



# ***Improving Silence***

*Three Quaker texts for soprano voice and guitar*

*Nigel Morgan*

This study score has been downloaded from the [website archive](#) of composer Nigel Morgan. The PDF file is solely for personal study, repertoire research or educational reference. It is not intended for use in public performance except in educational situations when an extract is required for illustration purposes.

Performance scores and parts are available from Tonality Systems Press in two formats: as standard printed and bound paper copies, and as PDF electronic masters carrying a special electronic license for an unlimited number of performances over an agreed period. For more information please e-mail [Tonality Systems Press](#).



# *Improving Silence*

*Three Quaker texts  
for soprano voice and guitar*

*Nigel Morgan*

## **About the music**

The Quakers, known today as The Religious Society of Friends, have their origins in the Puritan sects of 17 Century Britain. They hold to no creed, they have no liturgy or established doctrine, their religious services are meetings held in silence. What might be said to constitute a theology is a rich tradition of testimonial writing of personal experience; it is from this tradition three texts have been chosen, two from the late 17C and one from the beginning of the 20C. These texts have been distilled for setting to music in poetic paraphrase. No words have been added, but the texts simply stripped of any unnecessary description or amplification until they assume a poetic form. The composer has devised the descriptive titles. Together these three paraphrases pull together some of the essential aspects of Quaker spirituality, faith and practice.

**Alpha and Omega** is from a text by William Penn, one of the founding fathers of Quakers in America, whose name lives after him in the state of Pennsylvania. He was a close associate of the founder of the Quaker movement George Fox. Written during his time in America and published in 1682 in a pamphlet *No Cross No Crown* this paraphrase is a gentle guide to a right structure in daily life. It stresses the importance of time for ‘retiring the mind into pure silence’ and for regarding God as the ‘overseer of your thoughts, words and actions’.

**The School of Christ** is taken from the words of a contemporary of Penn, Isaac Penington whose writings were published in 4 volumes in the late 17C. The text is a response to Romans 14.4 in which St Paul expresses concerns for the way Christians tend to judge one another. Paul says ‘Let us then pursue the things that make for peace and build up the common life’. Penn says ‘Leave conscience to its full liberty . . . seek unity in the Light, walking together’.

**Meeting for Worship** is a meditation by the 20C social reformer and author Joan Mary Fry (sister of the artist Roger Fry). This text is part of her Swarthmore lecture of 1910, subsequently published as *The Communion of Life*. The words invite us to look first to nature as a way to grasp the essence of a silent meeting, ‘Think of the high noon of summer. Think of the stillness of snow’. Fry also talks about ‘sinking deeper into the life of God’ where the ‘tangles of the outer life may be seen in their true proportions’.

## **Performance Notes**

The singer and guitarist might adopt a presentation and delivery that reflects something of the Quaker tradition. If appropriate and possible there could be a period of silence before and after each song.

No dynamics markings have been added to the score to allow performers to respond freely to their collective readings of the text.

A performing score in portrait is available. This contains comprehensive fingering for the guitarist to realise the many resonant effects called for in the score.

## **Alpha and Omega**

I will begin . . .  
with the morning  
(with the beginning of time)

As you wake,  
retire your mind  
into a pure silence,  
from all thoughts  
of worldly things,  
. . . and wait upon God,  
to feel his good presence,  
to commit your whole self,  
into his blessed care.

Then rise . . . (if well)  
immediately,  
ever remembering  
that God is present,  
the overseer  
of your thoughts,  
your words,  
your actions . . .

If you have intervals  
from those lawful occasions  
delight to step home  
(within yourself I mean).  
Commune with your heart  
and be still.

I will end . . .  
with the evening,  
(with the ending of time)

The evening come . . .  
Read again the Holy Scripture,  
and have your time of retirement  
before you close your eyes.

(So the Lord may be  
the Alpha and Omega  
of your life)

*William Penn 1682*

## **The School of Christ**

And oh, how sweet  
and pleasant to the  
truly spiritual eye  
to see several forms in the School of Christ.  
Everyone learning their own lesson,  
and knowing, owning, loving  
one another in their several places.

To feel the same spirit and life,  
to walk in our own order.  
Knowing what it is to receive truth.

For this is the true ground  
of love and unity.

Beware haste,  
not pressing knowledge and practice,  
but waiting patiently  
till the Lord fits such to be received.

Leave conscience to its full liberty.  
Preserve it single and entire,  
seek unity in the Light  
walking together.

*Isaac Penington 1659*

### **Meeting for Worship**

For each and all.  
We need silence and stillness.  
For each for all,  
that atmosphere of waiting souls;  
this is not the hush before the storm,  
when no twig moves  
no leaf dares to stir.

Think of the high noon of summer,  
think of the stillness of snow,  
how heat or lightness  
everywhere  
give that sense of abounding life,  
making a quietness of rapture

As mind, as soul,  
as even the body grows 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 infilling, uplifting  
Divine Redeeming Love  
becomes real.  
Not quiescence, the soul is alive,  
yet so still,  
it hardly knows  
its own  
intensity.

*Joan Mary Fry 1911*

# Alpha and Omega

*with purpose* ♩ = 75

**Soprano**

*I will be - gin with the mor - ning*

*(with the be - gi - nning of*

**Guitar**

*(risonare sempre)*

7

*poco a poco ritard.*

*a tempo primo*

*time)*

*As you a - wake re - tire your mind in - to a pure si - lence,*

15

*from all thoughts of worl - dly things and wait u - pon God to feel his pre - sence.*

21

to co-mmit your whole self in to his ble-ssed care then rise (if well)

28

i-mme-di-ate-ly e-ver re-mem-be-ring that God is pre-sent,

35

the o-ver-see-r of your thoughts, your words, your ac-tions



41

if you have in - ter - vals from your law - ful o - cca - sions de - light to step

48

*(sotto voce)* *(normale)* *poco a poco ritard.*  $\text{♩} = 75$  *tempo primo*

home (wi - thin your self I mean) Co - mmune with your heart and be still. I will end

*(risonare)*

54

with the eve - ning (with the en - ding of time) the

*molto ritardando e calando*

eve-ning come read a - gain the Ho - ly Scrip- tures and have your time of re-tire-ment be - fore you close your eyes.

# The School of Christ

with consideration ♩ = 60

Soprano

And Oh, how sweet and plea - sant to the tru - ly spi - ri - tual eye to see

Guitar

(risonare)

5

se - v'ral forms in the School of Christ. E - very one lear - ning their own le - sson, and

10

kno - wing, ow - ning, lo - ving one a - no - ther in their se - v'ral pla - ces.

16

To feel the same spi - rit and life, to walk in our own or - der. Know - ing

(risonare)

22

what it is to re - ceive truth. For this is the true ground of love and u - ni - ty

28

*poco a poco accelerando* *a tempo primo* *poco a poco accel.* ♩ = 90 *tempo primo*

be - ware haste not pre - ssing love and pa - tience but wai - ting

(stacatto e pizzicato) (risonare)

34 ♩ = 60

pa - tient - ly till the Lord fits such to be re - ceived. Leave

40

con-science to its full li-ber - ty. Pre - serve it sing - le and en - tire. Seek

48

u - ni - ty in the Light. Wal - king to - ge ther.

# Meeting for Worship

*with an attentive mind* ♩ = 50

**Soprano**

For each and all we need si - lence and still - ness. For each for all

**Guitar**

(risonare)

† = D

5

*(quasi parlando)*

*normale*

the at - mo - sphere of wai - ting souls, this is not the hush be - fore the storm when no twig moves no leaf dare to

11

♩ = 100

stir. = ♩

Think of the high noon of su - mmer. Think of the still - ness of snow

18

how heat or light - ness e-v'ry - where give that sense of a boun - ding life, ma - king a qui - et-ness of

23

*poco a poco ritard.*

rap- ture. As mind, as soul, as e-ven the bo- dy grows still, sin - king dee-per and dee-per in-to the life

29

*a tempo*

of God, the pe- tti- ness, the tan - gles, the fai - lures of the ou - ter life be - gin to be

36

seen in their true proportions, and the sense of in-filling, up-

41

(quasi parlando)

lif-ting, Di-vine Re-dee-ming Love be-comes real. Not qui-e-sence, the soul's a-live.

46

*a tempo primo* ♩ = 50  
(normale)

Yet so still, it hard-ly knows its own in-ten-si-ty.

for Alice Fox