

Penington *speaks*

Isaac Penington (1617-1679) was an expert in inward experience. He was a man who knew the true meaning of mysticism. He was a Quaker whose life and writings reflect the certainty, conviction, and commitment of a disciple of Christ.

Penington was born into a prominent Puritan family; his father was once Lord Mayor of London. His education was of the best for that period; his style of writing reflects his wide acquaintance with literature and his absorption of the flavor and beauty of the finest writers.

In 1658 Penington and his wife joined the Quaker movement and devoted all their talents to this renaissance of first-century Christianity. With George Fox, Robert Barclay, James Naylor, William Penn, and others they helped to make Quakerism a powerful force in the England of their day.

Penington's greatest contribution was through his public ministry, through his remarkable letters, and through his many publications. Robert Barclay was the scholarly, logical protagonist of Quakerism; Penington the literary, mystical interpreter of the new movement. Eleven years of imprisonment was a price he paid for his faith, but nothing daunted his devotion to Truth.

Across the years Penington still speaks to our condition even though the quaint phraseology of the 17th century may seem a bit strange to our ears.

ON HIS CONVERSION . . .

" . . . at last (when my nature was almost spent, and the pit of despair was even closing its mouth upon me) mercy sprang, and deliverance came, and the Lord my God owned me, and sealed his love unto me, and light sprang within me, which made not only the Scriptures, but the very outward creatures glorious in my eye, so that everything was sweet and pleasant and lightsome round about me."

" 'Well, then, how came this about?' will some say. Why thus. The Lord opened my spirit, the Lord gave me the certain and sensible feeling of the pure seed, which had been with me from the beginning; the Lord caused his holy power to fall upon me, and gave me such an inward demonstration and feeling of the seed of life, that I cried out in my spirit, *This is he, this is he; there is not another, there never was another. He was always near me, though I knew him not. . . . Oh! that I might now be joined to him and he alone might live in me.*"

"I gave up to be instructed, exercised, and led by him, in the waiting for and feeling of his holy seed, that all might be wrought out of me which could not live with the seed."

ON HIS COMPULSION TO TESTIFY . . .

"Now thus having met with the true way . . . I cannot be silent (true love and pure life stirring in me and moving me), but am necessitated to testify of it to others; and this is it: to retire inwardly, and wait to feel somewhat of the Lord, somewhat of his holy spirit and power, discovering and drawing from that which is contrary to him, and into his holy nature and heavenly image."

ON RELIGION . . .

"The main thing in religion is to receive a principle of life from God, whereby the mind may be changed, and the heart made able to understand the mysteries of his kingdom, and to see and walk in the way of life; and this is the travail of the souls of the righteous, that they may abide, grow up, and walk with the Lord in this principle; and that others also, who breathe after him, may be gathered into, and feel the virtue of, the same principle."

"The beginning of this religion, of this power and holy inward covenant, is sweet; but the pure progress and going on of it much more pleasant, as the Lord gives to feel the growth and sweet living freshness of it; notwithstanding the temptations, fears, troubles, trials, oppositions, and great dangers, both within and without. . . ."

ON THE GOSPEL STATE . . .

"The gospel state is a state of substance, a state of enjoying the life, a state of feeling the presence and power of the Lord in his pure holy spirit, a state of binding up, a state of healing, a state of knowing the Lord and walking with him in the light of his own spirit. It begins in a sweet, powerful touch of life, and there is a growth in the life (in the power, in the divine virtue, in the rest, peace, and satisfaction of the soul in God) to be administered and waited for daily. Now art thou here, in the living power, in the divine life, joined to the spring of life, drawing water of life out of the well of life with joy? Or art thou dry, dead, barren, sapless, or at best but unsatisfied mourning after what thou wantest?"

ON CHRIST . . .

"Christ is a perfect physician, and is able to work a perfect cure on the heart that believeth in him, and waiteth upon him. Yea, he came to destroy the works of the devil, to cleanse man's mind of the darkness and power of Satan, and to fill it with the life and power of truth; and he sent forth a ministry not only for the beginning but for the perfection of the work; yea, his sword in the mouth and heart is powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, and he can cast out the strong man, and cut down all that is corrupt and contrary to himself, and break down every stronghold in the mind, and spoil all the goods of the enemy."

"Christ is the minister of the true sanctuary, which God hath pitched, and not man. There is a city whose builder and maker is God. The foundation stone, the cornerstone, the top stone of this city or building is Christ. He, therefore, that would know Christ, and be built upon Christ, must find a holy thing revealed in his heart, and his soul built thereon by him alone can raise this building, who can rear up the tabernacle that hath long been fallen down, who can build up the old waste places, and restore the paths for the ransomed and redeemed of the Lord to walk and travel in."

"Christ hath plainly chalked out the path of his rest to every weary, panting soul, which he that walketh in cannot miss of . . . the rest is at the end of it, nay, the rest is in it; he that believeth entereth into the rest."

ON THE SEED OF GOD IN MAN . . .

"The seed of God is the word of God; the seed of the kingdom is the word of the kingdom. It is a measure of the light and life, of the grace and truth, which is by Jesus Christ, whereof in him is the fulness. It is a heavenly talent, or manifestation of his spirit in the heart, which is given to man for him, in the virtue and strength of Christ, to improve for God. This which God hath placed in man, to witness for himself, and to guide man from evil unto good (in the pure breathing, quickenings, and shinings of it) this is the seed, which is freely bestowed on man, to spring up and remain in him, and to gather him out of himself into itself."

"The pure, living, heavenly knowledge of the Father, and of his Son Christ Jesus, is wrapped up in this seed."

" . . . he that is united to the seed, to the measure of grace and truth from Christ . . . is united to God, and ingrafted into Christ; and as the seed is formed in him, Christ is formed in him; and as he is formed and new-created in the seed, he is the workmanship of God, formed and new created in Christ."

"What is the nature of the seed of God, or the seed of the kingdom?

It is of an immortal, incorruptible nature. . . .

It is of a gathering nature. . . .

It is of a purging, cleansing nature. . . .

It is of a seasoning, leavening, sanctifying nature. . . .

It is of an enriching nature. . . .

It is of an improving, growing nature, of a nature that will grow and be improved. . . ."

ON PRAYER . . .

"Prayer is the breath of the living child to the Father of Life, in that spirit which quickened it, which giveth it the right sense of its wants, and suitable cries proportionate to its state, in the proper season thereof. . . . Prayer is wholly out of the will of the creature; wholly out of the time of the creature; wholly out of the power of the creature; in the spirit of the Father, who is the fountain of life, and giveth forth breathings of life to his child at his pleasure."

"Lord, take care of all thy children. Oh thou tender Father, consider what they suffer for the testimony of thy truth and for thy name's thyself. Oh carry on thy glorious work which thy own mighty arm hath begun and cut it short in righteousness for thine Elect's sake, that it may be finished by thee, to thine own everlasting praise."

ON HOLY OBEDIENCE . . .

"Give over thine own willing, give over thine own running, give over thine own desiring to know or be anything, and sink down to the seed which God sows in thy heart and let that be in thee, and grow in thee, and breathe in thee, and act in thee, and thou shalt find by sweet experience that the Lord knows that and loves and owns that, and will lead it to the inheritance of life, which is his portion."

ON THE QUAKER MEETING . . .

"And this is the manner of their worship. They are to wait upon the Lord, to meet in the silence of flesh, and to watch for the stirrings of his life, and the breaking forth of his power amongst them. And in the breakings forth of that power they may pray, speak, exhort, rebuke, sin, or mourn, and so on, according as the spirit teaches, requires, and gives utterance. But if the spirit do not require to speak, and give to utter, then everyone is to sit still in his place (in his heavenly place I mean) feeling his own measure, feeding thereupon, receiving therefrom (into his spirit) what the Lord giveth. Now in this is edifying, pure edifying, precious edifying; his soul who thus waits is hereby particularly edified by the spirit of the Lord at every meeting. And then also there is the life of the whole felt in every vessel that is turned to its measure; insomuch as the warmth of life in each vessel doth not only warm the particular, but they are like an heap of fresh and living coals, warming one another, insomuch as a great strength, freshness, and vigor of life flows into all. And if any be burthened, tempted, buffeted by Satan, bowed down, overborne, languishing, afflicted, distressed, and so on, the estate of such is felt in spirit, and secret cries, or open (as the Lord pleaseth), ascend up to the Lord for them, and they many times find ease and relief, in a few words spoken, or without words, if it be the season of their help and relief with the Lord."

" . . . we wait on the Lord, either to feel him in words, or in silence of spirit without words, as he pleaseth."

ON HIS TESTAMENT OF FAITH . . .

"But some may desire to know what I have at last met with. I answer, I have met with the seed. Understand that word and thou wilt be satisfied. I have met with my God; I have met with my Savior; and he hath not been present with me without his salvation; but I have felt the healings drop upon my soul from under his wings. I have met with the true knowledge, the knowledge of life, the living knowledge, the knowledge which is life; and this hath had the true virtue in it, which my soul hath rejoiced in, in the presence of the Lord. I have met with the seed's Father, and in the seed I have felt him my Father. There I have read his nature, his love, his compassions, his tenderness, which have melted, overcome, and changed my heart before him. I have met with the seed's faith, which hath done and doth that which the faith of man can never do. I have met with the true birth, with the birth which is heir of the kingdom, and inherits the kingdom. I have met with the true spirit of prayer and supplication, wherein the Lord is prevailed with, and which draws from him whatever the condition needs; the soul always looking up to him in the will, and in the time and way which is acceptable to him."

"The Inward Journey of Isaac Penington," by Robert J. Leach, is recommended for a fuller account of Penington's writings. It may be obtained from Pendle Hill, Wallingford, Pennsylvania.

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