

## **Period of Quietism**

By John Hunter, Durham Friends Meeting

The close of the seventeenth century brought an end to persecutions. Friends were strongly established in Britain and North America, and were the dominant religious group not only in Pennsylvania, but in other colonies including North Carolina. By then, a structure of meetings, from local to the national Yearly Meeting, had been established in Britain, with several yearly meetings in the colonies, which George Fox had visited. The testimonies of integrity, peace, equality, and simplicity were clarified and began to harden into rigid rules for which members could not only be “elderred,” but also “read out of meeting.” The period of Quietism had begun, and lasted through the eighteenth century. The plain clothes and plain speech, which had been powerful revolutionary symbols of equality and simplicity lingered on to be the peculiar ways of a peculiar people. Deviation from the prescribed norms became the basis for admonition and even “disownment.” One cause of “disownment” was “marrying out” to someone not a Friend. Naturally, this caused a decline in membership. Patterns of organization and membership originally developed as protections against persecution, became straitjackets to protect against contamination by the world. Schools were established to provide “guarded education.”

For those who were comfortable within the fold, this period of “quietism” provided an exemplary way of life, of loving communities characterized by simplicity and serenity. A fine example of this way of life was John Woolman (1720-1772) of Mount Holly, New Jersey. Growing up in a sheltering family and meeting, he learned tailoring and shopkeeping, as adjuncts to a deep spiritual life. When he found himself in danger of becoming a prosperous merchant, he cut back his activities to tailoring and his small farm, so that he would not be “cumbered” by possessions and would have time to follow the leadings of the spirit.

As a young clerk in a shop, he was asked to write a bill of sale for a slave. This traumatic experience led him to his life calling from God. He traveled by foot and horseback up and down the colonies, persuading Quaker slave owners to free their slaves. He also worked in the business sessions of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to obtain the adoption of minutes against slave holding. As a result primarily of the efforts of John Woolman and others, most American Quakers had given up slave holding by the time of the Revolutionary War. Woolman’s Journal is a classic not only of Quakerism, but of American literature. Friends were, with few exceptions, neutral in the French and Indian and Revolutionary Wars; this cost them a great deal of membership and influence. This loss was compounded by a serious schism early in the next century.

## **The Great Quaker Separation in America**

During the period of Quietism, British Friends in general had become converted to an evangelical Christianity that accepted orthodox Christian theological dogmas in an almost creedal form. This movement spread to America at about the same time as a general growth of Deism. Deists generally believed in a creator who did not intervene thereafter, and were skeptical of the historic authenticity of the Bible. Many of the American “founding fathers” were Deists. American Friends tended to drift in both directions, leading to serious conflicts over theological issues. British Friends came over to America

to support their “true” orthodoxy against those Friends who held that the “inner light” was to be honored above the Bible and traditional Christian doctrines.

Prominent among the latter was Elias Hicks, a Long Island farmer and minister, who was widely popular as a preacher, not only to Friends, but to the general religious public.

Hicks was a powerful speaker, emphasizing the primacy of guidance by the light within over all other religious authorities. Hicks became the principle target of the British evangelicals, some of whom followed him from meeting to meeting standing to rebut his message in an effort to overcome his influence.

The conflict came to a head in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1827, where urban wealth had become allied with Christian (evangelical) orthodoxy and was almost exclusively represented in the clerkship and on the key committees holding the reins of power and authority. Rural simplicity was allied with the message of Hicks and was represented by the majority of yearly meeting members most of whom attended the Green Street Meeting or lived in the rural outskirts of the city. The sessions ended with two “Philadelphia Yearly Meetings,” one “Orthodox,” and the other “Hicksite.” The (often bitter) split moved on to New York, Canada, Baltimore, and the newly established Ohio Yearly Meeting. Individual meetings endured bitter splits and even families were sometimes torn over this issue.

Quakers were a part of the westward movement of European settlement across the continent. As Orthodox Friends continued to be influenced by evangelical movements in other protestant groups, they adopted many of the practices of these churches, including organs, programmed worship services, paid ministers, steeples on their churches, and missionaries. This also occurred in the eastern Orthodox yearly meetings in America, except for Philadelphia. In New England Yearly Meeting, this produced another split in 1845. John Wilbur, a Rhode Island schoolteacher, objected to these changes and took his case to the Yearly Meeting sessions. The resultant split produced a small yearly meeting (Wilburite) and a much larger one (called “Gurneyite” for Joseph John Gurney, the most prominent British Evangelical Friend). There are now three Wilburite yearly meetings in Ohio, Iowa, and North Carolina, officially called Conservative.

## **Nineteenth-century Developments**

To avoid living in a slave culture, many Friends moved from the south to the Northwest Territory (which became the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin). Established by the Ordinance of 1787, it was to be “forever free” of slavery. For example, large numbers left the Carolinas for Indiana. Substantial numbers later moved on to Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, California and Oregon. During the late 1860s through the 1870s a radical change swept over Quakers in the Midwest with the adoption of revivals and the preaching of immediate sanctification. Many Midwestern meetings took up hymn singing, paid pastors, led prayers, churches with steeples, and other trappings of evangelical Christian churches. Toward the end of the century, the Gurneyite movement split again, with the most evangelical yearly meetings separating from the main body of Orthodox. These evangelical yearly meetings now constitute the Evangelical Friends International (EFI).

Friends of all persuasions were active against slavery, founding antislavery societies, editing abolitionist papers, and playing an important role in supporting the escaped slave leaders of the “underground railroad” to help more slaves escape across the free but

perilous northern states to Canada. Quaker women, first active in the anti-slavery movement, became the dominant leadership of nineteenth-century movements for women's rights. Especially notable were Lucretia Mott and the Grimke sisters. Progressive Friends meetings were formed in mid century which helped focus even more energy on these issues even as mainstream Friends were sometimes slow. Friends also continued to struggle for fair treatment of Native American Indians, to the extent that President Grant appointed a Quaker as Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Friends efforts at fair treatment were overwhelmed by the land-hungry anti-Indian sentiment. This sentiment supported the illegal settlers who invaded the Indian lands. The Civil War was as traumatic for Friends as for the nation as a whole. Sympathies were sharply against slavery, but the peace testimony was strong. Some enlisted and fought, but many Friends took advantage of the opportunity to "buy out" of the draft. In general, efforts at peacemaking were not well received. The Emancipation Proclamation was gratifying, but the freed slaves were in need of a great deal of help. Friends responded, as did others, by setting up schools for Negroes in the former slave states. Schools were also set up for Indians in Oklahoma, which produced an early missionary effort for American Friends.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, vigorous leadership in all branches revived Quakerism, which had hardened both in North American and in British Friends into virtual denial of one another's existence. Hicksite and Orthodox Friends would not accept one another's communications, and London Yearly Meeting refused to be "in correspondence" with the Hicksites. Even yearly meetings which agreed in theology, form of worship, and structure had little to do with one another except in the exchange of formal "epistles"—letters "to Friends Everywhere"—drafted by yearly meeting sessions. George Fox had encouraged the setting up of Friends schools, as did William Penn. This had developed by the end of the nineteenth century into a network of boarding secondary schools in Britain and the eastern United States and high schools in Washington, New York City, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. These were followed by colleges in Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Ohio, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, California, and Oregon.

## **Twentieth-century Movements**

The harsh separateness of Friends in the nineteenth century was changed through the leadership of a remarkable group of young men on both sides of the Atlantic. The principal figure in North America was Rufus Jones, born in 1863 in the small Quaker village of North China, Maine, in the Gurneyite New England Yearly Meeting. He was educated in Quaker schools and Haverford College, with graduate study at Harvard. He had a long teaching career at Haverford. His central academic interests were in Quaker history, mysticism, and devotion. Jones was also involved in church affairs, and while quite young became the editor of the **American Friend**, the principal journal of Gurneyite Quakerism. He also was involved in the process which led to the organization of the Friends Five Years Meeting, (now the Friends United Meeting [FUM]), an association of Gurneyite yearly meetings formed in 1900. Jones was not a supporter of the Richmond Declaration of Faith, a strong statement of Christian orthodoxy prepared at a large conference in 1887, and was influential in preventing it from becoming the basis of association of the Five Years Meeting.

At this same time, a group of Hicksite leaders brought their yearly meetings together in the Friends General Conference (FGC). These two groups, though unreconciled to one another, were the beginnings of a movement for unity that brought all Friends closer together in the next century.

In response to the harsh treatment of conscientious objectors in the World War of 1914-1918, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) was organized in 1917 to provide alternative service. Although located in Philadelphia, it was supported by Friends from many yearly meetings and was established as an independent corporation. Rufus Jones served as Clerk of the Board. The AFSC has followed the Quaker tradition of relief work, feeding children on both sides of the Spanish Civil War, and in Germany after both world wars. It has since grown into a very influential peace and justice organization, with programs in all regions of the world and a budget in the tens of millions. AFSC is supported by most U.S. yearly meetings, as well as many who are not Friends. In 1947, The Religious Society of Friends received the Nobel Peace Prize for its humanitarian work. The award was accepted by the AFSC and its counterpart in Britain.

At the end of World War II, the Friends' Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) evolved from the AFSC to be the Quaker lobby in Washington. FCNL has been, and is, of great value to Friends concerned with right governmental action. It is supported by most U.S. yearly meetings, and is recognized as one of the most accurate and reliable sources of Washington information.

In education, the twentieth century brought residential adult study centers in Birmingham, England and suburban Philadelphia, summer camps for children, several yearly meeting retreat centers, and a new college in New York. The Earlham School of Religion was founded in the 1960s at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana. It was designed to provide pastors for FUM Friends churches with high quality training and a strong background in Quakerism. It has also provided the same opportunity for many Friends of other backgrounds.

Other forms of closer association have developed over the years. In 1931, Fifty-seventh Street Meeting was established in Chicago, belonging to both Illinois Yearly Meeting FGC and Western Yearly Meeting FUM. Then, in the 1940s and 1950s, several yearly meetings which had split in 1827 and soon after, were reunited: Philadelphia, Canadian, New England, New York, and Baltimore. All these belong to FGC and all but Philadelphia also belong to FUM.

During this time, Rufus Jones continued to be the most prominent Quaker in the U.S., speaking widely among Friends, lecturing on the prestigious ecumenical religious lecture circuit, writing constantly (history of Quakerism, mysticism, devotions), promoting unity among Friends, and teaching at Haverford College. His assertion that Quakerism was essentially a mystical religion brought him more into favor with Hicksite Friends and less with Orthodox Friends, despite his Orthodox roots and long affiliation with Haverford, founded by Philadelphia Orthodox Friends. In a way, this made him a bridge and furthered unity, since many Orthodox Friends continued to admire him.

In the middle of the century, there was new growth of Hicksite and other "liberal" Quaker groups in the U.S. In the following fifty years, there came to be a meeting or worship group in many university and college communities across the Mid West. A comparable growth occurred on the West Coast. Pacific Yearly Meeting, Hicksite in spirit though not affiliated with Friends General Conference, divided to add North Pacific and

Intermountain Yearly Meetings. There has also been a substantial growth in the former California YM (FUM), which is now Southwest YM in the EFI. This expansion in the middle west and west occurred during a period of decline in numbers of Friends in Britain and the eastern United States (with the exception of some college or university centers.)

In 1920, a world conference of Friends was held in London, and a second conference in 1937 at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, resulted in the creation of the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC), which has grown in membership to include nearly all yearly meetings in the world. As its name suggests, it has no authority over its members, but is a catalyst, for Friends meeting together to share spiritual life and temporal concerns. It meets every three years in a different part of the world, with representatives from all member yearly meetings, and sponsors world conferences at roughly fifteen-year intervals. The FWCC is organized into Sections for Europe and the Near East, Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and the Americas. These Sections hold annual meetings to maintain spiritual contact and consider issues in their regions. The FWCC uses its international character to qualify as the sponsor of the Quaker programs at the United Nations in New York and Geneva, but the actual work is done by the AFSC in New York and Britain Yearly Meeting, through its Quaker Peace and Social Witness Committee in Geneva.

The growth of the FWCC is a result in part of Friends' missionary activities, since many of the new yearly meetings around the world are the result of missions. These were undertaken for the most part by evangelical Friends in both the FUM and EFI yearly meetings. The greatest fruits have been in East Africa, Central America, the Andean highlands of Bolivia and Peru, and Alaska. It is believed by some observers that Kenya has the majority of all Friends in the world; with an estimate running as high as 200,000 Friends. The other large mission groups number in the tens of thousands. Since there are slightly more than 100,000 in the U.S., less than 20,000 in Britain, and smaller numbers in other European and English-speaking countries, it is clear that a majority of Quakers world-wide are dark-skinned, poor, evangelical, and English is not their mother tongue. These newer groups are providing spiritual and practical leadership for world Quakerism through the FWCC.