influenced by Erasmus.

In his youth he had seen with his own eyes the methods which the Spanish Inquisition employed to compel uniformity of faith and he dedicated himself to the cause of liberty of religious thought. With this passion for intellectual and spiritual freedom was joined a deeply grounded disapproval of the fundamental ideas of Calvinism. As a Humanist, he was convinced that however man had been marred by a fall, he was still possessed of native gifts, and bore deep within himself an unlost central being, which joined him indissolubly to God.

On the great theological issues of the day he "disputed" against the leading theologians of the Netherlands. Jacobus Arminius, at the turning of his career, was selected to make once for all a refutation of Coornhert's dangerous writings. He, however, became so impressed, as he studied the works which he was to refute, that he accepted many of Coornhert's views, and became himself a greater "heretic" and a more dangerous opponent of Calvinism than the man he was chosen to annihilate. He frequently mentions Franck by name and quotes his views. It is certain, too, that he loved and translated the writings of Sebastian Castellio.

Coornhert himself endeavoured to find the way to a religion grounded in the nature of things and of universal value, the "law" of true religion is a disposition toward goodness. Religion, of this true and saving sort, never comes through hearsay knowledge, or along the channels of tradition, or by head knowledge of texts and of the written word. It comes only with inward experience of the Word of God, and it grows and deepens as the will of man lives by the Will of God. Every stage of this process, which in a word is *obedience to the Light*, makes the fact and meaning of sin clearer, and the nature of goodness more plain, and it leads away from a superstition of fear to a religion of love and joy. The real Sabbath is not a sacred day, but rather an inward quiet, a prevailing peace of soul, a rest in the life of God from stress and strain and passion.

Coornhert especially criticizes Calvin for having given undue prominence to "pure doctrine". All speculations about the Trinity, or about the dual nature of Christ, transcend our knowledge and should be rejected.

On behalf of those who could not conform, he pleaded for freedom of conscience and for the right to live undisturbed as members of the invisible Church, waiting meantime and seeking in quiet faith for the coming of new and divinely commissioned apostles who would *really reform* the apostate Churches, and gather in the world a true Church of Christ.

Meantime, while waiting for this true apostolic Church to appear, Coornhert approved of the formation of an *interim-Church*. This interim-Church was to have no authoritative teachers or preachers. In place of official ministry, the members were to edify one another in Christian love. All persons who confess God as Father, and Jesus Christ as sent by God, and who in the power of faith abstain from sins, may belong to this interim-Church. Coornhert's proposed interim-Church, conceived as only a temporary substitute for the true apostolic Church, for which every spiritual Christian is a "seeker", found actual embodiment in a movement of the early seventeenth century, known in Dutch history as the "Collegiants".

The leaders of this movement, the Van der Kodde brothers, owed the course of their religious development to the writings of men like Sebastian Castellio and Jacobus Acontius, the Italian humanist, who laid down the principles that no majority can make a binding law in matters of faith, that only God's Spirit in the hearts of men can certify what is truth. Deeply imbued with the ideas of these spiritual reformers, and in sympathy with many of the views and practices of the Mennonites about them, the Van der Kodde brothers decided to come together without any minister and hold a meeting of the free congregational type.

Giesbert Van der Kodde now expressed himself emphatically against listening to preachers who lived without working and at the expense of the community and who hindered the free exercise of "prophecy". They soon moved their meeting (called a Collegium, i.e. gathering) to the neighbouring town of Rynsburg, where it received additions to its adherents, largely drawn from the Mennonites, many of whose ideas were strongly impressed upon the little "Society", - for example, opposition to taking oaths, and refusal to fight. They also adopted, as the Mennonites did, the Sermon on the Mount as the basis of their ethical standard. They insisted on simplicity of life, plainness of garb, rejection of the world's etiquette, absence of titles in addressing persons, and equality of men and women, even in public ministry.

From the first there was a pronounced tendency to encourage a ministry of "prophetic openings". John Van der Kodde declared that he should fear the loss of his salvation if he failed in a meeting to give utterance to the Word of God revealed to him in his inner being. They encouraged the custom of silent waiting as a preparation for "openings". They, however, were persons of scholarship and refinement, and not tumultuous or strongly emotional, but, on the contrary, they highly valued dignity and propriety of behaviour.

As the movement spread, *Collegia*, or societies, were formed in other localities. Once every year they had a large yearly meeting at Rynsburg, to which members came from all parts of Holland.

A young Mennonite doctor, Galenus Abrahams, soon became the most prominent Collegiant leader in Holland. We get a very interesting sidelight on Galenus Abrahams in the *Journal* of George Fox. William Penn and George Keith held a "discussion" with this famous Collegiant leader in 1677. Fox himself had a personal interview with Abrahams at about the same time. Fox says that he found this "notable teacher", very high and shy, so that he would not let me touch him nor look upon him, but he bid me keep my eyes off him, for he said they pierced him!" But at a later visit, in 1684, Fox found the Collegiant doctor "very loving and tender". In spirit they were very near together, and with a little more insight on both sides the two movements might have joined.

The most important book which came from a member of this group - *The light on the Candlestick* - is indistinguishable in its body of ideas from Quaker teaching and differs only in one point, that it reveals a more philosophically trained mind in the writer than does any early Quaker book with the single exception of Barclay's Apology. The author was probably Peter Balling, one of a group of scholarly Collegiants. *The Light on the Candlestick* was very quickly discovered by the Quakers, who circulated it as a Quaker Tract. It was translated into English in 1663.

The Collegiant author writes in this book, "We direct thee to within thyself, to mind and have regard unto, that which is within thee, to wit, the Light of Truth, the true Light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world. Here thou shalt find a Principle certain and infallible, through which increasing and going on into, thou mayest at length arrive unto a happy condition. Of this thou mayest highly adventure the tryal. He that will not adventure, shall never begin, much less finish his own salvation. We say then, that we exhort every one to turn unto the Light that's in him."

We can judge no doctrine, no Book to be Divine (he writes) except by some inward and immediate knowledge of what really is Divine. Without this Light the Scriptures are only Words and Letters. No finite thing can bring us a knowledge of God unless we already have within us a sufficient knowledge of Him to make us able to appreciate and judge the Divine character of the particular revelation. God must be assumed as present in the soul before any basis of truth or of religion can be found. "The Light is the first Principle of Religion. - Mind, therefore, the Light that is within thee."

This Light - the first Principle, of all Religion - is also called in this little Book by many other names. It is "the living Word", "the Truth of God", "the Light of Truth"; it is "Christ"; it is the "Spirit". As a Divine Light, it reproves man of sin. It leads man into Truth "even though he has never heard or read of Scripture"; it gives him peace of conscience in well-doing; and, if followed and obeyed, it brings him into union with God. It operates in all men. As soon as a man turns to it, he discovers "A Principle whereby he may, without ever erring, guide the whole course of his life, how he is to carry himself toward God, his Neighbour and himself". The author is not trying to draw his readers to any new sect. He says, "We will not draw thee off from one heap of men to carry thee over unto another."

Such is the teaching of this strange little book, revealing the maturest expression of this slowly developing spiritual movement, which began with Hans Denck, flowed through many lives, and burst out full flood in England in "the Children of the Light", who were known to the world as Quakers.

CONCLUSION

The Quakers of the seventeenth century are obviously one of the great historical results of this slowly maturing spiritual movement, and they first gave the movement a concrete body and organism to express itself through. The modern student, who goes to the original exposition of Quakerism to find out what the leaders of this movement conceived their message to be, quickly discovers that they were not radical innovators setting forth novel and strange ideas, but that they were on the contrary, the living embodiment of ideas which have now become familiar to the reader of these chapters.

It was, we are now well aware, out of the Seeker-groups of the northern counties of England that the new "Society" was actually born, and it grew as it gathered in the prepared groups

of “Seekers”. The creation of the Quaker “Society” was not the work of any man; the groups were there before the formative leader appeared. In fact the very term "Quaker" had already been in use as far back as 1646 for the members of some of these highly emotional Seeker communities. As soon as these groups - intense in their expectations - found a leader, the effect was extraordinary. Their group-experience of a common divine Spirit coming upon their lives, their discovery that God was in their midst and Fox’s compelling sense of apostolic mission, were grounds enough to change these Seeker groups into a Body possessed of the faith that the long-expected Church of the Spirit had at last come.

Fox reveals in a variety of ways his connections with the great body of spiritual ideas that had been accumulating for more than a century before his time, but for the most part these influences worked upon him in subconscious ways, as an atmosphere and climate of his spirit, rather than as a clearly conceived body of truth which he got by reading authors. He can be rightly appreciated only as he is seen to be a member of an organic group-life which formed him as much as he formed it.

The expositions of the more scholarly Quakers show an explicit acquaintance with the writings of these men whom we have been studying, and they cannot be adequately understood in isolation. The ideas and peculiar phrases of the spiritual reformers “pass and come again” in their works. No Quaker has presented this view in a more adequate way than has Barclay in one of his early Tracts: “The manner whereby Christ’s righteousness, death and sufferings, become profitable unto us, is by receiving Him, and becoming one with Him in our hearts, and we are cleansed from our sins, not *imaginarily*, but really, and we are really and truly made righteous”.

The root principle of Quakerism is belief in a divine Light in the soul of man. It is also frequently called “the Word of God”, or “That of God in you”, or “Christ within”. But under whatever name it goes, it is always thought of as a *saving Principle* for him who says yes, responds, obeys, co-operates, and allows this resident Seed of God to have full sway in him. All the Quaker terms for the *Principle* were used by Sebastian Franck and by Caspar Schwenckfeld.

Quakerism is, thus, no isolated religious phenomenon. It is deeply rooted in a far wider movement that had been accumulating volume and power for more than a century before George Fox became a “prophet” of it to the English people. And both in its new English and its earlier continental form, it was a serious attempt to achieve a more complete Reformation, to restore primitive Christianity, and to change the basis of authority from external things, of any sort whatever to the interior life and spirit of man.