

Brief History of George Fox

George Fox

George Fox was born in 1624 and was raised by Puritan parents. He was a young man during the height of the civil war in England, but he played no role in it. At this time he was wandering the countryside in England, reading the Bible inside and out, and pressing anyone who would talk to him for answers to inward questions. He struggled extensively with despair because he felt he could not live a righteous life. He found the preachers of his day, who encouraged him to accept his sinful and imperfect nature, to be “poor comforters”. He continued to search the Bible and his own inner conscience for an answer to his despair.

As the Puritan revolution progressed and radicalized, many began to distrust any religious authority and any ritual expression of the gospel. It seemed to them that none of the existing alternatives were faithful to the life and teachings of Jesus. It also seemed to them that all religious ritual seemed hollow and empty. Some of these people (called Ranters) began to give up their search of the Truth and rather spent their energy mocking Truth and drinking, etc. Others called themselves Seekers and simply sat in silence in their meetings, waiting for a deeper Truth to be revealed.

Fox had discovered within himself a Voice or a Light or a Guide that began to teach him and bring him into a new life that brought him out of his despair. He had many names for this direct and unmediated experience of the Divine. He then began to feel led by this Light Within to preach about it. The message he preached was simple – that Christ had come to teach his people himself. George Fox had nothing to teach others, except to direct them to the Living Christ within themselves.

This message – that Christ had come and that he was available to all in their own inner conscience – had a profound resonance to many of those radical puritans who had begun to distrust any outward religious authority or ritual. Fox’s message helped them to find what they were looking for: an inward spiritual authority that could give their lives meaning and order.

During the late 1640s and 1650s, Fox continued to travel the countryside, going from town to town, but now he carried a message. Within a few years, Fox had begun to draw together a community of people who waited on the guidance of the Christ Within to lead them in all aspects of life – from worship to the conduct of business to outward testimonies to the world.

By Andrew Wright, Durham Friends Meeting

Overview

Four key aspects of George Fox’s thoughts and how they would shape the Quaker movement he would go on to found. The four aspects are:

- **a) Spiritual experience is at the heart of the Quaker faith and has the greatest authority, not text, tradition or church;**
- **b) For the first Quakers, true religion is inward;**
- **c) Fox is clear that everyone can have the kind of transforming experience he has had;**
- **d) Everyone is spiritually equal**