



Three Quaker Texts

William Penn, Isaac Penington, Joan Mary Fry

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I WILL BEGIN here also with the beginning of time, the morning. So as you wake, retire your mind into a pure silence, from all thoughts and ideas of worldly things, and in that frame wait upon God, to feel his good presence, to lift up your hearts to him; and commit your whole self into his blessed care and protection. Then rise, if well, immediately.

Being dressed, read a chapter or more in the Scriptures, and afterward dispose yourselves of the business of the day, ever remembering that God is present, the overseer of all your thoughts, words and actions...

And if you have intervals from your lawful occasions, delight to step home – within yourselves, I mean – and commune with your own hearts and be still.... This will bear you up against all temptations, and carry you sweetly and evenly through your day's business, supporting you under disappointments and moderating your satisfaction in success and prosperity. The evening come, read again the Holy Scripture, and have your times of retirement before you close your eyes, as in the morning. So the Lord may be the Alpha and Omega of your lives. – William Penn, 1693.

AND OH, HOW SWEET and pleasant it is to the truly spiritual eye to see several sorts of believers, several forms of Christians in the school of Christ, every one learning their own lesson, performing their own peculiar service, and knowing, owning, and loving one another in their several places and different performances to their Master, to whom they are to give an account, and not to quarrel with one another about their different practices (Rom. 14.4). For this is the true ground of love and unity, not that such a man walks and does just as I do, but because I feel the same Spirit and life in him, and that he walks in his rank, in his own order, in his proper way and place of subjection to that; and this is far more pleasing to me than if he walked just in that track wherein I walk. Nay... I cannot so much as desire that he should do so, until he be particularly let thereto, by the same Spirit which led me. And he that knows what it is to receive any truths from the Spirit, and to be led into practices by the Spirit, and how prone the fleshy part is to make haste, and how dangerous that haste is, will not be forward to press his knowledge or practices upon others, but rather wait patiently till the Lord fit them for the receiving thereof...

The great error of the ages of the apostacy hath been to set up an outward order of uniformity, and to make men's consciences bend thereto, either by arguments of wisdom, or by force; but the property of the true church government is, to leave the conscience to its full liberty in the Lord, to preserve it single and entire for the Lord to exercise, and to seek unity in the light and in the Spirit, walking sweetly and harmoniously together in the midst of different practices. – Isaac Penington, 1659.

FOR EACH and all the silence and stillness are needed. It is not that the worshipers wait for something to happen, for the service to begin. That would be like the hush before a storm, when no leaf or twig dares to stir. That is not the waiting in a Friends' Meeting. Think rather of the high noon of Summer, or the stillness of a snow-covered country, how the heat or lightness everywhere gives an intense sense of overflowing and abounding life, making a quietness of rapture rather than of fear. Such, only of a deeper and far more intimate kind, is the atmosphere of waiting souls.

It may be that words will spring out of those depths, it may be that vocal prayer or praise shall flow forth at the bidding of Him Whose presence makes worship a communion, but whether there be speech or silence matters not.

Gradually, as mind, soul, and even body grow still, sinking deeper and deeper into the life of God, the pettiness, the tangles, the failures of the outer life begin to be seen in their true proportions, and the sense of Divine infilling, uplifting, redeeming Love becomes real and illuminating. Things are seen and known that are hidden to the ordinary faculties. This state is not merely one of quiescence; the soul is alive, active, vigorous, yet so still that it hardly knows how intense is its own vital action. – J.M. Fry, 1911