

# Thomas Kelly *speaks*

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Thomas R. Kelly's life (1893-1941) was a quest for reality. Two methods of achieving that goal characterized his search. In his earlier years the stress was upon scholarship; in the latter years the emphasis was upon commitment to Christ and holy obedience to the Inner Voice. Scholarship was not neglected but it became subordinate to inward orientation.

His life came into focus in the summer of 1938 on a memorable visit among German Quakers. There he was "literally melted down by the love of God," as he described the experience. For the next three years he poured out this experience in writing and speaking about the centrality of inward experience, the strength of the blessed community, the joys of the Christ-centered life, and the need for Christian concern. At the height of his powers he passed to the Great Beyond.

Born into a Quaker family in southwestern Ohio, he attended Wilmington College and Hartford Seminary. Most of his life was spent as a professor of philosophy at Earlham College, although he taught for a short time at Pickering College, at the University of Hawaii, and towards the close of his life at Haverford College. During World War I he worked with the Y. M. C. A. in Europe and during 1924-25 he and his wife headed the Quaker Center in Berlin. Quaker outreach in the Orient was one of his chief concerns.

The message of this great mystic is desperately needed today as he still speaks from his first-hand experiences with God.

## ON GOD . . .

"But there is a wholly different way of being sure that God is real. It is not an intellectual proof, a reasoned sequence of thoughts. It is the fact that men *experience* the presence of God. Into our lives come times when, all unexpectedly, He shadows over us, steals into the inner recesses of our souls, and lifts us up in a wonderful joy and peace. The curtains of heaven are raised and we find ourselves in heavenly peace in Christ Jesus. Sometimes these moments of visitation come to us in strange places—on lonely roads, in a class room, at the kitchen sink. Sometimes they come in the hour of worship, when we are gathered into one Holy Presence who stands in our midst and welds us together in breathless hush, and wraps us all in sweet comfortable-ness into His arms of love. In such times of direct experience of Presence, we know that God is utterly real. We need no argument. When we are gazing into the sun we need no argument, no proof that the sun is shining."

## ON A LIVING RELIGION . . .

"Religion isn't something to be added to our other duties, and thus make our lives yet more complex. The life with God is the center of life, and all else is remodelled and integrated by it. It gives the singleness of eye. The most important thing is not to be perpetually passing cups of cold water to a thirsty world. We can get so fearfully busy trying to carry out the second great commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself", that we are underdeveloped in our devoted love to God. But we must love God as well as neighbor."

## **ON THE INWARD LIGHT\* . . .**

"The Inner Light, the Inward Christ, is no mere doctrine, belonging peculiarly to a small religious fellowship, to be accepted or rejected as a mere belief. It is the living Center of Reference for all Christian souls and Christian groups—yes, and of non-Christian groups as well—who seriously mean to dwell in the secret place of the Most High. He is the center and source of action, not the end-point of thought. He is the locus of commitment, not a problem for debate. . . . A practicing Christian must above all be one who practices the perpetual return of the soul into the inner sanctuary. . . ."

"What is here urged are inward practices of the mind at deepest levels, letting it swing like the needle, to the polestar of the soul. And like the needle, the Inward Light becomes the truest guide of life, showing us new and unsuspected defects in ourselves and our fellows, showing us new and unsuspected possibilities in the power and life of good-will among men."

## **ON THE RESULTS OF CONTACT WITH THE LIGHT . . .**

"The basic response of the soul to the Light is internal adoration and joy, thanksgiving and worship, self-surrender and listening. The secret places of the heart cease to be our noisy workshop. They become a holy sanctuary of adoration and of self-oblation, where we are kept in perfect peace, if our minds be stayed on Him who has found us in the inward springs of our life."

"We are owned men, ready to run and not be weary and to walk and not be faint."

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## ON THE STEPS TO HOLY OBEDIENCE . . .

" . . . the first step . . . is the flaming vision of the wonder of such a life, a vision which comes occasionally to us all, through biographies of the saints, through the journals of Fox and early Friends, through a life lived before our eyes . . . , through meditation upon the amazing life and death of Jesus, through a flash of illumination. . . ."

" . . . the second step to holy obedience is this: Begin where you are. Obey *now*. . . . Live this present moment, this present hour . . . in utter, utter submission and openness toward Him.

" . . . the third step in holy obedience, or a counsel, is this: If you slip and stumble and forget God for an hour, and assert your old proud self, and rely upon your own clever wisdom, don't spend too much time in anguished regrets and self-accusations but begin again, just where you are."

"Yet a fourth consideration in holy obedience is this: Don't grit your teeth and clench your fists and say, 'I will! I will!' Relax. Take hands off. Submit yourself to God. Learn to live in the passive voice . . . and let life be willed through you."

## ON THE FRUITS OF HOLY OBEDIENCE . . .

"The fruits of holy obedience are many. But two are so closely likened together that they can scarcely be treated separately. They are the passion for personal holiness and the sense of utter humility."

## ON PRAYER . . .

"This practice of continuous prayer in the presence of God involves developing the habit of carrying on the mental life at two levels. At one level we are immersed in this world of time, of daily affairs. At the same time, but at a deeper level of our minds, we are in active relation with the Eternal Life."

"Such practice of inward orientation . . . is the heart of religion."

## ON THE CROSS . . .

"The Cross as dogma is painless speculation; the Cross as lived suffering is anguish and glory. Yet God, out of the pattern of His own heart, has planted the Cross along the road of holy obedience. And He enacts in the hearts of those He loves the miracle of willingness to welcome suffering and to know it for what it is—the final seal of His gracious love. I dare not urge you to your Cross. But He, more powerfully, speaks within you and me, to our truest selves, in our truest moments, and disquiets us with the world's needs. By inner persuasions He draws us to a few definite tasks, *our* tasks. God's burdened heart particularizing His burdens in us."

## ON JOY . . .

"Christians who don't know an inner pentecostal joy are living contradictions of Christianity."

"I'd rather be jolly Saint Francis hymning his canticle to the sun than a dour old sober-sides Quaker whose diet would appear to have been spiritual persimmons."

## ON THE GATHERED MEETING . . .

"I believe that the group mysticism of the gathered meeting rests upon the Real Presence in our midst. Quakers generally hold to a belief in Real Presence, as firm and solid as the belief of Roman Catholics in the Real Presence in the Host, in the Bread and Wine of the Mass."

"Some individuals need already, upon entering the meeting, to be gathered deep in the spirit of worship. There must be some kindled hearts when the meeting begins. In them and from them, begins the *work* of worship. The spiritual devotion of a few persons, silently deep in active adoration, is needed to kindle the rest, to help those others who enter the service with tangled, harried, distraught thoughts to be melted and quieted and released and made pliant, ready for the work of God and His Real Presence."

"Brevity, earnestness, sincerity—and frequently a lack of polish—characterize the best Quaker speaking."

"Words that hint at the wonder of God, but do not attempt to exhaust it, have an open-ended character. In the silences of our hearts the Holy Presence completes the unfinished words far more satisfyingly."

"Vocal prayer, poured from a humble heart, frequently shifts a meeting from a heady level of discussion to the deeps of worship. Such prayers serve as an unintended rebuke to our shallowness and drive us deeper into worship, and commitment. They open the gates of devotion, adoration, submission, confession. They help to unite the group at the level at which real unity is sought."

## ON CHRISTIAN CONCERN . . .

"Our fellowship with God issues in world-concern. We cannot keep the love of God to ourselves. It spills over. It quickens us. It makes us see the world's needs anew. We love people and we grieve to see them blind when they might be seeing, asleep with all the world's comforts when they ought to be awake and living sacrificially, accepting the world's goods as their right when they really hold them only in temporary trust. It is because of this holy Center we relove people, relove our neighbors as ourselves, that we are bestirred to be means of their awakening."

"Would that we could relove the whole world! But a special fragment is placed before us by the temporal now, which puts a special responsibility for our present upon us."

" . . . a Quaker concern particularizes . . . cosmic tenderness. It brings to a definite and effective focus in some concrete task all that experience of love and responsibility which might evaporate, in its broad generality, into vague yearnings for a golden Paradise."

" . . . a concern has a foreground and a background. In the foreground is the special task, uniquely illuminated, toward which we feel a special yearning and care. . . . But in the background is a second level, or layer, of universal concern for all the multitude of good things that need doing."

"The world needs something deeper than pity; it needs love."



## ON THE SIMPLIFICATION OF LIFE . . .

" . . . I would suggest that the true explanation of the complexity of our program is an inner one, not an outer one. The outer distractions of our interests reflect an inner lack of integration of our own lives. We are trying to be several selves at once, without all our selves being organized by a single, mastering Life within us. Each of us tends to be, not a single self, but a whole committee of selves. . . . It is as if we have a chairman of our own committee of the many selves within us, who does not integrate the many into one but who merely counts the votes at each decision and leaves disgruntled minorities."

"Life from the Center is a life of unhurried peace and power. It is simple. It is serene. It is amazing. It is triumphant. It is radiant. It takes no time, but it occupies all our time. And it makes our life programs new and overcoming. We need not get frantic. He is at the helm. And when our little day is done we lie down quietly in peace, for all is well."

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