

The Meetinghouse Library You Might Not Have Known About

There's a good reason why present-day Friends still treasure the writings of early Quakers: they claimed to be guided by direct communication with God, and *they really behaved as if they did*. William Penn wrote in 1696: "That which the People call'd Quakers lay down, as a Main Fundamental in Religion, is this, That God, through Christ, hath placed a Principle in every Man [and woman], to inform him of his Duty, and to enable him to do it." For ages Christians had been told that they needed some outward authority to inform them of their duty, and that, no matter how hard they tried to "get right with God," they couldn't help sinning. But now the Quakers were coming to know *by personal experience* that "Christ is come to teach His people Himself," and Christ *could and did* empower them to "go, and sin no more," as Jesus had told people to do in the Gospel stories. This was revolutionary! *How did they come to get this experience?* we wonder. – They tell us *plainly!*

The hitch is, the "plain speech" of the 1600s is not the plain speech of the twenty-first-century. Part of the problem is that early Quakers thought, spoke, and wrote in a kind of Bible-jargon that we may not be able to decode unless we've internalized the King James Bible as they did, so many of us don't "get" all of the allusions and references. For example: George Fox famously wrote "walk cheerfully over the world" (*Journal*, Nickalls ed., 263; or *Works*, 1:289). For Fox, "walk" did not just mean "go somewhere" but, here at least, something more like "act," as in "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Ephesians 4:1 KJV). "Cheerfully" did not mean a joyful mood so much as an absence of fear or reluctance (cf. Acts 24:10). And "the world" was the devil's kingdom (John 7:7, 12:31), so to *walk over it* meant not to be trapped and defiled by it.

Good news! There's a copious **virtual library of early Quaker writings online**, and also tools to make the biblical resonances of the language more audible to the modern ear. The **Quaker Bible Index** (QBI, accessible at esr.earlham.edu/qbi/) was created to help modern readers "get" the allusions in, say, Fox's warnings against "grieving, vexing, and quenching the Holy Spirit" (*Works*, 5:399, 7:214). A concordance like the University of Michigan's searchable King James Bible (quod.lib.umich.edu/k/kjv/) locates "grieving" the Holy Spirit in Eph 4:30, "vexing" it in Isa 63:10, and "quenching" it in 1 Thess 5:19. The QBI allows you to key in "1 Thess 5:19" and instantly call up an array of early Quaker warnings against "quenching the Spirit." As the QBI's creator, Esther Greenleaf Mürer, acknowledges, it's "a work in progress," and doesn't yet index every book of the Bible, but construction continues.

Earlham School of Religion, which hosts the QBI, also hosts its own creation, the **Digital Quaker Collection** (DQC, accessible at esr.earlham.edu/dqc/). The DQC is a searchable collection of hundreds of long-out-of-print works by over one hundred authors, searchable not only by Bible verse cited (e.g., Matthew 5:44) and word or phrase (e.g., "love your enemies"), but with "wild cards" allowed, so that keying in "love* * enem*" would call up all variant readings such as "love one's enemy," "love our enemies," and "loveth not his enemy."

Other online resources available to searchers of early Quaker texts who lack an academic institution's access to **Early English Books Online** (EEBO) include **Quaker Heritage Press** (QHP), whose website, www.qhpress.org/, prominently displays a link to a "Catalog of historic Quaker texts in print or online, regardless of source." This includes, notably, (a) "Rosemary Moore's very thorough bibliographies of **Quaker and anti-Quaker publications from 1652-1666**" (www.qhpress.org/rmoore/index.html); (b) the **Quaker Writings Home Page** (www.qhpress.org/quakerpages/qwhp/) and the **Quaker Homiletics Online Anthology** (www.qhpress.org/quakerpages/qhoa/qhoa.htm), both created by Peter D. Sippel. The QHP also links to the growing number of Quaker classics published, in print and online, by the **New Foundation Fellowship** (nffquaker.org/ and www.foundationpublicationsnffusa.org/publications/).

Many early Quaker texts in **Spanish translation** are at raicescuaqueras.org.

The Quakers of those formative early years lived lives transformed by personal encounters with the Light and Person of the living Christ. They still speak to us today (as does He), showing the way into a faithful life entirely surrendered to the will of God. What they wrote is now accessible to anyone with a computer and an internet connection. It's the virtual Quaker meetinghouse library you might not have known about, open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

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Also online, at shortlink: <https://wp.me/Pa0X3r-m>