

William Penn *speaks*

William Penn is one of the rare individuals in world history. Although he lived from 1644 to 1718, his thinking was far ahead of his time.

The continual strife in Europe disturbed him and he drew up a plan for a European federation which antedated the League of Nations by more than 225 years. He was concerned about education and some of his views are strikingly similar to those of outstanding educators today. He was a champion of minorities, whether they were American Indians, oppressed German Mennonites or persecuted English Quakers. He was a city planner, laying out Philadelphia with ample provisions for health, beauty, and recreation. He was a defender of democracy, whether he was upholding the right of trial by jury in the famous Penn-Meade case, or defending the rights of the common man in the American colonies.

Above all he was a Christian statesman, carrying into the Holy Experiment in government in Pennsylvania (and to a lesser extent in New Jersey and Delaware) his basic beliefs as a Quaker.

He had his faults, such as misjudging those around him, and becoming involved in embarrassing financial situations. But he was a great man. "The greatest Englishman and the greatest European of his time" is the comment of one writer; "the greatest of the founders of the American colonies" is the estimate of another.

In the pages that follow he speaks:

ON RELIGION . . .

"The humble, meek, merciful, just, pious and devout souls are everywhere of one religion; and when death has taken off the mask, they will know one another, though the diverse liveries they wear here make them strangers."

". . . do you sit down in true silence, resting from your own will and workings, and waiting upon the Lord . . . until the Lord breathes life into you, refresheth you, and prepares you, and your spirits . . . for His service . . . ?"
(From "A Tender Visitation")

"Let us choose, therefore, to commune where there is the warmest sense of religion, where devotion exceeds formality, and practice most corresponds with profession, and where there is at least as much charity as zeal. For where this society is to be found, there shall we find the Church of God."

"I know no religion that destroys courtesy, civility, and kindness."

"Be it enacted . . . that no person . . . in this province, who shall confess and acknowledge one Almighty God to be the Creator, Upholder and Ruler of the World, and who professes him or herself obliged in conscience to live peaceable and quietly under the civil government, shall in any case be molested or prejudiced for his or her conscientious persuasion or practice. Nor shall he or she at any time be compelled to frequent or maintain any religious worship place or ministry whatever contrary to his or her mind, but shall freely and fully enjoy his or her Christian liberty in that respect . . ." (From an act of the Provincial Assembly, 1682)

ON FAMILY LIFE . . .

"Now I am to leave thee, and that without knowing whether I shall ever see thee more in this world, take my counsel into thy bosom, and let it dwell with thee in my stead while thou livest.

First: Let the fear of the Lord and a zeal and love to His glory dwell richly in thy heart; and thou wilt watch for good over thyself and thy dear children and family. . . .

Secondly: Be diligent in meetings for worship and business; . . . and let meetings be kept once a day in the family. . . .

Thirdly: Cast up thy income and see what it daily amounts to; by which thou mayest be sure to have it in thy sight and power to keep within compass. . . .

Fourthly: And now, my dearest, let me recommend to thy care my dear children. . . . Above all things endeavor to breed them up in the love of virtue, and that holy, plain way of it which we have lived in. . . .

Fifthly: Next breed them up in love of one another. . . . For their learning be liberal. Spare no cost; for by such parsimony all is lost that is saved. . . ."

ON ADVICE TO HIS CHILDREN . . .

And now, my dear children . . . hear my counsel and lay it up in your hearts. . . .

In the first place remember your Creator in the days of your Youth . . . eschew the appearance of evil. . .

Next, betake yourselves to some honest industrious course of life. . . . Love not money nor the world. . . .

Pity the distressed and hold out a hand to help them. . . .

Be humble and gentle in your conversations, of few words, I charge you, but always pertinent.

In making friends, consider well first; and when you are fixed be true. . . .

Watch against anger, neither speak nor act in it. . . .

Avoid flatterers, for they are thieves in disguise. . . .

Next, my children, be temperate in all things.

Be also plain in your apparel. . . . Be sure you speak no evil of any. . . ." (Farewell Letters, 1682)

ON EDUCATION . .

The world is certainly a great and stately volume of natural things. . . But, alas! how very few leaves of it do we seriously turn over. This ought to be the subject of the education of our youth. . . . We are in pain to make them scholars, but not men! To talk, rather than to know. . . . We press their memory too soon . . . and load them with words and rules; to know grammar and rhetoric, and a strange tongue or two, that it is ten to one may never be useful to them, leaving their natural genius to mechanical and physical or natural knowledge uncultivated and neglected, which would be of exceeding use and pleasure to them through the whole course of their life."

ON SOCIAL JUSTICE . . .

"It is a reproach to religion and government to suffer so much poverty and excess."

"Nor can we expect to be heard of God in our prayers that turn the deaf ear to the petitions of the distressed amongst our fellow creatures."

"Those who would mend the world must first mend themselves."

ON RELATIONS WITH THE INDIANS . . .

"I have great love and regard toward you, and I desire to win and gain your love and friendship by a kind, just, and peaceable life; and the people I send are of the same mind, and shall in all things behave accordingly; and if in anything any shall offend you or your people, you shall have a full and speedy satisfaction for the same, by an equal number of just men of both sides, that by no means you may have just occasion of being offended against them." (From a letter to the Indians, 1681)

ON THE USE OF FORCE . . .

"Force may subdue, but love gains, and he that forgives first wins the laurel."

"But what sort of Christians must they be, pray, that can hate in His name, who bids us love; and kill for His sake, that forbids killing, and commands love, even to enemies? O, that we could see some men as eager to turn people to God, as they are to blow them up, and set them one against another."

ON GOVERNMENT . . .

"For my country, I eyed the Lord in the obtaining of it, and more was I drawn inward to look to Him and to owe it to His hand and power, than to any other way. I have so obtained it, and desire that I may not be unworthy of His love, but do that which may answer His kind providence, and serve His truth and people; that an example may be set up to the nations; there may be room there, though not here, for such *an holy experiment*."

" . . . government seems to me a part of religion itself, a thing sacred in its institution and end. . . ."

"Governments, like clocks, go from the motion men give them; and as governments are made and moved by men, so by them they are ruined too. Wherefore governments rather depend upon men, than men upon governments . . . if men be bad, let the government be never so good, they will endeavor to warp and spoil it to their turn."

ON PHILADELPHIA . . .

"And thou, Philadelphia, the virgin settlement of this province, named before thou wert born, what love, what care, what service, and what travail have there been to bring thee forth and preserve thee from such as would abuse and defile thee! Oh, that thou mayst be kept from the evil, that would overwhelm thee; that, faithful to the God of thy mercies, in the life of righteousness, thou mayst be preserved to the end. My soul prays to God for thee, that thou mayst stand in the day of trial, that thy children may be blessed of the Lord, and thy people saved by His power." (From "A Prayer for Philadelphia," 1687)

ON A FEDERATION OF EUROPE . . .

"Now if the sovereign princes of Europe . . . would, for the . . . love of peace and order, agree to meet by their stated deputies in a general diet, estates, or parliament, and there establish rules of justice for sovereign princes to observe one to another; and thus to meet yearly, or once in two or three years at farthest, . . . (in) the Sovereign or Imperial Diet, Parliament, or State of Europe; before which sovereign assembly should be brought all differences . . . that cannot be made up by private embassies before the session begins; and that if any of the sovereignties that constitute these imperial states shall refuse to submit their claim or pretensions to them, or to abide and perform the judgment thereof, and seek their remedy by arms, or delay their compliance beyond the time prefixed in their resolutions, all the other sovereignties, united as one strength, shall compel the submission and performance of the sentence, with damages to the suffering party, and charges to the sovereignties that obliged their submission. To be sure, Europe would quietly obtain the so much desired and needed peace to her harassed inhabitants; no sovereignty in Europe having the power and therefore cannot show the will to dispute the conclusion; and, consequently, peace would be procured and continued in Europe." (From "An Essay Towards the Present and Future Peace of Europe," 1693)

ON THE ART OF LIVING . . .

"Cast up your income and live on half, if you can one-third, reserving the rest for casualties, charities, portions."

"A true friend unbosoms freely, advises justly, assists readily, adventures boldly, takes all patiently, defends courageously, and continues a friend unchangeably."

"If thou thinkest twice before thou speakest once, thou wilt be twice the better for it."

"If thou hast not conquered thyself in that which is thy own particular weakness, thou hast no title to virtue, though thou art free of other men's."

"Humility and knowledge in poor clothes excel pride and ignorance in costly attire."

"And until we are persuaded to stop, and step a little aside, out of the noisy crowd and encumbering hurry of the world, and calmly take a prospect of things, it will be impossible we should be able to make a right judgment of ourselves. . . ."

"The country life is to be preferred, for there we see the works of God; but in cities little else but the works of men. And the one makes a better subject for contemplation than the other."

"Be universal in your spirits. . . ."

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