

EXAMINATION OF JAMES NAYLOR

Magistrates of Bristol

After a career as agricultural laborer and service in the Parliamentary army, James Naylor (1618–1660) embraced Quaker doctrine in 1652. He abandoned his previous life and possessions, becoming a travelling evangelist. Soon leading Quakers, including George Fox (1624–1691), worried that Naylor’s ministry over-emphasized enthusiasm and bred social unrest. In September 1656, Naylor spent a brief imprisonment in Exeter. The next month he entered Bristol in a manner highly reminiscent of Christ’s Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem. The Bristol city government arrested Naylor, and conducted the following interrogation.

October 1656

- Q. Are not you the man that rode on horseback into Bristol, a woman leading your horse and others singing before you, “Holy, holy, holy, Hosannah,” etc.?
- A. I did ride into a town, but what its name was I know not and, by the Spirit, a woman was commanded to hold my horse’s bridle, and some there were that cast down clothes and sang praises to the Lord, such songs as the LORD put into their hearts. And it is like it might be the song of “Holy, holy, holy,” etc.
- Q. Whether or no you did reprove those women?
- A. Nay, but I bade them take heed that they sang nothing but what they were moved to by the LORD.
- Q. Do you own this letter (whereupon a letter was shown him) which Hannah Stranger sent unto you?
- A. Yea, I do own that letter.
- Q. Are you (according to that letter) the fairest of ten thousand?
- A. As to the visible, I deny any such attribute to be due unto me. But if as to that which the Father has begotten in me, I shall own it....
- Q. Are you the only Son of God?
- A. I am the Son of God, but I have many brethren.
- Q. Have any called you by the name of Jesus?
- A. Not as unto the visible, but as Jesus, the Christ that is in me.
- Q. Do you own the name of the King of Israel?
- A. Not as a creature, but, if they give it Christ within, I own it and have a kingdom but not of this world. My kingdom is of another world, of which you wot not.
- Q. Whether or not you are the Prophet of the Most High?
- A. you have said I am a prophet.
- Q. Do you own that attribute, the Judge of Israel?
- A. The judge is but one and is witnessed in me, and is the Christ; there must not be any joined with Him. If they speak of the Spirit in me, I own it only as God is manifest in the flesh, according as God dwells in me and judges there Himself.
- Q. By whom were you sent?
- A. By Him who has sent the Spirit of His Son in me to try, not as to carnal matters, but belonging to the Kingdom of God, by the indwelling of the Father and the Son, to judge of all spirits, to be guided by none.
- Q. Is not the written Word of God the guide?
- A. The written word declares of it and what is not according to that is not true.
- Q. Whether you are more sent than others, or whether others be not sent in that measure?

- A. As to that I have nothing at present given me of my Father to answer.
- Q. Was your birth mortal or immortal?
- A. Not according to the natural birth, but according to the spiritual birth, born of the immortal seed.
- Q. Were you ever called the Lamb of God?
- A. I look not back to things behind, but there might be some such thing in the letter. I am a lamb, and have sought it long before I could witness it.
- Q. Who is your mother, or whether or not is she a virgin?
- A. Nay, according to the natural birth.
- Q. Who is your mother according to your spiritual birth?
- A. No carnal creature.
- Q. Who then?
- A. [To this he refused to answer.]
- Q. Is the hope of Israel in you?
- A. The hope is in Christ and, as Christ is in me, so far the hope of Israel stands. Christ is in me the hope of glory.
- Q. What more hope is there in you than in others?
- A. None can know but them of Israel, and Israel must give an account.
- Q. Are you the everlasting Son of God?
- A. Where God is manifest in the flesh, there is the everlasting Son, and I do witness God in the flesh. I am the son of God, and the Son of God is but one.
- Q. Are you the Prince of Peace?
- A. The Prince of everlasting Peace is begotten in me.
- Q. Why do you not reprove those that give you these attributes?
- A. I have said nothing unto them but such things are written.
- Q. Is your name Jesus?
- A. [Here he was silent.]
- Q. For what space of time have you been so called?
- A. [And here.]
- Q. Is there no other Jesus besides you?
- A. [These questions he forbore either to confirm or to contradict them.]
- Q. Are you the Everlasting Son of God, the King of Righteousness?
- A. I am, and the Everlasting Righteousness is wrought in me. If you were acquainted with the Father, you would also be acquainted with me.
- Q. Did any kiss your feet?
- A. It might be they did, but I minded them not.
- Q. When you were called the King of Israel, did you not answer, "you say it"?
- A. Yea.
- Q. How do you provide for a livelihood?
- A. As do the lilies, without care, being maintained by my Father.
- Q. Whom do you call your Father?
- A. He whom you call God.

Q. What business had you at Bristol, or that way?

A. I was guided and directed by my Father.

Q. Why were you called a judge to try the cause of Israel?

A. [Here he answered nothing.]

Q. Are any of these sayings blasphemy or not?

A. What is received of the LORD is truth.

Q. Whose letter was that which was written to you, signed T.S.?

A. It was sent me in Exeter Gaol by one the world calls Thomas Symonds.

Q. Did you not say, "If you had known me, you had known the Father"?

A. Yea, for the Father is my life.

Q. Where were you born?

A. At Anderslow in Yorkshire.

Q. Where lives your wife?

A. She whom you call my wife lives in Wakefield.

Q. Why do you not live with her?

A. I did till I was called to the army.

Q. Under whose command did you serve in the army?

A. First under him they call Lord Fairfax.

Q. Who then?

A. Afterwards under that man called Colonel Lambert.¹ And then I went into Scotland, where I was a quartermaster, and returned sick to my earthly habitation, and was called into the north.

Q. What went you for to Exeter?

A. I went to Lawson, to see the brethren.

Q. What estate have you?

A. I take no care for that.

Q. Does God in an extraordinary manner sustain you without any corporal food?

A. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Father. The same life is mine that is in the Father; but not in the same measure.

Q. How are you clothed?

A. I know not.

Q. Do you live without bread?

A. As long as my heavenly Father will. I have tasted of that bread of which he that eats shall never die.

Q. How long have you lived without any corporal sustenance, having perfect health?

A. Some fifteen or sixteen days sustained without any other food except the Word of God.

Q. Was Dorcas Erbury dead two days in Exeter, and did you raise her?

A. I can do nothing of myself. The Scripture bears witness to the power in me which is everlasting; it is the same power we read of in the Scripture. The Lord has made me a sign of His coming. And that honour that belongs to Christ Jesus, in Whom I am revealed, may be given to him, as when on Earth at Jerusalem, according to the measure.

¹ General John Lambert (1619–1684), Parliamentary commander of the northern forces

Q. Are you the unspotted Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world?

A. Were I not a lamb, wolves would not seek to devour me.

Q. Are you not guilty of horrid blasphemy, by your own words?

A. Who made you a judge over them?

Q. Wherefore came you in such an unusual posture as two women leading your horse, others singing "Holy, Holy," etc. with another before you bare-headed, knee-deep in the highway mud, when you might have gone in the causey. And at such a time that, it raining, your companions received the rain at their necks and vented it at their hose and breeches?

A. It tended to my Father's praise and glory, and I ought not to slight anything which the Spirit of the LORD moves.

Q. Do you think the Spirit of the LORD moved or commanded them?

A. Yea.

Q. Whom meant they by "Holy, Holy, Holy," etc.?

A. Let them answer for themselves; they are at age.

Q. Did not some spread their clothes on the ground before you when you rode thorough Glastonbury and Wells?

A. I think they did.

Q. Wherefore did you call Martha Symonds mother, as George Fox affirms?

A. George Fox is a liar and a firebrand of Hell, for neither I, nor any with me, called her so.

Q. Thou have a wife at this time?

A. A woman I have who by the world is called my wife; and some children I have, which according to the flesh are mine.

Q. Those books which you have written, will you maintain them and affirm what is therein?

A. Yea, with my dearest blood.

Following this inquiry, authorities in Bristol sent Naylor to London for an examination before the Second Protectorate Parliament. After a month-long investigation, Parliament convicted Naylor of blasphemy. After standing in the pillory, having a hot iron pierced through his tongue, and being whipped through the streets of London, Naylor was transported back to Bristol to suffer another public whipping. After these corporal punishments, he served two years at hard labor, after which he formally repented of his actions.

The Grand Imposter Examined, or, The Life, Trial, and Examination of James Naylor, the Seduced and Seducing Quaker... (London: Henry Brome, 1656) [modernized]