

PART I
Chapter I
HISTORICAL STATEMENT

George Fox and the Rise of the People Called Quakers

George Fox

The people called Quakers had their beginnings in England at a time of great religious and political ferment. The Reformation had involved crown and church alike, and the struggle with the papacy had opened the way for numerous independent movements that affected all elements of society. It was out of this ferment that George Fox discovered and developed a vital faith. He was born in July, 1624, into a Christian home. His father, Christopher, was known in his community as "Righteous Christer" and his mother, Mary, was "a good, honest, virtuous woman." In Fox's own account in his Journal, he writes, "When I came to eleven years of age, I knew pureness and righteousness; for while a child I was taught how to walk to be kept pure." At nineteen years of age, experiencing deep spiritual conflict, he began a four-year period of wandering over the land, studying his Bible and seeking spiritual help from churchmen and dissenters alike. He then tells of his great religious experience, "And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could I tell what to do: then, oh! then I heard a voice which said, 'There is One, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition¹.'" In 1647, at the age of twenty-three, he began the ministry that was to bring together before his death in 1691 some fifty or sixty thousand Friends in England, besides large groups in America and elsewhere.

First Called Quakers

The emphasis of George Fox on the light of Christ" led to the adoption by his followers of the name "Children of the Light". This was succeeded as early as 1652 by "Friends in the Truth", or merely "Friends", from the saying of Jesus, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."² The popular name, "Quakers", was said by George Fox to have been first applied by Justice Bennett in 1650, "because I bade them tremble at the word of the Lord". It was said by Robert Barclay to have been applied as a term of reproach because "sometimes the power of God will break forth into a whole meeting. . .and thereby trembling and a motion of the body will be upon most if not upon all"³.

Early organization

Although he declared that he was forming no new sect or denominational group but bringing a universal message, Fox soon found some organization necessary for his growing fellowship. Though various local and general meetings had been held previously, the first regular Monthly Meeting seems to have been organized in 1653. Fox, referring to 1656, writes, "About this time I was moved to set up the men's Quarterly Meetings throughout the nation", thus carrying on a work already begun and furnishing an enduring pattern of organization. General meetings had been held in various localities prior to 1671 when London Yearly Meeting began to meet regularly. Dublin (Ireland) Yearly Meeting was also organized in 1669.

Period of Persecution

During this early period of Quakerism the persecution because of the refusal to take oaths, pay tithes, and attend the Established Church was extremely severe. About four hundred and fifty young leaders among Fox's followers either were killed or died as a result of the various forms of persecution. The Meeting for Sufferings looked after the victims of persecution and other cases of need, and later had general charge of the affairs of the group between sessions of the Yearly Meeting.

¹ Journal, 1694 edition, p. 8.

² John 15:14

³ Barclay's Apology, 1908 edition, p. 342

American Beginnings and Growth

Growth and Expansion

The universal aspect of Quakerism led its messengers at an early date to the continent of Europe and as far east as Turkey and Palestine. They ministered without prejudice to Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and Moslems, and impartially to kings, nobles, and peasants. The first Friends to cross the Atlantic went to Barbadoes where they had large followings. Mary Fisher and Ann Austin who came to the Island in 1655, passed on to Boston the next summer and, as far as is known, were the first Quaker visitors to the American mainland. These women were seized at once, imprisoned, and finally sent back to their place of departure as were the other Quaker apostles who ventured to come later. But banishment, fines, whipping, imprisonment, and even the hanging of four of their number on Boston Common, 1659-1661, were not sufficient to restrain their coming. "If God calls us", they declared, "woe to us if we come not".

Early American Yearly Meetings

George Fox and other early leaders visited America, evangelizing and aiding in the organization of Meetings. The first Yearly Meeting to be organized was New England in 1661; Baltimore Yearly Meeting was established in 1672 and Virginia Yearly Meeting was established in 1673 "by the motion and order of George Fox", who had also attended the first and second sessions of Baltimore Yearly Meeting. Virginia Yearly Meeting united with Baltimore in 1845. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting was organized in 1681; New York in 1695, by New England; North Carolina in 1698; Ohio, the first beyond the Alleghenies, in 1813 by Baltimore. Indiana Yearly Meeting was organized by Ohio in 1821 and became the parent meeting of several other Yearly Meetings, including Wilmington in 1892. Miami, Center, and Fairfield Quarterly Meetings purchased the site for Wilmington College in 1870 as a school to educate their Quaker youth and the community young people. Wilmington Yearly Meeting's formation in 1892 evolved out of this joint concern. Today Wilmington Yearly Meeting continues to play an active role with respect to its College as detailed on pages 55 of this document.

Branches of Friends

Lack of Unity

The Yearly Meetings were independent bodies united only by a common origin and by common beliefs and practices. Some degree of fellowship was maintained by annual exchange of epistles and by visits of traveling ministers who came with minutes certifying their good standing at home; returning minutes testified to their acceptable attendance. But since there was no common disciplinary guide, no central point of reference or mode of conference, there was abundant room for the development of divergent standards and practices under the influence of local leaders and conditions.

Orthodox-Hicksite Separation

In 1827-28 long smoldering differences in doctrinal teaching and disciplinary practice, not unmingled with personal feelings, came to a head over the teaching and standing of Elias Hicks and resulted in separations in five Yearly Meetings: Philadelphia, New York, Ohio, Indiana, and Baltimore, in the order named. No separation occurred in New England, North Carolina, or Virginia. Both groups in each case retained the name of the original Yearly Meeting and were popularly distinguished later by the terms, "Orthodox" and "Hicksite".

Wilbur-Gurney Controversy

Several Yearly Meetings were involved in a second series of separations, extended over a longer period. This is known as the Wilbur-Gurney controversy after the leaders of the two factions, or as the

Conservative-Progressive separation due to the questions at issue. The conclusive authority and the systematic study and teaching of the Scriptures, the use of new evangelistic methods, and the discontinuance of some of the ancient testimonies were the chief causes of separation. A division occurred in New England Yearly Meeting in 1845 and was followed by divisions in Ohio, Western, Iowa, Canada, and North Carolina Yearly Meeting.

Evangelical Movements of the Nineteenth Century

Ministry of Gurney

The development of American Quakerism has been greatly influenced by the visits of prominent English Friends. Hannah Backhouse made extensive visits in the 1830's, encouraging Bible reading and study, and the organization of Bible classes and Bible schools. Her cousin, Joseph John Gurney, who later visited nearly all the American Yearly Meetings, gave the Bible a still more important place in Friends' consideration and placed a new emphasis on conversion and on justification through the atoning death of Jesus Christ. Other influences reinforced these movements and when the exclusiveness that had kept Friends from outside contacts was weakened, the American revival of the 1850's reached the younger members.

Leading In 1860 Lindley M. Hoag of Iowa Evangelists and Sybil Jones of New England were present at Indiana Yearly Meeting and encouraged a special meeting for the young Friends that became a time of vocal exercise and testimony by hundreds. As a result an unusual group of young men and women were ready for the work of evangelization which followed. The revival movement, checked by the Civil War, reappeared and continued throughout the 1870's and the 1880's under the leadership of such evangelists as John Henry Douglas, Robert Douglas, Nathan and Esther Frame, Allen Jay, and many others. There was some opposition to the new methods and some excesses developed, but the movement spread, reaching the pillars of the Meetings and the general community alike.

Development of the Pastoral Ministry

Origin of Pastoral Ministry

The development of the pastoral ministry during the latter half of the nineteenth century was due to the growing demand for leadership. The change probably would have come eventually but more slowly if it had not been for the impetus given to it by the evangelical movement. Many were brought into membership by the revival meetings who had had no experience in the practices and methods of the Society of Friends nor any knowledge of their doctrines or traditions. "In places there were whole Meetings with only a few birthright members. Often converts in a series of meetings would join Friends merely because the preacher was a Quaker and they had no other denominational preferences."⁴ This called for a teaching ministry and for pastoral care such as had never been rendered in the traditional type of Quaker meeting with its system of distributed responsibility.

Employment of Pastors

It was natural, therefore, that the evangelist should be asked to remain in the community and devote his/her entire time to ministry and the shepherding of the flock. The feeling against the paid ministry diminished and references to it were omitted in revisions of the Discipline. Definite employment and financial assistance were provided for ministers and evangelists who were called to serve as pastors. These developments were obvious departures from the early practices of Friends, meeting as they did at

⁴ Russell, "The History of Quakerism", p. 483

the hour of worship in a silence that might continue through the hour, or that might be broken by any one of several resident ministers or other members of the congregation. The change to pastoral ministry took place gradually but not without regret and even opposition on the part of many. Today many Friends find their needs met in unprogrammed worship and others use pastoral leadership. Wilmington Yearly Meeting contains both forms of worship.

Origin of the Friends National Organizations

Concern for Unity

It was felt that more contact among geographically separated "orthodox" Friends was needed to help prevent future divisions. The year after the separation of 1828, a conference of the "Orthodox" Yearly Meetings was held in Philadelphia where a testimony was formulated which they all adopted as a statement of belief. Other conferences were held in 1849, 1851, and 1853 following the Wilbur-Gurney separation, but were ineffective since not all the Meetings were represented. Western Yearly Meeting twice asked for a conference but without success. Finally, in 1887, in response to a proposal made the year before by Indiana Yearly Meeting, twelve Yearly Meetings, including London and Dublin, sent delegates to a general conference held in Richmond, Indiana. Specially invited members from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (Arch Street) were also present but not as official delegates. The principal work of this conference was the formation of the Richmond Declaration of Faith which was later adopted by six of the Yearly Meetings represented. London, New England, and Ohio Yearly Meetings did not adopt the declaration, while Dublin, New York, and Baltimore Yearly Meetings gave their general approval without formal adoption.

Origin of Friends United Meeting

A second conference with the same American representation met at Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1892. It was largely concerned with the consideration of the pastoral ministry to which it gave its approval. It also planned for united foreign missionary activities and for another conference to be held in the same city five years later. When this third conference met in 1897, it approved the idea of a uniform discipline which was to provide for a conference every five years with delegated powers. The new discipline was prepared and submitted to the Yearly Meetings in 1900 for approval; its adoption by eleven Yearly Meetings by 1902 opened the way for the organization of the Five Years Meeting. The first session was held in Indianapolis in 1902. The Meeting now meets every three years and is called Friends United Meeting. Of the Yearly Meetings represented at the conference of 1897, only Philadelphia and Ohio remained outside of the new organization. Canada Yearly Meeting joined the Five Years Meeting in 1907 and Nebraska Yearly Meeting was organized by the Five Years Meeting in 1908. Oregon Yearly Meeting withdrew in 1926 and Kansas in 1937. The Friends United Meeting is now an international organization with the following membership: Baltimore, California, Canadian, Cuba, East Africa, Indiana, Iowa, Jamaica, Nebraska, New England, New York, North Carolina, Southeastern, Western and Wilmington Yearly Meetings.

Origin of Friends General Conference

The Hicksite Yearly Meetings of Baltimore, Genesee (Canada), Illinois, Indiana, New York, Ohio, and Philadelphia, after several years of working together informally, joined in forming the Friends General Conference in 1900. As the bitterness of the nineteenth century schisms diminished, most of these Yearly Meetings have united with their orthodox and/or conservative counterparts. In doing so Canada, New York, and Baltimore retained membership in Friends United Meeting. Later New England Yearly Meeting, affiliated with F.U.M., also joined F.G.C. Other Yearly Meetings have since been formed and have joined Friends General Conference.

Origin of Evangelical Friends Alliance

In 1965 four strongly evangelical Yearly Meetings; Kansas, Rocky Mountain, Oregon (now Northwest Yearly Meeting), and Ohio (now Evangelical Friends Church, Eastern Region) formed the Evangelical Friends Alliance. There has been an increasing amount of cooperation between Friends United Meeting and Evangelical Friends Alliance in recent years, particularly through the Faith and Life Movement.

Other Cooperative Agencies

Associated Committee of Friends on Indian Affairs

The Associated Committee of Friends on Indian Affairs was organized in 1869 as the result of government request that Friends appoint members to serve as Indian agents in Kansas and Oklahoma. The government relationship lasted only ten years, but the concern of Friends in this area was continued. The ACFIA is supported by Friends from a wide variety of Quaker groups and Yearly Meetings. Wilmington Yearly Meeting has actively participated in the work of the Committee by its appointment of representatives.

There are four Friends Centers in Oklahoma under the direction of the Associated Committee of Friends on Indian Affairs. Support comes from voluntary Yearly Meeting contributions, local Meetings and individuals.

American Friends Service Committee

As a channel for service in a wide range of humanitarian activities at home and abroad, the American Friends Service Committee has achieved wide recognition. It was organized in 1917 to train and equip for war relief and reconstruction work in Europe the conscientious objectors to compulsory military training in the first World War. Its work has been continued through the years in Europe and America, and more recently in Asia and Africa, as a religious expression of the Society of Friends in fields of social action. Whatever concerns human beings in distress, whatever may help free individuals, groups, and nations from fear, hate or narrowness - these are subjects for the Committee's consideration. With the belief that the "Something of God in Man" will respond to unselfish love and constructive good will, the Committee attempts to interpret religion in concrete ways as a reconciling influence wherever violence and conflict have developed. Its work has been supported by all groups of Friends and by many non-Friends, and it has cooperated closely with the Friends Service Council (London). In 1947 these two organizations were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Friends World Committee for Consultation

Friends of all branches attended a Friends World Conference in London in 1920, at Swarthmore and Haverford, Pennsylvania in 1937, at Oxford, England, in 1952, and at Guilford College, North Carolina, in 1967. An American All Friends Conference held at Oskaloosa, Iowa, in 1929, was likewise inclusive. At the World Conference of 1937 steps were taken to organize a committee "for future promotion of contacts and cooperation among Friends". This has resulted in the formation of a "Friends World Committee for Consultation", with an American section in which most Yearly Meetings are represented by official appointment. Under its supervision, a second American All Friends Conference was held at Richmond, Indiana in 1942, and at Wilmington, Ohio in 1957. A Conference of Friends in the Americas was held in Wichita, Kansas in 1977. The Faith and Life Conferences in recent years have attracted Friends from all of the major groups in the United States.

Friends Committee on National Legislation

A group of Friends gathered at Quaker Hill, Richmond, Indiana, in 1943 and organized the Friends Committee on National Legislation. It was agreed that a national representative Committee would meet periodically to discuss issues, make decisions and set policy for the program. While it has been recognized from the beginning that the FCNL does not speak for all Friends in the United States, it is equally clear that many Friends believe in and support the ideas advanced by the Committee. The staff of the FCNL does not take a position on any issue without the approval of the Committee. The Friends Committee on National Legislation presents its views to members of Congress and other government officials through personal interviews, testimony before congressional committees and printed statements. It publishes a newsletter and sponsors conferences and seminars to provide information for concerned citizens so they can more knowledgeably form opinions and make them known to government officials. The FCNL has offices in Washington, D.C. convenient to the legislative buildings.

Councils of Churches

A wider fellowship and fruitful co operation with other religious groups have followed the participation of Friends in local, state, and national associations and federations of churches. The most extensive relationship with the Christian world has been attained through membership in the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America and the World Council of Churches.⁵ Thus Friends have traversed a full range of experiences from a small, persecuted group, through an age of exclusiveness to a place of friendly recognition by churches of widely differing doctrinal emphases and modes of worship.

⁵ Part II, Chap. V, p. 65-66