GEORGE FOX AND THE SOCIETY OF THE FRIENDS (QUAKERS) #2
THE SPREAD OF THE QUAKERS IN THE FACE OF PERSECUTION

Prayer
Scripture: John 4:23, 24
Hymn: 641 "O Brother Man"

The Society of Friends was the product of the ministry of George Fox that followed his conversion experience. The "Inner Light" of this experience caused him to cry out against the churches of his time and against the religious wars and persecutions. Fox preached a new age of the Spirit and the reconstruction and restoration of the spiritual church of the Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles. He and his Friends were severely persecuted not only by both the Church of England and the Puritans, but also by the civil government.

THE RAPID GROWTH AND SPREAD OF FOX'S MOVEMENT

Fox's early ministry which began in 1647 was among the scattered Baptist communities and the Seekers of Nottinghamshire. He found many who were deeply dissatisfied with existing religious conditions and who were "waiting upon the Lord." Denouncing the churches with their "hireling" ministry, their "steeple-houses," their cold, formal and empty ceremonies, and hypocritical living, and proclaiming the "Inner Light" within every man that could lead him to victorious spiritual living, Fox made many converts. Many of these early converts joined in spreading the message with great zeal.

Everywhere Fox and his followers were bitterly opposed by the Church of England and the Puritans. They called themselves "Children of Light", "Publishers of Truth," "Friends of the Truth," or just "Friends." Fox and his early followers were most immoderate and excessive in their zeal. They showed little tact in their bitter denunciations of the churches and their ministers. Fox, himself, suffered his first imprisonment, in Nottingham in 1649, for interrupting the priest in the midst of the sermon. The priest was expounding the idea that Scripture was the authority by which all doctrines should be judged. Fox interrupted to declare that the Holy Spirit was the authority. In 1650 he was imprisoned at Derby on the charge of blasphemy. In the question and discussion period following the sermon Fox had taken the opportunity to set forth his ideas of spiritual religion. In Derby Justice Bennett, presiding over the trial of Fox, branded Fox and his followers as "Quakers." Fox had exhorted the judge to "tremble before the Lord." Reports had been spreading that in the meetings of the Friends the people often became so worked up emotionally that they trembled and shook. In the mind of the people the Friends were connected with the wild and fanatical Ranters, many of whom listened to Fox and some of whom became his followers. The nickname, "Quakers," caught on and spread. Often Fox's followers showed less restraint and common-sense than
their leader and soon Quakers filled the jails. They gained a reputation for interrupting worship services and stirring up trouble wherever they went.

Fox's ministry met with great success in northern and western England. He won a group of Seekers who had a chapel in Preston Patrick. Preston Patrick became known as the first Quaker community.

Fox and his disciples preached in churches when they had an opportunity. More often they spoke in private homes, in barns, or in the open air.

In 1652 Fox met Margaret Fell of Swarthmore Hall near Ulverston on the edge of the English Lake District. Her "Conviction" followed close on their first meeting. She became one of his most zealous, devoted and influential followers. Her husband, Thomas Fell, was a member of the Long Parliament, Judge of the Assize of the Chester and North Wales Circuit, Vice-Chancellor of the Duchy, and Attorney for the County Palatine of Lancaster. He was one of the most important men in the northern part of England. At the time he was about fifty-four years of age and his wife was sixteen years younger than her husband—thirty eight at the time. She married at eighteen years of age and had borne the judge nine children—eight girls and one boy. For twenty years she had been a "seeker" but had continued to attend and support the parish church at Ulverston where William Lampitt was minister. Fox described Lampitt as a man of high professions without inward life or truth, "full of filth," but he "hid his dirty actions" from the judge and his wife.

When Fox heard that Margaret Fell kept "open house" for ministers at Swarthmore Hall he made his way there. Fox and Lampitt engaged in informal debates before Margaret who quickly saw through Lampitt and was convinced of the truth of Fox's message. Margaret asked Fox to accompany her to the Ulverston service but he refused until he felt moved of the Lord to go. They arrived in the midst of a hymn. Fox was moved to publicly declare, "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, but he is a Jew who is one inwardly." He proceeded to proclaim that God had come to teach men inwardly by the Spirit, calling them from dead forms, empty practices, and second-hand religion to a life of truth and spirit. When Fox said, "Art thou a Child of the Light and what thou speakest is it inwardly from God?", Margaret stood up and said, "We are all thieves; we have taken the words of Scripture, but we know none of their truths in ourselves." A magistrate ordered Fox removed from the church. Margaret Fell cried out, "Let him alone. Why may not he speak as well as any other." It was her first public stand with the children of Light.

Judge Fell had been away at the time. When he returned he heard that his wife had been bewitched by Fox. The judge's first reaction was that Fox was a "Ranter." When Fox heard that the judge had returned he went to Swarthmore Hall and gave him a full interpretation of Christianity. The judge gave him a fair hearing and was favorably impressed but was not ready to surrender to a "convincement." He did give Fox permission to hold meetings in the Hall.
Two justices issued a warrant for Fox's arrest, charging him with blasphemy, but feared to serve them because of Judge Fell. When Fox heard of the unserved warrant he appeared at the Lancaster sessions to answer the unserved warrant. Judge Fell accompanied him. Although forty priests appeared to accuse Fox the justices were confounded by Fox and Judge Fell. The case was thrown out of court. Fox continued to gain people of standing when they would give him a fair hearing. Swarthmore Hall became his headquarters and Judge Fell continued to defend him without ever proclaiming himself a Quaker. Margaret Fell backed the movement with her life, her voice, her influence, and her money.

In the 1650's the Quakers were the most aggressive and dynamic religious movement in England. Most of the converts came from the lower middle class but Fox reached people of all classes. Zealous "Publishers of the Truth" spread all over England and Wales. Fox himself preached in every county in England and Wales. By 1654 the Friends had spread to London, Bristol and Norwich. Within the first ten years meetings of Friends had been established in most parts of England. Friends were preaching and winning converts in Scotland, Ireland, Holland, Germany, Austria, Jerusalem, the West Indies—they had great success in Barbados and Jamaica—and in North America. Fox made journeys into Scotland and Ireland. He wrote many letters to encourage and guide the faithful.

EARLY YEARS IN AMERICA

Two Quaker women, Ann Austin and Mary Fisher, attempted to invade Massachusetts in 1656. They arrived on a vessel from Barbados in July, 1656. The deputy-governor, Richard Bellingham, had received word they were coming. He sent officers aboard who searched their trunks, confiscated their books, and put them in prison. The hangman burned the books (about 100) in the market-place. All were forbidden to speak to them under penalty of a fine of five pounds. A board was nailed over their window so that no one could see them. All paper, ink, and pens had been taken away from them. They were stripped nude and subjected to examination to see if they were witches. All this was without trial and before there was a law against Quakers. After five weeks of cruel treatment they were shipped back to Barbados. Two days after they left another ship arrived from London with eight Quakers on board. The horrified magistrates forced the captain to take them back to England.

The first law against the Quakers was passed while the women were still in prison. It was dated "Boston, 14 of October, 1656." It began: "Whereas, there is a cursed sect of heretics lately arisen up in the world which are commonly called Quakers, who take upon them to be immediately sent of God and infallibly assisted by the Spirit to speak and write blasphemous opinions, despising government and the order of God in church and Commonwealth...." The law provided for heavy penalties on the master of any vessel who knowingly brought a Quaker into the colony. Any Quaker who came from any direction was to be committed to a house of correction, severely whipped, kept constantly at work, and no one was to speak or converse with a Quaker. Any person importing or concealing Quaker books was to suffer heavy penalties.
The real founders of American Quakerism were eleven men and women who arrived on the ship, Woodhouse, in 1657. They planted the seed on Long Island. They spread the Word throughout Rhode Island. Newport and Providence became centers of successful missions. They made inroads into both Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay Colonies, with Quakers in Salem, Sandwich and soon in many other towns.

A second law against Quakers was passed on October 14, 1657 enacting severer penalties. A third law was enacted on May 19, 1658, forbidding Quakers to hold meetings; any who attended a Quaker meeting was to be fined ten shillings and anyone who spoke was to be fined five pounds. Heavier penalties were levied on repeat offenders. On October 19, 1658 and on May 22, 1661 laws provided that Quakers who were banished and who returned should suffer death.

In 1661 four Quakers were hanged on Boston Common--three men and one woman. Twenty-seven other Quakers, including Wenlock Christison, had been condemned but before they were executed the "King's Missive" of Charles II arrived and the prisoners were freed. The death penalty was formally repealed in Massachusetts in 1681. Whipping had ceased in 1677 and other laws against Quakers had been suspended on March 23, 1681/82. Quakers continued to be imprisoned for refusing to pay the tithe.

THE QUAKERS IN THE 1660's

In spite of mounting persecution the Quakers continued to grow and spread. They established themselves as one of the most missionary groups in all of church history. By 1656 Fox estimated there were over 1,000 Friends in prison. By 1661 the number had grown to over 3,000. Hundreds died in jail. The Restoration in 1660 brought much more severe treatment. Quakers were ruinously fined, flogged, transported to colonies abroad and imprisoned everywhere. The Conventicle Act of 1664 imposed heavy penalties on anyone who attended a religious service where the Anglican forms of worship were not used. A harsher Conventicle Act was passed in 1670. An uprising led in London by a Quaker fanatic, Thomas Venner, resulted in the Quaker Act of 1662 that prohibited all Quaker meetings. The Five Mile Act of 1665 forbade any non-conforming minister to teach school or to come within five miles of any organized town unless he promised he would not attempt any alteration in church or state. Such laws hit Quakers hardest of all. Some 15,000 Quakers were brought to trial and received some sort of sentence.

Under such conditions the Quakers continued to grow and Fox found it advisable to work out a national organization in the 1660's. Monthly Meetings were established to keep watch over and to direct the membership. Quarterly Meetings were established for larger districts and the London Yearly Meeting began for all Britain. In 1668 Fox published his "Rule for the Management of Meetings."

In this difficult period the Friends won some of their most distinguished converts. As early as 1661 William Penn, son of Admiral Sir William Penn, began taking an interest in Fox and the Quakers. In 1666 William Penn moved over to "convincement." He was severely opposed by his father but nothing could turn him from his conviction that he had found the Light and the Truth. He became
a powerful minister of the gospel and soul-companion to Fox. He surpassed all the other Friends in the power of his writings.

Also in 1666 Robert Barclay at the age of eighteen was won. Fox had visited Scotland in 1657. He wrote, "I felt the Seed of God to sparkle about me, like innumerable sparks of fire." Aberdeen became a fertile place for Quakers. When David Barclay who had fought by the side of Gustavus Adolphus on the continent and with Cromwell and had sat in two Parliaments, openly "owned the Truth" he was imprisoned in Edinburgh. Young Robert who had studied in Paris and in the Scots Theological College and who had great facility in Latin and French and was well schooled in the Fathers and great theologians of the church, visited his father and another Quaker, John Swinton, in the prison. Robert Barclay became a Friend. He became the foremost Quaker scholar of his time and one of the most devoted followers of the unlearned Fox. He published in Latin in 1676 his Theologiae Verae Christianae Apologia, the ablest defense of the Quaker position. It was published in English as the Apology for the True Christian Divinity (1678).

Fox made fruitful journeys through Scotland and Ireland. In 1670 the Dublin Yearly Meeting was set up.

FOX'S MARRIAGE WITH MARGARET FELL

Judge Fell died in 1658. Eleven years later George Fox and Margaret Fell were married. She was seven years his senior. Fox had shown her considerable attention so that there was some gossip. She met him in London before he left on the tour in Ireland. He had told her that he believed they should be married on his return to London. She met him in Bristol, and Fox signified their intention of marriage in a meeting. All seven of Fell's daughters were present at the marriage in Bristol on October 27, 1669, and all seven signed the certificate of marriage. Fox believed the marriage was of the Lord and was made in heaven. Once the marriage was made Fox set out again on his journeys. In the twenty-one years following the marriage he spent about five years with his wife. From Swarthmore Hall she was a pillar of strength in the northern part of England. When Fox was not on a journey abroad he was often in London. Wherever he was he sent letters that began "Dear Heart."

QUAKERS IN THE 1670's

The Second Conventicle Act of 1670 increased the penalties against the Friends but did not discourage them. Quakers who migrated to escape persecution were considered weak and sinful. Quakers waited for a call from God. When they felt a call they went regardless of the cost. Irish Quakers held their first Dublin Yearly Meeting in 1670.

George Fox suffered a severe illness in 1670-1671 in Stratford and Enfield. After recovering he set sail for the West Indies in 1672 with a band of twelve helpers that included his first convert, Elizabeth Hooten. They spent a busy but fruitful three months in Barbados visiting Friends, settling meetings, and working to better humanity. Fox was greatly concerned over the treatment of slaves. Everywhere Fox was lied about and misrepresented. In Barbados he
drew up a statement of his and the Friends' belief in all the great doctrines of Christianity to answer the charge that he was sympathetic with the doctrines of the Socinians.

From Barbados he sailed to Jamaica where he spent seven weeks putting the Friends' meetings in good order and encouraging them. He was treated kindly by the governor and the magistrates. Elizabeth Hooton died in Jamaica. Fox left one of his band, Solomon Eccles, in Jamaica and he and the others sailed for Maryland. For over a year, travelling on horseback, fording rivers, Fox went up and down the coast from Maryland to Rhode Island. Some nights were spent in the woods, some in Indian villages, but most often after travelling twenty to thirty miles in a day he would come to the home of a Quaker. Often he visited with magistrates and they came to hear him preach. He spoke to groups gathered in homes. Often he spoke to large crowds in the open. He preached to Indians through an interpreter. The preaching resulted in many convincements. The Friends enjoyed their greatest success in North America. Their work prospered in Rhode Island. Fox attended a large meeting in Providence of Quakers from all over New England. He attended a very large meeting in Oyster Bay on Long Island, where their work was most fruitful. There were many meetings in Maryland and Delaware. They met with little success in Virginia. The first friends had settled in New Jersey in 1663. By 1670 a building had been erected in Shrewsbury and a meeting was held. Fox visited Friends in Shrewsbury and Middletown.

After Fox's return to England two Quakers, John Penwicke and Edward Billinge, in 1674, bought half of New Jersey, known as West Jersey, from the proprietor, Berkeley. William Penn took great interest in West Jersey, sending some 800 Quakers to establish homes in 1677-78. The Quakers of West Jersey turned their eyes to East Jersey and sent some 230 of their number to settle.

On his return to England in 1673 Fox received a joyous welcome but he and his Quakers still had to face severe persecution. Fox established the Meeting for Suffering in 1675 to intercede with the government.

Some of the Friends began to question the structure Fox's meetings gave the movement. John Wilkinson and John Story led a vigorous protest and opposition to organization as binding the free testimony of the Spirit. For twenty years Fox had to deal with the disruption among his followers.

In 1677 Fox accompanied by William Penn and Robert Barclay made a mission journey into Holland, Germany and Austria. They were well received.

WILLIAM PENN'S EXPERIMENT IN PENNSYLVANIA

One of the most spectacular triumphs of the Quakers was William Penn's establishment of Pennsylvania as a colony for Quakers. In 1681 Charles II granted Pennsylvania to William Penn in payment of a debt of 16,000 pounds that the crown owed Penn's father, Vice Admiral Sir William Penn. Penn made Pennsylvania a "holy experiment" to provide a refuge for Quakers and others oppressed in conscience. Philadelphia was founded in 1682. The colony was a success from
the start. Quakers maintained political control until they voluntarily withdrew from control in 1755 because of conscientious inability to support the crown's war with France. There was heavy non-Quaker immigration that included German Baptists, German Lutherans, and German Reformed, Dutch Lutherans and Reformed, Swedish Lutherans, Mennonites and Presbyterians. Penn established friendly relations with the Indians and won many of them.

THE FAITH AND PRINCIPLES OF THE FRIENDS

Wherever the Quakers went their central and basic doctrine was that of the "Inner Light." A favorite scripture passage was "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in Truth" (John 4:23, 24). There is that of God in every man—the Holy Spirit. By following the Divine Spirit, the Inner Light, one can discover true belief and righteous conduct without the help of any minister. The Spirit is the voice of God that speaks directly to the soul, uniting the believer with the Living Christ, freeing him from sin, enabling him to perform good works. The visible effects are mostly of a moral character: simplicity, purity, truthfulness. The indwelling Spirit gave one a new radical perspective on the church and on society. Fox's aim was to reconstruct Christianity and to restore it to its primitive life and power.

Scripture to the Friends was precious as the testimony of the Spirit in ages past but it was necessarily of less importance to those who had the Spirit as their teacher. The Bible was not the final word of God but a part of a continuing revelation of the divine Christ. Quakers studied the Bible for its teaching rather than out of the necessity of belief in miracles.

The Friends denounced the "hireling ministry", "steeplehouses", and the sacraments. When Quakers built church buildings they were only meeting houses—bare rooms where they would wait in silence in "holy expectation before the Lord" until some member, whether man or woman, felt stirred to speak. They believed in the priesthood of all believers. The Spirit was as apt to speak to a woman as to a man. They denounced a professional and paid ministry. The Gospel should be preached without fee or reward. They recognized that some people had special gifts and some volunteered for or were assigned certain duties. These could be recorded as "ministers." "Elders" were responsible for conducting meetings for worship. "Overseers" supervised the life of the congregation. These were "works" and not "offices." All outward sacraments such as baptism and the Lord's Supper were rejected as empty formalities not needed by those baptized in the Spirit and who fed on Christ spiritually. They believed the sacraments tended to Roman Catholicism. They opposed the singing of hymns in worship. Art and music were considered vanities. They refused to pay tithes. They considered the common names of months and the days of the week to be pagan, using such terms as First-day and Second month.

The Friends denounced all state interference with religion. They had no written creed. The ancient creeds were considered human notions with no authority. Details of belief were matters of personal conviction.
The Friends insisted on the essential worth and dignity of all men, the quality and brotherhood of all men, and respect for human rights. They rejected hypocritical polite speech, using "thee" and "thou" to every person, high and low, instead of using "you" for nobility. They refused to remove the hat to any man. They wore plain clothes of the ordinary working people--Fox was known for his leather breeches. They condemned slavery. In the colonies they urged friendly relations with the Indians. Fox condemned all Christian participation in war. Christians should live "in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion for all wars."

The Quakers refused all oaths. "Walking in the light" meant telling the truth so that no oaths were needed. They urged fixed price trading, holding it was wrong to ask a higher price than one was willing to take.

The religion of the Friends was an attempt to put all these ideals into practice.

THE PERSECUTIONS AND IMPRISONMENTS OF FOX AND THE FRIENDS

The Quaker principles were considered dangerous and a threat to both church and state. The early Quakers were highly provocative, tactless, uncompromising. The followers were often more extreme than Fox himself. He broke completely with existing churches and expressed open hostility on almost every point. He challenged almost every entrenched form and established practice. He thundered against priests and preachers, church buildings, sacraments and worship services, and cherished doctrines--especially predestination and depravity.

Fox and his Quakers suffered much from angry mobs--often mobs incited by the clergy. Fox himself was hauled before magistrates over sixty times. He was imprisoned eight times. Rarely were there less than 1,000 Friends in prisons at any time. It is claimed that some 15,000 were imprisoned and that over 450 died in prison. Many more were cruelly tortured, whipped, and exiled. Many were ruined financially by fines and confiscations.

In the early years of his ministry the greatest danger Fox faced was from angry mobs that stoned him, beat him with sticks and clubs, and shouted for his death. Gradually the people became convinced that he was an honest, brave man working for the rights and privileges of the common people. But as the mob spirit died down the courts and the magistrates took up the battle, often urged on by the clergy.

His first imprisonment was at Nottingham in 1564 for interrupting the sermon. The second was a six months sentence at Derby on the false charge of blasphemy. A second six months was added to his sentence when he refused a commission in the Commonwealth army. His third imprisonment was seven weeks in "a filthy nasty place...where men and women were put together" in Carlisle. The prisoners were almost eaten to death by lice. The most terrible of his dungeon experiences was the fourth imprisonment of eight months in Launceston Castle. He was treated brutally by the jailers. Fox would allow no pain or suffering to keep him from sincerely and
honestly living out and practising the truth he taught with his lips. He wrote, "I was never in prison that it was not the means of bringing multitudes out of their prisons." Often he won fellow prisoners to "convincement" and sometimes his jailers. The fifth imprisonment in Lancaster Castle was short. After pretending he was very dangerous, without bond or guards, alone he was allowed to travel to London, carrying his own charges to the judges. The London judges freed him.

All through Cromwell's rise to power Fox hoped he would grant the Friends relief and freedom to worship. Three times Fox was able to speak in Cromwell's presence. Each time he earnestly tried to bring Cromwell to "convincement." Cromwell hardened himself against the truth. Fox believed it was the result of worldly considerations. The failure to convert Cromwell was a big disappointment. In the end Cromwell refused to tolerate Quakers.

The sixth imprisonment of one month in Leicester in 1662 resulted from his refusing to take the Oath of Supremacy and Allegiance. His longest imprisonment was the seventh that began at Lancaster in 1664 and ended at Scarborough in 1666. The rising of the Fifth Monarchy Men against Charles II resulted in harsh measures against Quakers. They were forbidden to hold meetings. Daniel Fleming of Rydal Hall, Westmoreland offered a reward of five pounds for the arrest of Fox. He was arrested and when he refused to remove his hat the judge sent him to jail. Each time when he came up for release the judge ordered him to take the Oath of Supremacy and Allegiance. Each time he refused and received a new sentence. Margaret Fell was sentenced to life imprisonment and her estate confiscated. After four and a half years the king ordered her release and eventually she recovered her estate. Fox was removed to Scarborough on the coast of the North Sea where he was placed in a room open to the wind and rain. There was no fireplace. His clothes stayed wet and cold. The floor was covered with water. The exposure broke his health and he never fully recovered.

The eighth and last imprisonment began in Worcester in 1673 just after he returned from America. He was on the way to see his ill mother. He was arrested. His mother died while he was in prison. He was moved to London. After fourteen months in prison he was freed in 1675. The Lord Chief Justice freed him without any oath, saying he had heard many good reports of Fox.

FOX'S LAST DAYS

In 1689 the Toleration Act of William and Mary finally granted the right to worship to Quakers and other Dissenters. Fox had lived to see his people granted toleration. They still suffered many disabilities for many years and were often imprisoned for refusing to pay tithes to support the Anglican establishment. To the end Fox was actively engaged in promoting the welfare of his brethren. He died on January 13, 1691.
FRIENDS AT THE END OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

By the end of the seventeenth century Quakerism was losing its dynamic vision of the Gospel for all people and was becoming a particular sect that emphasized solidarity, discipline, and peculiar dress and speech. Prosperity, a measure of legal security, and middle-class respectability had brought a decline in the intense spirituality of its early years. In 1700 Margaret Fell lamented "We are now coming into Jewism."