George Fox: The Significance of His Life and Work to the Study of Mysticism

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The main lines of the life of George Fox are so well known as to require no full treatment here; therefore the writer shall concern himself only with those biographical features which have special bearing upon the relation of Fox to the study of mystical religion.

In common with most significant men, Fox was in a large degree the product of his times. His years of spiritual struggle and crisis coincided with the most stormy years in the religious life of England. The fall of the monarchy left the government, not directly in the hands of the Scotch Calvinists, but in the hands of the Independents. The old order was shaken; England was not ready for a reign of universal Presbyterianism; the Calvinists were no less implacable than they had been before.

It is not surprising, therefore, that at this time religious sects of every sort appeared, and extravagances were common. All this was indicative of a religious revolution, whose currents ran deeper than these surface eddies. The religious soul of England was stirring; and a new faith was being born—a faith which proposed to trust the individual with liberty and responsibility.

Such groups as the Seekers and the Ran ters were, quite apart from the soundness of their work, straws in the wind. But they served to crystallize no stable movement, for as Thomas Edwards says:

The sect of Seekers grows very much and all sorts of Sectaries turn Seekers; many leave the congregations of Independents, Anabaptists, and fall to be Seekers, and not only people but Ministers also; and whosoever lives but a few years (if the sects be suffered to go on) will see that all the other sects ... will be swallowed up in Seekers.”¹

Thus, there was a need for some leader who should be able to rally the Seekers into a group bearing some semblance of homogeneity.

I. The Conversion of Fox

Into the Midlands was born George Fox. His mother was, as he himself said, “of the stock of the martyrs.” In his youth, he was a serious, sober-minded boy, with a dislike of the frivolous upon the part of either young or old. Gambling, gaming and drinking were repulsive to him. In his business relations (and we are strangely uninformed concerning the early means by which Fox made his livelihood), he became known for his honesty. Having never been inclined toward ways usually known as sinful, he was one among many of the early Quaker leaders whose lives were marked from the beginning by uprightness, and who constituted exceptions to the thought that great saints must first have been great sinners.

The spiritual crisis in the life of George Fox came in the year 1643, when he was nineteen years old. For the next five years, he seems to have wandered from place to place, seeking peace of mind and heart and taking opportunity to consult any who might assist him. During this time, he was an eager student of the Bible; and there is reason to believe that during these years he stored the subliminal recesses of his mind with the Scripture, so that in later years that which was treasured up there was brought above the threshold in his “openings”.

Often in his lonely room in some town, where he read and meditate till times he would work with a kind of poetic passion, and sit in hollow

¹Edwards, Gangræna, II, 135.
tered bank of a brook, and read the book that told him about God and man’s true life.*

His travels took him to London, where he found no one to counsel him concerning the deep need of his soul. Upon his return to Drayton, he was variously advised: by some to marry, by others to become a soldier in the Revolution. Ministers in the vicinity suggested tobacco and psalm-singing, neither of which appealed to the young Seeker. Two years of such search for counsel yielded him nothing, and his total impression of the religious life of his vicinity was that the “priests” were hirelings, and no shepherds; one near Tamworth he found to be “like an empty, hollow cask”.

Equally futile were the remedies of blood-letting, and of alms-giving at Christmas time. During this period of seeking, Fox frequently had “openings” (these we shall discuss later); as he received deeper insights into the Scriptures, he was the more beset with temptations, and with feelings of his own unworthiness. He had a “condition” to which neither Presbyterian nor Independent could “speak”.

It is best to let Fox speak himself concerning his conversion.

But as I had forsaken the priests, so I left the separate preachers also, and those esteemed 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 and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could I 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 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 pre-eminence: who enlightens, and gives grace, and faith and power. Thus, when God doth work, who shall hinder it? and this I knew ex perimentally. *

This summarizes the end of his long spiritual quest. His periods of temptation and darkness were past; and it is significant that, in common with Paul, he employs the figure of light, which figured so largely in Paul’s conversion and which is a familiar motif in mystical literature of all ages.

This event marks a turning point in the ministry of Fox. The long period of temptation, which so exercised him and drove him in quest of counsel, ended; and he began to exercise himself as a counsellor and war ner of others. He summarizes his message and commission in the following terms:

I was sent to turn people from darkness to the light, that they might receive Christ Jesus: for to as many as should receive Him in His light, I saw that He would give power to become the sons of God: which I had obtained by receiving Christ. I was to direct people to the Spirit, that gave forth the Scriptures, by which they might be led into all truth, and so up to Christ and God, as they had been who gave them forth. I was to turn them to the grace of God and to the truth in the heart, which came by Jesus; that by this grace they might be taught, which would bring them salvation, that their hearts might be established by it, and their words might be seasoned, and all might come to know their salvation nigh.

Several features stand out in these words: there is the constant stress upon “light”; there is the insistence upon inwardness; there was a stress upon the inspiration of the Scriptures; there was stress upon the saviorhood of Jesus Christ; and there was the stress upon spiritual certitude.

To George Fox, the operation of light within the human heart serves a two-fold purpose: it shows a man his sin; and it reveals Christ who can take it away.

This insistence upon the personal, inward relation with Christ, involving the removal of the sense of guilt for sin, marked the balance of the ministry of Fox. From about 1647 until his death in 1691, he travelled widely, covering the British Isles, and visiting America, the West Indies, and Holland. H. G. Wood estimates that he spent six or seven of the years between 1647 and 1675 in several different prisons.* His clashes with the authorities were pre-

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*Jones, Story of George Fox, p. 11.
*Jones, Autobiography of Fox, p. 70ff.
*Autobiography, p. 82.

*Journal, Vol. 1, p. 35.
*Wood, George Fox, p. 29.
cipitated by his insistence upon his right to enter disputations with clergymen at the conclusion of their services. Public comment was permitted upon occasion; but Fox and his associates went beyond the usual limits, and frequently disturbed the services; and after 1656, Parliament made more stringent the Act of Mary against such disturbance, with the result that the Quakers were more and more frequently in collision with the authorities.

It is an open question, whether the situation required or justified such violent protest. But with George Fox, prudential motives were secondary, when he was convinced that the Lord wished him to perform a task; and imprisonments were gladly accepted, almost in exchange for the privilege of denouncing hireling ministers and their "steeple-houses". But it is significant that out of this movement of vehement protest "a great people was gathered", a people which survived the many ephemeral protest movements, which have survived only in the pages of histories.

The later years of Fox' life were spent in gathering together, organizing, corresponding with, and defending the Societies of Friends. Whether or not his policy of creating an organizational structure was consistent with the Quaker insistence upon perfect individualism, he saw that the perpetuation of his message required some integrating structure. And as we study the sources upon which the new movement drew for its membership, and the methods pursued in its progress, and the literature which it produced, we may discover some facts that cast direct light upon the contribution of the work of Fox and the movement he precipitated to our understanding of the general subject of Mysticism.

II. Fox and the Calvinism of His Day

It is probable that no founder of a religious group has been more widely misunderstood in the "house of his Friends" than has George Fox. The writer is of the opinion that his principles and those of early Friends have suffered gross mutilation at the hands of those who have taken sentences from the writings and Epistles and have interpreted these wholly out of harmony with their larger settings and their historical contexts.

The point at which Fox has been most frequently misunderstood is the point at which he came into conflict with the Puritanism of his time. And the basic point of controversy in this connection is: Is George Fox to be considered as one who cut himself off from the stream of orthodox Protestantism, in his fundamental attitude toward the authority of the Holy Scriptures?

The answer of some is an unqualified "yes"; others give a negative answer. To unravel the problem, two methods must be pursued: first, the scattered statements of Fox relative to the matter must be investigated; and second, there must be sought some definite statement upon the subject, if this can be found. To list even a part of his statements upon the subject would, however, expand this paper beyond its proper limits. Herbert G. Wood, late lecturer at Woodbrooke, summarizes the question as follows.

Fox was sent to dissuade men from putting their trust in the Scriptures as the word of God, and to urge them to trust in the Spirit by which the Scriptures were given forth, and which dwelt in their own hearts. This seemed to the Puritan a belittling of Scripture, which was little short of blasphemy.

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Fox certainly used expressions at times which suggested that the spiritual life was altogether independent of the Scriptures. He is very emphatic on the originality of his own inspirations.*

Here was a point of collision with Puritanism, which had by this time, in Fox' judgment, degenerated into a lifeless form of orthodoxy which went no further than a declaration of mental assent to a proposition, without any admission that these Scriptures held forth anything more than a barren message to the mind of an absolute sovereignty, before which man had no proper moral agency.

It is necessary to anticipate a subject to be mentioned subsequently, that of the relation of the "openings" to the Scriptures.

This I saw in the pure opening of the light, without the help of any man; neither did I then...
know where to find it in the Scriptures, though afterwards, searching the Scriptures, I found it. For I saw in that light and spirit which was before the Scriptures were given forth, and which led the holy men of God to give them forth, that all must come to that Spirit, if they would know God, or Christ, or the Scriptures aright, which they that gave them forth were led and taught by."

Thus, Fox viewed the Scriptures as a living voice, not as a mere series of past utterances. Concerning the source of his openings, more will be said later. The significant thing to notice at this point is that Fox found his openings to be in accord with Scripture, and indeed, in terms employed in them. Wood says again: "Fox certainly did not wish to cut himself loose from the historical Scriptures, though it was difficult enough to explain the Quaker attitude toward them."

It will be helpful, if we can find some direct statement from the pen of Fox himself. Such a statement we have in his Epistle to the Governor of the Barbadoes, under date of 1671:

Now concerning the Holy Scriptures.
Wee doe beleive (sic) that they were given forth by the holy spirit of God through the holy men of God, who spoke (as ye scriptures of truth saith) as they were moved by the holy Ghost in 2 of Peter 1:21; and that they are to be read and beleived and fulfilled and he that fullfills them is Christ (and they) are profitable for doctrine for reproofe for Correction and for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all Good workes 2. Tim. 3. & 16. and are able to make us wise to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, and wee doe beleive that the scriptures are the words of God, for it is said in Exod: 20:1: God spake all these words saying &c, meaning the 10 Commandments Given forth upon Mount Sinai, and in Revel. 22. 18. saith John I testifie to every man that heareth the words of the prophesie of this booke if any man shall take away from the words — (not word) of the booke so in Luke 120: because thou beleivest not my words and (so in) John 5.45: & 15.7: & 14.23: & 12.45: so that wee call the scriptures as Christ and the Apostles called ym and as the holy men of God called them vist the words (not word) of God."

From this it appears that Fox was in no sense cut off from the general stream of orthodox Protestant tradition, and that his controversy with Calvinism was with what he felt to be its misunderstanding of the Scriptures: notably, its rigorous insistence upon the "letter" as against the "spirit" of them; also its insistence upon unconditional election, and its eloquent plea for continuance in sin. For Fox was pronounced in his advocacy of free-will and of perfectionism. Both of these emphases are derivatives of the mystical insight, of which more shall be said later.

And it was just here that he differed with the Calvinists. Theirs was a rigorous and closed system, with its total emphasis upon objectivism—upon the judicial and forensic aspects of the divine system, which left no room for the inner life. And while accepting the general framework of orthodox Protestantism of his day, he insisted upon that very principle for which the Reformation stood, namely, that of private interpretation of Scripture. This the Genevan logicians implicitly denied. Fox felt that his "openings" were the exclusive property of no man: that "they were the normal and rightful experience of all men of his day... Even as directly as to the apostles of old, the Lord speaks to His people Himself.""

This attitude could not but be misunderstood, as will be all expressions of individual religious experience to the theologians of the iron-clad systems. But, and this is repetition, Fox was attempting to make a place within the framework of an orthodox Protestantism for the mystical insight, and with all its concomitants of individualism, private judgment, and immediacy.

III. His Religious Insight: "Openings"

The Journal conveys to the reader the impression that its writer was endowed, in an unusual degree, with the gift of penetrating the thoughts and conditions of men. He had, as Rachel Knight points out, exceptionally keen senses of sight, smell, and hearing. He was a keen observer.

His combined senses saw in the bearing of Oliver Cromwell his approaching illness and death, in the
priest Lampitt his foul spirit, and in the shifting elusive expression of the face of the licentious woman the record of her life. The insincerity of priests and laymen, who "professed that which they did not possess," the unjust spirit that led to persecutions and to political warfare, to harmful social habits, and to industrial injustice and inefficient service, were all matters of personal concern to him through his quick sensing of them.\(^\text{14}\)

But over and beyond these expressions of insight based upon keen conscious powers, he possessed an unusually large subliminal capacity, together with what might be termed a largely-developed sense of unconscious incubation. In his youth, he stored his mind with biblical material; and his "openings" represent the bursting forth—after prolonged periods of subconscious incubation in the "underground workshop of thought", as Jastrow terms it,—of these materials.

His openings were sometimes auditory and sometimes visual. Most of them appear to have come in the form of a bursting upon his consciousness of a truth, frequently in the language of Scripture. And these openings were in harmony with each other, as he says: "When I had openings they answered one another and answered the Scriptures, for I had great openings of the Scriptures."\(^\text{15}\)

It is significant also that his openings sometimes came in a negative form, as for example, the one in which he perceived that "God, who made the world, did not dwell in temples made with hands." It is typical of the mental processes of Fox that he immediately reasoned the positive counterparts of this, that "His people were His temples, and He dwelt in them."\(^\text{16}\) This conclusion was obviously the result of his application of the principle "opened" to him, to the prevailing opinion of the "hiring" clergy, that God dwelt in their "steeple houses".

Concerning the relation of his openings to his belief in Jesus Christ, Rachel Knight says:

\(^{14}\)"Ibid., p. 70.
\(^{15}\)Knight, op. cit., p. 78.
\(^{16}\)Ibid., p. 80.

The prevalent Jesus Christ concept in Calvinistic England remained the ideal for Fox. It therefore gave form to his developing convictions. All the forces of his life headed into this thought, and it became the moving centre of the opening.\(^\text{17}\)

This was most largely true of his auditory openings, to which the Journal gives the major attention. Of the visual type of experience, relatively little appears in the writings. The one most quoted was that of his vision of

an ocean of darkness and death and an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness.\(^\text{18}\)

The imagery of such openings was restrained, and was confined almost entirely to the motif of light, as is indicated also in the experiences which he records of seeing "innumerable sparkles of fire", or the "flaming sword" stretching southward before the warring of Holland and the London fire.\(^\text{19}\)

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that Fox experienced immediate quickenings of "truth" to his own inner consciousness. His disposition was such that his subconscious seemed to labor over ideas which his conscious mind had forgotten. These remained in incubation for a longer or shorter time, finally rising above the threshold of consciousness with a force which arrested the man, and brought his reason into play in the application of them. The bearing of the openings upon the subject of mysticism will be noted further in the final section of this paper.

III. The Practicality of Fox' Emphasis

In general Quakerism has served to combine the mystical insight with a high degree of application of the truth-experience to the life situation.

The experiences of mystical insight were never, to Fox, an end in themselves; they

\(^{17}\)Knight, op. cit., p. 88. This same author says (op. cit., p. 21) that she cannot "accept in full, with all its implications, his message of the truth of a divinely endowed humanity that is capable of becoming sons of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ."

\(^{18}\)Ibid., p. 80.
\(^{19}\)Ibid., p. 76.
were not considered to be for his personal enjoyment, but as the impetus to the propagation of the message which burned in his heart.

This emphasis placed a strain upon the consistency of his message. For it is easy to see that his anti-clericalism might logically have served also to make him an antinomian with respect to religious organization. Yet he shortly laid the foundation for what became in reality a religious denomination. Miss Knight says:

In Fox this conflict was intense, and it took years for him to achieve experimentally his higher self as a religious leader. He had refused to become an ordained priest. He preached because he felt driven by the inner need to give forth his message and draw people to the Truth. It was only after years that he formulated and clarified this mission, so that when asked his profession he replied that he was a preacher of righteousness."

His message, as "preacher of righteousness", centered in the assertion that Christ could "speak to the conditions" of men. He personally exercised an especial gift for discerning the thoughts and needs of men. And his preaching served a twofold purpose: to wrest men from their blind trust in dogma for salvation; and to turn them toward a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Along with this evangelical emphasis, he began early to stress certain social reforms, such as prison reforms, anti-slavery agitation, opposition to intemperance, and to the taking of oaths, as well as the more characteristic testimony against war. These emphasis served to excite public opposition to the Quakers, which was otherwise being tempered by the growing spirit of religious toleration. But these social issues afforded new points of collision.

His religious methods included an unusual emphasis upon the training of children, both boys and girls, and of young women. This led to the establishment of schools for the young; so that children were trained in Quaker principles. When the parents were imprisoned, the children carried on the Meetings for Worship.

Thus, Fox made a significant contribution to the social application of the Gospel. His aim was, at whatever cost, to translate into practical terms the requirements of the teachings of Jesus. His application of Scripture to personal conduct was extremely literal: from "let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay", he insisted that the taking of oaths was incompatible with the spirit of Christ. The objection was basically to the double standard of truth which the oath implies.

His religious writings were always practical; they made no pretense of being abstract or philosophical. They always contain earnest appeals for a righteous life; they may be repetitious, and at times internally inconsistent. They were, however, of a piece with his insistence upon the practical integration of faith and life.

His religious principle committed him to a belief in the principles of democracy. His intense individualism and his insistence that God addresses the inner consciousness of every man, opposed both the absolutism of the Stuarts and the theocratic tendencies of the Calvinists. His democratic views resulted also in the acceptance of the economic independence and social equality of women, which issued later in the production of a "distinctive and noble type of womanhood".

Fox thus avoided the vain dreamings and fanatical statements which marked the work of many social extremists of his day. This was an era ripe for extravagances.

Full of sectarian fanaticism, controversy, persecutions and changing faiths and governments, it was dangerously rife with temptations. But Fox, with clear vision, urged upon magistrates, rulers and potentates that they rule wisely and justly and turn to the Lord for their guidance; upon tradesmen that they be scrupulously honest in all their dealings, upon servants that they serve cheerfully and honestly. All that he preached he put into effect in his own life. So we find Fox a consistent expounder and defender of a spiritual unity in all mankind."

Thus, Fox's mysticism represented a new departure in that it placed no emphasis

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"Knight, op. cit., p. 117f.
upon the personal enjoyment of the mystical experience. In his youth, Fox doubtless experienced raptures,
but he never revelled in such solitude for its own sake as the typical mystics do. On the contrary, until he found the way out of it he is ill at ease. He was perfectly capable of meeting that God 'in the bush', and was always very sure that God dwells not in temples made with hands; but he had no wish to avoid 'the mart and the crowded street' .... The religion of Fox was, then, a very insistently social religion, in which solitude was an incident, not a goal. Contemplation was with work; and the Light was still with him in the company of his friends.  

IV. The Contribution of the Experience Of George Fox to the Study of Mysticism

To analyze the mysticism of George Fox, the principles by which William James considers the mystical state are as good as any, namely: Ineffability, Noetic quality, Transiency, and Passivity.

With respect to the first, Ineffability, the experiences of Fox were not strictly such as James describes. While it is not demonstrable that he could always adequately communicate the nature of his mystical states, there are, nevertheless, arguments in favor of the view that the feature of ineffability was no more especially characteristic of them. For instance, he was able to put in words much that came to him in visual experience, this being in terms sufficiently familiar to allow its expression in clear language. The symbolism of light-and-darkness, and of the flaming sword, was far from subtle. Again, the auditory experiences found expression in language of Scripture, or akin to it. Moreover, Fox assumed that others could understand the same insights, and began immediately to communicate them with urgency upon others.

As to the noetic quality of Fox' mystical states, there has already been given attention to the fact that both the visual and the auditory "openings" had a "truth content", which represented the end-product of his subconscious incubation of ideas, chiefly from the Bible. Thus, the content of his openings represented insights and illuminations which his discursive intellectual processes alone would probably not have attained. And they most certainly came to Fox with a sense of authority. Nor was he content to allow them to remain only as authoritative to him; his ministry of persuasion was based upon them. How he justified his attempt at universalization of this content is another question, a question to which no unequivocal answer can be given. The writer's personal guess is, that Fox considered this content to be in accord with Scripture, which he accepted as a rule of life, and hence binding upon all, since all might perceive what he had just seen.

The element of transiency was certainly present. His openings appeared as a flash of insight, though there is evidence that upon occasion he was overwhelmed with the mystical state, and remained in a state of suspended consciousness for a time; but this was by no means typical of him. As Rachel Knight points out, he was no ecstatic of the Montanist type. Rather he resembled St. Paul, in his tendency to pass from the state of insight, the Mount of Vision, to the "normal, mystical life". Thus he illustrates Hocking's "Principle of Alternation", by deriving from the mystic's experience a new level of spiritual life. Thus in a certain sense, his mysticism was sustained; its high moments came and went, but left the totality of his experience elevated and ennobled. There was, therefore, in his type of mysticism a tendency away from the dualism shown in some types, by which a vast gulf separated the moment of insight and the practical life.

Concerning the passivity of Fox' mystical states, there are varying opinions. Most writers make relatively little of the importance of the element of the trance or the duration in his religious life, though he doubtless did experience these. But in general, the state left him articulate, and with a full recollection of what had occurred.

Concerning the two tendencies which almost without exception mark the mystic, namely monism and optimism, it needs to be

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*^Royce, J., "George Fox as a Mystic", in Harvard Theological Review, January, 1919, p. 380.
*^James, Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 380.

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said that in Fox both of these were modified by the essentially practical nature of his religious life. The classic example of his vision of Oneness is that of the "ocean of light and love, which overwhelmed the ocean of darkness." But there is a total lack of the element of pantheism. Any monism that he may have advocated rested upon the basis of moral unity: that is, the overcoming of evil by good. Fox was no nature mystic; his writings are remarkably matter-of-fact concerning the external world; his concern was with the heart-need of the sons of men.

Concerning his optimism: his negative message—directed against the existing order in English religious life—at times all but obscures his message of hope. The only basis which he found for optimism was in "a religion of veracity, rooted in spiritual inwardness". He lacks any philosophical pattern which would require "a happy ending" for all things. His mysticism was not merely emotional; it involved the whole thinking and willing man, and consisted of the "intense awareness of the entire man in his consciousness of God."

Something needs to be said concerning Fox' approach to the mystic vision. He lacked the ascetics' view: of long periods of purgation, of fastings, of self-mortifications. To him the way to Truth was the pursuit of Truth. Fitting behavior, to him, was living in the midst of the world, not in withdrawal from it, nor in turning away from life and all that it offers.

His Perfectionism shared something of both optimism and monism. He insisted upon "Christ Within sufficient for all things, to teach them and to make them perfect as He is, and as God is." No forensic, imputed righteousness would suffice for him: and at his Perfectionism the Calvinists raged. His conviction was that perfection consisted in answering to the end for which the subject was designed: and this thing inconceivable that so renovate men as to perfect. And this perfection consisted, Within, as again reckoned unto.

His mysticism, moreover, was characteristic in its emphasis upon freedom. In his reaction against Calvinism, he insisted upon the principle of each person's guidance, and a corresponding personal responsibility. Not that his writings contain any philosophical treatment of the subject of free-will: for he was a philosopher only by implication. But the individualism characteristic of mysticism was so elaborated in his work as to render his movement congenial to the Anabaptists and other free-will sects, so that from them many of his Society were drawn.

Some will judge that Fox' mysticism was no mysticism at all, since it did not tear itself away from the world or direct men and women into the cloister. In this, his work resembled that of St. Francis. The emphasis was everlastingly upon the practical: to use the language of John Mackay it was a religion of the road, not of the balcony. If it be asked, in what sense it deserved the title of Mystical, the briefest answer would be, in its insistence upon Immediacy. Man's entire relation to God, his approach to Scripture, and his apprehension of the duties of man in society:—all were to be derivatives of the answer which the individual found in his own soul. Fox distrusted the mediated, the second-hand. And regardless of the failure of his mystical states to answer to all of the conventional tests, this feature alone justifies, it seems, the application of the title.

Finally, Fox made a distinctive contribution to the total subject of mysticism in his new emphasis upon corporate "waiting upon God".

Such corporate waiting upon the Lord as a Friends Meeting is not a mere collection of independent Quietistic worshippers each in his own heart, worshipping and waiting for the voice of the Lord to speak individually with him in the silence. The group is rather a single unit, so confused and so interrelated and interacting that it becomes, not a summation, but a multiplication of active, alert, energizing seekers, so that when the corporate communion finds In words, the works break not into the silence, but seem rather to be breathed out of it; and one speaks not alone for the edification of the other,
but rather sums up and expresses the combined spirit of the gathering.24

This attitude was carried throughout the Quaker procedure. In worship, the one who gave vocal expression did so as spokesman for the group; in business sessions, there were no ballotings and no majority-rulings. If there were no "sense of the meeting", the matter under consideration was tabled, for further consideration.

This marks a new departure in mysticism. It represents a view of leadership given by the Holy Spirit and springing out of the occasion. Fox made little of his own service in the ministry of the Society. Whoever spoke, spoke the Divine message; and it mattered little who the vocal exponent may have been. The important thing was that the group worshipped, thought, and met God as a unit. Through the insights of the one who ministered, be he old or young, man or woman or child, all found expression for "the consensus of the knowledge of God made evident in their own hearts."

This not only throws light upon the psychological implications of the mystical insight, in that it gives a place to the corporate exercise of communion in silence, but it also introduces a means whereby mysticism may be made practical and available to larger numbers. In other words, Quakerism sought to prepare the way for the exercise of a "normal" mysticism, with individualism regulated, and a system of "check and balances" against the tendency to antinomianism on one hand, and that of being too visionary on the other.

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George Fox thus introduced into the Anglo-American world a type of social mysticism, with a strong appeal to the healthy mind. Avoiding the extreme of individualism, and the snare of asceticism, he made available to a people capable of strong religious inwardness the more truly Teutonic type of mysticism, of which Jacob Boehme was the best Continental exponent.

His mysticism lacks much of the speculative and the romantic. It tends to be conservative. Its social emphasis keeps it from growing stale and sterile. It uses ecstasy as a means to an end, and allows full play for the intellectual element in apprehending Truth, and the volitional element in its vigorous protest against abuses and in its insistence upon a consistent ethic. Above all, it points the way to an opening up of all the channels of the worshipper's being in an intense awareness of the presence of Him who is Truth.

24Knight, op. cit., p. 37.