

# LIFE FROM THE CENTER

## *The Message and Life of Quaker Thomas Kelly*

The Message  
Edited by Kathleen B. Wilson  
The Life Story  
By Kathleen B. Wilson

### ***...IN DEVOTIONAL READING***

***Other seekers have gone before us, and many have left a legacy of their journeys. From these accounts of questions asked, of answers received, and of ways taken, we can find help as we listen for truth in our own hearts. . . .***

***— New York Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice***

LIFE FROM THE CENTER, *The Message and Life of Quaker Thomas Kelly*. Copyright © 2015 by Kathleen B. Wilson. Published on [quakerthomaskelly.org](http://quakerthomaskelly.org).

Numerous excerpts [pp. 1-100: 2000 words] from A TESTAMENT OF DEVOTION by THOMAS R. KELLY. Copyright © 1941 by Harper & Row Publishers, Inc. Renewed 1969 by Lois Lael Kelly Stabler. New introduction Copyright © 1992 by HarperCollins Publishers, Inc. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers. See endnote 7.

Numerous excerpts [pp. 3-97: 2364 words] from THE ETERNAL PROMISE: A SEQUEL TO A TESTAMENT OF DEVOTION by THOMAS KELLY. Copyright © 1966 by Richard M. Kelly. Copyright © renewed 1994 by Richard M. Kelly. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.

Numerous excerpts [pp. 10-125: 820 words] from THOMAS KELLY: A BIOGRAPHY by RICHARD M. KELLY. Copyright © 1966 by Richard M. Kelly. Copyright © renewed 1994 by Richard M. Kelly. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.

Excerpts [pp. 88, 90, 91:344 words] from THE ETERNAL PROMISE: A SEQUEL TO A TESTAMENT OF DEVOTION by THOMAS KELLY. Copyright © 1966 by Richard M. Kelly. Second Friends United Press edition 1988. Published by arrangement with Harper & Row. Used by permission of Friends United Press.

REALITY OF THE SPIRITUAL WORLD by THOMAS R. KELLY. Copyright © 1942 by Pendle Hill. Used by permission of Pendle Hill Publications.

THOMAS R. KELLY, AS I REMEMBER HIM by T. CANBY JONES. Copyright © 1988 by Pendle Hill. Used by permission of Pendle Hill Publications.

NEW LIGHTS AND INNER LIGHT by RICHARD M. KELLY. Copyright © 1995. Used by permission of Quaker Religious Thought.

THREE RAVENS AND TWO WIDOWS: A PERSPECTIVE ON CONTROVERSY AMONG FRIENDS by RICHARD MACY KELLY. Copyright © 2009 by Pendle Hill. Used by permission of Pendle Hill Publications.

THEN AND THE ETERNAL NOW: THOMAS KELLY IN AND BEYOND HISTORICAL CONTEXT by GUY AIKEN. Copyright © 2010. Used by permission of Canadian Friends Historical Association.

PRAYER AS BALLAST, RUDDER, AND SAIL by IRA G. ZEPP, JR. Copyright © 2003 by Ira G. Zepp, Jr. Published by One Tree Productions. Used by permission.

EXPLANATION AND REALITY IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF EMIL MEYERSON by THOMAS KELLY. Copyright ©1937 by Princeton University Press. Public Domain..

## INTRODUCTION

Many share a longing to know faith that is core, vital and true. Despite many important years in several churches, I found myself still searching. It was then that I discovered Thomas R. Kelly in a book by professor, Methodist minister, and family friend Dr. Ira G. Zepp. Introducing Thomas Kelly, Ira wrote: “In his all too brief a life (1893-1941), this brilliant Quaker taught us how to center our lives and discover the Light within.”<sup>1</sup>

In Kelly’s writing I find words that ring clear and true to my own experience. He writes of God, the Light, Love, Presence, the Power, the Living Christ, the Eternal One, Reality, the Other—beyond word or image. He writes of the Inner Light, within me and within all people. He writes of God speaking, even now, to me and to all who listen in the silence. He writes of surrender to God and of the resulting simplification of life.

So profound are his books *A Testament of Devotion* (TD) and *The Eternal Promise* (EP), I am led to introduce them to others through selected passages. His words are quoted, including italics, exactly as he wrote (except as indicated by ellipses or brackets). The format, however, is converted from prose to free verse, consistent with the poetic nature of his devotional writing.<sup>2</sup> Selections from both books are organized together by topic and speak to me directly and personally of the Light Within and life lived from the Center.

Although the biographical details of his life are specific to him, the path taken by Thomas Kelly is not unlike that of other seekers of Truth. And on reading both his life story and the message, it is clear they cannot be separated. His story speaks to the authenticity of his words by confirming that when he refers to “I,” “we,” “us,” and “our” throughout his devotional writing, he expresses the message in the words of his own experience.

It is hoped readers will find this introduction helpful and that you will hear Thomas Kelly saying:

I want to speak, as simply, as tenderly, as clearly as I can.

For God can be found. . . .<sup>3</sup>

It is as St. Augustine says:

He was within and we mistakenly sought Him without.<sup>4</sup>

EP p. 68

*KBW April 7, 2017*

# THE MESSAGE OF THOMAS KELLY

## [Introductory Words]

Quakers<sup>5</sup> appeared in history at just such a time as this,  
when the experience of deep religion  
had grown thin. . . .  
[Their] purpose was not to form another sect  
and to justify it by a peculiar tenet.  
Friends came to dig down  
to the wellsprings of spiritual immediacy,  
holding that religion means  
that which you know,  
feel, experience within yourself. . . .  
Religion means living and walking with God;  
experiencing the power and triumph of knowing Him  
—in short,  
living in the sense of the imminence of God.

EP p. 18

The paradox of true mysticism  
is  
that individual experience leads to social passion, . . .  
Love of God and love of neighbor  
are not two commandments,  
but one.  
It is the highest experience of the mystic,  
when the soul of man [or woman]<sup>6</sup> is  
known to be one with God himself,  
that utility drops off  
and flutters away, useless, to earth,  
that worldshaking consciousness  
of [humankind] in need  
arises in one  
and [one] knows [oneself] to be the channel of Divine Life.

EP p. 3

True decidedness is not of doctrine,  
but of life orientation.  
It is a commitment of life, thoroughly, wholly,  
in every department and without reserve,  
to the Inner Guide. . . .  
It is a joyful and quiet displacement of life  
from its old center in the self,  
and a glad and irrevocable replacement  
of the whole of life  
in a new and divine Center.  
It is a life lived out  
from an all-embracing center of motivation,  
which in glad readiness  
wills to do the will of the Father, [of God,]  
so far as that can be discerned.  
It is a life of integration, of peace,  
of final coordination of all one's powers,  
within a singleness of commitment.  
It is . . . the discovery of the power  
which comes from being "in the unity." EP p. 4

To you who may not know vividly such a life  
I hesitantly, yet also boldly,  
offer a description, not an argument.  
For a description rests primarily upon experience  
while an argument from postulates. . . .  
Mystical religion is everywhere grounded  
in the experimental [experiential] base.  
But descriptions themselves  
are always fragmentary substitutes . . . .  
Therefore these words are not meant to be  
merely intellectual, static word-pictures;  
a burning urge toward completion in immediacy  
underlies them.  
May these words and this speaker step aside,  
having sowed their mission,  
and the Life and Light itself be your guide. EP p.6

\*\*\*\*\*

## The Light Within

Deep within us all  
there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul,  
a holy place, a Divine Center,  
a speaking Voice,  
to which we may continuously return.

Eternity is at our hearts,  
pressing upon our time-torn lives,  
warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny,  
calling us home unto Itself.

Yielding to these persuasions,  
gladly committing ourselves in body and soul,  
utterly and completely,  
to the Light Within,  
is the beginning of true life.

It is a dynamic center,  
a creative Life that presses to birth within us.<sup>7</sup>

TD p.3

You who read these words  
already know this inner Life and Light.  
For by this very Light within you, is your recognition given.  
In this humanistic age

we suppose man is the initiator  
and God is the responder.

But the Living Christ within us is the initiator  
and we are the responders.

God the Lover, the accuser, the revealer of light and darkness  
presses within us.

“Behold I stand at the door and knock.” [Rev. 3:20]  
And all our apparent initiative is already a response,  
a testimonial to His secret presence  
and working within us.

The basic response of the soul to the Light  
is internal adoration and joy,  
thanksgiving and worship,  
self-surrender and listening.

TD p. 4

What is here urged  
are internal practices and habits of the mind.  
What is here urged  
are secret habits of unceasing orientation  
of the deeps of our being  
about the Inward Light,  
ways of conducting our inward life  
so that we are perpetually bowed in worship,  
while we are also very busy  
in the world of daily affairs.

What is here urged  
are inward practices of the mind  
at the 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 goodwill  
among men [and women].

But, more deeply,  
He who is within us urges,  
by secret persuasion,  
to such an amazing Inward Life with Him,  
so that, firmly cleaving to Him,  
we always look out upon all the world  
through the sheen of the Inward Light,  
and react toward [all people]  
spontaneously and joyously  
from this Inward Center.

TD pp. 5-6

\*\*\*\*\*

## Seeking and Being Found

The Quaker discovery and message has always been  
that God still lives and moves,

works and guides,

in vivid immediacy,

within the hearts of men [and women].

For revelation is not static and complete, like a book,

but dynamic and enlarging,

as springing from a *Life* and Soul of all things.

This Light and Life is in all men [and women],

ready to sweep us into its floods,

illumine us with its blinding,

or with its gentle guiding radiance,

send us tendered but strong

into the world of need and pain and blindness.

Surrender of self to that indwelling Life

is entrance upon an astounding,

an almost miraculous Life. . . .

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” [Rev. 3:20]

In the silence of your hearts

hear Him knock.

Outward teachers can only lead us to the threshold.

But “God Himself has come to lead His people.” [George Fox]

Such men and women must be raised up,

heaven-led souls

who are not “seekers” alone,

but “finders,”

finders who have been *found*

by the Father of all the world’s prodigals.

EP pp. 6-7

For there is a life beyond earnestness to be found.  
It is  
the life rooted and grounded in the Presence,  
the Life which has *been found* by the Almighty.  
Seek it, seek it.  
Yet it lies beyond seeking.  
It arises in *being found*.  
To have come only as far as religious determination  
is only to have stood in the vestibule.  
But our confidence in our shrewdness,  
in our education, in our talents,  
in some aspect or other of our self-assured self,  
is our own undoing.  
So earnestly busy  
with anxious, fevered efforts  
for the Kingdom of God have we been,  
that we failed to hear the knock upon the door,  
and to know that our chief task is  
to open that door  
and be entered by the Divine Life.

EP pp. 9-10

\*\*\*\*\*

## Self-Surrender

There is an old, old story that the gateway to deep religion is self-surrender. Dr. Coomaraswamy, writing upon the art of India, says that all developed religions have as their center the experience of becoming unselfed.

. . . according to our

Christian conception of the unselfing in religion,  
to become unselfed

is to become truly integrated as a richer self.

The little, time-worn self about which we fretted—

how narrow its boundaries,

how unstable its base,

how strained its structure.

But the experience of discovering

that life is rooted and grounded

in the *actual*, active, loving Eternal One

is also to experience

our own personal life firm-textured and stable.

For we are no longer imprisoned

between birth and death,

between yesterday and tomorrow,

but Eternity is our home,

while our daily affairs

are coordinated in that supernal light.

Profound immersion in the Divine Love

is a shaking experience.

But it is not an unsettling experience;

one becomes at last truly settled,

a coordinated, integrated personality. EP p. 10

Is religion subjective?

Nay, its soul is in objectivity,

in an Other

whose Life is our true life,

whose Love is our love,

whose Joy is our joy,

whose Peace is our peace,

whose burdens are our burdens,

whose Will is our will.

Self is emptied into God, and God in-fills it. TD p. 31

To find this “indwelling Christ”  
actively, dynamically working within us,  
is to find the secret that Jesus wanted to give to [all people].  
It isn’t a matter of *believing* in the Inner Light,  
it is a matter of *yielding* your lives to Him.  
EP p. 68

I have found  
that in the center of the religious life  
on our part,  
is a continuous and quiet willing away of our lives,  
a willing of all that we are  
and all that comes to us,  
into the heart and the will of God,  
utter dedication of will,  
utter surrender of oneself  
into God’s care,  
as a child trustingly surrenders  
to a father [or mother].

Down beneath the fluctuating changes  
of heavenly elation and hellish discouragement  
we can carry on  
a well-nigh continuous prayer life of *submission*,  
“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”

Luke 23:46 EP pp. 90-91

\*\*\*\*\*

## **The Eternal Now and Social Concern**

THERE IS AN EXPERIENCE OF THE ETERNAL  
breaking into time,  
which transforms all life  
into a miracle of faith and action.  
Unspeakable, profound, and full of glory  
as an inward experience,  
it is the root of concern for all creation,  
the true ground of social endeavor.  
This inward Life and the outward Concern  
are truly one whole,  
and, were it possible, ought to be described simultaneously.  
But linear sequence and succession of words  
is our inevitable lot and compels us to treat separately  
what is not separate: first, the Eternal Now . . .  
and second, . . . Social Concern.

TD p. 65

## *I. The Eternal Now . . .*

. . . I am persuaded  
that in the Quaker experience of Divine Presence  
there is a serious retention of both time and the timeless,  
with the final value and significance  
located in the Eternal,  
who is the creative root of time itself.

For “I saw also  
that there was an ocean of darkness and death,  
but an infinite ocean of light and love  
which flowed over the ocean of darkness.” [George Fox]

The possibility of this experience of Divine Presence,  
as a repeatedly realized and present fact,  
and its transforming and transfiguring effect  
upon all life—  
this is the central message of Friends.

. . . we no longer live merely in time  
but we live also in the Eternal.

The world of time is no longer the sole reality  
of which we are aware.

A second Reality  
hovers, quickens, quivers, stirs, energizes us,  
breaks in upon us  
and in love embraces us,  
together with all things,  
within Himself.

We live our lives at two levels simultaneously,  
the level of time and the level of the Timeless. . . .  
But, fluctuating in predominance though the two levels be,  
such a discovery of an Eternal Life and Love  
breaking in,  
nay, always there,  
but we were too preoccupied to notice it,  
makes life glorious and new.

TD pp. 67-68

Between the relinquished past and the untrodden future  
stands this holy Now,  
whose bulk has swelled to cosmic size,  
for within the Now  
is the dwelling place of God Himself.  
In the Now we are at home at last.  
The fretful winds of time  
are stilled,  
the nostalgic longings of this heaven-born earth-traveler  
come to rest.  
For the one-dimensional ribbon of time has loosed its hold.  
It has by no means disappeared.  
We live within time, within the one-dimensional ribbon.  
But every time-now is found to be  
a continuance of an Eternal Now,  
and in the Eternal Now receives a new evaluation.  
We have not merely rediscovered time;  
we have found in this holy immediacy of the Now  
the root and source of time itself.

TD pp. 71-72

An invariable element in the experience of Now  
is that of unspeakable and exquisite joy,  
peace, serene release.  
A new song is put into our mouths.  
No old song ever has caught the glory  
and the gladness of this Now;  
no former Now can be drawn upon  
to give perfect voice to this Now.  
The well-springs of Life are bubbling up anew each moment.  
When the angel is troubling the waters,  
it is no time to stand on the bank  
and recite past wonders.

[continued]

But the main point  
    is not that a *new song* is put into our mouths;  
    the point is that a new song is *put into* our mouths.  
We sing, yet not we,  
    but the Eternal sings in us. . . .  
It is the joy and peace and serenity  
    which is in the Divine Life itself,  
and we are given to share in that joy  
    which is eternally within all Nows.  
The song is *put into* our mouths,  
    for the Singer of all songs is singing within us.  
It is not we that sing;  
    it is the Eternal Song of the Other,  
        who sings in us,  
        who sings unto us,  
            and through us into the world.  
                    TD pp. 73-74

In the Eternal Now all [persons] become seen in a new way.  
We enfold them in our love,  
and we and they are enfolded together  
    within the great Love of God  
                    as we know it in Christ. . . .

They aren't  
    just masses of struggling beings,  
        furthering or thwarting our ambitions,  
or, in far larger numbers,  
    utterly alien to and insulated from us.  
We become identified with them  
    and suffer when they suffer  
    and rejoice when they rejoice.  
                    TD p. 74

## *II. Social Concern*

The experience of Divine Presence wholly satisfies,  
and there are a few who,  
    like those on the Mount of Transfiguration,  
    want to linger there forever  
    and never return to the valleys of men,  
    where there are demons to be cast out.  
But there is more to the experience of God  
    than that of being plucked out of the world.  
The fuller experience, I am sure,  
    is of a Love which sends us out into the world.  
“As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you” [John 20:21]  
becomes, not an external,  
    Biblically authorized command,  
    but a living, burning experience.  
For the experience of an inflooding, all-enfolding Love,  
    which is at the center of Divine Presence,  
is of a Love,  
    which *embraces all creation*,  
    not just our little, petty selves.

TD p. 80

We have tried to discover  
the grounds of social responsibility  
and social sensitivity of Friends.  
It is not in mere humanitarianism.  
It is not in mere pity.  
It is not in mere obedience to Bible commands. . . .  
The social concern of Friends  
is grounded in an experience—  
an experience of the Love of God. . . .  
Social concern is the dynamic Life of God  
at work in the world,  
made special and emphatic and unique,  
particularized in each individual or group  
who is sensitive and tender  
in the leading-strings of love.  
A concern is God-initiated,  
often surprising, always holy,  
for the Life of God is breaking through into the world.

TD pp. 84-85

It is a great message which is given to us  
—good news indeed—  
that the Light overcomes the darkness.  
But to give the message  
we must also be the message!<sup>8</sup>

\*\*\*\*\*

## Suffering and Springs of Hope

To you I speak with much hesitation about suffering.  
For I am only in middle years,  
    and for me life has not been hard.  
But there is an introduction to suffering  
    which comes with the birth pains of Love.  
And in such suffering one finds for the first time  
    how deep and profound  
    is the nature and meaning of life.  
And in such suffering one sees,  
    as if one's eyes were newly opened  
    upon a blinding light,  
    the very Life of the Eternal God . . . .

EP pp. 13-14

. . . the Inner Light illumines not only God  
    but the world.  
Its discovery within ourselves  
    does not insulate us, together with the Eternal,  
    in solitary ecstasy,  
    away from the poverties of earth;  
it opens our eyes to the old world and  
    shows it to us in a new way.  
Formerly the world spread itself out before us,  
    focused about ourselves.  
We were the center.  
All our enjoyment, of things and [people]  
    was for us,  
    to exploit, to rearrange,  
    to clamber over, to conquer.  
The effective limits of our world  
    were the limits of its utility or importance for us. . . .  
But in the Eternal Presence,  
the world spreads itself out,  
    not as our little world,  
    but as the world of God.

EP pp. 11-12

. . . with the great unselfing,  
the center of concern for suffering  
is shifted *outside* ourselves  
and distributed with breadth unbounded among all,  
friends and so-called enemies.  
For a few agonized moments  
we may seem to be given to stand  
*within* the heart of the World-Father  
and feel the infinite sufferings of love  
toward all the Father's children.  
EP 13

The heart is stretched through suffering, and enlarged.  
But O the agony of this enlarging of the heart,  
that one may be prepared  
to enter into the anguish of others!  
Yet the way of holy obedience  
leads out from the heart of God  
and extends through the Valley of the Shadow.  
TD p. 43

Through the inner revelation of the living Christ  
there has begun to dawn in us  
something of the communion  
between Love and Suffering and Burden-bearing. . . .  
In Him one sees these things grasped and embodied  
and lived out in time so amazingly  
that we stand in reverence and awe.  
And although we understand Him in part,  
through the Living Christ,  
yet we do not understand all.  
For the communion  
of Love and Suffering... and victory on the Cross  
contains the secret  
which leads back  
into the very nature of God Himself.  
EP pp. 14-15

Take a young man or young woman  
    in whom Christ is only dimly formed,  
    but one in whom the seed of Christ is alive.  
Put [them] into a distressed area,  
    into a refugee camp, into a poverty region.  
Let [them] go into the world's suffering,  
    bearing this seed with [them]  
    and in suffering it will *grow*,  
and Christ will be more and more fully formed in [them]. . . .

This is one of the springs of hope—  
the certainty that the seed of Christ is in us all  
    (Quakers have also called it the inner light)  
and the confidence that many of those  
    who call themselves Christian  
will enter suffering,  
    bearing this seed with them,  
    *daring* to let it germinate,  
    *daring* to let it take them through personal risk and  
    financial loss and economic insecurity,  
    up the steep slopes of some obscure Calvary. . . .

The second spring of hope is this:  
We simple, humble [people] can bear the seed of hope.  
No religious dictator will save the world;  
no giant figure of heroic size  
    will stalk across the stage of history today,  
    as a new Messiah.  
But in simple, humble, imperfect [persons]  
    like you and me  
    wells up the spring of hope.  
We have this treasure of the seed  
    in the earthen vessels –  
    very earthen vessels.

EP p. 22-23



## **Worship and Fellowship**

In the practice of group worship on the basis of silence  
come special times

when the electric hush

and solemnity and depth of power  
steals over the worshipers.

A blanket of divine covering comes over the room,  
a stillness that can be felt is over all,  
and the worshipers are gathered

into a unity and synthesis of life

which is amazing indeed.

EP p. 43

For mystical times are capable of all gradings and shadings,  
from sublime heights

to very mild moments of lift

and very faint glimpses of glory.

In the gathered meeting the sense is present

that a new Life and Power has entered our midst.

And we know

not only that we stand erect in the holy Presence,

but also that others sitting with us

are experiencing the same exaltation

and access of power.

We may not know these our neighbors

in any outwardly intimate sense,

but we now know them, as it were,

from within,

and they know us in the same way,

as souls now alive in the same areas

and as blended into the body of Christ,

which is His church.

[continued]

Again and again  
this community of life and guidance  
    from the Presence in the midst  
is made clear  
by the way  
    the spoken words uttered in the meeting  
    join on to one another  
        and to our inward thoughts. . . .

We are in communication with one another  
    because we are being communicated to,  
    and through,  
    by the Divine Presence.  
        EP pp. 45-46

This unity with our fellow worshipers,  
    such that we are “written in one another’s hearts,”  
    is in one sense created  
    and instituted in the hour of worship.

But in a deeper sense  
    it is *discovered* in that hour  
    that we *are* together in one body . . . .

And in a fashion  
    the vividness of our unity fades,  
    is transient,  
    grows weaker after the rise [end] of the meeting.

But the fact *disclosed* in the meeting,  
    namely, that we *are* one body, hid with Christ in God,  
remains,  
    secure from the ebb and flow of *feelings* and *emotion*.

Recall the counsel of George Fox,  
“But all Friends,  
mind that which is eternal,  
    which gathers your hearts together up to the Lord,  
and lets you see  
    that ye are written in one another’s heart . . . .”

EP p. 48

Many a [person] professes  
to be without a shred of mystical elevation  
yet is fundamentally a heaven directed soul. . . .  
The crux of religious living lies in the *will*,  
not in transient and variable states. . . .  
And as individual mystics  
who are led deep into the heart of devotion  
learn to be weaned away from reliance upon special vision,  
learn not to clamor perpetually for the heights  
but to walk in shadows and valleys, dry places,  
for months and years together,  
so must group worshipers learn that worship is fully valid  
when there are no thrills, no special sense of covering,  
but chiefly valleys and dry places. . . .  
I am persuaded that a deeper sifting of religion  
leads us down to the will,  
steadfastly oriented toward the will of God.  
In that steadiness of will  
one walks serene and unperturbed,  
praying only "Thy will be done,"  
confident that we are in His hands  
and He educates us in ways that we do not expect,  
but by means of dryness as well as by means of glory,  
we walk in gratitude if His sun shines upon us,  
and in serenity if He leads us in valleys and dry places. EP p.55

The final grounds of holy Fellowship are in God.  
Lives immersed and drowned in God are drowned in love,  
and know one another in Him,  
and know one another in love.  
God is the medium, the matrix, the focus, the solvent; . . .  
Such lives have a common meeting point . . . .  
They go back into a single Center  
where they are at home with Him and with one another.  
It is as if every soul had a final base,  
and that final base of every soul  
is one single Holy Ground, shared in by all.  
Persons in the Fellowship are related  
to one another through Him,  
as all mountains go down into the same earth. TD p.56

## Listening

We don't begin religion;  
    *God begins it, knocking within,*  
    in faint promptings,  
    in inward appeals  
        in the silences of our hearts. . . .

For the listening to the eternal  
    involves a silence within us,  
        a relaxed receptivity,  
        a listening and an expectancy  
            directed to a still small voice within.

Periods of quiet and meditation . . .  
    should be a part of normal living  
        for all who would go down  
            into central silences  
                which are to be found in the Heart of God.

And then steals in, again and again,  
    a heavenly warmth,  
    a sweet assurance, an invigorative solidity,  
    a constructive integration of the will,  
    a burning love for God,  
    a falling of the scales from the eyes,  
        so that one sees the world anew, simply, directly,  
        as if through the eyes of the God of Love.

I have no interest in silence as a *form*.  
But I know that devotion and dedication arise  
    in the deep communing of the heart,  
    in dwelling with a Silence  
        in the center of our being.

In periods of relaxed listening and expectancy  
    the silence within us seems to merge  
        with a creative silence within the heart of God  
    and we hear Eternity's whispers,  
    and we become miracles of Eternity  
        breaking into Time.

    Live a *listening life*.  
Order your outward life  
    so that nothing drowns out the listening. EP 88

\*\*\*\*\*

## The Simplification of Life

Strained by the very mad pace of our daily outer burdens,  
we are further strained by an inward uneasiness,  
because we have hints

that there is a way of life vastly richer and deeper  
than all this hurried existence,  
a life of unhurried serenity and peace and power.

If only we could slip over into that Center!

If only we could find the Silence  
which is the source of sound!

TD p.92

Life is meant to be lived from a Center,  
a divine Center. . . .

There is a divine Abyss within us all,  
a holy Infinite Center, a Heart,  
a Life who speaks  
in us and through us to the world.

We have all heard this holy Whisper at times.  
At times we have followed the Whisper, and  
amazing equilibrium of life,  
amazing effectiveness of living set in.

TD p. 93

I find that a life of little whispered words of adoration,  
of praise, of prayer, of worship  
can be breathed all through the day.  
One can have a very busy day, outwardly speaking,  
and yet be steadily in the holy Presence.  
We do need a half-hour or an hour  
of quiet reading and relaxation.  
But I find that one can carry  
the recreating silences within oneself,  
*well-nigh all the time. . . .*  
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.

TD p. 97

Now out from such a holy Center  
come the commissions of life.  
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 from this holy Center  
we relove people,  
relove our neighbors as ourselves,  
that we are bestirred  
to be means of their awakening. TD p. 98

Much of our acceptance of multitudes of obligations  
is due to our inability to say No. . . .  
But when we say Yes or No to calls  
on the basis of inner guidance  
and whispered promptings of encouragement  
from the Center of our life,  
or on the basis of a lack of any inward “rising”  
of that Life  
to encourage us in the call,  
we have no reason to give, except one—  
the will of God as we discern it.  
Then we have begun to live in guidance.  
TD pp. 99-100

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.  
[God] is at the helm.  
And when our little day is done  
we lie down quietly in peace,  
for all is well.  
TD p. 100

\*\*\*\*\*

**THE LIFE STORY  
OF  
THOMAS KELLY**

## HIS EARLY YEARS

Thomas Raymond Kelly was born in 1893 on a farm near Chillicothe, Ohio. His father Carlton died when he was just four, but he, his mother Madora, sister, and grandmother Kelly continued to live there with extended family nearby until he was ten. His formative years there were spent in a religious family atmosphere, such that he would later remember playing “minister” as a boy.

In the early 1800s there was a Protestant revivalist movement sweeping across Indiana, Kentucky, and southern Ohio where the Kelly ancestors settled. Outbreaks of tremendous religious enthusiasm occurred for two years during weeklong camp meeting revivals in Cane Ridge, Kentucky. Coming daily would be 10,000 to 20,000 people—Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and those from smaller and new sects. They saw themselves as “New Lights” and “sought to recreate the original spirit and lives of the first Christians or ‘Disciples’”. The Bible, not doctrine or church structure, was their principal guide.”<sup>9</sup> About 1855 Thomas Kelly’s grandfather Thomas William Kelly became a preacher and New Light evangelist.

In 1868 Quaker evangelist John Henry Douglas was led to that area “to visit and hold meetings among friends who lived in places remote from any meetings.”<sup>10</sup> “The New Lights and Revivalist Friends shared much. . . . Salvation was available to all that acknowledged sin and looked to God’s grace.”<sup>11</sup> Many of the extended Kelly family became Quakers and with neighbors founded the Londonderry Monthly Meeting. Thomas William Kelly became a Quaker at the age of 44 and was recorded a month later as a minister and designated as pastor. Thomas Kelly’s uncles and an aunt served the meeting as treasurer, elder, and clerk; his father Carlton served as Sunday school superintendent, assistant clerk, and clerk briefly before he died; and then his mother Madora served as clerk for six years.

Richard Kelly wrote of his father’s childhood: “His first experiences of public worship were not in the silence of a traditional Quaker meeting, but in the singing, preaching, teaching, praying of a holiness Quaker church.”<sup>12</sup> Going forward he further wrote, “The intellectual, scholarly man is still present, carefully shaping words and phrases, referring to ancient mystics, relating the experience of the

Light Within to the great philosophers of the East and West. But the fervor of the evangelists of his youth comes hammering through, insisting that religious experience be dramatic, be specific, be tangible, be real, be felt.”<sup>13</sup>

In 1903 Madora Kelly moved her children to Wilmington, Ohio so they could attend high school. She was determined that they would be educated and successful, and to that end she completed a business course and took a job to support her family. She had to be away a great deal which made home life difficult. Nevertheless, Thomas Kelly “recalled his life in Wilmington as so happy, compared to the early [lonely] days on the farm, that he felt his real life had begun there.”<sup>14</sup> A fun-loving youth, he played baseball and tennis with passion, greatly enjoyed playing practical jokes, and showed a “sense of humor . . . [that] remained a prominent feature of his personality in the following years.”<sup>15</sup>

At the same time he worked hard and was highly focused on academic excellence and achievement. He became skilled as a sheet metal worker, working part-time to support his education, and graduated from Wilmington College, a Quaker institution, in 1913 with a degree in chemistry.

After the move to Wilmington, Thomas Kelly became immersed in the Orthodox Quakerism of his mother’s family. She had attended Wilmington College (founded by Quaker evangelists), and her brother had been clerk of Wilmington Yearly Meeting. The meeting and college “became the focus of the Kellys’ religious and cultural life.”<sup>16</sup> During college Kelly became actively involved with the student Young Men’s Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.) and Young Friends Movement. Then after graduating, he spent two summers working with Young Friends in Ohio and Indiana, traveling on his motorcycle Jenny.

It was during an additional year at the Quaker Haverford College in Pennsylvania that the seeds of change in both his academic and religious lives were planted. At Haverford he was introduced by Rufus Jones to mysticism and a Quakerism different than he had known in the Midwest. He was also introduced to philosophy, a field that appeared to be a means of bringing together his interests in religion and science.<sup>17</sup>

## WHICH PATH TO TAKE?

After the year at Haverford, Thomas Kelly taught English and science at a Quaker preparatory school in Ontario, Canada, and there became involved with Quakers who supported a mission to Japan. Becoming committed to missionary service, he entered Hartford Theological Seminary (Connecticut) in 1916 and absorbed himself in Hebrew and New Testament studies. That same year he met his future wife Lael Macy, daughter of the minister of a nearby Congregational church.

Following the U.S. declaration of war on Germany, Kelly interrupted his seminary work to go to England, explaining that he wanted to go and “to bring, in any tiny way possible, the spirit of Jesus. . . . something of the spirit of Christ to other people.”<sup>18</sup> He was assigned by the Y.M.C.A. to the canteen service and later to work with German prisoners of war. After six months, however, he and others were relieved of their duties as a result of the military’s extreme hostility toward pacifism. He returned home and went back to seminary.

During that period he mulled seriously over whether he should go into religious or academic work. Shortly after entering seminary he had described his thinking in a letter to his mother:

I sometimes wonder if I do wrong in opposing my nature continually, as I do in planning to go into religious work that is dependent upon the social brilliancy of a man’s personality for some of its success. At times I feel it is *the* thing, and at others, that I might become more restless in such work, because technical study and teaching are so admired. I realize that direct personal work is the highest form of work, and always will feel that way, but I sometimes wonder if I don’t do it simply because it is the greatest, and not because I am best fitted for it. I think I can make a success of such work, and am not selfish in wanting to gratify my natural tendency toward the intellectual stuff. Sometimes, some days, I feel sure of one view, and in a few days the preference is reversed.<sup>19</sup>

Later, writing Lael Macy from England, he referred to “a feeling that is getting stronger and stronger. It is the desire to get into a college. . . . a big ‘ache’ for me, for I want so badly to do it.”<sup>20</sup>

Amazingly, a few months later Kelly received a letter from the president of Wilmington College, asking if he would be interested in teaching philosophy and Bible. After completing the Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1919 and marrying Lael Macy that May, he took the position. His mother was delighted to have him return to Wilmington, but he found the small town atmosphere very limiting after his experiences of the previous five years. His desire to teach, however, was confirmed, and he became focused on obtaining the doctorate needed for an academic career.

## THE PATH TAKEN

In the fall of 1921 Thomas Kelly returned to Hartford Theological Seminary to begin work on a Ph.D. in philosophy. At the same time he served as pastor of an interdenominational church in order to support his wife and himself. His dissertation concerned the work of a German physician turned philosopher and was titled *The Place of Value Judgments in the Philosophy of Hermann Lotze*.

After receiving his doctoral degree, he and Lael went to Germany for over a year to close the American Friends Service Committee’s Child Feeding Program at the end of its physical relief effort following World War I. During that time he was also involved in peace work and in the founding of an independent German Yearly Meeting. As he later wrote:

I found there in Germany a *new* Quaker movement. Men [and women] in it were squarely facing essentials in a way I never had. They were inquiring regarding the essence of religion and coming to conclusions far more daring than I had ever dreamed for myself. . . . I had little to give, but much to learn. . . .

But it was after leaving Germany and getting a perspective upon it that I found within myself that Quakerism is essentially a mystical fellowship,

[continued]

which transcends the ordinary barriers of religious organizations. The meaning of the universal presence of the Inner Light, the Logos, in every [person], the essential Christ in all people, glowed out suddenly. I saw that something of the God-life and God-character . . . was planted in every man [and woman], not artificially, but at the very core of their being, his [or her] ideal potential self. . . . I suddenly felt a great nearness to people of *all* religions who “lifted hands in prayer”.<sup>21</sup>

When he returned in 1925, Kelly began teaching at Earlham College, a Quaker institution in Richmond, Indiana. He was happy with life there: they built a house, and he enjoyed the teaching as well as the students. However, as time went by his views related to his deep experience with German Friends, his understanding of the Inner Light, and his love of scholarship in search of truth caused him to feel frustrated and estranged. “In scholarship, as well as in religious life, he would accept nothing but the ultimate in himself and others.”<sup>22</sup> And he began thinking of other options. During that difficult period, he and his wife were also blessed in 1928 with the birth of their daughter Lois.

In 1930 Kelly took a leave of absence to work on a Ph.D. at Harvard. He would later write to the chairman of its philosophy department: “My desire above all else is to be a genuine scholar in philosophy, not merely in intention, but achievement, and I have looked upon the Harvard Ph.D. as indicating the close of a satisfactory apprenticeship.”<sup>23</sup>

After two gratifying years studying at Harvard and teaching at nearby Wellesley College, Thomas Kelly returned to Earlham to teach while working on his dissertation. He maintained an exhausting schedule, returning from classes to work on the dissertation and spending his summers in libraries. As a consequence, existing health problems were exacerbated. He suffered from headaches, fatigue, incapacitating hay fever, and a serious attack of kidney stones. He also experienced a return of “‘woozy spells,’ as Lael Kelly termed them. These were times when his mind would nearly blank, and he would lose his coordination and strength.”<sup>24</sup> The “spells” had resulted in an initial failure of oral examinations for the Ph.D. from Hartford Seminary before he received the doctoral degree.

After Kelly suffered a severe nervous breakdown in late 1934, he managed to miss only a few classes and to complete and submit his Harvard dissertation. It was accepted and approved and was titled *Explanation and Reality in the Philosophy of Emile Meyerson*. The dissertation examined whether reality can be wholly explained and identified. Kelly found that because reality is ever expanding through time while explanation is ever *contracting*—aimed at elimination of time and difference—there can be no convergence. He concluded, “Reality is that which cannot be, yet is.”<sup>25</sup> Later “Reality” would be prominent in his devotional writing and particularly in the essay *The Eternal Now* and the pamphlet *Reality of the Spiritual World*.

In 1935 Kelly accepted a position at the University of Hawaii where he was able to pursue his longtime interest in Chinese and Indian thought. As later described by professor T. Canby Jones, “he was strongly attracted to the oriental tradition where philosophy is always engaged in seeking enlightenment, in finding the life-giving connection between our finite souls and the soul of the universe and putting it into practice.”<sup>26</sup>

Along with teaching, 1936 also included the birth of son Richard, involvement in the revival of a Friends Meeting, persistent sinus problems that resulted in surgery, and an unexpected but long-desired offer of a position at the prestigious Haverford College. That year the family of four left for Haverford, Pennsylvania.

## **EXPERIENCE OF PRESENCE AND THE LAST YEARS**

At last Thomas Kelly saw his life working out as he had hoped. He enjoyed living in Haverford and teaching courses such as traditional ones in philosophy and Quaker history and thought, as well as one in Eastern philosophy that he introduced. At the same time he prepared to take the final step toward the highly valued doctorate. In the fall of 1937 he returned to Harvard for the oral examinations. During his defense however, he suffered another “woozy” spell, and his mind blanked. He was told “[h]is performance was so entirely unsatisfactory . . . that he would never be permitted to come up for the degree again.”<sup>27</sup>

It was devastating, and he sank into such dark despair that his wife “feared the blow might literally be fatal.”<sup>28</sup> He had failed to attain the authentication he sought as a “genuine scholar” and at the cost of enormous debt, deteriorated health, years of work and struggle, and continuous strain on his family.

There was no explanation, but colleague Douglas Steere wrote that Kelly’s writing and spoken messages to others “seemed to be expounding less as one possessed of ‘*knowledge about*’ and more as one who had had unmistakable ‘*acquaintance with*.’”<sup>29</sup> T. Canby Jones, then a student of Thomas Kelly, remembered: “The ‘fire’ of the Holy Spirit illuminated his life. Friends could see it in his eyes, we could hear it in his gales of laughter, we witnessed that ‘joy of the Lord’ had become ‘his strength.’”<sup>30</sup> While in Germany in 1938, Kelly wrote of it to his wife:

This summer has *opened up* what was already opening up before, a new sense of unreserved dedication of oneself to a life of childlike dedication to God. . . . What I want to say . . . seems to grow out of an *internal influence*, which is so overwhelming that I can only recognize it as God working within me. Last winter you know I was much shaken by the experience of Presence—something that I did not seek, but that *sought* me. It was that which underlay the lecture on the Eternal Now. . . . this is the real root. And the work here [with German Friends] this summer, or, *in the midst* of the work here this summer, has come an increased sense of *being laid hold* on by a Power, a gentle, loving, but awful Power. And it makes one *know* the reality of God at work in the world. And it takes away the old self-seeking, self-centered self, from which selfishness I have laid heavy burdens on you, dear one.<sup>31</sup>

During that summer of 1938, Thomas Kelly had gone on behalf of American Friends to visit the German Yearly Meeting, learn of the horrifying situation in Nazi Germany, and share love and fellowship. He wrote of many people in letters to his wife as in one from Nürnberg, August 31:

I have met some *giant* souls, . . . and one *can't* be the same again. One thing I have learned, or feel, so overwhelmingly keenly, is the real pain of suffering *with* people. Sometimes it is suffering of a physical,

[continued]

financial kind; sometimes of a spiritual kind,  
baffled, no outlet, no hope, no point to life . . .  
*no chance to help others bear the burdens of life. . . .*<sup>32</sup>

It was a difficult transition from the suffering and the deep inner fellowship he knew in Germany back to the comfort of Haverford. Still feeling the impact of that intense experience, he returned to teaching, writing, giving lectures, conducting workshops, working with the American Friends Service Committee, and greatly enjoying increased time with family.

This was the period when he did most of his devotional writing. Describing his father's work, Richard Kelly wrote: "When he speaks, for example, of the 'Eternal breaking into time,' he is referring to his own experience. . . . *A Testament of Devotion* is implicitly autobiographical."<sup>33</sup> In late 1940 Thomas Kelly had written: "God experienced is a vast surprise. . . . God's guidance experienced is a vast, soul-shaking surprise. God's peace, God's power—the old words flame with meaning, or are discarded as trite, and one gropes for new, more glorious ways of communicating the reality."<sup>34</sup>

On January 17, 1941, less than three years after returning from Germany, he began the day exclaiming to his wife, "Today will be the greatest day of my life."<sup>35</sup> Later that day he wrote to the religious books editor of Harper Publishers, telling him how glad he was for the possibility of making several of his lectures into a small devotional book. Kelly confirmed, yes, in the next two weeks he could come to New York and discuss the book. That evening while drying dishes, Thomas Kelly died suddenly after a massive heart attack.

## **THROUGH HIM INTO THE WORLD**

The message that came through Thomas Kelly was expressed in the words of his experience. He shared them in lectures, essays, speaking presentations, articles for Quaker publications, and other writings. Some were published separately, but originally they had not been intended to be books. Only after his death were they put together by family and friends as *A Testament of Devotion* and *The Eternal Promise*. Except for two articles that totaled four pages, all the works were written in the period after his spiritual renewal near the end of 1937.

*A Testament of Devotion* (100 pages by Thomas Kelly) includes five essays and “A Biographical Memoir” of Kelly by Haverford professor Douglas Steere.<sup>36</sup> It was published just a few months after his death in 1941 and, according to Steere, without the cutting or revision Kelly likely would have done.<sup>37</sup> TD is the book by which Thomas Kelly is best known and has repeatedly been recognized as a spiritual classic, a message that is core, whole, and powerful.<sup>38</sup>

*The Eternal Promise* (97 pages by Thomas Kelly) was compiled and edited by Richard M. Kelly and published in 1966. The truly essential companion to *A Testament of Devotion*, it expands and completes the message expressed by Thomas Kelly. Constituting nearly all his remaining devotional writing, *The Eternal Promise* includes fifteen varied essays, articles and reflections.

*Reality of the Spiritual World* (39 pages) originated as a series of four addresses Kelly made during the winter of 1940-41 at Pendle Hill, a Quaker center for study and contemplation. After he died, Lael Kelly gave those manuscripts to Pendle Hill where they were put into pamphlet form and published in 1942.

Writing out of both his faith and extensive academic experience, Kelly began: “How can we be sure that God is real, and not just a creation of our wishes? . . . We are such creatures as demand to build upon the Truth.”<sup>39</sup> After examining various pragmatic arguments for the reality of God as well as their fallacies, Kelly wrote:

And this is the ground of religion.  
It rests upon a trust and a faith  
    that for the religious [person]  
    have become his [or her] deepest certainty,  
    the certainty of faith, not the certainty of logic.  
The certainties of faith call out our whole selves  
    in wholehearted and unreserved dedication.  
The certainties of logic leave our wills  
    untouched and [unsurrendered].<sup>40</sup>  
Be not disturbed by the intellectual criticism  
    of subjectivity and of mystic experience  
    which I have given.<sup>41</sup>

[continued]

I am persuaded that God is greater than logic,  
    although not contrary to logic,  
and our mere inability to catch Him  
    in the little net of our human reason  
    is no proof of His non-existence,  
but only of our need  
that our little reason shall be supplemented  
    by His tender visitations,  
and that He may lead and guide us to the end of the road  
    in ways superior to any that our intellects can plan.  
This is the blindness of trust,  
    which walks with Him, unafraid, into the dark.<sup>42</sup>

“. . . humbly walking in the presence and guidance  
    and will of God.”<sup>43</sup>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Richard ‘Dick’ Kelly (1936-2019), Thomas R. Kelly’s son, is *most gratefully* recognized as both editor of *The Eternal Promise* and source of his father’s essential remaining spiritual writing.

Beyond that, Dick wrote *Thomas Kelly, A Biography*, as a young man becoming “seriously interested in constructing a complete picture of Thomas Kelly in [his] own mind.”<sup>44</sup> In it he provided detailed biographical information and long letters his father had sent to family and friends, sharing personal experience and his awareness of God working within and through him. Dick’s work is critical to our understanding: the message needs the life story, and the life story needs the message.

“New Lights and Inner Light” is a major paper he presented in 1993 at Wilmington College upon the one-hundredth anniversary of his father’s birth. There he discussed the Kelly family’s revivalist New Light and holiness Quaker heritage, important information that was discovered after *A Biography* was written.

Following more research, Dick wrote the pamphlet *Three Ravens and Two Widows: A Perspective on Controversy Among Friends*, published in 2009. It addresses another subject but also provides more family history, and empathetic perspective on different strands of Quakerism, and additional insight into Thomas Kelly’s background and life experience.<sup>45</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ira Zepp, Jr., *Prayer as Ballast, Rudder, and Sail*, (New Windsor, Maryland: One Tree Productions, 2003), p.86.

<sup>2</sup> Guy Aiken, “*Then and the Eternal Now: Thomas Kelly In and Beyond Historical Context*,” *Canadian Quaker History Journal* Vol. 74 (2009).

Aiken wrote: “History and biography mold Kelly’s devotional writing. Yet Kelly’s smoldering experience of Presence evinces from him remarkable literary expressions that, like poetry, may burn through the mold of time and place and seep into the soul of anyone with ears to hear.” (p.43)

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Kelly, *The Eternal Promise: A Sequel to A Testament of Devotion*. Edited by Richard Kelly (New York: Harper & Row, 1966. Richmond, Indiana: Second Friends United Press edition, 1988), p. 65. Subsequent references will be cited with EP and the Page number(s).

This 1988 Second Friends United Press edition includes two important selections that were not in earlier editions.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Kelly, *The Eternal Promise*, p. 68.

<sup>5</sup> “Quakers” is a commonly used name for Friends, members of the Religious Society of Friends. It is a faith community that emerged in England with leadership from George Fox during the 1600s, a time of exceptional religious upheaval and ferment.

<sup>6</sup> Often but not always, Kelly used “man,” “men,” or “he” to represent all persons, as was done in his time. Today he would have written it differently. In this document inclusive language is used with brackets except where “men” or “man” is used as expressed in the Bible to represent all mortal humans in contrast to God.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas R. Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1941), 1996 edition, p. 3. Subsequent references will be cited with “TD” and the page number(s).

*A Testament of Devotion* (124 pages) was originally published in 1941 in hardcover and with a biography of Kelly at the beginning of the book. However, the paperback 1996 TD edition (126 pages), referenced throughout *Life from the Center*, has the biography at the end of the book. Therefore, the pagination differs in the two books although the texts are exactly the same.

Note there has been a 1992 hardcover edition of TD (only 86 pages) from which 50% of the words were eliminated, including 40% of the TD selections used here. No longer in print, it may still be sold on the internet.

<sup>8</sup> Richard M. Kelly, *Thomas Kelly: A Biography* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), p. 125. In 1988 these words were also published in *The Eternal Promise*, Second Friends United Press edition, page 97.

*Thomas Kelly: A Biography* includes numerous quotes from many of Kelly's letters, now archived in the Quaker & Special Collections, Haverford College, Haverford, Pennsylvania. They are part of the Thomas R. Kelly Papers, a collection that includes correspondence (1915-1941), studies, sermons, photographs, materials for *The Eternal Promise* and *A Testament of Devotion*, etc.

<sup>9</sup> Richard M. Kelly, "New Lights and Inner Light," *Quaker Religious Thought* Vol. 85 No.1 (1995), p.49. Accessible on internet by journal.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Macy Kelly, *Three Ravens and Two Widows: A Perspective on Controversy Among Friends* (Wallingford, Pennsylvania: Pendle Hill Pamphlet #401, 2009), p.17.

<sup>11</sup> "New Lights and Inner Light," p. 52.

<sup>12</sup> "New Lights and Inner Light," pp. 44-45.

<sup>13</sup> "New Lights and Inner Light," p. 54.

<sup>14</sup> "New Lights and Inner Light," p. 44.

<sup>15</sup> *Thomas Kelly, A Biography*, p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> "New Lights and Inner Light," p. 52.

<sup>17</sup> *Thomas Kelly, A Biography*, p. 25.

<sup>18</sup> *Thomas Kelly, A Biography*, pp. 33-34. From a letter Kelly wrote to Lael Macy just before sailing to Europe in June 1917.

<sup>19</sup> *Thomas Kelly, A Biography*, p. 28. From a letter Kelly wrote, dated Nov. 24, 1916.

<sup>20</sup> *Thomas Kelly, A Biography*, p. 39.

<sup>21</sup> *Thomas Kelly, A Biography*, pp. 54-55. From a letter Kelly wrote in 1928 to Harold H. Peterson, a Quaker and American Y.M.C.A. Secretary in Lahore, India.

<sup>22</sup> *Thomas Kelly, A Biography*, p. 60.

<sup>23</sup> *Thomas Kelly, A Biography*, p. 68.

<sup>24</sup> *Thomas Kelly, A Biography*, p. 69.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas R. Kelly, *Explanation and Reality in the Philosophy of Emile Meyerson* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1937), pp. 1-2 and 123.

<sup>26</sup> T. Canby Jones, *Thomas R. Kelly, As I Remember Him*, Wallingford, Pennsylvania: Pendle Hill Pamphlet #284, 1988), pp.27-28.

<sup>27</sup> *Thomas Kelly, A Biography*, p. 90.

<sup>28</sup> *Thomas Kelly, A Biography*, p. 91.

<sup>29</sup> *A Testament of Devotion*, p. 119.

<sup>30</sup> “*Thomas R. Kelly As I Remember Him*,” p. 31.

T. Canby Jones was a member of the student worship-sharing group that met at Kelly’s Haverford home for over two years, and he remembered Thomas Kelly in that pamphlet as his “beloved teacher and spiritual guide.” (p. 4) He would go on to become professor emeritus of religion and philosophy at Wilmington College, author, Quaker theologian, and peacemaker.

A note by K. B. Wilson: Although I did not know Canby Jones in November 2012, I sent him a draft of “The Message” portion of *Life from the Center*. He quickly responded: “I am just thrilled with the selections you have made and beg you to keep it up. Any additional help I can be, I joyfully offer! Your choices of selections are all just right on!! With Love and Encouragement . . . .” Before he became sick, we shared for six months, what he called, “our TRK type correspondence,” and I was blessed to meet him shortly before he died in February 2014 at the age of 92. He was a radiant soul who still called Thomas Kelly his “dear mentor and spiritual guide.”

<sup>31</sup> *Thomas Kelly, A Biography*, p.102. From a letter Kelly wrote, dated Aug. 16, 1938.

<sup>32</sup> *Thomas Kelly, A Biography*, p. 105.

<sup>33</sup> *Thomas Kelly, A Biography*, p. 93.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas R. Kelly, *Reality of the Spiritual World* (Wallingford, Pennsylvania: Pendle Hill Pamphlet # 21, 1942), p. 21.

<sup>35</sup> *Thomas Kelly, A Biography*: p. 122. Words recounted by Lael Kelly and quoted by her son Richard Kelly.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Kelly noted in *The Eternal Promise* on page xvi that it was Douglas Steere who had compiled *A Testament of Devotion*.

<sup>37</sup> *A Testament of Devotion*, p. 126.

<sup>38</sup> On January 16, 1941 Kelly wrote a letter to his brother-in-law Robert C. Whitehead, close friend and Congregationalist minister, telling him of Harpers' interest in publishing a small book of his essays. Continuing, he shared that he had just spent a week writing "The Light Within," the first chapter of what came to be *A Testament of Devotion*.

He explained that he wanted it to be "a little book of devotional practice—just how one tries to proceed as one orients one's life wholly about the Inner Light; how one carries on interior prayer; how one reacts to the outer world in the light of the Light within, etc. It is a book of practice, not of theory, or aims to be." (The quote is taken in part from *Thomas Kelly, A Biography*, p. 122 but entirely from the letter to 'Bob' Whitehead, archived in the Thomas R. Kelly Papers, Quaker & Special Collections, Haverford College, Haverford, Pennsylvania.)

<sup>39</sup> *Reality of the Spiritual World*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>40</sup> "Unsundered" replaces here the word "unenslaved." *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary*, 1996, defines the word slave as "one who is the property of and wholly subject to another."

Coming from the Greek text, the word "doulos" translates in English as "slave" in the *Bible*, Revised Standard Version (RSV), 1952, while the word "servant" is used in the King James Version (KJV), 1611. About 56-58 AD the Apostle Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans (RSV), including 6:16, 20-22, *essential* in describing his use of the word "slave":

16 Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience which leads to righteousness? . . .

20 When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 But then what return did you get from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification [the action and process of being found freed from sin] and its end, eternal life.

"Surrender" is a word Kelly used often in reference to total submission of one's will and oneself to God. "Unenslaved" is replaced here by "unsundered" in deference to Kelly who himself wrote that words are symbols and that over time symbols are no longer useful in representing reality. See *The Eternal Promise*, pp.38-39.

<sup>41</sup>In *Reality of the Spiritual World* Thomas Kelly's analytical thinking is clearly evident. In that pamphlet he wrote:

When a good Catholic like Joan of Arc has a mystical opening she reports that St. Catherine is speaking to her. . . . It is well-nigh impossible to get experience in the raw. Whatever it is in the raw, it is instantly caught up into a scheme of interpretation already in the mind of the experiencer. . . . The vast cultural background in which each of us is immersed sets a broad pattern of expectation and furnishes the material for interpretation, . . . A Quaker immersed in Quaker literature, Quaker silence, Quaker service, will reflect these things in his reports of his inner experience. (pp.19-20)

Especially in *Reality of the Spiritual World* but also in his two devotional books, Kelly recognizes a place for logic and writes of the religious mind embracing the whole of a person. The upper level of the mind manages daily affairs, thinking, communicating, seeing, and computing, while at the deepest levels those affairs are brought into the Light so that they may be seen and responded to in love and faith. See TD, pp. 9-11.

<sup>42</sup> *Reality of the Spiritual World*, p.15.

<sup>43</sup> *A Testament of Devotion*, p. 94.

<sup>44</sup> *Thomas Kelly, A Biography*, p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> In *Three Ravens and Two Widows: A Perspective on Controversy Among Friends* Thomas Kelly's son Richard offers particulars and stories regarding the different sides of their family. Thomas Kelly's mother Madora Kersey was part of a longtime Orthodox Quaker family that came to Pennsylvania during the time of William Penn and later moved to Ohio.

Thomas Kelly's great, great, great grandfather John Wilkins was disowned from Evesham Friends Meeting ("West Jersey") after he attended a public town meeting regarding the War of Independence. Later, his daughter Hannah and family moved to Ross County, Ohio, as did William and Dorcas Kelly, coming in 1803 from Virginia. Their son John Kelly and Hannah's daughter Harriet were married, and their son Thomas William Kelly would become a New Light evangelist minister and later a Quaker minister of the Gospel. His son Carlton became a fully involved Quaker in 1887 and in 1893 the father of Thomas Raymond Kelly.

The Macy ancestors of Kelly's wife Lael Macy were members of Nantucket Monthly Meeting from the early 1700's until the 1827-1828 Separation. They became members of the Congregationalist church while continuing active commitment to peace and social concern and family members becoming conscientious objectors during World War I. See pp.12, 16-17, and 22-23.