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## Welcome to FGC



### Friends and God

in

By [Mary K. Blackmar](#) ([#about-the-author](#))

At the very center of the Quaker faith lies the doctrine of the Inner Light.

Briefly stated, the principle of the Inner Light is this: In every human soul there is implanted a certain element of God's own spirit and divine energy. This element, known to the early Friends as "that of God in everyone," or the "seed," or the "seed of Christ," or the "seed of Light," means to them in the words of John "the Light that enlighteneth every man who comes into the world."

The Quakers believe that no first hand knowledge of God is possible except through that which is experienced, or inwardly revealed to the individual human being through the working of God's quickening spirit. So George Fox, in his *Journal*, is repeatedly shown commending troubled questioners to the "teacher within." In his long, anxious search for eternal life and peace, he found no help until he learned to listen to the inner voice.

So basic is the article of belief that it governs and explains the attitude of the Friends toward many things. they include the person and ministry of Christ, the scriptures, the establishment and authority of the church and its usages of ceremony, symbolism and sacraments, and especially the intimate obligations of the individual life.

Broadly speaking, the office of the inner Light is twofold. First, it discerns between good and evil, revealing the presence of both in human beings and, through its guidance, offers the alternative of choice. Second, it opens to human consciousness the unity of all human beings.

The Quakers believe that the potentialities of evil as well as good are latent in every one. But Quakers do not share the Calvinistic conception of a chasm separating God and

humans.

They feel, with Barclay, that the idea of inherited or "imputed" sin is an "invented and unscriptural barbarism." They believe that the seed of God is as universal and potent in us as the seed of evil, and, if not resisted but nourished and cultivated, will become the controlling force in our lives. As George Fox saw an ocean of light overcoming an ocean of darkness, so the modern Quaker sees the power of God available to overcome the evil in the nature of anyone who truly wants to do the will of God. To a great extent, therefore, we are the arbiter of our own destiny, having the power of choice. Salvation, in the Quaker sense, lies in our power to become the children of God.

Closely related to this conception of salvation is the Quaker ideal of perfection, affirming that by "minding the Light," waiting for ever fuller revelation of divine direction, the illuminated soul may eventually find it natural to live above the power or ordinary temptation. Such a life is never static, but always in a growing frame of wisdom, "shining more and more unto the perfect day."

The Quaker sense of God's immediate presence is the groundwork for a consciousness of human unity. Believing that all people partake in some measure of divine indwelling, the Friends are able to believe that where goodness is, there is God.

So it is possible for Friends to sympathize with the sincerity of all religious seekers. In this spirit they discover with Peter, after his vision, "Of truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."

The attitude of the Friends toward the scriptures is a natural outgrowth of their belief in the Inner Light. Since the written word arose out of the inspiration of the spirit of God in humans, it is the spirit and not the word which is the final authority of truth.

While some religious groups have emphasized the Bible as the final and finished charter of spiritual governance, the Quakers believe in a "continuing revelation." As the Light has shone, in the past, it has stirred the prophets, the saints and the apostles to record their deepest experiences of life and truth. So in the future, as the Light continues to shine, it should lead to further and fuller insights, to the understanding of divine new purposes, and to new powers of fulfillment.

Though the Inner Light, or the divine spirit, has always been available, the Quakers believe that in Jesus Christ the fullness of God's divine revelation is made manifest—"made flesh and dwells among us, full of grace and truth."

Since a sincere Friend aspires at all times and in all places to be conscious of the presence of God within, ceremonies and sacraments have but minor value.

Baptism means an inward or spiritual experience, not a ritual act. Communion is also of the spirit, and entails no outward act, being but a conscious openness to all divine intimations. The sabbath may differ in observance from other days but is not more holy.

Because Friends believe so ardently in the possibility of "immediate" or direct

communion, they have felt no need of elaborate ecclesiastical establishments, organizations or authority. They were and are individualists, as well as group seekers, and in their individual lives they assume the obligation of searching out and following the will of God as it applies to them.

Through their acceptance of direct accountability, they have endeavored to make of religion a way of life. Through their individual concerns they have resisted oppression and started great movements for the righting of human wrongs.

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### **About the Author(s)**

Born in 1873, **Mary K. Blackmar** was graduated from the University of Iowa in 1910 and went on to obtain a Master's degree from Columbia University in 1928 at the age of 55. Her literary experiences include the writing of a column for a New York newspaper and working on Columbia University's Columbia Encyclopedia.

She was a member of Solebury Friends Meeting in Pennsylvania for many years until her death in 1964.