**Inward Religion & Outward Action:**

**Reflecting on Graham Taylor’s “George Fox—The First Socialist?”**

**SVFM Forum January 19, 2025, leader Mel Keiser**

**What for Fox is the relation between inward spirituality and outward social action?**

**What outward action was Fox involved in and advocated?**

**What is the religious source of his activism?**

**How does his religious source enable seeing corruption & doing something about it?**

**What relevance does this have for our situation?**

**What is social?**

**Taylor:** Was George Fox the first Quaker Socialist? The word, ‘socialism’, is anachronistic, but Quaker Socialism is an ‘ethical socialism’, a blend of ethics and politics that Fox would recognise as his. (8)

**Fox:** “Woe is to all who… take tithes… you are them that appear beautiful outwardly to men, but are full of poison within… you are they who say and do not, you are those that lay heavy burdens upon the people.” In his sarcastic pamphlet, To the High and Lofty Ones, Fox bitterly attacked the games and sports enjoyed by the rich in the face of all the poverty around them. In The Basis of Truth, Fox denounced the land-grabbers who enclosed the people’s land: Woe unto you, “that set your rents on high, join house to house, field to field, till there be no place [left] for the poor.” (Taylor 3, quoting Fox)

You “that are called Christians – your blind men, widows, and fatherless children crying up and down [the streets] half a dozen together for bread… Is not this a shame for your Christianity? How dwelleth the love of God in you? … Surely you know that [we] are all of one Mould and Blood that dwell upon the Face of the Earth. Would not a little out of your abundance and superfluity maintain these poor Children some Lame and Blind, or set them at work that can work, and they that cannot, find a place of relief for them?” (Taylor 3-4)

“Have a place provided that all the poor, blind, lame creeples should be put into, and Nurses set over them, and looked to, cherished, and seen unto that they do not want… that there should not be seen a beggar walk up and down the streets, but that there might be a place where they might be maintained.” (Taylor 4)

I was moved to open my mouth . . . in the mighty power of the Lord, to tell them the mighty day of the Lord was coming upon all deceitful merchandise and ways, and to call them to repentance and a turning to the Lord God, and his spirit within them, for it to teach them and lead them. . . (George Fox’s *Journal*, ed. John L. Nickalls [London: London Yearly Meeting, 1975], 121).

[W]hen I heard the bell toll to call people together to the steeplehouse, it struck at my life, for it was just like a market-bell to gather people together that the priest might set forth his ware to sell. Oh, the vast sums of money that are gotten by the trade they make of selling the Scriptures, and by their preaching. . . . (*Journal* 39)

**What is religion for George Fox?**

**Taylor**: Fox was primarily religious but his message was actually social because he dared to tell “the ordinary man and woman” that “they could find God without priest or book”. Dispensing with priests and the Bible rendered the Church pretty redundant at a time when the state depended on the Church for both political support and social control. Taylor 2)

What Fox saw was new light flooding inward from Christ, and bringing with it a power to set things right, a power that spilled over from the individual into social causes. (7)

[I]n terrible anxiety about his spiritual condition, Fox was faced with the problem of which church was right, and which wrong, and in 1643 he left home. . . . (8)

**Fox’s Quaker Convincement**

[A]s I had forsaken the priests, so I left the separate preachers also, and those called the most experienced people; for I saw there was none among them all that could speak to my condition. And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could 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 let it? And this I knew experimentally (*Journal* 11).

Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts, and then thou wilt feel the principle of God to turn thy mind to the Lord God, whereby thou wilt receive his strength and power from whence life comes, to allay all tempests, against blusterings and storms. . . . [T]to feel after God, who is a God of order and peace, with his power and life. . . . And from thy own will, that is, the earthly, thou must be kept. … [L]ight doth make manifest and discover, temptations, confusions, distractions, distempers; do not look at the temptations, confusions, corruptions, but at the light that discovers them, that makes them manifest; and with the same light you will feel over them, to receive power to stand against them. . . . For looking down at sin, and corruption, and distraction, you are swallowed up in it; but looking at the light that discovers them, you will see over them. That will give victory; and you will find grace and strength; and there is the first step of peace. (Fox, *Journal*, “Letter to Lady Claypool,” 346-348)

**What is mysticism?**

**Taylor**: Some have said Fox was a mystic but if he was a mystic, he was not only a mystic. Mystics sit on mountain-tops or down in the desert, but Fox’s Quakers sat in the Bull and Mouth Tavern, their headquarters in central London. (7)

**Fox**: I read the Scriptures that spoke of Christ and God, yet I knew him not but by revelation, . . . as the Father of life drew me to his Son by his spirit. And then the Lord did gently lead me along, and did let me see his love, which was endless and eternal, and surpasseth all the knowledge that men have in their natural state, or can get by history or books; and that love let me see myself as I was without him. (*Journal* 11-12)

Now was I come up in spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God. All things were new, and all creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but pureness, and innocency, and righteousness, being renewed up into the image of God by Christ Jesus, so that I say I was come to the state of Adam which he was in before he fell. . . . in which the admirable works of the creation, and the virtues thereof, may be known, through the openings of that divine Word of Wisdom and power by which they were made. . . . [W]onderful depths were opened unto me. [A]s people come into subjection to the spirit of God, and grow up into the image . . . they may receive the Word of Wisdom, that opens all things, and come to know the hidden unity in the Eternal Being. (*Journal* 27-28)

**William Penn**: “True godliness don’t turn men out of the world but enables them to live better in it and excites their endeavours to mend it” (BYM Quaker Faith & Practice 23.02).