

Introduction

The Other Voice

Margaret Fell (1614–1702) was one of the founders of the Society of Friends¹ and one of most prolific women writers of the seventeenth century.² Born Margaret Askew and late in life married a second time to George Fox, who had converted her, Fell collaborated to shape the theology of the Inner Light that guided Friends in their Bible reading and their lives, helped to establish empowered roles for women among Friends, and through her writings, especially her letters or epistles, aided in uniting the traveling preachers of the Society into a community that stretched across Britain, and, eventually, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. Fell is best known today for *Women's Speaking Justified* (1666 and 1667), one of the first defenses of women's preaching in the Christian tradition, which has become an important text not only in Quaker Studies, but more broadly in early modern women's studies, religious studies, and the history of rhetoric. Like the achievements of many other women writers, for many years Fell's works and accomplishments were eclipsed by those of the men around her, but Fell has now

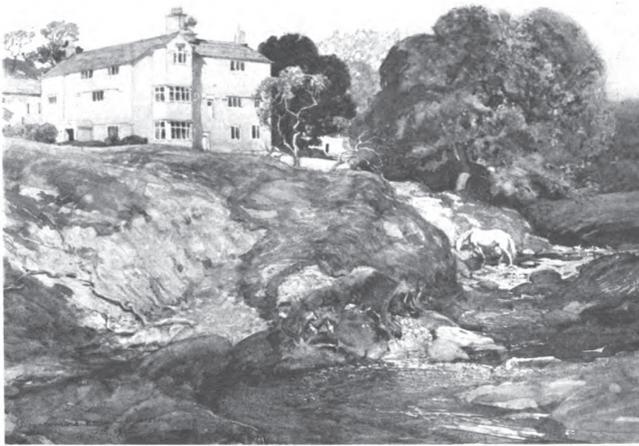
1. George Fox is generally referred to as “the founder” of the Society of Friends, but recent scholarship has recognized the importance of the community at large and especially the work of Margaret Fell and William Penn. See H. Larry Ingle, *First Among Friends: George Fox and the Creation of Quakerism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Bonnelyn Young Kunze, *Margaret Fell and the Rise of Quakerism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994); Rosemary Moore, *The Light in Their Consciences: Early Quakers in Britain 1646–1666* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000); Catie Gill, *Women in the Seventeenth-Century Quaker Community: A Literary Study of Political Identities, 1650–1700* (Burlington, VT and Aldershot, Great Britain: Ashgate, 2005); and Mary K. Geiter, “Penn, William (1644–1718),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004–), article published September 23, 2004, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>>.

2. Other prolific women writers of the seventeenth century who have recently also received more attention include mystic Lady Eleanor Davies, poet and novelist Margaret Cavendish, duchess of Newcastle, and poet and dramatist Aphra Behn. There are biographies, many editions, and dozens of books and articles now on these women writers, but see, for example, some of the scholarship that helped begin their recovery: Lady Eleanor Davies (1590–1652), *Prophetic Writings of Lady Eleanor Davies*, ed. Esther S. Cope (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Margaret Cavendish, duchess of Newcastle (1623?–1673), *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. Kate Lilley (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1992); Margaret Cavendish, duchess of Newcastle, *The Convent of Pleasure and Other Plays*, ed. Anne Shaver (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Aphra Behn (1640?–1689), *The Uncollected Verse of Aphra Behn*, ed. Germaine Greer (Stump Cross, Great Britain: Stump Cross Books, 1989); and Behn, *Oroonoko, The Rover and Other Works*, ed. Janet Todd (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1992).

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been recovered as a literary and religious figure increasingly important in feminist scholarship.

The pamphlets published in this volume indicate the range of genres and topics Fell dealt with across a long career of writing and leadership in the Society of Friends—autobiography, epistle or formal letter, and examination or record of a religious trial. Furthermore, we have chosen them to illustrate the reasons Fell belongs in a series on *The Other Voice*: besides revealing an emphasis on women's roles and gendered metaphors, her works contributed to the development of the unique theology of this small but lasting Protestant sect; her writings serve as evidence of seventeenth-century women's vernacular literacy; she developed a theory of reading different from that taught in early modern men's education; and her pamphlets exemplify the characteristics of the rhetoric of the Society of Friends. Fell's works are also important because of her confident participation in the religious politics of her day; she is unafraid to stand up to male authority figures, both those within the Quaker movement and also those without, from justices of the peace to the king of England. *A Relation of Margaret Fell, Her Birth, Life, Testimony, and Sufferings* (1690), for example, not only surveys the events of her life, but also places them in a political context, depicting a decades-long conversation with Charles II and his government about the right to liberty of conscience, a conversation she conducted through many visits to London as well as in letters addressed to Charles and other members of the royal family: such is the carefully crafted *Letter Sent to the King* (1666). Her pamphlet aimed at converting the Jews, *A Loving Salutation to the Seed of Abraham among the Jews* (1656) sheds light on the millenarian purpose of Friends' theology and on the early modern politics of relationships between religions lying outside the Church of England. *Women's Speaking Justified* not only defends women's preaching, but also alludes to the politics within the Society of Friends; Fell carefully stipulates that, according to the apostle Paul, *some* men as well as *some* women should not speak in church, referring perhaps to members of a rival faction who disputed George Fox's leadership of the Friends by disrupting services. The pamphlets in this collection, then, do not just provide chronological breadth, but also show how early modern women played a vital and active role in religious and political communities.



Swarthmoor Hall
by
S. Walton West R.W.L.

Figure 1. Swarthmoor Hall, frontispiece illustration by I. Walton West, RWL, from Helen G. Crosfield, *Margaret Fox of Swarthmoor Hall* (London: Headley Brothers, 1913). Public Domain, from the Pennsylvania State University Libraries.



Figure 2. “George Fox at Swarthmore Hall, with the Fell Family,” etching by Robert Spence. Reproduced by permission of Quaker & Special Collections, Haverford College, Haverford, Pennsylvania.

Life and Works

Margaret Fell (née Askew) was born in 1614 into a prosperous family near Dalton-in-Furness in Lancashire. Her mother was probably Margaret Pyper, who married Margaret's father John Askew in 1613.³ Fell has been portrayed in previous biographies as having a possible familial connection to the famous English Protestant martyr Anne Askew (1521–1546). While the connection is not proven, the shared name “Askew” was used by nineteenth-century scholars to foreshadow Fell's own contributions to later Reformist groups.⁴

In 1632, while still a teenager, Margaret Askew married her first husband, Thomas Fell (bap. 1599, d. 1658), of Swarthmoor Hall in Ulverston, Cumbria (previously part of Lancashire), a barrister (a lawyer who pleaded court cases) and eventually a member of Parliament and a judge. He held several government positions in the region under Cromwell and the Protectorate.⁵ Between 1633 and 1653, the couple had nine children, eight of whom grew to adulthood: one son, (George) and seven daughters (Margaret, Bridget, Isabel, Sarah, Mary, Susannah, and Rachel).

While she was raising her family, Fell also began to search for a deeper religious experience than that provided by organized religion, becoming a “Seeker,” who, according to Barbara Ritter Dailey, was an individual opting “for an inward attitude of waiting upon God.”⁶ As Fell later declares in *A Relation*, she was “inquiring and seeking about twenty years,” traveling in the region to hear different ministers, hosting “serious and godly men ... then called *lecturing ministers*” at Swarthmoor.⁷ Seekers were deeply affected by the many political and religious crises of seventeenth-century England, finding the internal conflicts inherent to organized religion troubling and distracting from the cultivation of true faith. Many women religious leaders of the period spent part of their lives as Seekers

3. Biographies of Fell include Isabel Ross, *Margaret Fell: Mother of Quakerism* (London: Longmans, Green, 1949); Kunze, *Margaret Fell and the Rise of Quakerism*; and Kunze, “Fell [née Askew], Margaret (1614–1702),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004–), article published September 23, 2004, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>>.

4. See Maria Webb, *The Fells of Swarthmoor Hall and Their Friends: With an Account of Their Ancestor, Anne Askew, the Martyr* (London: Alfred W. Bennett, 1865). On Anne Askew, see, for example, Elaine V. Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 29–47.

5. See Sean Kelsey, “Fell, Thomas (bap. 1599, d. 1658),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004–), article published January 3, 2008, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>>.

6. Barbara Ritter Dailey, “The Husbands of Margaret Fell: An Essay on Religious Metaphor and Social Change,” *Seventeenth Century* 2 (1987), 58.

7. Fell, *A Relation of Margaret Fell* (London, 1690).

because it afforded them a way in which to determine their own faith outside the controlling strictures of male-dominated religious groups.⁸

In 1652, when her husband was away on legal business, Fell, her family, and servants hosted such a traveling minister who changed their lives: George Fox (1624–1691).⁹ Fell, her daughters, and many of her servants were convinced of Fox's message and, as Fell reports in *A Relation*, were “turned ... from darkness unto light,” experiencing a new understanding of “the Eternal Truth, as it is in Jesus.”¹⁰ Margaret had first met George Fox at the parish church of St. Mary's in Ulverston, where she prevented the churchwarden from ejecting him merely by standing up in her pew and looking at one of the principal church leaders.¹¹

Although Thomas Fell did not become a Friend, he generally seemed supportive of his wife and children's religious enthusiasms, allowing Friends to hold their Meetings at Swarthmoor Hall. Perhaps, as had many heads of household during the rule a century earlier of Catholic Queen Mary, he remained in the state church to protect his offices in the government, his lands from confiscation, and his family from poverty. By Fell's own account, her marriage was a happy one, and, as Sally Bruyneel has observed, influential in Fell's blending of “legal response with a longer apologetic for Friends belief and practice.”¹²

Upon her conversion, Fell played an active and enthusiastic role in advocating for fellow Friends and promoting her faith. During the Protectorate government of Oliver Cromwell (1653–1659), dissenting Protestant groups flourished. The Quaker movement of the 1650s was initially focused on the north of England, where Fell lived, and by 1660, an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 people belonged to the Society of Friends.¹³ During this early period, while Fell's husband was still alive, Fell not only provided organizing support for the movement, but also began her writing campaigns. In 1656 alone, she published *To All the Professors of the World*, which addressed other dissenters in an attempt to persuade them to turn to their Inner Light and join the Society of Friends, *A Testimony of the Touchstone*

8. Sally Bruyneel, *Margaret Fell and the End of Time: The Theology of the Mother of Quakerism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 31.

9. See H. Larry Ingle, “Fox, George (1624–1691),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004–), article published September 23, 2004, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>>.

10. Fell, *A Relation of Margaret Fell*.

11. Margaret Fell, *Undaunted Zeal: The Letters of Margaret Fell*, edited by Elsa F. Glines (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 2003), 430. Sally Bruyneel reads the first encounter between Fell and Fox as one that indicates Fell's position of power over Fox, because she is the one with the authority to allow Fox to continue to speak; see *Margaret Fell and the End of Time*, 13.

12. See *A Relation of Margaret Fell* in this volume. See also Bruyneel, *Margaret Fell and the End of Time*, 24–27.

13. See Elsa F. Glines, ed., *Undaunted Zeal: The Letters of Margaret Fell* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 2003), 6.

for *All Professions*, a follow-up that urged other Protestants to use the Word inside them as a touchstone to test the beliefs of their sect, and *A Loving Salutation to the Seed of Abraham among the Jews*, urging the Jewish people to join Friends in welcoming the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures.

With the death of Thomas Fell in 1658, the Quakers lost a “judicial protector”¹⁴ and Margaret Fell “a tender, loving husband” of twenty-six years.¹⁵ Thomas’s will of 1658 provides additional evidence for his love and support of his wife: “I do hereby ... give and Bequeth unto my dear careful and entirely beloved Margrett Fell, my wife, Fifty pounds, as a token and testimony of my dearest affection unto her.”¹⁶ Barbara Ritter Dailey reads Judge Fell’s will as “a statement of support for the household conversion of 1652.”¹⁷

With the restoration of Charles II to the throne of England in 1660, the political position of Friends grew increasingly tenuous, and Fell became a courageous activist for her faith, petitioning the king personally for the civil rights of all Friends; her *Letter sent to the King* (1666) is a later example of her direct personal activism. Although the Declaration of Breda¹⁸ of 1660 promised religious tolerance, persecution of Friends actually increased during the Restoration. Fell was particularly vulnerable at this time as a widow who had lost some of the agency she enjoyed as the wife of a well-positioned judge. Beginning in the 1660s, Fell spent time in prison for her religious beliefs, and one such experience is recounted in *The Examination of Margaret Fell* (1663/4). In 1664, at the instigation of Fell’s neighbors, Col. Richard Kirkby (ca. 1625–1681), his son Roger Kirkby (ca. 1649–1708), and his brother and justice of the peace William Kirkby,¹⁹ Fell and Fox were arrested for holding Meetings at Swarthmoor Hall in violation of the Conventicle Act.²⁰ Fell’s legal woes were compounded by her refusal to take the Oath of Allegiance because she felt it would violate her religious principles. Not only was she imprisoned in Lancaster Castle for four years, but she also suffered loss of her income and property, as she explains in *A Relation*, through the sentence of *praemunire*. Friends often spent their time in prison writing, and were zealous employers of the printing press, distributing their pamphlets widely.

14. Glines, ed., *Undaunted Zeal*, 6.

15. Fell, *A Relation of Margaret Fell*.

16. Dailey, “The Husbands of Margaret Fell,” 58.

17. Dailey, “The Husbands of Margaret Fell,” 59.

18. A proclamation issued by Charles II that included provisions for religious tolerance. Glines notes that Charles most likely wished to assist Roman Catholics, and that Quakers faced increased persecution. See Glines, *Undaunted Zeal*, 253.

19. See Glines’s notes in *Undaunted Zeal*, 335, 361, 364, and 442.

20. The First Conventicle Act was passed in 1664 and forbade religious meetings of more than five people organized outside the bounds of the Church of England. The Act was meant to address the government’s concerns over potential conspiracy.

While Fell was in prison on this occasion, she wrote *Women's Speaking Justified* (1666 and 1667) as well as her petition to be released that was addressed to the king, *A Letter Sent to the King* (1666). Fell spent a total of about six years in prison over three separate occasions for her religious beliefs.

Fell's relationship with her second husband, George Fox, solidified her already prominent position within the Society of Friends. Fell married Fox in 1669, when she was fifty-five years old, ten years his senior, and had been a widow for a little more than a decade.²¹ Fell and Fox spent much of their twenty-two-year marriage apart from one another as each traveled to promote the Quaker faith.²² In the meantime, Fell's home of Swarthmoor Hall had become a central location for Friends' activities, from the spiritual act of worship to the organization of communication and publications: letters were sent there to be copied and passed on, and arrangements for publication and distribution of pamphlets were overseen there.²³ As Kate Peters argues, "Margaret Fell at Swarthmoor Hall was the central figure in the establishment of the movement."²⁴

If Margaret Fell was celebrated as the metaphorical "Mother of Quakerism," she was also a very real mother who raised nine children and several grandchildren. Fell makes frequent reference to her children in her works, showing the interrelatedness of her family and her theology.

Still, having survived imprisonment and the loss of her property, Fell would face additional hardships and assaults on her right to her home and finances from her only son, George Fell. The only one of her children who failed to embrace her faith, George was openly hostile to his mother's involvement in the Society of Friends and opposed her marriage to George Fox. George Fell argued that his mother had a claim to Swarthmoor Hall only as a widow, and that the estate should be transferred to him once she was married to Fox. His legal actions led to the eventual imprisonment of his mother, for the second time in her life, in 1670.²⁵ George Fell died six months after she was imprisoned, however, and Fell successfully petitioned the king to grant the estate to her daughters Susannah

21. Following the Friends' custom of equality between the sexes, George Fox waived his right to Margaret's property, agreeing to "not meddle with her estate"; see Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1972), 312; and Isabel Ross, *Margaret Fell: Mother of Quakerism*, 214–15.

22. After Fox's release from a harsh and life-threatening imprisonment in Worcester from 1673 to 1675, Margaret brought him home to Swarthmoor to recuperate. As Kunze notes, "His stay of twenty-one months from June 1675 to March 1677 was his longest stay with his wife, after which he recommenced his travels"; see Kunze, "Fell [née Askew], Margaret," *ODNB*.

23. See Kate Peters, *Print Culture and the Early Quakers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 38–40. Swarthmoor Hall continues to be a central location for Society of Friends Meetings, courses and workshops, retreats, and other activities.

24. Peters, *Print Culture and the Early Quakers*, 60.

25. See Bruyneel, *Margaret Fell and the End of Time*, 51–52.

and Rachel; Fell was released from prison in 1671. Fell's daughters allowed their mother to stay at Swarthmoor Hall, and the home to remain a stronghold for Quaker life. As Fell aged, her millenarian belief that they lived in the last days before Judgment deepened, and in 1677 she wrote her last pamphlet, the mystical *The Daughter of Zion Awakened*, which celebrates the Second Coming at work in the community of Friends, and the approach of the end of the world of suffering. Even in these later years, however, Fell could not escape the long reach of the authorities; arrested at her home in 1683 for holding a conventicle, she was imprisoned at Lancaster again for the third and last time in her life, along with her daughter Rachel and son-in-law Daniel Abraham, who would eventually inherit the Swarthmoor estate.

George Fox died in London in 1691, leaving Fell again a widow. She had visited him between April and June 1690. In characteristic biblical language, Fell said of Fox: "He was the instrument in the hand of the Lord in this present age, which he made use of to send forth into the world to preach the everlasting gospel, which had been hid from many ages and generations."²⁶

Meetings were a cornerstone of the faith and practice of the Society of Friends, and Fell in particular played a pivotal role in advocating for Women's Meetings. Although attempts at establishing Women's Meetings occurred in the 1660s, it was not until Fell was released from prison in 1671 that regularized Women's Meetings were established at Swarthmoor.²⁷ While tradition attributes the establishment of regularized Women's Meetings in the 1670s to George Fox, H. Larry Ingle argues that Fell and Fox were together in London in 1671 when Fox was formulating his plans, and that "In the north she positioned herself as champion of women's meetings."²⁸ Kunze establishes that the "earliest women's separate meeting outside London" was organized by Margaret Fell and her daughters, especially Sarah, and she further argues that in the early years of the movement Fell's involvement in establishing Women's Meetings was suppressed to shore up Fox's contested leadership of the Society of Friends.²⁹ By the 1680s, Catie Gill concludes, the Women's Meetings both reinforced women's traditional roles, overseeing care of orphans, widows, and Quaker prisoners, for example, but also preserved some of the equality in power of the early movement, as in the requirement that both men's and women's Meetings approve Friends' marriages.³⁰

In her later years, beyond her work with the Women's Meetings and her organizational duties for the movement at Swarthmoor Hall, Fell continued her travels, especially to London, where she often appealed to the king or members

26. Kunze, *Margaret Fell and the Rise of Quakerism*, 24.

27. See Glines's note in *Undaunted Zeal*, 406.

28. Ingle, *First Among Friends*, 252 and quotation p. 254.

29. Kunze, *Margaret Fell and the Rise of Quakerism*, 158, 164, and 166–67.

30. Gill, *Women in the Seventeenth-Century Quaker Community*, 164–71.

of the royal family for release of Friends in prison and for protection of liberty of conscience. Her first visit to London in 1660 was to petition Charles II for George Fox's release, along with that of other Friends, and she made nine more visits there. Fell remained active in the Society of Friends, and even traveled to London for the final time at the age of eighty-three.³¹

Fell died at Swarthmoor Hall on April 23, 1702, and was interred in the Quaker burial ground nearby. Although toward the end of her life she no longer enjoyed the same degree of popularity and influence among fellow Society of Friends leaders, her epistles were collected and republished posthumously by her children, ensuring that her contemporaries continued to remember her work and influence.³²

Friends' Theology and Early Modern Women's Literacy

In this section, we situate Margaret Fell and the tracts we have selected in several social and cultural contexts. Fell benefited from some of the outcomes of the Protestant Reformation as well as experienced some of its attendant political tensions.³³ As Fell writes in *A Relation of Margaret Fell*, she was "desirous to serve God," and "inquiring and seeking" in theological matters all of her life, and so a

31. See Kunze, *Margaret Fell and the Rise of Quakerism*, xi–xvi; and Bruyneel, *Margaret Fell and the End of Time*, 55.

32. See Bruyneel, *Margaret Fell and the End of Time*, 56.

33. On the English Reformation, the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century development and impact of a national Protestant church in Britain and the attempts to reform it or separate from it, see esp. Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans?: Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988); Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society Under the Tudors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993); Norman Jones, *The English Reformation: Religion and Cultural Adaptation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); Patrick Collinson, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Modern Library of Random House, 2004); Felicity Heal, *Reformation in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490–1700* (London: Allen Lane, 2003); Lee Palmer Wandel, *The Reformation: Towards a New History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Rosemary Moore, "Seventeenth-Century Context and Quaker Beginnings," in *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*, ed. Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 13–28; and the classic studies, A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964); and Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*. Helpful bibliographies include John N. King, ed., *Voices of the English Reformation: A Source Book* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 381–84; Margaret L. King, ed. and trans., *Reformation Thought: An Anthology of Sources* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2016), 211–12; and Margaret L. King, ed., *Oxford Bibliographies, Renaissance and Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010–present), <<http://www.oxford-bibliographies.com>>.

crucial influence on the development of the theology of the Society of Friends.³⁴ Equally important for our analysis, Fell's writings, which demonstrate an exhaustive knowledge of the Bible, influence the development of Friends' characteristic style, and record her own theory of reading scripture, also offer an opportunity for a case study in women's rhetorical literacy in the seventeenth century.

Fell was a Protestant, but after her conversion³⁵ by George Fox, she no longer attended the state church, the Church of England, and turned to the beliefs of the Society of Friends, helping to develop its theology and church organization in its early years. Although she had been raised as an Anglican, her family had read widely in dissenters' religious tracts; her first husband, Thomas Fell, was a respected local authority figure, a judge who remained Anglican and resigned his seat in Parliament because he disapproved of Cromwell. Thomas chose not to convert to the Society of Friends, but he supported their work and provided them with both protection and a place to meet. Margaret Fell was thus a crucial figure in the early days of the Society of Friends, when she, Fox, William Penn, and others established the Friends' beliefs. Here we should note that although the term "Quakers" is used in both scholarly and popular contexts, this was originally a disparaging name for the sect, and so we will use the term "Friends" when possible, as preferred by those in the early Society.

The Society of Friends, beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, drew on a century of Reformation, conformist, and dissenting beliefs in England. Like most English Protestants, Friends' religious practice centered on reading the Bible. Like most Anglicans and unlike many dissenters, they believed in free will, that people might voluntarily turn to Christ for forgiveness and salvation. Like most Protestants, they were iconoclasts and anti-Catholic, having no images or statues in their Meeting Houses. Like many other sectarians, they broke from the Anglican Church to follow a religion based on conscience. Like Familists (a Protestant sect founded by a Dutchman in the sixteenth century) Friends believed in an Inner Light that guided them in their reading of the Bible and in their actions. The history of the seventeenth century, with the continental Thirty Years' War and the British Civil War caused by religion, made Friends—like many other Protestants—believers in millenarianism, the expectation that the Second Coming was at hand and that Christ would soon return. But Friends further developed unique beliefs that set them apart from other Protestants. They held that the Inner Light in Friends showed that the Second Coming was already in progress, and that all Friends had Christ inside themselves. They refused to take oaths to the government, although they acknowledged its authority over earthly bodies,

34. Fell, *A Relation of Margaret Fell*. On Fell as a theologian, see Bruyneel, *Margaret Fell and the End of Time*, 16–17 and 164–65.

35. Although the term preferred by Friends is "convincement," we use the more common term "conversion."

and they carried the social resistance of other Protestants to an extreme, accepting women as preachers, refusing to attend Anglican services, and even rejecting the social hierarchy: they referred to all people as “thee” or “thou” (rather than the polite, formal “you”), and refused to use titles or doff their hats to superiors.³⁶ Fell was there from almost the beginning and helped to develop these beliefs.

The English Reformation also was the seedbed for the growth of the first two centuries of published English women writers. Access to a vernacular Bible from the late 1520s onward increased literacy generally, especially with the emphasis on faith in Christ the Word as the route to salvation. By the seventeenth century, both the new King James Version of the Bible (1611), in a folio edition, and the radical, sixteenth-century Puritan Geneva Bible “in pocket editions,”³⁷ were available. This emphasis on the Word also offered, for the first time, a clear justification for the importance of women’s education in England, and there was a dramatic increase in women’s literacy across the two centuries of the Reformation. Fell benefited from this increase, for she could both read and write. In addition, the lack of censorship during the British Civil War allowed the Friends and other protestant sects to develop their use of printing to promote their religious beliefs; and because of the equality of women in the early Friends’ movement, women, Fell among them, became writers, as well as preachers, leaders, and administrators. Granted, there were also constraints on women’s literacy, and they were often limited to reading the Bible or religious works. Although citing the classics as an authority was a mainstay of humanist argument during this period, Fell never cites any authority other than the Bible or the law (recalling her husband, a judge). The Reformation, however, was an important contributing factor in Fell’s ability to write and publish, as well as the source of the content of her pamphlets.

Friends’ Theology: The Inner Light and the Second Coming

The most important tenet in Friends’ theology is the central belief in Jesus Christ as an Inner Light, or Word, or Seed that guides converted Friends, what Hilary Hinds describes as “an indwelling divine presence that transformed the fallen human subject by emphasizing his or her access to ‘that of God within,’ thereby erasing any absolute boundary between human subject and divine presence.”³⁸ As

36. See Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, esp. 23–33, 72, 95, 98, 128, 176, and 243–48; MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe’s House Divided*, esp. 499–300, 502, and 526; Peters, *Print Culture and the Early Quakers*, 1 and 30; and Stephen W. Angell, “God, Christ, and the Light,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*, ed. Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 158–71.

37. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 93. See also MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe’s House Divided*, 72–76; and Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), esp. 1, 26, 52, and 54.

38. Hinds, *George Fox and Early Quaker Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 6.

Catherine M. Wilcox explains, “For the early Quakers, the work of Christ in the heart in the present was the focus of their religious thought and experience.”³⁹ To Anglicans, this seemed almost heretical, a denial of the Trinity. But Friends believed, as Sally Bruyneel explains, that Christ’s Second Coming was in progress, that the end of the world was near,⁴⁰ and that Christ had returned to live as a Word, Light, or Seed in the hearts of all Friends, helping them to understand the Bible, speaking the scripture directly to them, and commanding them to obey his requests rather than the laws of their government or the rules of the Anglican Church. To put it another way, each converted Friend was part of the Second Coming, the return of Christ in the flesh. Because of these beliefs, Friends’ theology may be called “Christocentric.”

Fell helped established this tenet of Friends’ theology, that the end of time was near and that Christ was here, immanent, inside each Christian, but fully present in converted Friends. Fell and other Friends found the idea of Christ as Word or Light living in the heart in both the Hebrew and New Testament scriptures, but they interpreted it as a promise fulfilled, rather than a promise for the future. The New Testament Acts of the Apostles recorded the descent of the Holy Spirit to Christ’s followers, to remain until the Second Coming, and most Christians read these biblical metaphors of Light as references to the Holy Spirit. But Friends believed that the Second Coming was in progress, and that Christ was the Word, Seed, Law, Light, Rock, Cornerstone that lived in converts’ hearts, guiding them. Fell was an architect of this belief, and so helped to construct the eschatology of Friends’ religion, a belief that the millennium (the end of time, thought to be about a thousand years after Christ’s death) was at hand.

In the texts included in this volume, we can see Fell shaping the belief in Christ, the returned Word or Light or Seed inside each Christian, as conscience, making the convert part of the Body of Christ—not only the Church, but also the immanent, returned Christ who heralds the end of the world. *To All the Professors of the World*, for example, is an early text in which Fell explains that other Protestants only profess “a Christ afar off,” but Christ is here, “the Light of Jesus Christ which manifests him in the flesh”—“This Word, which we have seen, which we have heard, which our hands have handled.” At the other end of Fell’s writing career, in *The Daughter of Zion Awakened*, Fell discusses the Second Coming as a continual process: “Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, hath God shined, in the light of his glorious Son, to recover, and to bring back, and to redeem his whole body, which is his Church, out of all nations, kindreds, peoples, tongues, and languages.... the everlasting day is dawning in the hearts of men and women.” This wonderful transformation imbued Friends with a powerful hope

39. Wilcox, *Theology and Women’s Ministry in Seventeenth-Century English Quakerism: Handmaids of the Lord* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 41.

40. Bruyneel, *Margaret Fell and the End of Time*, 6–7, 71, 79, and 103.

that instilled in them the courage to resist governmental and social constraints, for “in these last days,” “Christ is come in the flesh.” As Fell describes them in *A Testimony of the Touchstone for all Professions*, the opponents of this transformation are mere “potsherds” compared to the Rock, hard hearts instead of hearts imprinted with the Word, the blind who cannot see the Light. Those who were converted, Friends believed, knew how to interpret scripture, and indeed heard the scripture inside themselves: as Fell urges, “Turn to the Light in every one of your consciences; this is the Word of Faith.” Friends, Fell explains in *A Loving Salutation to the Seed of Abraham among the Jews*, are “tried by the Light, and led by the Light, and guided by the Light.” Throughout her pamphlets, Fell equates Christ with all the references in the scriptures to Light, Seed, Law, Word, Rock, Cornerstone, and conscience.

Friends’ Theology: Visions of Equality and Liberty of Conscience

One result of the belief that Christ is immanent in a Friend’s heart was the corollary belief that all are equal in God’s eyes—men and women, Jews and Christians, all races. Other Christians had adopted this tenet as well, following the passages by Paul in Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11, frequently quoted by Friends, but other Christians interpreted this concept as applying to the hereafter, not to the present: all would be equal in Heaven, but in this life, all are under the strictures of fallen humanity—women must obey men, and people must bow to their government’s laws, earthly laws that enforced inequality.

Fell was crucial in establishing the Friends’ belief that women were equal to men in the here and now, and especially that women might speak out and testify to their faith—what other sects called “preaching”—as surely as men.⁴¹ As we can see in *Women’s Speaking Justified*, Fell interprets scripture as establishing women and men as equal, “For Christ in the male and in the female is one,” and God “makes no such distinctions and differences as men do. . . . God hath put no such difference between the male and female as men would make.” In another passage, Fell urges that “the Bridegroom is with his bride, and he opens her mouth”; here she argues that Christ the Bridegroom (a frequent New Testament metaphor) lives in his Church, in the heart of every true believer, and, since the Church consists of both men and women, all are equal—women, as well as men, may speak in Meetings to testify to their beliefs. Elsewhere in *Women’s Speaking Justified*, Fell presents further evidence of women’s role in the church: “Moreover, the Lord is pleased, when he mentions his Church, to call her by the name of ‘woman,’” she writes, citing passages in Isaiah, Jeremiah, the Psalms, and the Song of Solomon (which Fell calls the Canticles). This belief in equality did not mean that men and

41. On the equality of men and women in Friends’ belief, see Wilcox, *Theology and Women’s Ministry*, 144, 161, 164–65, and 191–233; and Bruyneel, *Margaret Fell and the End of Time*, 18.

women needed to do everything the same way, however, and Fell and her daughters were active in establishing Women's Meetings in London and Yorkshire.⁴²

As a result of the belief that Christ has returned to live in the hearts of all converts, and that this return heralds the End of Time, Friends consequently believed that they were called to be missionaries, to turn as many people as possible—men and women, black and white, Jews and Muslims and Christians of other sects—to this belief. Friends traveled the world preaching their beliefs, and were imprisoned in locations as far apart as Madagascar and New England for their proselytizing. While Fell did not travel outside England, she promoted this belief in several pamphlets addressed to Jews and aimed at their conversion. As an example, we have included in this volume *A Loving Salutation to the Seed of Abraham among the Jews*. This pamphlet, published in English in 1656, but in Hebrew and English in parallel columns in 1660, is addressed to Jews, and urges them to convert by rereading the Hebrew Scriptures⁴³ as support for Friends' beliefs. In order to persuade Jews to these new beliefs, Fell uses the analogy of the covenant that God made with Israel to explain the Inner Light of Christ as a covenant to restore Jews to a spiritual Israel: "his covenant is he performing with you, if you do turn to that measure of Light which you have received from him." This approach may seem intolerant to us now, but in the seventeenth century, when Jews were persecuted as heretics and banished from England and several other European countries, Fell's strategy indicates her intention to treat them as equals, especially in her use of the Hebrew language and her arguments based not on New Testament but on the Hebrew Scriptures. The God to which Fell appeals in this pamphlet is one who views all people as equal: this "Lord teacheth all his people," and he is a God "which all nations must follow ... a leader of all unto God"—"Jew and Gentile, barbarian, Scythian, bond and free."⁴⁴ Especially interesting is her forgoing of the title "Christ" for this aspect of God, and her use, instead, of phrases from the Hebrew Scriptures.

Just as belief in the equality of all people was based on Friends' concept of the returned Christ as a Light manifested in their consciences, a Light all might follow, so Friends' appeals to the doctrine of liberty of conscience were based on this same idea. Friends were committed to following that Inner Light of Christ, not the regulations of the Church of England or the laws of king and parliament. Many dissenters had appealed to such liberty of conscience before—the martyr

42. Kunze, *Margaret Fell and the Rise of Quakerism*, 154–57.

43. The Hebrew Scriptures (the Hebrew Bible, or *Tanakh*), are the ancient texts of Judaism from which Christians compiled what they term the "Old Testament." Although most of the *Tanakh* was composed in Hebrew, some texts, such as parts of Daniel, were written in Aramaic, a language closely related to Hebrew.

44. Kunze concludes that she was able to "change the rules for race ... for she took a universalist approach in her theology." See *Margaret Fell and the Rise of Quakerism*, 10.

Sir Thomas More and other Catholics, the martyr Anne Askew, and many other dissenting Protestants. But, as Bruyneel claims, while the appeal to liberty of conscience was recognized in seventeenth-century English law, Friends “pushed the boundaries of the concept both in religion and society.”⁴⁵ In her letter to Charles II in this volume, Fell makes this appeal, and in her *Examination*, we can see her enacting liberty of conscience with full awareness of the consequences, despite her appeal to its power as a legal principle. In *A Letter sent to the King*, Fell tells Charles that God made him king, but that he, in return, has “laid oppression and bondage on the consciences of God’s people [i.e. the Society of Friends].” She reminds Charles that when he was in exile, he promised “that thou would’st give liberty to tender consciences,” and let nonviolent and law-abiding dissenters follow their religion. Indeed, in many petitions, audiences with the king, and letters, Fell successfully used this appeal in specific circumstances to convince Charles to release imprisoned Friends.

We can further see her enacting this principle in the record of her trial for holding Meetings at her estate, Swarthmoor Hall. Judge Twisden⁴⁶ had threatened that if Fell did not promise to discontinue holding Meetings at her house and attend the Church of England (which was required by law), he would ask her to swear the Oath of Allegiance, an oath that was often used to sift out Catholics but was frequently employed against more radical dissenters as well—although only very rarely against women. Those who refused the Oath were fined and jailed. In response to this threat, Fell explains the Friends’ refusal to take any oaths: “Christ Jesus hath commanded in plain words, *That I should not Swear at all*, Matthew 5, and for obedience to Christ’s doctrine and command am I here arraigned this day. So you, being Christians, and professing the same thing in words, judge of these things according to that of God in your consciences.” Here Fell asks judge and jury to follow their liberty of conscience, the Light of Christ inside them, against the letter of the law. Fell insists that she has been indicted “upon the account of my conscience, and not for any evil or wrong done.” The exasperated judge tries again and again to make Fell acknowledge that she has broken a law, and so committed an evil act, but she maintains the clear distinction between evil and crime that liberty of conscience prompts in her. She explains that Friends cannot go to the Church of England “contrary to our consciences.” And when the judge offers her “liberty till the next Assizes,” she refuses it, for she “must keep [her] conscience clear”: in precise legal terms, in a witty combination of theological and legal concepts, she chooses liberty of conscience over liberty.

45. Bruyneel, *Margaret Fell and the End of Time*, 81.

46. Sir Thomas Twisden (1602–1683), a justice of the King’s Bench. See Paul D. Halliday, “Twisden (formerly Twysden), Sir Thomas, first baronet (1602–1683),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004–), article published September 23, 2004, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>>.

Friends' Theology: Reading the Bible in the Heart

Friends' belief in the returned Christ as a Light in the heart of each convert further determined Fell's hermeneutics (her theory of Bible reading) and her method of exegesis (interpretation of the Bible); indeed, Fell was instrumental in establishing Friends' methods of reading the Bible. In her 1656 pamphlet, *To All the Professors of the World*, Fell sets out this method of reading:

Therefore, turn in to the measure of the Light given you from the Fountain of Light, and see what ye have there in possession. There ye will find your house unswept and unclean. For the woman, that had lost the groat, sought without; but she found it not till she came to sweep her own house, and there she found it. This parable ye must read within. Jesus ... *likened the Kingdom of Heaven to leaven, which a woman hid in three measures of meal, till all was leavened.* Though ye have the letter without you, yet these parables ye have to learn. Now turn to the Light, and there ye will come to see; and learning there, in the Light, ye will come to see and know the mysteries of God ...

Modern readers tend to see reading as transporting knowledge from outside texts into inner storage in the memory. For Fell, reading is not commodified, a transportation from outside to inside. Instead, reading is a work of caring, like women's sweeping up the house or making bread for the family. Reading can be seen as an enriching of outer text by inner text, as yeast makes bread rise. In addition, reading is an interaction between the reader and the Word within. For this inner Word, Fell uses the analogies of "Inner Light," or "Law, which is written on the heart," or "the Books of Conscience."⁴⁷

For Fell, a reader understands a text only from the interaction of outer and inner word, as she explains in *A Loving Salutation*: "these Scriptures were spoken forth from an eternal Spirit within, and no other spirit can read them but the same that spoke them forth, which Spirit is Light." If there is no Inner Light, readers are left with only "their own inventions and imaginations and meanings."⁴⁸ Only through the inner Word can the outer word of the Bible be understood.

47. *To All the Professors* and *Loving Salutation*—both in this collection; compare Fell's *A Call to the Universal Seed of God, Throughout the Whole World ...* (1664), in Margaret Fell, *A Brief Collection of Remarkable Passages and Occurrences Relating to the Birth, Education, Life, Conversion, Travels, Services, and Deep Sufferings of That Ancient, Eminent, and Faithful Servant of the Lord, Margaret Fell; But by her Second Marriage, Margaret Fox ...* (London, 1710), 317: "he is the true Christian, that hears the Word of God in his Heart."

48. Fell, *A Declaration and an Information from Us the People of God called Quakers, To the Present Governors, the King and Both Houses of Parliament* (London, 1660), 5.

For Friends, reading is a continual experience of “Revelation”: “the Lord’s Love ... opening unto you that which hath been shut, ... the Revelation of Jesus being made manifest in your Consciences, and the Law of the new Covenant being written in your Hearts, which you have read in.”⁴⁹ As Fell explains in *A Testimony of the Touchstone*, revelation is based not on a material text, but on the inner Word, “the immortal ingrafted Word of God.” According to Fell, others who call themselves Christians “have the Words and Declaration of Christ and the Apostles, declared from the Spirit of Life; and we have the Spirit, which these Words were declared from.”⁵⁰ In her study of theology and ministry in the Society of Friends, Catherine Wilcox notes the Friends’ belief that the Word of Christ opened inside them and that, while revelation was never uninformed by scripture, those inspired by the Light experienced the same spirit that inspired scripture to guide them in their reading.⁵¹

The reading process that Fell envisages does not ignore the Bible as a material book. Fell frequently urges her audience to “read and examine” the Bible, to become active readers who will make the Bible their own. For example, she exhorts, “And search the Scriptures, and examine them honestly, and see whether ye are not deceived by them who draw you from the Light.”⁵² The reading process that Fell advises, however, does not accept the material scriptures as privileged over the inner judgment of the reader, what Fell would call the Light of Conscience or the inner Word: “So, Dear Friends, Read, and Understand, Search and Examine in every Particular with the Candle of the Lord, which is lighted in you, which makes all things manifest of what sort it is.”⁵³

Women’s Literacy and Fell’s Reading and Writing

Because the Reformation began in the sixteenth century shortly after the printing press arrived in Europe and England, Protestants strategically promoted literacy and exploited print technology in their proselytizing. In the seventeenth century, the Society of Friends employed these strategies with great success, and Margaret Fell was a prolific contributor, through her “epistles” or letters to Friends and other religious groups and through pamphlet publication. Except for her autobiography,

49. Margaret Fell and James Parke, *Two General Epistles to the Flock of God* (London, 1664), 4. On the Friends’ belief in “continuing revelation,” see Glines, ed., *Undaunted Zeal*, 5.

50. Fell, *A True Testimony from the People of God, (Who by the World Are Called Quakers) ... Directed To All the Professed Teachers in the World, Who Go under the Name of Christians, &c.* (1660), in *A Brief Collection*, 242.

51. Wilcox, *Theology and Women’s Ministry*, 57–76.

52. Fell, *A Tryal of the False Prophets* (n.d.), in *A Brief Collection*, 144.

53. Fell, *A General Epistle to Friends* (1658), in *A Brief Collection*, 198.

A Relation, Fell's works might have circulated first in manuscript⁵⁴ before being printed for circulation to a wider audience, and, after her death, assembled in *A Brief Collection of Remarkable Passages and Occurrences Relating to ... Margaret Fell* (1710). Friends anticipated the ways that later Protestant sects—especially Methodists—used literacy and religious newsletters and journals to sustain believers and propagate new conversions.

While the Bible of the medieval Roman Catholic Church discouraged individual reading except for clerics or others who read Latin, or those with enough money to afford expensive, hand-produced vellum manuscripts, the vernacular translations of the Protestant Reformation, printed on relatively inexpensive paper, allowed much wider circulation of the Bible and more individual interpretation. Print technology thus supported two key Reform tenets from the sixteenth century on: the path to salvation was by means of the Word rather than the rite (Christ communicating through the biblical text rather than the ritual commemoration of Christ's sacrifice in the Mass); and the guide to salvation was individual interpretation rather than the authority of the Catholic Church (based on the inner voice of faith, rather than the voice of the priest). The Protestant Reformation thus promoted wide literacy throughout Europe and Britain, including that of women, because one needed to read the Word to be saved.⁵⁵

Studying Fell helps us to better understand women's reading and writing practices. Early modern literacy has been assessed mainly by two means: percentages of actual signatures vs. signatories' marks on public records such as wills, and book ownership and marginal commentary. This information mainly concerns men because women rarely owned books, and, in a culture where reading and writing were taught separately, women and lower-class men were more often taught just to read, rather than to read and write.⁵⁶ In the last few decades,

54. See Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 160: friends' "letters were not truly personal in the modern sense. Hundreds would be recopied as inspirational messages of self-transcendence and loyalty to the group ... while many were explicitly framed as epistles, to be circulated and read aloud at meetings. Letters were also the primary means of organizing the movement."

55. See, for example, Harvey Graff, "The Legacies of Literacy," in *Language and Literacy in Social Practice*, ed. Janet Maybin (Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, 1994), 157: "The Reformation constituted the first great literacy campaign in the history of the West, with its social legacies of individual literacy as a powerful social and moral force." He points out that Sweden, as a result, achieved nearly universal literacy through home education sponsored by the Lutheran Church with the monarchy's support. This literacy, however, was almost wholly the ability to read not to write (159). On women's literacy, see also R. A. Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe: Culture and Education, 1500–1800* (New York: Longman, 1988), 134–37; and Wilcox, *Theology and Women's Ministry*, 133–34, on literacy and Quaker women.

56. On early modern men's book ownership and annotation, see Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century*