

## New Garden Friends Meeting

---

A Religious Society of Friends | Established in 1754  
801 New Garden Road, Greensboro, NC 27210  
T: 336/292-5487 E: office@ngfm.org

October 21, 2015

Dear Friends of North Carolina Yearly Meeting,

New Garden Friends Meeting has given prayerful consideration to the affirmations set forth in “the plan” that all the monthly meetings in NCYM-FUM were asked to respond to. We have approved a minute in response and included a companion collection of Fox’s writings about the use of scripture. They are enclosed.

We are sending this minute to the wider yearly meeting rather than only to the committee that devised “the plan” because this minute is a plea that all of us in the yearly meeting can learn to live with differences rather than requiring uniformity of belief and thought. We do so in the hope that others will affirm this approach as the best means of achieving peace among us.

In peace,

Mary Louise Smith  
Monthly Meeting Clerk  
New Garden Friends Meeting

*Attachments: 2*

## **New Garden Friends Meeting's Response to "the Plan" offered by a Task Force of NC Yearly Meeting, FUM**

New Garden Friends Meeting, established in 1754, has been a member of NC Yearly Meeting, FUM for over 250 years. We offer this response in the spirit of cooperation and in hopes of clear communication with NC Yearly Meeting, FUM.

### 1. Affirm NC Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice, including the Richmond Declaration of Faith

We are a diverse community of seekers, searching together in the Quaker way and finding that it reveals the Light of God, leading us forward on our spiritual journeys both individually and together. Together, we seek to find and affirm that of God in everyone and to live in the power of the Light which takes away the occasion of wars and strife, which inspired the scriptures, and which still speaks to us experientially every day. Because of our faith in the continuing revelation available to us through our Inward Teacher, we do not require statements of belief or "affirmations" such as those laid out in "the Plan." While we value the scriptures, like George Fox, we do not wish to confuse the words with "the Word" which is above and beyond them (*see the attachment of quotations reflecting Fox's teachings on the place of scripture*), nor do we hold such tests of orthodoxy as the Richmond Declaration to be necessary. We use several versions of Faith and Practice as guides and find their use of queries to be more in keeping with a Quaker understanding of faith and more helpful than "affirmations." Instead, we trust the Holy Spirit to work within each individual and in our community as we labor to discern a way forward. We believe that if we follow our leadings, we can find the will of God individually and together. We meet together for encouragement and by sharing our experiences build one another up in faith, trusting that when we meet in expectant waiting, the Holy Spirit will reveal the next step we need to take in order to move forward in faith. As Fox suggests, the Holy Spirit works within us by "convincement," making it unnecessary for us to insist that each person have a common understanding at each moment. We believe that if we "take others to God and leave them there," the Light will shine and reveal the Truth to them and to us. For this reason, we reject an unnecessary reliance on doctrine. A creed is a creed, no matter what you call it, and we find such things to be a distraction and the very antithesis of Fox's focus on trust in the Holy Spirit's guidance in the here and now.

### 2. Dual Affiliation

For us, the Monthly Meeting is central, but we do not wish to be insular. While some New Gardeners have found meaningful relationships and connections to service opportunities through NCYM-FUM, for others, Friends General Conference is a better fit. In affiliating with Friends General Conference through Piedmont Friends Fellowship and Yearly Meeting, New Garden Friends were recognizing that fact. We did not seek to part ways with NCYM-FUM. New Garden was well aware that NCYM Faith and Practice did not prohibit dual affiliations and that a number of meetings and yearly meetings are dually or even triply aligned with FUM, EFI and FGC before our decision to join PFYM was made. Instead of creating barriers, we sought to open more doors and windows to the wider Quaker world.

### 3. Integrity

While it is likely true that there are those among us who might affirm a) through d) as laid out by “the Plan,” it is undeniable that most among us would not. For example, our community includes people who are divorced and lesbian and gay folk. In no way do we find affirming them and their love for one another contrary to the testimony of integrity. As discussed before, we find queries regarding right relationship, responsible use of alcohol, stewardship of the earth, honesty in word and deed and seeking peace in all things to be more useful for purposes of self-examination in the light of God’s love than are statements of belief on these topics.

### 4. Askings

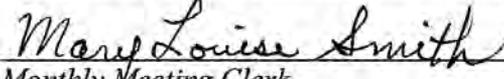
This is an area New Gardeners have recently been encouraged to reexamine. Because NCYM has been perceived as excluding some of our members and pursuing projects which did not fit with our sense of right priorities, New Garden has not paid some portion of our askings in recent years, only funding projects we felt clear to support. Painful, hurtful interactions with others in NCYM-FUM have contributed to a perception of estrangement. Because we have contributed to specific projects and not to the general budget, some have had the misimpression that we have been giving nothing at all. This has never been the case. This year, we were persuaded that perhaps it was unfair for us to benefit from our connection to NCYM-FUM in some ways without contributing to the general budget, and we knew the Yearly Meeting was facing financial difficulties. For this reason, we did contribute some of our funds towards askings this year, and our clerk has encouraged us to reevaluate our approach toward askings in a more thorough-going manner in the year ahead.

### 5. Our Vision

Our wish and vision for NCYM-FUM is to dream of a yearly meeting where the variety of meetings represented under its umbrella might come together for fellowship and service, honoring that of God in each of us. Rather than requiring an affirmation of beliefs, such a yearly meeting would affirm the gifts of each meeting and trust the Holy Spirit to work in each community to find ways that each community’s diverse gifts might complement the whole. For example, those with a concern for evangelism through church-planting would be supported and encouraged in this, while those who sought to address racism in their communities or peace in the Middle East would also be appreciated and encouraged to follow their leadings to work on these concerns. In our ideal yearly meeting, there would be enough love and trust to celebrate different callings, with no expectation, and certainly no effort, to force all meetings to be the same. “For there are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities, but the same God, who activates all of them in everyone.” (I. Cor. 12: 4-6)

In this spirit and in this hope, we offer our response to NCYM-FUM.

*Approved by New Garden Friends Monthly Meeting 10.04.2015*

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
*Monthly Meeting Clerk*

# GEORGE FOX'S TEACHING ON THE PLACE OF SCRIPTURE

---

This file contains some passages I've found in the writings of George Fox (1624-1691, often named as the founder of Quakerism) that explain his view of the Bible and indicate the basis for his hermeneutic, or principle of interpretation. If you know of additional passages on this theme, please advise me. --George Amoss

---

## **(1) From *The Great Mystery*:**

And the scriptures, which signify writings, outward writings, with paper and ink, are not, as you say, infallible, nor are they divine, but human, and men get a human knowledge from them; and so writings with paper and ink are not infallible, nor is the scripture the ground of faith, but Christ [is the ground], who was before the scripture was written; this the scripture tells you, and that God is divine; and the scriptures are the words of God, which Christ, the [W]ord, ends, who is the author of the faith.

## **(2) A famous passage from the Journal:**

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, O then, I heard a voice which said, "There is one, even [i.e., namely] 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 [i.e., hinder] it? and this I knew experimentally. My desires after the Lord grew stronger, and zeal in the pure knowledge of God, and of Christ alone, without the help of any man, book, or writing. For though I read the scriptures that spake of Christ and of God, yet I knew him not, but by revelation, as he who hath the key did open, and as the Father of life drew me to his son by his Spirit. Then the Lord gently led me along, and let me see his love, which was endless and eternal, surpassing all the knowledge that men have in the natural state, or can get by history or books; and that love let me see myself, as I was without him; and I was afraid of all company, for I saw them perfectly, where they were, through the love of God which let me see myself. [For an explication of that passage, see ["Questioning Quakerism as Mysticism."](#)]

## **(3) From the Journal:**

[...the priest] took for his text these words of Peter: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well, that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts." And he told the people that this [word] was the scriptures, by which they were to try all doctrines, religions, and opinions. Now the Lord's power was so mighty upon me, and so strong in me, that I could not hold, but was made to cry out and say, "Oh! no; it is not the scriptures;" and told them it was the Holy Spirit, by which the holy men of God gave forth the scriptures, whereby opinions, religions, and judgments were to be tried; for it led into all Truth, and so gave the knowledge of all Truth.

## **(4) From the Journal:**

That which I was moved to declare was this: "That the holy scriptures were given forth by the Spirit of God; and all people must come to the Spirit of God in themselves, by which they might know God and Christ, of whom the prophets and the apostles learnt; and by the same Spirit know the holy scriptures; for as the Spirit of God was in them that gave forth the scriptures, so the same Spirit of God must be in all them that come to understand the scriptures; by which Spirit they might have fellowship with the Father, with the Son, with the scriptures, and with one another; and

without this Spirit they can know neither God, Christ, nor the Scriptures, nor have right fellowship one with another. I had no sooner spoken these words, than about half a dozen priests, that stood behind me, burst out into a passion. One of them, whose name was Jackus, amongst other things that he spake against the truth, said, That the Spirit and the letter were inseparable. I replied, "Then everyone that hath the letter hath the Spirit; and they might buy the Spirit with the letter of the scriptures." This plain discovery of darkness in the priest moved Judge Fell and colonel West to reprove them openly, and tell them, That according to that position, they might carry the Spirit in their pockets, as they did the scriptures.

**(5) From the Journal:**

These things I did not see by the help of man, nor by the letter, though they were written in the letter, but I saw them in the light of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by his immediate Spirit and power, as did the holy men of God, by whom the Holy Scriptures were written. Yet I had no slight esteem of the Holy Scriptures, but they were very precious to me, for I was in that spirit by which they were given forth, and what the Lord opened in me I afterwards found was agreeable to them.

**(6) From the Journal:**

They asked me whether the scripture was the word of God. I said [that] God was the Word and the Scriptures were writings, and the Word was before writings were, which Word did fulfill them.

**(7) In Epistle CCCXX**, after many pages of scriptural references which he adduces to confirm the validity of women's meetings and ministry, Fox makes this remarkable statement:

And if there was no scripture [that is, no scriptural warrant] for our men and women's meetings, Christ is sufficient, who restores man and woman up into the image of God, to be helps-meet in the righteousness and holiness, as they were in before they fell. So he is our rock and our foundation to build upon.

**(8) From Epistle CCLXV:**

...for he that believes in the light, it lets him see the scriptures, the prophets, Christ and the apostles' words, and by it they do distinguish the true prophets' words from the false, the holy men's words from the unholy, the sanctified from them that are not sanctified, Christ's words from the antichrist's, the true apostles' words from the false. So Christ the light teacheth his people to believe in that which manifests all things; and they that believe in the light have the witness in themselves of Christ, in whom they do believe, they have the witness in themselves, that he is their redeemer, and savior, and their way, their truth, and their life....

---

NOTES:

Except where otherwise noted, the quotations from George Fox's Journal are taken from a 19th century printing from Friends' Bookstore in Philadelphia.

(1) *The Great Mystery of the Great Whore Unfolded*, Vol. 3 of Fox's Works, p. 476 (2) Fox's Journal, pp. 60, 61

(3) *Ibid.*, p. 76

(4) *Ibid.*, p. 128

(5) *Ibid.*

(6) *Fox's Journal*, John T. Nickalls, ed., pp. 158-159

(7) *Works of George Fox*, Vol. 8, 1831, p. 10

(8) *Ibid.*, p. 115