

**THE INFLUENCE OF JOHN WOOLMAN
ON THE QUAKERS'
ANTISLAVERY POSITION**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that John Woolman was the catalyst in persuading the Society of Friends to become the first denomination in the American colonies to adopt a position favoring the abolition of slavery. The author portrays Woolman's untiring efforts to combat the eighteenth-century's pervasive attitudes towards slavery with emphasis on his personal encounters with Quaker slaveholders, his itinerant ministry through the colonies, and his antislavery writings. Woolman's gentleness and his abilities as a communicator and writer were his resources in spreading his antislavery message.

Slavery was an acceptable practise among all the eighteenth-century denominations in the American colonies. As the few antislavery supporters were heard, slowly the American Society of Friends began to be open to change. The result was that the Quakers became the first American sect to change its stance on slavery when, in 1776, it adopted a policy of abolition at the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Other Yearly Meetings throughout America quickly followed suit. A key factor in their decision was John Woolman's vision of liberation for slaves and his labors towards the fulfillment of his vision. Woolman led the American Quaker slaveholders back to the basics of Quakerism by identifying with them in their wrongdoing of slavery and by making himself a model of selfless devotion.

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INTRODUCTION

Less than a century after the establishment of the first English settlement in America at Jamestown, Virginia (1607), slavery had become an accepted institution in the New World. The first Negroes from Africa were shipped to Virginia in 1619 to provide labor for the plantations. There is evidence of slavery by 1640 and Virginia, Maryland and other colonies made slave laws as early as 1660.¹ It is ironic that many pioneers who had emigrated to America seeking freedom found themselves involved in enslaving other human beings, namely, Negroes from Africa.

The Society of Friends or Quakers, as did all other seventeenth and eighteenth-century denominations in America, accepted the practise of slavery and many members had become wealthy slaveholders. Quakers were both influential and numerous, particularly in Pennsylvania and New Jersey and became the first significant group to take a stand against slavery in the eighteenth century. The question this thesis seeks to address is, What role did John Woolman play in the Quakers' decision to reject the institution of slavery?

¹Winthrop D. Jordan, *The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States* (London, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 26.

Elfrida Vipont calls the eighteenth-century Quaker John Woolman "the finest flowering of all that was best in the Quietist period."² This shopkeeper, who later became a tailor by trade and supplemented his income by surveying, drawing wills, keeping an orchard, and occasionally teaching school, was also a Quaker minister for twenty-nine years. He travelled widely in the American colonies and to Britain proclaiming his message of liberty for slaves. The historian Frederick Tolles writes,

More than any other single influence, it was Woolman's clear and steady voice that woke the conscience of the Quakers and ultimately, through them, of the western world, to the moral evil of slavery.³

A number of biographies have been written about Woolman and all praise his lifestyle and ideals while each one depicts him in a distinct way. Janet Whitney in *John Woolman: American Quaker* has provided an excellent but wordy account.⁴ She presents Woolman in the setting of his time but on occasion lapses into

²Elfrida Vipont, *The Story of Quakerism 1652-1952* (London: The Bannisdale Press, 1954, reprinted 1970), 151.

³John Woolman, *The Journal of John Woolman and A Plea for the Poor*, ed. Frederick B. Tolles, The John Greenleaf Whittier Edition Text (New York: Corinth Books, Inc., 1961; The Journal was originally published in 1774), viii. Tolles was professor of Quaker history and director of the Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College, PA. "Quaker" was originally used in 1647 as the nickname of a sect of women in England who shook during religious experiences when the power of God came upon them. See R. E. Selleck, "The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)," in *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (hereafter called D.C.A., Downer Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 454. The term was applied to the followers of George Fox by Justice Gervase Bennett in 1650 and became universal. Fox was charged with blasphemy and appeared before the Justice, who referred to the state of Spirit-possession by the disciples of Fox as quaking. Quakers also became known as the Society of Friends or Friends. See Melvin B. Endy, Jr., *William Penn and Early Quakerism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 59, n. 14.

⁴Janet Whitney, *John Woolman: American Quaker* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1942).

sentimentality. Whitney has added a great wealth of detail unavailable in Woolman's *Journal*. Edwin H. Cady, in *John Woolman: the Mind of the Quaker Saint*, portrays Woolman as one who was similar to modern man, in that he lived in an era which moved from a relatively tranquil age into a complex, confusing time.⁵ One third of Cady's work deals with Woolman's ancestry and his youth, while the remainder covers his journeys. Cady employs numerous quotes from Woolman's *Journal*.

Paul Rosenblatt's *John Woolman* centers on Woolman as a writer and devotes a large section to a literary analysis of his *Journal*.⁶ Rosenblatt is more illuminating on Woolman's social commentary than on his contributions as a Quaker mystic. Another work, *The Journal and Essays of John Woolman*, edited by Amelia Mott Gummere, includes a revealing biography of Woolman, a new edition of his *Journal*, and supplementary data in footnotes and appendices.⁷ Phillips Moulton, however, asserts that Gummere's edition of Woolman's *Journal* is inadequate for three reasons: (1) she confused two of Woolman's manuscripts and her final text does not represent Woolman's intentions; (2) the text contains numerous minor errors and undocumented variant readings; and (3) her editorial

⁵Edwin H. Cady, *John Woolman: The Mind of a Quaker Saint* (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1965).

⁶Paul Rosenblatt, *John Woolman* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1969).

⁷Amelia Mott Gummere, ed., *The Journal and Essays of John Woolman* (New York: The Macmillan company, 1922).

methods are inconsistent. For example, on page two the same word is spelled "seting" and "sitting."⁸ Yet, as Edwin H. Cady maintains, Gummere's work is still "the indispensable Woolman reference."⁹

The key document in understanding Woolman is his *Journal*, which he completed over a period of sixteen years (1756-1772). Following his death in England in 1772, the Quaker Meeting for Sufferings in Philadelphia appointed a committee which prepared it for publication.¹⁰ The first revised transcript came off the press in Philadelphia in 1774.¹¹

Moulton says that many editions of the *Journal* have been printed since Woolman's death and "every printed edition to date has differed at literally hundreds of points from the final manuscript Woolman prepared for the printer."¹² Edwin Cady writes,

It seems to me there is no doubt that the writings of John Woolman must be kept on the registry of needed tasks of the Center for Editions of American Authors [CEAA] until somebody produces a definitive edition by modern and professional bibliographical means.¹³

⁸John Woolman, *The Journal of John Woolman*, ed. Phillips Moulton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 276.

⁹Cady, *John Woolman: The Mind of a Quaker Saint*, 174.

¹⁰The "Meeting for Sufferings" was a committee established to care for Quaker concerns in the intervals between the Philadelphia Yearly Meetings. Elton Trueblood, *The People Called Quakers* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), 150-51.

¹¹Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 273-74.

¹²*Ibid.*, 273.

¹³Cady, *John Woolman*, 128, n. 7.

Moulton's edition has been chosen for this thesis because he, in accordance with the standards and methods of the CEAA, has aimed "to produce (as nearly as possible) a text representing the final intent of the author....The editor has taken care that no words be added, substituted, or omitted."¹⁴

The *Journal* is composed of twelve chapters and is mainly devoted to Woolman's itinerant ministry. Chapter one covers the first twenty-two years of his life with just a few references to his childhood and adolescent years.¹⁵ The last chapter comprises his four-month visit to England, where he died of small pox on 7 October 1772.¹⁶ The remaining ten chapters are a summation of his journeys, experiences, and dealings with his Quaker peers.

One of the best treatments of Woolman's *Journal* is by Howard Brinton, who has analyzed over one hundred typical Quaker Journals and observed the following stages incorporated into them: (1) Divine revelations in childhood; (2) Compunction over youthful frivolity; (3) Period of search and conflict; (4) Convincement; (5) Conversion; (6) Seasons of discouragement; (7) Entrance upon the ministry; (8) Adoption of plain dress, speech and simple living; (9) Curtailment of business; and (10) Advocacy of social reform. Brinton notes that a few Quaker

¹⁴Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, x. Moulton's edition contains 170 pages including footnotes on original wording, etc.

¹⁵Chapter one has 11 pages in Moulton's edition.

¹⁶The last chapter - chapter 12 - has eleven pages in Moulton's edition.

Journals include no more than three or four of these stages while the majority contain most of them. Woolman's *Journal* is a classic record of all ten stages and this understanding helped considerably in writing this thesis.¹⁷ Brinton's echelon assists in depicting Woolman as a Quaker archetype.

The *Journal* itself is important for this thesis because of the details it contains regarding Woolman's role as a travelling Quaker minister and of his efforts to counteract the pervasive proslavery attitudes of his day. It is no accident that the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, the same year in which it published Woolman's *Journal* (1774), resolved to disown Quakers who sold or transferred slaves and, two years later, adopted a position of abolition among its members. In addition to his *Journal*, John Woolman wrote two treatises against slavery. *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes: Recommended to the Professors of Christianity of Every Denomination*, Parts I and II, are significant writings on the issue.¹⁸ He also wrote a number of other essays and epistles. He composed a letter in 1775 stating the Quakers' pacifist position regarding war. It was signed by fourteen Quakers and sent to "Friends on the Continent of America."¹⁹ He wrote *An Epistle of Tender Love and Caution* the same year and sent it to Quakers throughout Pennsylvania. In

¹⁷Howard Brinton, "Stages in Spiritual Development as Recorded in Quaker Journals," in *Children of Light* (New York: The Macmillan company, 1938), 385-86. For a complete description of the various stages see 381-406.

¹⁸Both essays are in Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 198-237.

¹⁹See Appendix, 151-53. The term "Friends" (capital F) refers to Quaker(s) or member(s) of the Society of Friends.

it he defined the Quaker stand against war and paying taxes to support hostile conflicts:

We therefore think that we cannot be concerned in wars and fightings, so neither ought we to contribute thereto by paying the tax directed by the said Act [of Assembly], though suffering be the consequence of our refusal, which we hope to be enabled to bear with patience.²⁰

Woolman also composed *An Epistle of Tender Love and Compassion* (1755) which was sent to Quakers throughout Pennsylvania by twenty-one Friends, *A Plea for the Poor or A Word of Remembrance and Caution to the Rich* (1763-1764, published in 1793), *Considerations on Pure Wisdom and Human Policy* (probably published 1768), *Considerations on the True Harmony of Mankind* (1770, not published until 1837), and *Remarks on Sundry Subjects* (1772, published posthumously in 1773). *Remarks* includes five essays entitled, "On Loving our Neighbors as Ourselves," "On the Slave Trade," "On Trading in Superfluities," "On a Sailor's Life," and "On Silent Worship."²¹

John Woolman did not speak to the broad culture and population of his day but chose to remain within the confines of Quakerism. He became a conscience to the Quakers which would not let them rest until they dealt with the problem of slavery. David Brion Davis, a noted authority on American slavery, writes,

If the Western world became more receptive to antislavery thought between the time Woolman left for North Carolina in 1746 and when he

²⁰Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 85.

²¹See Appendix, 151-52.

arrived in England in 1772, the self-effacing Quaker was a major instrument of the transformation.²²

In an attempt to understand and evaluate Woolman's influence, this thesis focuses on his conscience, which resulted in his plain lifestyle of integrity and his concern for the plight of slaves. My thesis seeks to demonstrate that his personal integrity and his untiring labors in both preaching and writing made John Woolman the major influence in the Quakers becoming the first religious group in the American colonies to take a stand against slavery and finally to abolish it among its members in 1776. Because this was the small swell of a larger tide of abolition that culminated in the Civil War nearly a hundred years later, Woolman must be examined and placed in his larger historical context.

²²David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), 489.

CHAPTER ONE

SLAVERY AND QUAKERS IN THE EARLY AMERICAN COLONIES

During the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the population of America expanded with an influx of Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, Swedish, Danish, French, and English immigrants. Added to this, hundreds of thousands of blacks from Africa had been imported through the slave trade. Marcus W. Jernegan writes that there were probably a million slaves in the American colonies up to the time of the Revolution.²³ By the early 1700s, many colonists were third generation who had fewer cultural or emotional ties to the mother countries than their parents and grandparents. Their loyalties and interests were in the land of their birth - the American colonies.

²³Marcus W. Jernegan, "Slavery and Conversion in the American Colonies," in *American Historical Review* 21 (1916): 504.

The nineteenth-century historian, Robert Baird, provides a useful and relevant interpretation of the religious history of the American Colonial Era by dividing it into four periods. The first, extending from the earliest English settlement in Virginia in 1607 to 1660, was one in which religion flourished and can be called the golden age of the cycle. There were only a few minor short Indian wars with minimum losses during this interval - with the Pequods in 1637, between the Dutch and Algonquins in 1643, and two minor wars in Virginia in 1622 and 1644.²⁴

The major accomplishment of this period was, according to Baird, the spread of religion throughout the colonies.²⁵ Renowned men such as Edward Winslow, John Cotton, Increase Mather and his son Cotton in Massachusetts Bay, William Brewster in Plymouth, Thomas Hooker in Connecticut, John Davenport in New Haven, Robert Hunt and Alexander Whitaker in Virginia, and Roger Williams in Rhode Island were distinguished for their devout leadership.²⁶

The colonists did not ignore the religious life of the native Indians and a number endeavored to Christianize them. In 1646, for example, John Eliot began his labors among the natives from Cape Cod to Worcester, a distance of over one

²⁴See Robert Baird, *Religion in America* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1856), 202-06.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 202.

²⁶Biographical entries on each of these pioneers can be found in D.C.A.

hundred miles. He made repeated journeys through the area, mastering the language and translating the Scripture into their native tongue.²⁷ The famous Indian princess, Pocahontas, became a Christian in Virginia, was baptized, and joined a Christian church.²⁸

The second period was from 1660-1720. After 1660, most of the colonies experienced great troubles, especially wars. For example, Massachusetts fought a war against King Philip, chief of the Pokanoteks, and other tribes who joined together to wipe out the colonists. Virginia experienced a serious Indian war and a rebellion (1675-76) which threatened the colony. The Carolinas fought a decimating war with the Tuscaroras in 1711-12. England's wars with France and Spain agitated the colonies and brought financial burdens upon them.

The colonies were also experiencing growth and prosperity. They had become permanent as wealth was increasing and commerce was expanding. Interest in religion began to diminish during this period.

The third period (1720-1750) was distinguished by what is known as the Great Awakening. The English and French were engaged in fighting, especially in the 1740s. The revivals of the Awakening infused new life into the churches, chiefly in New England, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and certain areas of New York.

²⁷Baird, Religion in America. 591.

²⁸Ibid., 203.

This was the period when the Edwards and Tennants made converts in the Northern and Middle States, and George Whitefield itinerated throughout the South and the Atlantic seaboard preaching and instigating revivals.²⁹

John Woolman took his first journey as a Quaker minister throughout East Jersey with Abraham Farrington (1743) during this period of religious upheaval. Three years later, accompanied by his friend, Isaac Andrews, he travelled to Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. The Quakers were sensitive to currents generated by the Great Awakening and many, including Woolman, were insisting on a return to Quaker fundamentals - purity of faith, plain speech and clothes, and avoidance of all luxuries.

The fourth period extended from 1750 to the Declaration of Independence in 1776. The colonies aided England in defeating the French in 1763, ending in the conquest of Canada, which was secured by the treaty of Paris. During this period, disputes also increased between the American colonies and the mother country. When all prospects for an amicable settlement seemed slim, the colonies began to prepare for revolutionary war.

²⁹A useful new bibliography explaining the contemporary significance of itinerant ministry and published journals is Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism*, Library of Religious Biography (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991).

Americans were nation builders in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Max Savelle, in *Empires to Nations*, claims that the most significant development in America during these centuries was nationalism.³⁰ Economically, the colonies were becoming self-sufficient and were trying to move away from the regulatory system of imperial mercantilism towards freedom of commerce. The English Navigation Act of 1660 stated that goods travelling to or from the British colonies must be transported only in British registered ships. The edict enumerated a list of commodities which must go through British ports on their way to and from foreign markets.³¹

Upon discovering that they could obtain higher prices for their goods and buy imports cheaper outside the British monopolies, the American colonists began to defy English control and implement illegal free trade. The magnitude of the intercolonial system could not and would not be contained forever in the old mercantile structure. This led to a growing tension between the colonists and the British government, particularly after the defeat of the French in 1763 and the removal of the threat from Quebec and Louisiana.

The political culture of the American colonies was also undergoing changes. There was increasing power in colonial representative bodies as the

³⁰Max Savelle, *Empires to Nations: Expansion in America, 1713-1824* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), 8.

³¹*Ibid.*, 93.

population and expansion of territorial areas increased. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the colonies were basically pawns on the international chessboard but, as the 1700s developed, they became integral portions of the European empires. The English American colonies began to develop their own international objectives: additional lands not yet acquired, especially those in the West and Northwest; freedom of commerce; and isolation from European wars in colonial America. Anglo-Americans were anxious to seize the nearby territories of rival empires, such as the Spanish, who claimed a vast area of land from a 1494 treaty with the Portuguese.

The eighteenth-century Anglo-American religious culture can be described as a conglomeration of denominations and theological persuasions. A large segment was Anglican and its supreme governor was the English monarch. While it was the established Church in England, there was no Anglican bishop in America. The Northeastern Colonies were predominately Congregational and Presbyterian and subscribed to a Calvinist theology.³² Quakers, Lutherans, Mennonites, Baptists, and Moravians were more significant in the Middle and Southern Colonies, particularly in Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and

³²Calvinist theology is described on pages 34-37 of this thesis.

Maryland. There was also a scattering of Jews and Roman Catholics in certain areas.³³

The Enlightenment also influenced America with the theory that people could be illuminated through reason, science, and education. Immanuel Kant wrote, "Enlightenment is man's leaving his self-caused immaturity....Have the courage to use your own intelligence! is therefore the motto of the Enlightenment."³⁴ This was not a mass movement like the Great Awakening, but it was influenced by such celebrated European writers as Montesquieu (1689-1755), Voltaire (1694-1778), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), Denis Diderot (1713-1784), and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).³⁵ Although the Enlightenment occurred in Europe, particularly in England and in aristocratic "salons" in France, its ideas soon swept through America. It spread by way of England, especially through books that traveled in the holds of merchant ships and produced American Enlightenment thinkers such as Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson. Liberal religious thought gave rise to new religious beliefs such as Deism, Unitarianism, Universalism, and even atheism.

³³Saville, *Empires to Nations*, 167.

³⁴Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" in *Western Civilization: Images and Interpretations*, ed. Dennis Sherman, 3d ed., (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1991), 62.

³⁵He was christened Francois-Marie Arouet and chose the pen name "Voltaire."

Enlightenment thinkers, who were called *philosophes*, developed and popularized ideas which formed the basis for modern thought. They employed skepticism, empirical reasoning, and satire in their writings, which ranged from pamphlets to Diderot's *Encyclopedie*. Many university professors and statesmen governing the destinies of America were exponents of Enlightenment thought.

The majority of *philosophes* believed that reasoning and education could dispel the darkness of the past that had kept people in "a state of immaturity." They mainly criticized the church and governments for keeping the citizens ignorant and thus hindering progress. They were not chiefly political or social revolutionaries but they advocated revolutionary concepts. They worked for change, not through bloodshed, riots, or political upheavals, but through reform by enlightened monarchs and leaders.³⁶

The *philosophes* introduced new ideas in the eighteenth century. Kant, for example, argued that humanity had remained immature because of its own cowardice and laziness. People had learned to depend upon other individuals to think and work for them, he asserted, such as doctors who decided their diets and clergymen who dictated their conscience. Kant declared that all that is required for enlightenment is freedom, "namely, the freedom for man to make public use of his

³⁶See Sherman, ed., *Western Civilization*, 314-326.

reason in all matters...primarily in *matters of religion*."³⁷ Voltaire also advocated the restoration of freedom, which he saw as the natural right of individuals, including personal, property, and religious liberties.³⁸

Many of the ideas and opinions of the Enlightenment thinkers were conflicting and inconsistent with each other. For example, Montesquieu praised the church but did not believe in religion, while Rousseau believed in religion but denounced the church as a tyranny. Montesquieu advocated practical political liberty, while Voltaire surrendered political liberty for a guarantee of intellectual freedom. Yet, there were ideas which permeated the writings of all the *philosophes*, namely, individual rights and equality. One individual who shared the thoughts and ideas of the Enlightenment thinkers on these issues was John Woolman.

Woolman believed that it was a gross injustice to deny one the right to live her/his own life without outside interference, and especially to hold another in bondage. On occasion Woolman used enlightenment terminology, claiming that liberty is an inherent natural "right of innocent people."³⁹ He implored for equality between blacks and whites and argued that the principles of brotherhood and the

³⁷Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" in *Western Civilization*, ed. Sherman, 63.

³⁸Voltaire, "Philosophical Dictionary: the English Model," in *Western Civilization*, ed. Sherman, 69.

³⁹John Woolman, "Some Considerations," Part II, in *The Journal of John Woolman*, ed. Moulton,

golden rule apply to both. Concerning blacks Woolman writes, "I believe liberty to be their right and see they are not only deprived of it but treated in other respects with inhumanity in many places."⁴⁰ Yet, while Enlightened thinkers and those sympathetic to their cause contended for liberty and equality, slavery continued to flourish throughout America.

Slave holding is an ancient institution which dates back to antiquity and, as David Brion Davis in *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* points out, it was taken for granted through the centuries. There is no indication from authors of the ancient world that slavery was "an intolerable evil that should be eradicated by any civilized nation."⁴¹ The defenders of slavery argued that during the Old Testament era, godly men such as Abraham, David, and Job kept slaves. Furthermore, they claimed, according to Mosaic law, Jews were permitted to own slaves with certain restrictions: no Hebrew master was to hold an Israelite slave for more than six years (Ex. 21:2); punishment by death was dealt to the one who stole and sold another individual (Ex. 21:16); a poor Israelite who was sold to a fellow Jew was not to be compelled to serve as a slave, but as a hired servant, and was to be released within fifty years (Lev. 25:39-46); and Moses gave instructions for the redemption of Jews bought by resident aliens (Lev. 25:47-55). Those who

⁴⁰Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 63.

⁴¹Davis, *Slavery in Western Culture*, 62.

defended slavery maintained that New Testament writers do not condemn slavery, and many eighteenth-century Christians viewed slaveholding as part of the authority needed to restrain sinful men.

Davis says that "the association of religious mission with liberation from bondage to men and with a new bondage to higher authority" was of great significance to early American colonists.⁴² Just as Israel was delivered from Egyptian bondage to freedom in Canaan, so Americans were delivered from European spiritual slavery and tyranny to liberty in the New World. And as Israelites were to be slaves to the divine Mosaic law, so Americans were to adhere to the divine law in their new land.⁴³ Yet, as Winthrop Jordan writes. American colonists justified slavery on the basis that blacks were "slaves by nature" and were inferior to the white populace.⁴⁴

Christians in general viewed slavery as a punishment by the Almighty upon sin. The slave was a Canaanite, the offspring of Ham, Noah's son, who was condemned to slavery.⁴⁵ Slavery was viewed as a "model of dependence and self-surrender," since Jews considered themselves slaves of Yahweh and Christians saw

⁴²Ibid., 65.

⁴³Ibid., 64-66.

⁴⁴Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Williamsburg, VA: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 179.

⁴⁵Gen. 9: 25, 26 says, "And he (Noah) said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.

Note: All scriptures are taken from the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible, as this was probably the translation used in the eighteenth-century American colonies."

themselves as slaves of Christ. Slavery was also perceived as "the starting point for a divine quest," for the believer was redeemed from the slavery of the corrupted flesh of Adam to liberty in Christ.⁴⁶ For two thousand years, believers looked upon sin as a kind of slavery but in the 1700s some began to consider slavery as a kind of sin.

America had thus developed into a highly stratified society by the eighteenth century. The white population stood at the apex with mulattoes next. They were followed by native Indians while black slaves constituted the lowest stratum of the hierarchy. There were also many subdivisions within each level. For example, white politicians and wealthy landowners were considered higher than farmers or white laborers on the social ladder. Mulattoes were above free blacks, who, in turn, had a higher social status than black slaves.⁴⁷

It was into this stratified culture that Quakers arrived and began to establish their place in society. Quakers were a Protestant religious sect which originated in England in 1652. They had suffered great persecutions in their home country and a number had emigrated to the American colonies. The message of Quakerism came to be regarded as dangerous in an age when "the Bible as a closed and static body of doctrine reached its zenith and predestination was a tenet of

⁴⁶Davis, *Slavery in Western Culture*, 90.

⁴⁷Savelle, *Empires to Nations*, 106-07.

popular orthodoxy."⁴⁸ Quakerism was also feared and rejected because it undermined the establishment by going against the socially accepted ordained ministry, it denounced the accepted practises of the sacraments, and its own invigorated conduct was attributed to the "Inner Light" and the "Inner Voice." Most despairing to the colonial authorities was "the missionary zeal which flowed from Quaker conviction of the universality of the Holy Spirit's work."⁴⁹

Frederick Tolles contends that "no less than sixty men and women carried the Quaker message to the New World" between 1656 and 1660.⁵⁰ Mary Fisher and Ann Austin, the first Quaker missionaries to America, sailed from Barbados to Boston in 1656. Upon arrival they were immediately accused by the authorities of blasphemy, spreading heretical teaching, and opposing authority, and were straightway imprisoned on suspicion of witchcraft, during which time they suffered persecution. After some time they were sent back to Barbados but their belongings, including their bedding and Bibles, were confiscated as payment for the jailor's fee.⁵¹

⁴⁸Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), 178.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

⁵⁰Savelle, *Empires to Nations*, 9.

⁵¹Arthur Worrall and Hugh Barbour, "Quaker Beginnings in England and New York," in *Quaker Crosscurrents: Three Hundred Years of Friends in the New York Yearly Meetings*, ed. Hugh Barbour and others (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 4. Also see Selleck, "Friends, The Religious Society of (Quakers)," in *D.C.A.*, 455, and Vipont, *The Story of Quakerism*, 51.

Friends arrived in Boston from London two days later and met with the same fate. The following year (1657), a group of Quakers from London sailed to New Amsterdam, later called New York, on the vessel *Woodhouse*. A number continued on to Rhode Island where religious toleration was prevalent and where they were joyfully welcomed and received.⁵²

Quakers were often persecuted in the American colonies for their "error and blasphemy."⁵³ Some New England colonies passed anti-Quaker legislation which prohibited Friends from entering them. Others whipped, imprisoned, and expelled these pacifists who were accused of treason and disloyalty to their country for refusing to take oaths or to participate in war.⁵⁴ The most severe persecution occurred in Massachusetts, when four Quakers (William Leddra, Marmaduke Stephenson, Mary Dyer, and William Robinson) were hanged between 1659 and 1661 because they insisted on returning after being expelled by colonial authorities.⁵⁵

⁵²William C. Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, edited by Henry J. Cadbury, 2d ed. (Cambridge: The University Press, 1955), 403. Roger Williams founded Provincetown, RI in 1536. Under his leading it became the first North American colony where freedom of religion was accepted for all religious groups excluding open atheists. See Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 60.

⁵³William Ames, *Conscience with the Power and Cases thereof* (London, 1630), bk. 4, 10, quoted in Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts* (Cambridge, MA: n.p., 1933), 165-66.

⁵⁴Thomas J. Curry, *The First Freedoms: Church and State in America to the Passage of the First Amendment* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 21.

⁵⁵Trueblood, *The People Called Quakers*, 14.

Rhode Island was a refuge for all who dared to oppose the established colonial church in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including Separatists, Baptists, Quakers, and other religious radicals. Sydney Ahlstrom claims the colony was

the first commonwealth in modern history to make religious liberty...a cardinal principle of its corporate existence and to maintain the separation of church and state.⁵⁶

In the South, Quakers first entered Virginia in 1657 but they made "little headway. The authorities were determined not to allow Friends to interrupt the colony's religious and social uniformity;" however, Maryland welcomed them because of its "perennial need" for new settlers.⁵⁷

In 1681, King Charles II of England granted the Quaker, William Penn, the Pennsylvania charter - a large portion of property which became known as Pennsylvania.⁵⁸ The grant was a settlement of a sixteen thousand pound debt owed to Penn's father, Admiral Sir William Penn.⁵⁹ William Penn Jr. left England and landed at Newcastle, Delaware on 27 October 1682 with about seventy Friends who had sailed with him.⁶⁰ He not only settled Pennsylvania but he played an important

⁵⁶Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 182.

⁵⁷Curry, *The First Freedoms*, 42.

⁵⁸Richard S. Dunn, "Penny Wise and Pound Foolish: Penn as a Businessman," in *The World of William Penn*, ed. Richard S. Dunn and Mary Maples Dunn (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1986), 51.

⁵⁹Trueblood, *The People Called Quakers*, 57.

⁶⁰Over one hundred left England but about thirty perished in an outbreak of smallpox aboard the ship. Elfrida Vipont, *The Story of Quakerism*, 118.

role in bringing settlers into the other Middle Colonies.⁶¹ Pennsylvania became the most secure region for religious toleration in the world.⁶²

In 1682, Pennsylvania's "Frame of Government" was published which established what is known as Penn's "Holy Experiment" in America. The charter permitted freedom of religion to believers in God. It stated that "no person...shall at any time be compelled to frequent or maintain any religious worship, place or ministry whatsoever, contrary to his or her mind."⁶³ This was good news to dissenting groups, like the Quakers, because it offered a place of security from persecution. Pennsylvania, unlike other colonies, did not require its residents to attend the Anglican Church nor pay a ministerial tax which went for its support. Quaker leaders played important roles in Pennsylvania's local affairs and government and provided much of the conscience for the colony. Penn's settlement also attracted German Mennonite and Dutch Quaker immigrants who built what was called Germantown.

While Pennsylvania's Charter of Privilege (1701) demanded that the colony's officers believe in Christ and required them to submit to a religious test, the colony established the broadest religious liberty in America and its government

⁶¹Ned Landsman, "William Penn's Scottish Counterparts: The Quakers of 'North Britain' and the Colonization of East New Jersey" in *The World of William Penn*, ed. Dunn and Dunn, 241.

⁶²Noll, *A History of Christianity*, 66.

⁶³Curry, *The First Freedoms*, 75.

continued its policy of religious toleration.⁶⁴ This was the only English colony where Roman Catholics were permitted freedom of worship. In the eighteenth century, other colonies began to follow Pennsylvania's steps. By 1727, for example, Massachusetts and Connecticut had exempted Anglican dissenters from paying ministerial taxes and Anglicans' contributions went to support their own ministers and churches. Penn's administration also provided fair and proper treatment to native Americans.⁶⁵

Following their arrival in the New World, Quakers soon became recognized as leaders in many fields of society. The Reynolds and Darby families were pioneers in iron manufacture and the development of the steam engine. A number became prominent scientists, such as William Cookworthy, and leading physicians and botanists, as did the Fothergills and Lettsoms, who practised both professions. Quakers founded several major banking institutions, one which bore the name of Barclay Bank. Various industries also flourished in connection with the financial establishments, like the Lloyds' ironmasters and the Gurneys' cloth manufactures. There were also numerous smaller ventures, such as shopkeepers, bakers, tailors, and trades-persons. Many Quakers were educators who, because of

⁶⁴Ibid., 81.

⁶⁵Ibid., 66-67.

their love for learning, taught in day schools, colleges, and universities.⁶⁶ John Woolman, for example, started a school for all the children in his area who were not receiving an education, including the poor, in which he was the teacher "from time to time." He composed a *Primer or First Book for Children* which realized three editions.⁶⁷

The majority of Quakers, including ministers, "were deeply involved in slavery." A number of Quaker merchants in Newport and Pennsylvania figured prominently in the West Indies trade. Many Friends in the North as well as in Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina owned slaves.⁶⁸ Slavery was an important ingredient of their prosperity and was accepted in both society and Quaker circles.

In the first half of the 1700s, few white American colonists saw the injustice of slavery. There had been an occasional lonely voice, usually Quaker, calling for reform and abolition, but there was no general recognition that slaveholding was unchristian. Many ministers and church members, including Quakers, were slaveholders with some congregations providing slaves as part of the manse or parsonage furnishings. In Charleston, for example, the Anglican vestry had ratified that "a Negro man and woman and four cows and calves be purchased"

⁶⁶Vipont, *The Story of Quakerism*, 146-48.

⁶⁷Whitney, *John Woolman: American Quaker*, 333-35.

⁶⁸Lester B. Scherer, *Slavery and the Churches in Early America, 1619-1819* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 69.

for the incoming minister. Swedish Lutherans, in 1719, purchased slaves for their manse at Christiana, Delaware. Later, German Lutherans acquired slaves to care for their buildings and to work their land in Virginia. Scores of ministers in New England owned slaves.⁶⁹

It is not surprising that many Christian colonists had a dual view of slavery in the eighteenth century. To quote David Brion Davis:

Slavery was contrary to the ideal realm of nature, but was a necessary part of the world of sin; the bondsman was inwardly free and spiritually equal to his master, but in things external he was a mere chattel; Christians were brothers, whether slave or free, but pagans deserved in some sense to be slaves.⁷⁰

To bring an individual into slavery involved the possibility of sin, but to hold a slave was considered part of the governing process of the New World. Such dualism engendered problems for a number of Quakers who believed that slaveholding was an evil and sinful practice.

By the mid-eighteenth century, deteriorated social conditions were causing the colonists to question the economics of slavery. For example, exhausted soil and antiquated methods of sugar production were affecting the British West Indies slave plantations; sugar produced by the French and Spanish was glutting the market which resulted in plunging prices; African slave costs were rising; and debts

⁶⁹For further information see *ibid.*, 64-69.

⁷⁰Davis, *Slavery in Western Culture*, 165.

and depleted soil were forcing American tobacco colonies to crop diversification and westward expansion.⁷¹

War was also a great social concern in the colonies. The rivalry between England and France continued in the New World in the 1750s. The French were penetrating the unexplored territory beyond the English colonies with hopes of uniting Canada with Louisiana, the native Indians were beginning to side with the English, and a spirit of unrest abounded. With the defeat of the French at Quebec (1763), the British government was no longer willing to pay for westward expansion or to fight new wars with the Indians. David Brion Davis writes.

The loss by France of most of her colonial empire, and the acquisition of Canada by Britain, quite naturally stimulated a searching reassessment of all aspects of imperial economics and administration.⁷²

Since William Penn's "holy experiment," Quakers had been governing Pennsylvania. The 1750s brought a crisis to the Society of Friends in America, especially in the South with the war between the French and the Indians, plus a series of Indian attacks on frontier settlements. The Quaker officials faced a serious challenge. Settlers were pressuring them for funds to assist in protecting their towns and villages, but their pacifist principles prevented them from voting for the necessary finances.

⁷¹Ibid., 485-86.

⁷²Ibid., 485.

John Woolman composed *An Epistle of Tender Love and Compassion* advocating the pacifist position, which was signed by fourteen Friends, and sent it to "Friends on the Continent of America," in 1755."⁷³ Most Quaker officials, in the light of growing militarism and after much soul-searching, debate, and advice from English Quakers, decided to abandon their government roles. The crisis, which marked the end of the "holy experiment," forced the Quakers to ask why God had allowed war to come to their peace-loving people. Where had they gone wrong? What would become of their province? John Woolman and some of his contemporaries had the answer: the sin of slaveholding was bringing God's retribution upon the colonies. Until the colonists repented of their wrongdoing, they would continue to experience God's punishment.

Meanwhile, war taxes were levied and young colonists were conscripted. Some Quakers argued that to refuse to pay the war tax constituted disloyalty to their country, while others believed that there was no compromise to be found between their peace testimony and actual fighting. The peace testimony, in Woolman's view, was not a passive attitude, but it involved upholding the resolve of George Fox to "live in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars."⁷⁴

⁷³See Appendix in this thesis. p. 151.

⁷⁴Vipont. *The Story of Quakerism*. 155.

Many wealthy Friends, especially in the Philadelphia area, paid the tax which caused John Woolman distress. He writes that to pay it was "exceedingly disagreeable, but to do a thing contrary to [his] conscience appeared yet more dreadful."⁷⁵ There was only one option open for Woolman: assume the role of mediator. He suggested that Friends pay a tax, not to support the present French and Indian War, but to voluntarily contribute to recompense the natives for their loss of land which settlers had confiscated from them and to help those colonists who had suffered depredations.

On a personal level, Woolman found himself in a dilemma when, in 1758, a British officer requested that he house two soldiers, promising a reimbursement of six shillings a week per man. Woolman believed that, while war was contradictory to Christian principles, he had a responsibility to his civil authorities, so he agreed to accommodate the soldiers. Only one infantryman turned up, whom he lodged free of cost, because he apparently believed it was wrong to accept payment. In his *Journal*, he refers to Thomas á Kempis and John Huss who, when confronted with non-Christian principles, suffered martyrdom rather than offend God and their conscience. Woolman indicates that true charity is more acceptable than

⁷⁵Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 76.

martyrdom, and even though all Christians do not always agree with the Society of Friends' teachings, all who labor for good are involved in a worthy cause.⁷⁶

As the Seven Years War broke out in 1756, Quakers were moving towards pacifism and even to freeing their slaves. Many wealthy Friends who held positions of power and influence in government were looking for an easy way out. While Quakers were part of the upper strata of society, Woolman grew to detest the exploitation of the poor and blacks and became the leading Quaker in the antislavery crusade. Willard Sperry says that Woolman had a "kind of cosmic sympathy for suffering" as he travelled from New England to North Carolina.⁷⁷

As Enlightenment ideas were spreading, Woolman's public crusade against slaveholding began to gain momentum. He believed that slaveholding was wrong and he was deeply moved in his spirit that fellow members in the Society of Friends would hold other innocent individuals in the bondage of slavery. He went to what he perceived was the root problem of slavery - the slaveholders themselves.

⁷⁶Ibid, 82-84.

⁷⁷Willard L. Sperry, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Studies in Classics of Christian Devotion* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1939), 152.

CHAPTER TWO

QUAKER ORGANIZATION AND THEOLOGY

Quakerism originated with George Fox (1624-1691) in Northern England in the mid-seventeenth century. In 1652, Fox had a vision on Pendle Hill and "prophesied that 'a great people' were 'to be gathered' and that they were 'a people in white raiment' who 'were coming to the Lord'."⁷⁸ This "great people" began as a small gathering of Seekers (one of the radical Protestant discontented groups spawned by the English Civil War) with Fox as its leader.⁷⁹ They later called themselves the Society of Friends.

At the time of Fox's vision, Charles I had been beheaded (1649), Parliament controlled the government and, in 1653, Oliver Cromwell would

⁷⁸Rosenblatt, John Woolman, 21.

⁷⁹Braithwaite, The Beginnings of Quakerism, 78-79.

dissolve the legislature, become Lord Protector of the country, and the Rule of the Saints would begin.⁸⁰ During this political turmoil and unrest, Fox "undertook a troubled quest for religious authority."⁸¹ He was a nonconformist who sought help and comfort in priests and "Separate preachers." He writes in his *Journal*,

But as I had forsaken the priests, so I left the Separate preachers also, and those called the most experienced people; for I saw there was none among them all that could speak to my condition. And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone...then, oh! then I heard a voice which said, 'There is one, even Jesus Christ, that can speak to thy condition', and when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy.⁸²

From that day forward, Fox began to trust experience and personal revelation above all other authorities in the Christian faith, including the Scriptures.

Quakers developed their theological beliefs and doctrines from those of George Fox. Melvin Endy points out that some Quaker beliefs were similar to, and even sometimes overlapped, Puritan theology, but they diverged at critical elements.⁸³ For example, both accepted an apocalyptic view of the world in which God will establish his kingdom on earth, but they disagreed in many areas on the methods he will use. Fox taught that Quakers would inaugurate the new Kingdom of God on earth in his day, which would grow from inside out. Quakers accepted

⁸⁰Bonnelyn Young Kunze, Margaret Fell and the Rise of Quakerism (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 198.

⁸¹R. E. Selleck, "The Religious Society of Friends," in D.C.A., 454.

⁸²George Fox, *The Journal of George Fox*, ed. Norman Penney, (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1949 [originally published 1694]), 8.

⁸³Puritans were comprised largely of dissenting Anglicans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Reformed, and Particular Baptists.

two significant beliefs which diverged radically from Puritan theology in general. They believed in present continuing revelation in addition to what the Scriptures teach, and they stressed Christ as the eternal Spirit within rather than as the historical Jesus.⁸⁴

In addition, Quakers rejected the Puritans' and Anglicans' Calvinist doctrine of predestination which said, in the words of the modern theologian Millard Erickson, that

God in his plan has chosen that some shall believe and thus receive the offer of eternal life. He foreknows what will happen because he has decided what is to happen.⁸⁵

Quakers believed that "potentially anyone could experience God directly and inwardly, regardless of gender, nationality or social status."⁸⁶ Everyone, not just the elect, could receive the Inner Light, for "God is immanent in the human heart."⁸⁷ According to George Fox, "each man has a piece of God in him."⁸⁸

Basic Calvinist doctrine, also known as Reformed Theology, was defined by classic confessions, such as the Belgic Confession (1561), the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (1562 and 1571), the Heidelberg Catechism

⁸⁴See Melvin Endy, "Puritanism, Spiritualism, Quakerism," in *The World of William Penn*, ed. Dunn and Dunn, 284, and Richard Bailey, *New Light on George Fox and Early Quakerism: the Making and Unmaking of a God* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), 34-39.

⁸⁵Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 355.

⁸⁶Jean R. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery: a Divided Spirit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 5.

⁸⁷Rosenblatt, John Woolman, 22.

⁸⁸Trueblood, *The People Called Quakers*, 74.

(1563), the Canons of the Synod of Dort (1619), and the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647).⁸⁹ The Synod of Dort articulated the five points of Calvinism, which has since been labelled by the acronym "tulip" - total depravity (all humanity are depraved and unable to merit salvation), unconditional election (God has unconditionally elected some to salvation through his saving grace), limited atonement (God's atonement is limited to his elect), irresistible grace (those who are chosen of God are unable to resist his grace), and perseverance of the saints (the chosen will persevere to the end and none of the elect can be lost).

These beliefs were refuted in Robert Barclay's *Apology for Christian Divinity*, which was considered the standard work of Quaker beliefs and theology in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. His *Apology* was written in Latin and first issued in English in 1678. It was reprinted nine times in England, three in Ireland, three in Philadelphia, and three in New England.⁹⁰

While the Puritans believed that humans were born corrupt and sin has confirmed their depravity (total depravity), Quakers taught that children are born in innocence and remain in that condition until they commit a sinful act.⁹¹ Friends denounced Calvinist predestination and unconditional election. Barclay asserted

⁸⁹"Calvinism," in D.C.A., 211.

⁹⁰J. William Frost, "The Dry Bones of Quaker Theology," in *Church History* 39 (1970): 505. Robert Barclay was a Scottish apologist and the most famous Quaker systematic theologian of his day.

⁹¹Robert Barclay, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, 13th ed. (Manchester, 1860), Prop. IV: xi.

that predestination injured God and made him "the author of sin." God's exercise of his foreknowledge determined the eternal destiny of all humanity, and this made him responsible for evil. If one believes in predestination, Barclay charged, Christ is a curse to all humankind because, instead of providing salvation for all, he has made the damnation of a "far greater number of men" inevitable.⁹² This demonstrates the Quaker opposition to limited atonement. Quakerism sought to exonerate God from all injustice.

Quakerism strongly opposed the Puritan doctrine of irresistible grace. The Synod of Dort stated that God's grace cannot be refused by anyone whom he has chosen or elected. The Westminster Confession states that one needed only to be passive "until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it."⁹³ Barclay wrote a parallel passage in his *Apology* with one exception - he said that "it is possible for [man] to resist" God's grace.⁹⁴

The Calvinist did not have free will in responding to the work of God; the Quaker did. In the final analysis, Puritans believed that those whom God had elected would be saved and that they were unable to fall (perseverance of the

⁹²Ibid., Prop. V and VI: iv, 64, 66.

⁹³Westminster Confession, ch. X: 2, 265; quoted in Frost, "The Dry Bones of Quaker Theology," 513.

⁹⁴Barclay, *Apology*, Prop. V and VI: 88.

saints). Friends believed that all were prone to fall and humanity's "natural depravity could cancel out the seed of God within."⁹⁵ In other words, according to Quaker theology, one could fail in faith and be damned because of weakness or any other reason, but, according to Puritan theology, no elect person could be lost because God has predestined each one to salvation.

The key doctrine in Quaker belief was the Inner Light of Christ, which was initially advocated by George Fox. Fox believed and taught that the Inner Light was not a natural inherent part of humanity as conscience, nor was it the spiritual aspect we possess. Rather, it "was the transcendent God perceptibly breaking into human consciousness."⁹⁶ Friends believed that "God had to have some agency within a man by which he could infallibly let him know his will."⁹⁷ Light was an apt agency and metaphor because it provided insight, knowledge, and illumination of God to humanity and conveyed the fact of God residing in humans.

Fox taught that the Scriptures and the Spirit are one and the same voice, but only those in right relationship with God's Spirit could understand and properly apply the Scriptures. He stressed that the Bible is not the Word of God, but rather points to him who is - Jesus Christ. Quakers followed Fox's teachings concerning the Scriptures and used them for self-examination and as a test of morality and

⁹⁵Frost, "The Dry Bones of Quaker Theology," 516.

⁹⁶Selleck, "Friends, The Religious Society of (Quakers)," in D.C.A., 454.

⁹⁷Frost, "The Dry Bones of Quaker Theology," 510.

doctrine. They ultimately placed them under the authority of the Inner Light. Fox wrote in his *Journal*:

Now when the Lord God and his Son Jesus Christ sent me forth into the world, to preach His everlasting gospel and kingdom, I was glad that I was commanded to turn people to *that inward light, spirit, and grace, by which all might know their salvation, and their way to God* [italics mine].⁹⁸

One became a Christian, according to Fox and his followers, through obedience to Christ within, who is the Light, and not by following the teachings of the Bible.⁹⁹ Puritans, on the other hand, taught that salvation is attained only through Christ's atoning sacrifice, as the Holy Spirit reveals Christ to the believer through the Scriptures, which are the Word of God.¹⁰⁰

The second generation of the Society of Friends were not always in total agreement with first generation Quaker theology. George Keith, a Philadelphia Quaker schoolmaster, adopted partial Puritan beliefs and argued in 1691 that the Inner Light alone was insufficient for salvation. He maintained that Christ's atoning work and the Scriptures were enough for spiritual redemption. This was Puritan theology and was contrary to Fox's idea that the authority of the Inner Light was the absolute guide in matters of faith. The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting condemned Keith's theory in 1692 and shortly thereafter disowned him. In 1695,

⁹⁸Penney, ed., *The Journal of George Fox*, 21.

⁹⁹Selleck, "Friends, The Religious Society of (Quakers)," in *D.C.A.*, 454.

¹⁰⁰Kunze, Margaret Fell, 198.

they countered with a declaration entitled *Our Ancient Testimony Renewed*. They stated that Christ and his people - the sanctifier and the sanctified - are one and believers are "made partakers of the divine nature" in every sense.¹⁰¹ These statements appear to be anomalies at such a late date - three years after the issue arose. The debate may have been laid to rest temporarily, but the debate about authority in Quaker theology and methodology did not die.

The Society of Friends sanctioned other doctrines which separated them from other early colonial American churches. They rejected all violence, including just wars; they denounced paying tithes or taking oaths; they opposed a paid and professional ministry; they practised the priesthood of all believers; they refused subservience to others, including symbols such as doffing one's hat; they used plain speech such as "thou" and "thee" instead of "you" and "your;" and they believed they were the true descendants of the New Testament Christians. These signs of Quakerism were often a frequent excuse for persecution in their early years.

Quakerism and Quaker theology were not original, even in the seventeenth century. As Geoffrey Hubbard indicates, elements of their teachings and practises were to be found in earlier Anabaptists, Particular Baptists, and Familists.¹⁰² Familists observed silence in their meetings, believed in the Inner

¹⁰¹See Richard Bailey, *New Light on George Fox*, 248-254.

¹⁰²Familists were a sect founded in 1530 by Henry Nicholas in Holland, whose writings were in the library of George Fox.

Light, insisted on plain speech, wore plain clothing, and rejected war and taking of oaths. Particular Baptists rejected paying tithes and a professional clergy and welcomed female preachers. Anabaptists also rejected war and the taking of oaths.¹⁰³

Quakers viewed every Friend as a potential minister in a broad sense. They accepted both males and females into the Christian ministry, believing that there is no distinction and restriction of exercising one's gift between sexes. An old Quaker practice was to "record" one as a minister and issue a certificate to that effect to the individual. Reginald Reynolds, in *The Wisdom of John Woolman*, states, "To be recorded as a 'minister' was, in the main, a recognition of one's gift."¹⁰⁴

John Woolman recognized in his *Journal* that not all of the "faithful" are called to the ministry, but "whoever are, are called to minister of that which they have tasted and handled spiritually." He writes that the true ministers of Jesus Christ sense "the operation of his spirit upon their hearts, first purifying them and thus giving them a feeling sense of the conditions of others."¹⁰⁵ He saw many snares, such as prosperity and wealth, in which ministers could become entrapped,

¹⁰³Geoffrey Hubbard, *Quaker By Convincement* (Markham, ON: Penguin Books, 1974), 22-23.

¹⁰⁴Reginald Reynolds, *The Wisdom of John Woolman with a Selection from his Writings as a Guide to the Seekers of Today* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1948, reprinted 1981), 9.

¹⁰⁵Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 31.

and was continually on guard against such vanities.¹⁰⁶ He undoubtedly wanted to be an example to Friends through his lifestyle and deportment and so would not act or speak in any manner which would jeopardise his role as a model Quaker.

In their infancy, the Quakers had little organization beyond their regular public meetings. Jean Soderlund, in *Quakers and Slavery*, says that, in the late 1660s, Fox began to establish a hierarchal structure of meetings which continues to the present day.¹⁰⁷ The Quaker organizational method has kept them from disintegrating through the years.

In Quaker structure the local worship meeting was at the lowest level. The Swedish-Finn, Peter Kalm, who visited Philadelphia in 1749, wrote that weekly meetings were held three times on Sunday - from ten to twelve in the morning, two in the afternoon, and six in the evening, which Woolman refers to as "First Day Meetings."¹⁰⁸ Quakers met twice during the week for worship in addition to Sunday meetings - from ten to twelve on Tuesdays and Thursdays. A religious service was conducted also on the last Friday of each month. Both sexes attended the local meetings where they sat on opposite sides of the room and equally participated as leaders in singing and praying.¹⁰⁹ Quakers waited for divine

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁰⁷Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 189-94.

¹⁰⁸E.g., Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 23.

¹⁰⁹Henry J. Cadbury, "Philadelphia Quakerism in 1749 as Seen by a Finn," in *Bulletin of the Friends Historical Association XXXI* (Spring 1942), 28-30.

inspiration before speaking or praying in their meetings, which often resulted in long intervals of silence. During these intermissions it was not uncommon for attendants to fall asleep.

Next up the hierarchical structure was the Quakers' business meeting which, Woolman informs us in his *Journal*, he attended regularly. Such gatherings ascended from the Monthly to the Quarterly to the Yearly Meeting. The Monthly Meeting sent delegates to the Quarterly Meeting which, in turn, sent representatives to the Yearly Meeting. Issues such as discipline, slavery, construction of new meeting houses, and the like were debated at the Monthly Meeting. Generally unresolved issues were brought to the Quarterly Meeting¹¹⁰ and, if still unsettled, were debated at the Yearly Meeting. Crucial issues such as slavery were discussed by the entire Society.

The Monthly Meeting conducted the first and earliest stage of business. This meeting was composed of Quakers from several local assemblies in the same township or area. Men and women held separate Monthly Meetings but the men exercised more power and authority than the women. Jean Soderlund describes the business of the Men's Monthly Meeting as follows:

¹¹⁰Elton Trueblood says that the Quarterly Meeting "is a geographical unit covering an area in which representatives of local congregations gather four times a year." Trueblood, *The People Called Quakers*, 285.

It disowned unrepentant members for disciplinary offenses, discussed and made decisions on issues such as antislavery reform and the participation of Friends in government, provided poor relief on a larger scale than the women's meeting, mediated disputes among members, controlled the meeting's property, managed the schools, investigated the behavior and marital status of men before approving marriages or writing removal certificates, and often supervised inquiries into the conduct of women as well.¹¹¹

The Women's Monthly Meetings differed from the Men's Monthly Meetings in that they dealt with such issues as women's behavior, the marital status of women, relief for the poor, and unaccepted Quaker practices, such as fornication, slander, and backbiting. When they believed severe discipline was necessary, such as disownment, they referred the case to the Men's Monthly Meeting.¹¹²

The Quaker administrators, composed of ministers, elders, and overseers, performed the majority of the Monthly Meetings' tasks. The chief duty of the ministers was to preach. The elders were appointed to make certain that both ministers and members were guided by the Light. The overseers watched the general behavior of all Quakers and reported misdeeds and misconduct to the Men's Monthly Meeting.

Quakers did not practice voting in their meetings. They believed that their guidance came from the Inner Light and decisions were reached by attaining a "sense of the meeting." The clerk, who was chosen by the body to preside over the

¹¹¹Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 190.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, 189-90.

meeting and also to keep the minutes, determined the acceptance or rejection of the issue following the usual debate. It was not unusual to have disagreement on issues in any business meeting. In such cases, decisions were postponed or compromises made. Soderlund says that it was not uncommon for one or two prominent Quakers to prevent a Monthly, Quarterly, or Yearly Meeting from taking an important stand.¹¹³

The Yearly Meeting included a large territory and was comparable to a diocese in the episcopal system. William Comfort writes:

Their business is to consider the state of the Society, to maintain a spiritual correspondence with other groups of Friends all over the world, to hear and consider reports of many standing committees on publications, education, the social order, missions, peace, charities and national legislation, to allocate income of trust funds, to pass on business of general interest to the Society, and issue directives and recommendations on many matters including discipline to the subordinate Meetings.¹¹⁴

Many issues and concerns reaching the eighteenth-century Yearly Meeting had already been debated by the Monthly and Quarterly Meetings, which were unable to come to a consensus. Now they would be debated by a representation from a much larger area and it was hoped that agreement could be attained. If a decision could not be reached, it was not uncommon for the American Yearly

¹¹³Ibid., 192.

¹¹⁴William Wister Comfort, *Quakers in the Modern World* (New York: The Macmillan Press, 1949), 95.

Meeting to request counsel from the London Yearly Meeting, which was considered "first among equals."¹¹⁵ All the American colonies' Yearly Meetings looked to London as their parent Yearly Meeting and based their procedure on the London discipline. In the colonies the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting was considered the leading Yearly Meeting.¹¹⁶

Janet Whitney says that, by 1754, Yearly Meetings were in existence in London and Dublin (representing the British Isles), Philadelphia and Burlington (representing Philadelphia and New Jersey), New York (New York and Connecticut), New England (Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine, and Rhode Island), North Carolina (North and South Carolina and Georgia), Virginia, and Maryland. Quakers' Yearly Meetings in the British Isles, Europe, and America generally kept in touch by letter "at least once a year." They communicated how Friends were functioning in each country and requested advice on disputable issues.¹¹⁷

Quakers in the American colonies were separated from the broader culture by clothing, language, theology, worship forms, and pacifism. On another level, they were part of the increasingly prosperous American society which depended upon lower class laborers and slaves. The application of Quaker theology to life

¹¹⁵J. William Frost, *The Quaker Family in Colonial America* (New York: n.p., 1973), 4.

¹¹⁶Whitney, John Woolman, 191.

¹¹⁷Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 193.

became a challenge with which John Woolman struggled more than many of his Quaker peers.

CHAPTER THREE

WOOLMAN'S TENDER CONSCIENCE

In order to understand John Woolman's conscience, ethics, and spirituality, one has to understand what it was like to be a third generation eighteenth-century Quaker.¹¹⁸ John was the fourth child and eldest son among thirteen children. "I was born," he writes in the opening of his *Journal*, "in Northampton in Burlington County in West-Jersey, A.D. 1720."¹¹⁹ West Jersey was predominately a Quaker colony from its inception and was pervaded by Quaker piety and sobriety.

The English Friends who had settled in Burlington County "had come from Yorkshire and Gloucestershire." John Woolman's progenitors "belonged to Painswick" and he "was the product of a Society of Friends that was well

¹¹⁸Conscience is used in this paper as a metaphor which points to the moral dimension of John Woolman, that is, it stands for his personal moral consciousness.

¹¹⁹Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 23.

established and consolidated."¹²⁰ Quakers controlled the governorship and awarded it to Robert Barclay in 1682, who governed it by a deputy until it became a royal colony in 1688.¹²¹

Eighteenth-century Quakerism was more occupied with the intense development of its own inner resources to keep apart from the world than it was in the reformation of the world. Friends were very concerned with their own lifestyles and those of the other members, particularly in apparel, conduct, demeanor, and leisure. Doris Dagleish says that, by Woolman's time,

Quaker "Elders" exercised over their fellow-members as rigid a censorship of dress, deportment, and recreation as was ever claimed by the most vigilant Kirk Session in Scotland.¹²²

Samuel and Elizabeth Woolman (John's parents) were strict members of the Society of Friends who regularly instructed their family in Christian principles. John's reference to his childhood is scanty, but adequate, and it demonstrates Howard Brinton's first stage in spiritual development - "divine revelations in childhood."¹²³ Woolman writes: "Before I was seven years old I began to be

¹²⁰Doris N. Dagleish, *People Called Quakers*, Essay Index Reprint Series (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1938; reprinted 1969), 60, 61.

¹²¹Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 206-07. Barclay was the Scottish apologist, systematic theologian, and author mentioned earlier, see footnote 90.

¹²²Dagleish, *People Called Quakers*, 61.

¹²³See Howard Brinton's ten "Stages in Spiritual Development" on page five of this thesis.

acquainted with the operations of divine love.¹²⁴ He does not provide further information of the "operations" or how he came to know them.

Woolman's parents taught him to read "near as soon as [he] was capable of it." On Sunday afternoons it was a practice for the Woolman family to read the Scriptures or some type of religious books together.¹²⁵ His *Journal* records that, as a boy, he was thoughtful and meditative and "found comfort in reading the Holy Scriptures and thinking on heavenly things." He became an avid reader as his young intellect was stimulated by pursuing "religious books, one after another," from his father's library. He collected books and alludes to, refers to, and quotes from approximately forty separate volumes and, according to his ledger, loaned twenty eight books from his personal library to friends.¹²⁶ His frequent use of the Bible and references to writings by Thomas á Kempis, John Huss and especially George Fox¹²⁷ indicate part of the wide range of his reading spectrum. He developed into a literate, educated, cultured Quaker who undoubtedly had many special interests. This provided him with the background to create his *Journal* and other literary works.

¹²⁴Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 23.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, 23-24.

¹²⁶Frederick Tolles, "John Woolman's List of 'Books Lent'," in *Bulletin of Friends Historical Association*, XXX (Autumn 1942), 72-81.

¹²⁷Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 75, 76.

As a child, John Woolman developed a sensitive conscience. This is evidenced in his remorse over an unfortunate incident. On his way to a neighbour's house one day, he saw a mother robin sitting in her nest. As the bird flew off, he threw stones and killed her. He was soon "seized with horror, as having in a sportive way killed an innocent creature while she was careful for her young." He records that "after some painful considerations" he climbed the tree and killed the young fledglings, rather than leave them to die of starvation. He viewed the Scripture proverb, "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel" (Prov. 12:10), as being fulfilled through his terrible misdeed.

Woolman was deeply troubled over his cruelty "for some hours." This led him to believe that God "hath placed a principle in the human mind" which, if followed, leads to "goodness toward every living creature," but if rejected, "the mind shuts itself up in a contrary disposition."¹²⁸ This is Brinton's second stage in spiritual development which he terms "compunction over youthful frivolities."¹²⁹

John Woolman attended a little Quaker school in the village of Mount Holly. Eighteenth-century schooling was considered more of an option than a necessity. Janet Whitney tells us that "when the cow calved, when the calf was slaughtered, when the haying had to be done, when the apple harvest was ripe, or

¹²⁸Ibid., 24-25.

¹²⁹See page five of this work for Howard Brinton's ten "Stages in Spiritual Development."

when a journey was projected," school closed for the occasion and perhaps did not resume for the season.¹³⁰ Rosenblatt says that in the philosophy of education in rural areas during the eighteenth century,

the emphasis was placed on an education in things; in use; in the discipline and purification of the self. There was no attempt in the country Quaker school to inspire the intellectual life. Rudimentary education was sufficient for the rustic Quaker.¹³¹

In his *Journal*, Woolman informs us that his parents, especially his father, Samuel, greatly influenced his life. Samuel Woolman was a man of high moral standards and integrity who "manifested much care for us his children, that in our youth we might learn to fear the Lord." He endeavored to instill in them the "principles of virtue" and particularly "a spirit of tenderness, not only towards poor people, but also towards all creatures of which we had the command."¹³² John Woolman was exposed to a gentle disposition in his childhood which helped mold a tender conscience that would remain with him through his life.

Another factor in shaping Woolman's conscience was parental discipline. His *Journal* records that, when he was twelve years old, he impertinently answered his mother who had corrected him for a misdemeanour during his father's absence. On his way home from a meeting the following Sunday, his father spoke to him of

¹³⁰Whitney, John Woolman, 335.

¹³¹Rosenblatt, John Woolman, 32.

¹³²Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 44.

the incident and reminded him "to be more careful in the future." John felt a sense of shame and confusion over the incident. He repented of his wrongdoing to the Lord and writes, "I do not remember that I ever after that spoke unhandsomely to either of my parents, however foolish in some other things."¹³³ He was learning the lesson that youthful frivolities was unacceptable in the Quaker setting.

At sixteen years of age, Woolman experienced a period of rebellion against his Quaker tradition. He "began to love wanton company" and "perceived a plant in [him] which produced much wild grapes."¹³⁴ During the next couple of years, he experienced Howard Brinton's third stage of spiritual development - a "period of search and conflict."¹³⁵ The teenager became so sick that he thought he would die. He was overwhelmed with "darkness, horror, and amazement" along with his "pain and distress of body."¹³⁶ Convinced of his need to turn to God, he repented of his sins and was restored to health.¹³⁷

Woolman's resolutions of humility and sincerity were short lived as he writes in his *Journal*, "to exceed in vanity and promote mirth was [his] chief study." His parents encouraged him to fear the Lord but, being a typical teenager, he

¹³³Ibid., 25.

¹³⁴Ibid., 26.

¹³⁵This is the third stage in Howard Brinton's ten "Stages in Spiritual Development." See page five of this paper for a list of all the stages.

¹³⁶Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 26.

¹³⁷This is what Howard Brinton refers to as the fourth stage in "Stages in Spiritual Development." For an enumeration of Brinton's ten stages see page five of this essay.

continued in his own self-will. He did retain a love for "pious people and their company brought an awe" upon him.¹³⁸

When he was eighteen, Woolman began to follow the dictates of his own conscience. He started to seek the Lord in "deserts and lonely places," confessing his sins to God and calling upon him for help. The truth broke upon him that he must forsake his ungodly friends and his new life must be governed by the divine principle of "loving God as an invisible, incomprehensible being."¹³⁹ Woolman records that he was

early convinced in [his] mind that true religion consisted in an inward life, which brings love and reverence for God the Creator...[and] true justice and goodness, not only toward all men but also toward the brute creatures.¹⁴⁰

It appears that Woolman experienced Howard Brinton's stages of "compunction" and "conversion" in these solitary experiences.¹⁴¹

At twenty-one years of age, John, "having had schooling pretty well for a planter." obtained a job with a merchant in Mount Holly as shop manager and accountant. Janet Whitney alleges that John's employer was looking for an assistant whom he could trust with his new store. His worker must be

¹³⁸Moulton. ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 26.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, 26, 27, 28.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁴¹Howard Brinton's ten "Stages in Spiritual Development" are found on page five of this work.

an able accountant, his honesty must be above reproach, and he must combine pleasing manners with a capacity to keep himself out of mischief, even when left entirely on his own, next door to a tavern.¹⁴²

Whitney writes that "with good will, candid discussion, final approval, and businesslike clearness on all points," Woolman left home for his new career. She says that although he did not "leave home far, he left completely." His new place of employment was five miles from his father's residence and six from that of his employer.¹⁴³ The young assistant soon proved his integrity and reliability.

During his first experience of living alone, several young people visited him and tried to entice him to "vanities." Woolman records in his *Journal*, "I felt myself encompassed with difficulties and had fresh occasion to bewail the follies of time past in contracting a familiarity with a libertine people."¹⁴⁴ This describes Brinton's sixth stage of "seasons of discouragement" in the young Quaker's spiritual journey.¹⁴⁵ Woolman writes that during these periods he found his "Heavenly Father" to be merciful to him beyond what he could express. The usual spiritual exercises of attending Quaker meetings and reading the Bible and other "good books" on "First Days after noon" were a part of his life.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴²Janet Whitney, John Woolman 70.

¹⁴³Ibid., 62, 29-30.

¹⁴⁴Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 30.

¹⁴⁵See page five of this work for a complete list of Brinton's ten "Stages in Spiritual Development."

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 28, 30.

Woolman was acquainted with the eighteenth-century Quaker practise of Advices and Queries in their meetings. Doris Dagleish describes them as

a collection of exhortations on the right management of one's affairs both inward and outward, and a collection of questions, or groups of questions, in pondering which a whole Meeting can achieve a corporate examination of conscience.¹⁴⁷

Advices and Queries date from the late seventeenth century and were chiefly concerned with faithfulness, such as regularly paying tithes or conforming to worldly standards. Dagleish states there were seventeen Queries and each month the Quakers considered one or two in their meetings. Some of them were quite cumbersome, as the following examples illustrate:

Do you "walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us?" Do you cherish a forgiving spirit? Are you careful of the reputation of others; and do you avoid and discourage tale-bearing and detraction? Are you honest and truthful in word and deed? Do you maintain strict integrity in your business transactions and in all your relations with others? And are you careful not to defraud the public revenue?¹⁴⁸

Advices and Queries continue to the present and although they are not identical with those of the eighteenth century, Alfrida Vipont informs us that they are "conceived in the same spirit."¹⁴⁹ Undoubtedly such strict convictions had a great influence upon the development of John's conscience and his openness to ministry.

¹⁴⁷Dagleish, *People Called Quakers*, 61.

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 62, note 1.

¹⁴⁹Vipont, *The Story of Quakerism*, 143.

Opportunities to share "openings" or "intuitive perceptions of the truth" were provided in Quaker Meetings and Woolman began to take advantage of them.¹⁵⁰ One day, he mustered enough courage to speak publicly but, as he records in his *Journal*, "not keeping close to the divine opening, I said more than was required of me." For several weeks he was mentally tormented and asked God's forgiveness. "After this, feeling the spring of divine love opened and a concern to speak," he writes, "I said a few words in a meeting, in which I found peace."¹⁵¹ John was learning "the operation of the Spirit" for he notes that, around age twenty-three, he

had many fresh and heavenly openings in respect to the care and providence of the Almighty over his creatures in general, and over man as the most noble amongst those which are visible.¹⁵²

Woolman and two of his colleagues were recommended for ministry in 1743 by the Burlington Monthly Meeting to the Quarterly Meeting of Ministers and Elders. Janet Whitney records the minute of the Meeting: "The Monthly Meeting of Burlington have recommended that our friends Peter Andrews, John Woolman, and Josiah White...as Friends whom they have unity with, to be members of this meeting."¹⁵³ Quakers did not hold special gatherings to recognize one as clergy,

¹⁵⁰Hubbard, *Quaker By Convincement*, 19.

¹⁵¹Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 31.

¹⁵²*Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁵³Whitney, *John Woolman*, 98.

nor did they practice any special ritual such as laying on of hands. They simply made a minute at their Monthly Meeting that the individual was a member. This entitled one to be recommended to the Quarterly Meeting of Elders and Ministers for approval if s/he so desired and thus become a full-fledged minister. Thus Woolman reached Brinton's seventh stage in spiritual development in his "entrance upon the ministry."¹⁵⁴

Quaker ministers, who were originally called "First Publishers of Truth," travelled extensively during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The itinerant tradition originated with George Fox, whose far-reaching journeys took him to Ireland with four other Friends in 1669,¹⁵⁵ to Barbados and America (1671),¹⁵⁶ and throughout Northern England.¹⁵⁷ In his writings and travels, Fox urged Quakers to support those who voluntarily gave themselves to itinerant ministry:

If any minister of Jesus Christ...come to our houses and minister unto us of spiritual things, we will set before him our carnal things: and he that soweth unto us spiritual things, it is the least that we minister unto him of our carnal things.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴Howard Brinton's ten "Stages in Spiritual Development" are recorded on page five of this thesis.

¹⁵⁵William C. Braithwaite, *The Second Period of Quakerism*, ed. Henry J. Cadbury, 2d ed. (Cambridge: The University Press, 1961), 260.

¹⁵⁶Thomas E. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 5.

¹⁵⁷Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, 116-20.

¹⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 136.

While Friends did not pay tithes, they approved a voluntary offering to aid those in ministry and who were unable to provide for themselves and their families through secular employment.

In addition to itinerating in the American colonies, Quaker ministers travelled widely throughout the British Isles and other parts of Europe, and to the West Indies, making Quaker converts, establishing Societies of Friends' Meetings, and maintaining a cohesion between groups.¹⁵⁹ Itinerants assisted in preserving a unity of theology and practice between the Societies, especially as they visited the Monthly, Quarterly, and Yearly Meetings, and were a great asset since communications between distant groups were difficult. Janet Whitney points out that Quakers depended upon personal contact through their ministers for cohesion between Meetings (groups) since they had "no pope, no bishop, no moderator, [and] no head." It was the voluntary itinerant ministry which provided the "living cement to fix the whole Society together."¹⁶⁰

The same year he became a minister, Woolman's philosophy of man, which he called "the most noble" among all creatures, was put to the test when he personally confronted the issue of slavery.¹⁶¹ His employer directed him to write a

¹⁵⁹Curry, *The First Freedoms*, 24, 25. "Meeting" was the name used to designate a local group of Quakers.

¹⁶⁰Janet Whitney, "Rufus Jones: Friend," in *The Atlantic Monthly* 193 (April 1954): 29, quoted in Cady, *John Woolman*, 65.

¹⁶¹See Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 32.

bill of sale for his female Negro slave. Woolman was placed in a moral predicament as he believed that slavery was inconsistent with the Christian religion and was therefore wrong. In retrospect, he describes the mental and emotional anguish of the moment in his *Journal*:

The thing was sudden, and though the thoughts of writing an instrument of slavery for one of my fellow creatures felt uneasy, yet I remembered I was hired by the year, that it was my master who directed me to do it, and that it was an elderly man, a member of our Society, who bought her; so through weakness I gave way and wrote it, but at the executing [of] it I was so afflicted in my mind that I said before my master and the Friend that I believed slavekeeping to be a practice inconsistent with the Christian religion. This in some degree abated my uneasiness, yet as often as I reflected seriously upon it I thought I should have been clearer if I had desired to be excused from it as a thing against my conscience, for so it was.¹⁶²

This act against his conscience brought Woolman to the conclusion that he should not have written the bill. He resolved that, in the future, he would not write bills of sale involving slaves again. His firm determination would demonstrate that there is social value in a purely personal standard of ethical purity. William E. Channing states, "The secret of Woolman's purity is that his eye was single, and that conscience dictated his words."¹⁶³ Writing this bill of sale was crucial in shaping Woolman's conscience to the antislavery position. The incident

¹⁶²Ibid., 32-33.

¹⁶³John Greenleaf Whittier, *The Writings of John Greenleaf Whittier*, ed. Horace C. Skudder, vol. 8 (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1898), 345.

had such a profound impact on his life that, from that day, he became a pacesetter among the antislavery proponents.

Later, a man asked Woolman to write a will for a dying brother who wished to leave his slaves to his children. Although writing wills was a profitable endeavor, Woolman told the man he objected to doing such writings.¹⁶⁴ Thereafter, he declined to write any wills or bills of sale that involved transferring ownership of slaves. He notes that he had

a fresh confirmation that acting contrary to present outward interest from a motive of divine love and in regard to truth and righteousness, and thereby incurring the resentments of people, opens the way to a treasure better than silver and to a friendship exceeding the friendship of men.¹⁶⁵

He also refused to write wills which made children absolute rulers over others or which made children subservient.¹⁶⁶ Unwittingly, John Woolman was becoming a spokesman for the cause of slaves because his sympathetic conscience would not permit him to remain silent on the issue. The power of one man's conviction is recognized by Elton Trueblood: "Here, as early as 1743, is the fountainhead of one of the chief tributaries of what eventually became a mighty stream of antislavery conviction."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 46.

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁶⁷Trueblood, *The People Called Quakers*, 155.

At age twenty-nine, Woolman married "a well-inclined damsel, Sarah Ellis" (1749).¹⁶⁸ The following year an only daughter was born to the couple whom they named Mary. A son, William, was born 21 July 1754 but died three months later. Whitney says that Woolman was so devastated by the death of his only son that in his writings he passed over it in complete silence.¹⁶⁹ When Woolman writes, "I had but a small family," it has the tone of finality, for he knew there would be no descendant to carry on his name. His wife, Sarah, and daughter, Mary, supported him during his travels and were loyal to his cause.

A pure conscience, which, as John Calvin maintains, "is nothing other than inward integrity of heart," is among the most distinctive and impressive of John Woolman's characteristics.¹⁷⁰ It led him to become the champion of the antislavery position among eighteenth-century Quakers. There can be no doubt that Woolman considered himself as being guilty of the crime of slavery because he lived in a slave-holding society and he did not consider himself as separate from or above the slave owners who inflicted such suffering. Woolman did not urge punishment upon the guilty masters; instead, he struggled to help free them from their evil practise. Thus he provided a genuine example of a Christian approach to

¹⁶⁸Moulton, ed. *The Journal of John Woolman*, 44.

¹⁶⁹Whitney, *John Woolman*, 177.

¹⁷⁰Paul Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), 366.

social problems. The full drama of Woolman's life is a reflection of the inner drama - the history of a tender conscience.

CHAPTER FOUR

WOOLMAN'S SIMPLE LIFE OF INTEGRITY

Edwin Cady argues that there are two crucial stages in any significant creative life:

The discovery of the fundamental insights - the vision, the idea, the sense of the possibility of form, or whatever it is; then the establishment of a way of life which will permit the realization of the possibility.¹⁷¹

John Woolman's discovery of his "vision" came when he reluctantly wrote the slave bill of sale for his employer. His second stage - "the establishment of a way of life" - was his active involvement in and dedication to the slavery issue.

Woolman's years as an employee with a merchant in Mount Holly provided the opportunity for his discovery of "the fundamental insights." He writes in his *Journal* that his "mind was more strongly engaged for the good of [his]

fellow creatures" than for pleasure or self-interests. When his employer's family moved to Mount Holly two years after John settled there, Woolman tells us that he was held in great respect by them.¹⁷²

As a young man, John Woolman refused to pursue wealth or worldly ambition. He had "several offers of business that appeared profitable" but he did not see his "way clear to accept of them, as believing the business proposed would be attended with more outward care and cumber than was required of [him] to engage in." He preferred a modest life that he might enjoy "the blessing of the Lord."¹⁷³

In 1746, Woolman relinquished his position as clerk and began his trade as a tailor.¹⁷⁴ He records that he decided to add "a little retailing of goods [to] get a living in a plain way without the load of great business." He initially sold "trimmings for garments" and shortly after began to sell "clothes and linens."¹⁷⁵ He became the village entrepreneur, as Williard Sperry observes:

He made their breeches and gowns and stomachers. He surveyed their lands, grafted their apple trees, drew up their title deeds and wills, made inventories of their properties, wrote indentures for apprentices, went to court in his neighbour's behalf, and was the executor of their estates.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷²Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 30, 31.

¹⁷³*Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁷⁴Whitney, *John Woolman*, 89.

¹⁷⁵Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 35, 53.

¹⁷⁶Sperry, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 144.

Woolman writes in his *Journal* that he bought and sold articles which were necessary and generally avoided those which served vanity. He experienced spiritual weakness whenever he sold futile items, as he explains:

It had been my general practice to buy and sell things really useful. Things that served chiefly to please the vain mind of people I was not easy to trade in, seldom did it, and whenever I did I found it weaken[ed] me as a Christian.¹⁷⁷

Woolman adopted a plain life style including dress, speech, and living, which Howard Brinton claims was a further stage in typical Quaker spiritual development.¹⁷⁸ He, with many other eighteenth-century Quakers and mystics, rejected all "superfluities" and luxuries as unnecessary.

John Woolman thus had a good business venture which was growing yearly. However, his business created an internal struggle for he observed that the humble person who enjoyed God's blessing needed only a little of this world's possessions, and, while success in business did not bring inward satisfaction, an increasing yearning for wealth begets a desire for more. His philosophy was that "truth required [him] to live more free from outward cumbers." He was not interested in attaining riches because they distract the mind and encroach on one's time.¹⁷⁹ Whitney describes Woolman's view of the wealthy as

¹⁷⁷Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 53.

¹⁷⁸See page five of this thesis for a list of Brinton's ten "Stages in Spiritual Development." A further description of Brinton's "adoption of plain dress, speech, and simple living" is on pages 71-72.

¹⁷⁹Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 53.

enslaved by their riches, keeping long hours, bound by a multiplicity of engagements, involved in problems of bills, debts, foundering ships, far-flung investments, bad and good seasons on their large land estates, [and] difficulties of justice to an unmanageable number of employees.¹⁸⁰

Woolman records in his *Journal* that he experienced turmoil in his mind between business affairs which brought large profits and a moderate lifestyle which he believed would bring fulfillment in his life. "Until the year 1756 I continued to retail goods, besides following my trade as a tailor," he writes, "but I felt a stop in my mind."¹⁸¹ Considering religion and integrity the principal factors in his life, the businessman John Woolman made his choice: he lessened his business ventures and directed his customers to his competition. He closed his shop and limited himself to tailoring. He "also had a nursery of apple trees, in which [he] employed some of [his] time - hoeing, grafting, trimming, [and] inoculating."¹⁸² Howard Brinton claims that "curtailment of business" was typically a further step in the Quaker's spiritual success.¹⁸³

A number of Woolman's acquaintances did not conform to the Quakers' plain lifestyle. They practised the common eighteenth-century procedure of purchasing unnecessary items on credit, often ending up in debt. They were

¹⁸⁰Whitney, John Woolman, 85.

¹⁸¹Moulton, ed, *The Journal of John Woolman*, 53.

¹⁸²*Ibid.*, 53-54.

¹⁸³Howard Brinton says that "curtailment of business" is stage nine in spiritual development in a Quaker's *Journal*. A list of Brinton's ten stages is on page five of this paper.

frequently sued at the law courts because they could not pay their financial obligations. As Woolman observed some of his friends' deficits, his conscience disturbed him and he decided to assist them. "Having often observed occurrences of this kind," he notes, "I found it good for me to advise poor people to take such goods as were most useful and not costly."¹⁸⁴ Although Woolman was "a Man of Industry," Ernest Rhys perceives that he "avoided, and strove much to lead others out of extreme Labour and Anxiousness after perishable Things."¹⁸⁵ Woolman did not feel he was interfering in his neighbours' affairs; rather, he was helping them enjoy a better quality of life free from liability, debt, and law suits.

Woolman's simple lifestyle appears to be an attempt to bring his American Friends back to Fox's understanding of the Inner Light, which both Woolman and Fox perceived was in every individual. Woolman believed that if each Quaker followed the Light within, the practice of slavery would terminate among the members of the Society of Friends. He was attempting to demonstrate to his Quaker peers, and especially to affluent slaveholders, that wealth and greed are unnecessary evils in the Christian life. He reiterated George Fox's idea of the equality of all people - black and white, bond and free - in the eyes of God.

¹⁸⁴Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 54.

¹⁸⁵John Woolman, *John Woolman's Journal*, ed. Ernest Rhys, *Everyman's Library* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1910, reprinted 1922), 10, 11.

Woolman sought to demonstrate true Christianity in his simple lifestyle which provided the integrity by which he ministered and implored the case of the slaves.

With ministerial recognition, Woolman travelled widely and observed not only the state of Quaker spirituality but also how Quakers treated their slaves. Abraham Farrington, an esteemed minister-friend, invited Woolman to accompany him on a visit to the eastern part of New Jersey in 1743. It was common for Quakers to travel in pairs, especially when a young minister was first itinerating.¹⁸⁶ The experienced and influential preacher was a mentor for the novice, John Woolman, and instructed him in following the leading of the Spirit. Woolman writes that he was often silent during the meetings, and when he spoke, it was with great care so it might be only what Truth revealed. The tour took about two weeks and he learned "some profitable lessons."¹⁸⁷

Woolman was establishing a paradigm which he would follow in his itinerant ministry. He would not speak hastily nor carelessly and sought to have the "sense of the meeting." He wanted to learn from others, to observe living conditions of slaveholders and slaves, to understand the problems which Friends were confronting, and to make friends wherever he went.

¹⁸⁶Whitney, John Woolman, 99.

¹⁸⁷Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 34.

During his first visit to the Southern Colonies (ca. 1746), Woolman's sense of the sinfulness and injustice of slavery was enhanced. The slaves' plight bothered him greatly and he began to promote social reform on their behalf in a way which he had not previously done. Howard Brinton claims that "advocacy of social reform" is the final stage in typical Quaker spiritual development.¹⁸⁸

Although Woolman often stayed with slave owners whom he believed had become rich through the toil and labor of their slaves, their luxurious lifestyle made him feel very uneasy. During his first southern trip, he writes that where masters treated their slaves properly, bore their share of the burden, and lived a moderate lifestyle, he felt "easy," but where they lived in luxury and overburdened their slaves, he was inwardly distressed, and frequently had private conversations with them concerning proper treatment of their Negroes.¹⁸⁹

David Brion Davis asks: "How could one go to minister to the unrighteous without partaking of their unrighteousness?"¹⁹⁰ Woolman found a way when he was entertained in slave-operated homes - he would not leave until he made a financial donation to the slaves. Sometimes he gave "pieces of silver" to the head of the family privately and requested that it be given "to their Negroes as

¹⁸⁸See page five of this thesis for a list of Brinton's ten "Stages of Spiritual Development."

¹⁸⁹Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 38.

¹⁹⁰Davis, *Slavery in Western Culture*, 490.

they believed would make the best use of them."¹⁹¹ Other times, he personally contributed money to the slaves. This Quaker preacher believed it was wrong to take advantage of anyone's hospitality for his own profit, nor would he be associated with unrequited labor. His integrity forced him to treat slaves and slave owners as equals.

To carry this out, he adapted ways to protest quietly in homes which implemented slave labor. One of the most revealing incidents occurred in a Pennsylvania rural community in 1758, where he had made a powerful speech denouncing slavery. He was taken to the home of a prominent citizen, Thomas Woodward, for dinner where he observed a number of slaves working. He quietly left the house without speaking a word to anyone and did not return. Woodward was immediately aware of the reason for Woolman's departure. He was so moved with his guest's sincerity that, the next morning, he informed his wife he must liberate his slaves.¹⁹² It is apparent that Woodward was more influenced by Woolman's demonstration than any words which could have been spoken, and determined not to keep such a house any longer where guests refused to be entertained.

¹⁹¹Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 60.

¹⁹²Trueblood, *The People called Quakers*, 162.

In addition, John Woolman refused to use products of slave labor and for years he carried out a quiet personal vendetta against dyed clothing.¹⁹³ He renounced the use of dyed cloth because the dyes used in clothing originated from the West Indies' slave plantations.¹⁹⁴ To use or wear such products, in Woolman's opinion, was to condone and endorse slavery. Dyes also rendered some materials "less useful," Woolman argued, and were used to conceal dirt and promote vanity. "To wash garments and keep them sweet, this appears clean," he wrote, but to hide dirt in clothing strengthens "a spirit which would cover that which is agreeable." He was perturbed that cleanliness was not promoted in society: "I have felt a longing in my mind that people might come into cleanliness of spirit, cleanliness of person, [and] cleanness about their houses and garments."¹⁹⁵

As his clothes wore out, Woolman replaced them with undyed garments until, by 1761, he was wearing simple plain clothing. The next year he secured a natural-colored beaver hat. He writes that he "believe[d] dyed clothing to be customs which have not their foundation in pure wisdom."¹⁹⁶ For the remaining eleven years of his life John Woolman used

plainness and Simplicity of Dress, and, as much as possible, avoided the Use of Plate, costly Furniture, and feasting; thereby endeavouring to become an Example of Temperance and Self-denial, which he

¹⁹³Vipont, *The Story of Quakerism*, 156.

¹⁹⁴Whitney, *John Woolman*, 276.

¹⁹⁵Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 190.

¹⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 120.

believed himself called unto, and was favoured with Peace therein, although it carried the Appearance of great Austerity in the View of some.¹⁹⁷

To the outside world, Woolman was undoubtedly the object of much jesting and joking, wearing his unattractive undyed clothes and natural-coloured fur hat. "The apprehension of being looked upon as one affecting singularity felt uneasy to me,"¹⁹⁸ he discloses. He notes in his *Journal* that he felt isolated for some time even in the ministry, because his fellow Quakers were not aware of his motives for being plainly clothed. He chose a bold course of silence and continued to wear the conspicuous clothing, believing that the Lord, in his own time, would turn the hearts of Friends back to him.¹⁹⁹ It may be assumed that Woolman's tenacity paid off, for this is his last reference to his "singularity" on the subject of apparel.²⁰⁰

John Woolman exposed what he perceived to be the greatest social evil of his day - the practise of slavery. He believed that the colonial public had to reckon with the issue of slavery and, through every protest, every speech on the subject, and every one-on-one confrontation with the slaveholders, he was driving another stake in the abolitionists' cause.

¹⁹⁷"A TESTIMONY OF THE MONTHLY-MEETING OF FRIENDS Held in Burlington, the first Day of the eighth Month, in the Year of our Lord 1774, concerning our esteemed Friend, JOHN WOOLMAN, DECEASED," in John Woolman's Journal, ed. Rhys, 10.

¹⁹⁸Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 121.

¹⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 121-22.

²⁰⁰Moulton, in his glossary, defines singularity as "peculiar; odd; unusual; different." *Ibid.*, 314.

Woolman can be described as superior to his neighbours in his integrity, in his moral sensitivity - especially on the slavery issue - and in his purity of life.²⁰¹

This is reflected in his strict Quaker beliefs and his desire to return to the Quaker ideal. Woolman's life certainly does not portray what every eighteenth-century Quaker was, but it does portray something of the richness of Quaker potential. His simple life of integrity enabled him to speak to a generation of Quakers who were torn between Quaker ideals and a more prosperous and broad-minded approach to life.

²⁰¹Trueblood, *The People Called Quakers*, 152.

CHAPTER FIVE

QUAKER "VOICES IN THE WILDERNESS"

John Woolman ministered in a world where few people, including Quakers, saw anything immoral in the institution of slavery, although they might agree that slaves ought to be well treated. As part of their world view, many colonists turned to the Scriptures for direction in life. Between the mid-eighteenth century and the Civil War, large numbers of books and articles were written, both advocating and opposing the slavery issue. Because John Woolman was one of the earlier articulate abolitionists, he responded to some of the typical arguments and others responded to him.

Many colonists in Woolman's era sought biblical grounds to justify slavery. Their arguments were more than an exercise in equivocation; they were based on historical biblical exegeses of both Old and New Testament texts which

eighteenth and nineteenth-century scholars believed shed light on the controversial subject of slavery. Colonial American writers on slavery were not obscure men, for their works were widely read and popular throughout the colonies and each enjoyed a wide influence in its time.²⁰² Woolman was aware of a number of biblical arguments in favor of slavery and devoted a fair amount of his writing to their refutation. The nineteenth century witnessed the culmination of the debate and provided the best documented arguments for and against the practise.

The common eighteenth-century view of slavery was no different from early arguments which propounded that slaves were condemned by God through Noah's curse, and slavery was God's punishment upon wicked immoral people. Christians had traditionally argued that God had given special privileges to the Jewish people to own slaves, and the New Testament church had continued the practise. Abolitionists, such as John Woolman, rejected such a claim. They "presupposed an irreconcilable conflict between slavery and the Christian message that all men were equal before God" and therefore slavery was immoral.²⁰³ David Brion Davis writes,

Historians have not generally appreciated the importance of the tedious and representative debates over 'the Bible and slavery', debates that set the stage for the better-known controversies over

²⁰²Eric L. McKittrick, "The Defense of Slavery," in *Slavery Defended: the Views of the South*, ed. Eric L. McKittrick (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), 2.

²⁰³David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, paperback, 1986), 114.

Darwinian evolution and so-called Higher Criticism. Even after the American Civil War some orthodox Jews as well as Christian biblical scholars continued to insist on the abstract lawfulness of human bondage as an ordinance of God.²⁰⁴

A number of major proslavery biblical arguments were circulated in America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The first was the **ARGUMENT OF DIVINE DECREE** which stated that slavery is God's judgment upon the sinful acts of Ham and his descendants. The argument is based upon Genesis 9:22-27, where Noah cursed his son Ham for his wicked act of viewing his father's nudity.²⁰⁵

Proslavery advocates argued from **THE THEORY OF PROPHECY** which, they claimed, originated with Noah. Noah prophesied that Canaan would be "a servant of servants unto his brethren" (Gen. 9:25). The theory claimed that

²⁰⁴Ibid., 112.

²⁰⁵As Noah lay drunk in his tent, the Scripture says that his son Ham, "saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without.

And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness.

And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him.

And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.

And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.

God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant" (Gen. 9:22-27).

The ARGUMENT OF DIVINE DECREE was best articulated a century after Woolman by Thornton Stringfellow, a prominent early nineteenth century Baptist minister of Culpepper County, Virginia. Larry Tise designates Stringfellow as the "most widely published essayist on the Bible and slavery." See Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: a History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens, GA and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1987), 176, and Thornton Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument: or Slavery in the Light of Divine Revelation," in *Cotton is King, and Pro-Slavery Arguments*, ed. E. N. Elliot (Augusta, GA: Pritchard, Abbott & Loomis, 1860, reprinted 1968), 460-62.

blacks, who are Canaan's descendants, have been designated by God to be the lowest of slaves and are condemned to perpetual slavery.²⁰⁶ The argument stated that this Scripture is fulfilled in the slavery of Africans, which is God's punishment upon them for their wickedness.²⁰⁷

At the same time, the proslavery proponents asserted, the institution of slavery was "full of mercy." Slavery was viewed as "the providentially-arranged means whereby Africa is to be lifted from her deep degradation, to a state of religious and civil liberty."²⁰⁸ The Boston Puritan clergyman, Cotton Mather, argued as early as 1706 that God may have chosen some to be His children who "have been Scorched and Blacken'd by the Sun of *Africa*." He asked,

Who can tell but this poor creation may belong to the Election of God? Who can tell but that God may have sent this Poor Creature into my Hands, so that One of the Elect by my Means may be called; and by my Instruction be made Wise unto Salvation?²⁰⁹

Slavery defenders used the argument of **GOD'S CURSE - BLACK SKIN** which said that Noah's curse upon Ham and his son, Canaan, resulted in their progeny becoming black. In the eighteenth century, black was considered an

²⁰⁶In his Commentary on Genesis, John Skinner states that the phrase, "a servant of servants" (Gen. 9: 25), is literally "the lowest of slaves." John Skinner, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis (New York: C. Scribner, 1910), 184.

²⁰⁷Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 464.

²⁰⁸Howell Cobb, A Scriptural Examination of the Institution of Slavery in the United States (GA: Perry, 1856), 3.

²⁰⁹Cotton Mather, The Negro Christianized. An ESSAY to EXCITE and ASSIST that GOOD WORK, The INSTRUCTION of Negro-Servants in Christianity (Boston: B. Green. 1706), 3.

offensive color and was the symbol of "the foul, the malicious, [and] the diabolical." White-skinned, on the other hand, symbolized "the good and the lovely."²¹⁰ Black and white contrasted filthiness and purity, promiscuity and virginity, baseness and virtue, ugliness and beauty, evil and good, the devil and God. Black-skinned persons were generally viewed in the American colonies as repugnant and the lowest class in society while whites were appealing and were middle or upper-class citizens.²¹¹

Proslavery advocates argued that **SLAVES WERE PROPERTY**. The argument is based on Gen. 24:35, which says that God gave to Abraham "flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, and menservants, and maidservants, and camels, and asses." The "menservants and maidservants" were slaves, the argument maintained, and were associated in the Scriptures with other property of Abraham such as animals and wealth. Stringfellow asserted that God authorized the Jews to purchase heathens

as property; to hold them and their posterity in bondage; and to will them to their children as a possession for ever; and more, it allows *foreign slaveholders to settle and live among them; to breed slaves and sell them* [italics his].²¹²

²¹⁰Scherer, *Slavery and the Churches*, 26.

²¹¹Numerous examples of white and black in Middle English, Shakespeare, the Bible, and Milton are in P. J. Heath, "Colour Symbolism," in *Folk Lore* 59 (1948): 169-70, 175-78, 182-83; also see Harold R. Isaac, "Blackness and Whiteness," in *Encounter* 21 (1963): 8-21.

²¹²Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 476.

Another argument in favor of slavery maintained that God had ordained **TWO CLASSES OF SERVITUDE** in ancient Hebrew captivity - one was for a "brother" or "fellow-Israelite" and the other for the "heathen."²¹³ If a brother was poor and was sold to another Israelite, he was not to be compelled to be a slave but a hired servant. In the Year of Jubilee, he was to be released so he could return home to his family and possessions.²¹⁴ The "heathen," on the other hand, were permitted to be bought as "bondmen and bondmaids," and could be ruled over perpetually.²¹⁵

David Brion Davis points out that although eighteenth-century antislavery clergymen scorned the biblical justification of slavery, most of them accepted Leviticus chapter 25 as meaning,

in the hedged words of the Scottish abolitionist, 'that slavery is not of *such a nature, as to preclude the possibility of the Divine Being himself, in any circumstances whatever, tolerating its existence*' [italics his].²¹⁶

²¹³God commanded that the brother was to be "as an hired servant, and as a sojourner, he shall be with thee, and shall serve thee until the year of jubile [sic]:And then he shall depart from thee, both he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family" (Lev. 25:40-41).Concerning the "heathen" God said, "And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession: and they shall be your bondmen for ever" (Lev. 25:46).

²¹⁴The Year of Jubilee was the fiftieth year following Israel's entrance into the promised land (Lev. 25:1-9). "And the Lord said unto Moses in Mount Sinai, saying....And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile [sic] unto you....Thy brother...shall serve thee unto the year of jubile: and then shall he depart from thee, both he and his children with him, and shall return unto his family..." (Lev. 25:1, 10, 41).

²¹⁵"But thy bondmen, and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids.

And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen for ever: but over your brethren the children of Israel, ye shall not rule one over another with rigour" (Lev. 25:44, 46).

²¹⁶Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress*, 112.

The eighteenth-century defenders of slavery contended that the **NEW TESTAMENT ALSO ENDORSES SLAVERY**. They insisted that Christ condoned, rather than condemned, slavery. First, they asserted that He did not command its abolition; second, He did not introduce any new moral principle under the gospel dispensation; and third, slavery existed in all the Roman provinces where the apostles planted churches and the practise was not denounced by them.²¹⁷ Rome "swayed its sceptre over one hundred and twenty million of souls;" Stringfellow writes, "that in every province and in every family, *absolute slavery existed* [italics his]."²¹⁸ The apostles commanded Christian subjection on the part of servants to their masters as well as political subjection to all forms of government, for the purpose of "the will of God" and putting "to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (I Pt. 2:13-15). The majority of eighteenth-century Quakers accepted these arguments for slavery and to move Friends to the abolitionist position meant convincing them that both biblical teachings and Quaker values were contrary to slavery.

"The root of all evil," as John Woolman referred to slavery at the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1758, permeated the colonial Society of Friends

²¹⁷Thornton Stringfellow, "A Scriptural View of Slavery," 94-95.

²¹⁸Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 483.

from the seventeenth century.²¹⁹ Quakers had accepted slavery but the voices of some members were being raised against it and attitudes slowly began to change. Friends' involvement in changing the history of American slavery is summed up by Thomas Drake:

The only significant movement against slavery in colonial America took place among the Quakers. They too groped their way slowly, with hearts searching, toward the conviction that slavery could not truly be reconciled with their Christian faith.²²⁰

Woolman's was certainly not the first and only voice against slavery, but his would prove to be crucial at the moment of decision in 1774.

Drake designates the protestors of three centuries ago as "prophets crying in the wilderness" because their numbers were few and their opposition to slavery was largely ignored and disregarded.²²¹ While the theory was generally accepted in the American colonies that blacks were destined by providence to a life of servitude, and colonists were God's ministers who affected his will, a few solitary voices were raised against the oppression of slavery.

One such voice was by the founder of Quakerism, George Fox. Fox sent a letter to the New World in 1657, only a year after the first Quaker missionaries arrived. While he did not condemn slaveholding, he expounded the equality of all

²¹⁹ Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 68.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

people in the eyes of God. Fourteen years later, on his way to America (1671), he visited Barbados. Here he saw slaves working and living in degradation and immorality and his interest in their situation revived. Fox preached in meetings conducted in the slaveholders' homes and shared the gospel with the slaves. He also admonished the Quaker masters to teach their Negroes Christianity and its virtues.²²²

Fox printed a tract entitled *God's Family-Order* in 1676. In it he challenged the Quakers to consider the sacrifice of Christ for all people, including blacks:

...Christ died for all, both Turks, Barbarians, Tartarians, and Ethiopians....Christ, I say, shed His blood for them as well as for you; and hath enlightened them as he hath enlightened you; and his grace hath appeared to them as well as it hath appeared unto you; and he is a propitiation for their sins as well as for yours: for he is the propitiation of the sins of the whole world.²²³

Fox reasoned that since Christ died for all, everyone, including slaves, has the right to hear the Gospel and accept it.

Fox urged that the gospel be preached to all, because it is "the power that giveth liberty and freedom, and is glad tidings to every captivated creature under the whole heaven."²²⁴ He wrote that if slaves had served faithfully, they should be

²²²Ibid., 6.

²²³George Fox, *The Journal of George Fox*, ed. Norman Penney, Vol. II (Cambridge, 1911), 195.

²²⁴A. Thomas, "The Attitude of the Society of Friends Toward Slavery in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Papers of the American Society of Church History*, VIII: 277, 283.

liberated after a "considerable Term of years," and not go "empty-handed."²²⁵

There is no evidence that the Barbados Friends accepted Fox's proposal for there was no change in the conditions of slaves in the colony. It is conceivable that his recommendations gave an added weight of authority to later Quakers who spoke out against slavery, especially in the Society of Friends' Meetings.

One of the earliest non-Quaker voices raised against slaveholding was the Puritan Judge of the Massachusetts Superior Court, Samuel Sewall (1652-1730).²²⁶

He is important in the history of antislavery because, as Duncan Rice says, he "was the first member of the colonial ruling class to turn publicly against [the institution]."²²⁷ The colony was concerned about the number of black immigrants pouring into Boston and Sewall was seen as addressing the problem. He appears to have stood alone in his antislavery stand but there is no evidence that he was considered an overzealous abolitionist.

The slave trade between Guinea and America disturbed Sewall. He denounced the enterprise, charging that "Man stealing is ranked amongst the most atrocious of Capital Crimes."²²⁸ He argued that no one has the God-given right to take liberty from an innocent human being and force that person into slavery.

²²⁵George Fox, *Gospel Family Order, Being a Short Discourse Concerning the Ordering of Families, Both Whites, Black, and Indians* (London: G. F., publishers, 1676), 16.

²²⁶See G. W. Harper, "Sewall, Samuel," in *D.C.A.*, 1077.

²²⁷C. Duncan Rice, *The Rise and Fall of Black Slavery* (New York and London: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975), 190.

²²⁸Samuel Sewall, *The Selling of Joseph: A Memorial* [originally published 1700], ed. Sidney

Sewall wrote and published an antislavery tract entitled *The Selling of Joseph: A Memorial* in 1700. In it he "essayed to prevent Negroes and Indians from being rated as cattle."²²⁹ He held that Joseph's brothers were slaves to him just as much as he was to them, and they had no more authority to sell him than to kill him. He asserted that "all Men, as they are the Sons of *Adam*, are Coheirs, and have equal Right unto Liberty."²³⁰

Sewall, however, seems to have been a racist to the degree that he did not want blacks in his area. He wrote of the numerous Negro males present in Boston and how they were so physically different from the white population in their condition, colour, and hair, that they would never blend in with the population, but "remain in our Body Politik as a kind of extravasant blood."²³¹ He claimed that every black man represented an empty space in the colony, and they should be replaced by white men who could make suitable husbands for the residents' daughters. In Sewall's judgment, marriages between blacks and whites were inadmissible. He contended that it would be better, for that reason, to depend entirely upon white indentured servants or wage laborers for economical purposes

Kaplin. (Massachusetts: The Gehenna Press of Northampton, 1969), 9.

²²⁹Joshua Coffin, *A Sketch of the History of Newbury, Newburyport, and West Newbury from 1635 to 1845* (Boston: S. G. Drake, 1845), 338. Quoted from the diary of Sewall.

²³⁰Kaplin, ed., *The Selling of Joseph*, 8, 9. Sewall wrote *The Selling of Joseph* to repress the importation of slaves into Boston.

²³¹*Ibid.* Kaplin says that "extravasant blood" is blood forced out of its proper vessels. Here, Kaplin asserts, Sewall shows a reservation in his thinking about Negroes - since they are so different from white people "they can never embody with us."

and avoid using black slaves altogether. Sewall believed that the war against Africans should cease and blacks should be returned to their homelands.²³²

Sewall's writings present a double motivation for the sparse antislavery sentiments in America in 1700: opposition to enslaving human beings and opposition to a permanent black population. Like those of George Fox, Judge Sewall's works failed to arouse interest in changing the slaves' situation or instigating an antislavery stance in the colonies.

During the first half of the eighteenth century, a number of Quakers spoke out and wrote against the practice of slaveholding. These abolitionists, according to Jean Soderlund, were "just a handful...before the conflicts with Great Britain in the 1760s and 1770s popularized the notion that liberty was a natural right."²³³ They argued from the Enlightenment viewpoint that all innocent people have the right to liberty and freedom. They contended that to detain people against their wills in slavery was a violation of their natural God-given right and those who held them were accountable. Perhaps what was needed was a new era of persecution which would awaken Friends from their spiritual slumber, for a number saw slavery as a symbol of spiritual bondage, which blocked the road to Quaker restoration and redemption.²³⁴

²³²Ibid.

²³³Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 3.

²³⁴The following Quakers are but a representation of the many who spoke publicly against slavery

One of the earliest eighteenth-century abolitionists was the New Jersey Quaker, John Hepburn, who maintained that people ought not to be enslaved. He wrote and published a tract in 1715 entitled *The American Defense of the Christian Golden Rule*. Drake says that Hepburn's work came "during the height of the first slavery controversy in [the] Philadelphia Yearly Meeting."²³⁵ Hepburn declared in his *Defense* that slavery was "antichristian, [and] a vile...contradiction of the gospel of the blessed Messiah."²³⁶ He asserted that slavery and the slave trade opposed the doctrine of Christ. He asked whether Christ "commanded *to do to all men as we would they should do to us* or as we would be done by [italics his]?" Hepburn challenged the colonial slave owners to have their Negroes treat them in the same manner as they treated their slaves. Hepburn, like Fox, reminded Friends that all people are equal in the sight of God and are not to be bought or sold. He charged that trafficking in "the Bodies and Souls of Men, was and is the Merchandize of the Babylonish Merchants spoken of in the *Revelations*."²³⁷

Masters were using their profits, Hepburn contended, which were accumulated through slave labor,

in the eighteenth century. They appear to be the leaders in the Society of Friends on the antislavery issue and the mistreatment of slaves.

²³⁵ Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 34.

²³⁶ John Hepburn, *The American Defense of the Christian Golden Rule, or an Essay to Prove the Unlawfulness of Making Slaves of Men. By Him Who Loves the Freedom of the Souls and Bodies of All Men* (New York, 1715), microfiche, Evans no. 1678, 3. Also see David Brion Davis, *Slavery in Western Culture*, 316-19.

²³⁷ Hepburn, *The American Defense*, 9.

to go with *fine powdered Perriwigs*, and *great bunched coats*; and likewise keep their Wives idle (*Jezebel-like*) to *paint their faces* and *puff and powder their hair*, and to bring up their Sons and Daughters in *idleness* and *Wantonness*, and in all manner of *Pride* and *Prodigality*, in *decking* and *adorning* their carcasses with puffed and powdered Hair, with *Ruffles* and *Top-knots*, *Ribbons* and *Lace*, and *Gay Clothing*, and what not [*italics his*].²³⁸

Slaves, on the other hand, had only rags to wear. During the cold winter months, they did not have clothing or shoes to protect themselves from the frost or snow. Hepburn alleged that even the dogs were treated better than slaves. He believed that abusive treatment of slaves caused them to commit "heinous Sins, such as Lying, Stealing, Robbing, and Self-Murder."²³⁹ Hepburn argued that masters were forcing their slaves to break all of the ten commandments.

The opponents of slavery maintained that taking an individual's freedom is the greatest injury one can do against a fellow citizen. Hepburn claimed in *The American Defense* that slaveholders have taken their slaves' volition, which is to take their liberty. He declared that God has given each individual a free will so that everyone is master of his own choice. To deprive one of free will is to deprive one of free choice and to go contrary to the teachings of the Bible. God himself will not force his will on anyone, even if it is for the good of the individual. In like manner, Hepburn contended, American colonists did not have the right to force their wills

²³⁸Ibid., 11.

²³⁹Ibid., 12.

on slaves, whether black, white, or Indian. He argued that to do so robs others of the "noble gift which God has given to them. This is an antiChristian practice and incurs God's displeasure." If they had any hope of salvation, he warned, they ought to set their slaves free immediately.²⁴⁰

Reading *The American Defense*, one is struck with the manner in which Hepburn attacked the backsliding and sins of the Society of Friends. Slaveholding was not always the focal point in his writing. It was generally used as a vehicle to attack the evil and worldly practises of Quaker leaders. Hepburn was intent on calling the Society of Friends and its ministers and elders back to their essential fundamentals. However, there was no response from Friends' Meetings to his pleas for better treatment of slaves or for emancipation. It appears that Quakers were determined to "suppress the agitation over slavery."²⁴¹ Yet the seeds of the antislavery movement were being sown and would bring a harvest in its time.

None of these early abolitionists, according to Duncan Rice, spent a great part of his life in the cause of slavery. In this sense, "the first true abolitionists were two eccentric, and more radical, American Friends, Ralph Sandiford and Benjamin Lay."²⁴² Sandiford (1693-1733), an English Quaker immigrant who had become a

²⁴⁰Ibid., 8, 20-22.

²⁴¹Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 36.

²⁴²Rice, *The Rise and Fall of Black Slavery*, 193.

merchant in Philadelphia, saw slavery as a universal evil through which the Antichrist had taken his stand, and it had invaded the Society of Friends.²⁴³

Sandiford wrote two treatises against the practice of slavery. The first, entitled *A Brief Examination of the Practice of the Times, by the Foregoing and the Present Dispensation, whereby is Manifested how the Devil Works*, was published in 1729. In it, Sandiford declared that to "take a Man from his Native Country, his Parents and Brethren, and other Natural Enjoyments, and that by Stealth," is a gross injustice.²⁴⁴ He contended that those who held slaves in bondage, including Quakers, were as evil as those who stole them. He likened them to the enemies of Christ who crucified Him and desired that His blood may be on them and on their children.

Sandiford denounced the ministers and elders of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting as evil and linked them with diabolical workers. He writes,

The tender seed of the honest hearted is suffering to see both elders and ministers as if [they] were clothed in it, and their offspring after them filling up the measure of the parents' iniquity.²⁴⁵

He charged that the Antichrist had invaded the practice of slaveholding and slavery was the embodiment of the beast. Quakers who held slaves were part of the

²⁴³Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 37, 39.

²⁴⁴Ralph Sandiford, "A Brief Examination of the Practice of the Times, by the Foregoing and the Present Dispensation, whereby is Manifested how the Devil Works" [originally published 1729], in *Am I not a Man and a Brother*, ed. Roger Bruns (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1977), 35.

²⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 9. David Brion Davis discusses Sandiford sparingly in *Slavery in Western Culture*, 320-21.

demonic system. Sandiford further indicted that the practice of slavery had become a hindrance to the gospel, especially among the heathen, and had offended some who were searching for the Truth.²⁴⁶ In essence, Sandiford attacked Quaker slaveholding ministers and elders more than pleading the cause of slaves.

Sandiford wrote his second treatise in 1730 entitled *The Mystery of Iniquity; in a Brief Examination....*²⁴⁷ In it he refuted the argument that Africans are the descendants of Ham and claimed that there is no proof for the assumption. He maintained that Ham was cursed to serve even the worst of the descendants of Shem and Japheth. According to the Word of the Lord, Sandiford asserted, Ham's offspring, who were the Canaanites, perished in a mighty catastrophe, making it impossible for black people to be his descendants.²⁴⁸ He does not say by what destruction they were annihilated.

The Society of Friends was offended by Sandiford's writings, especially his first essay which condemned their leaders. They expelled him from their meetings and boycotted his business, forcing him to leave Philadelphia. Sandiford became ill and was "broken by the strain of constant controversy," his conscience

²⁴⁶Sandiford, "A Brief Examination," 35.

²⁴⁷The complete title is *The Mystery of Iniquity; in A Brief Examination of the Practice of the Times, by the Foregoing and the Present Dispensation, whereby is Manifested how the Devil Works. Unto which is added in the Postscript, the Injury this Trading in Slaves doth the Commonwealth, humbly offer'd to all of a Publick Spirit*, (Philadelphia, 1730). *The Mystery of Iniquity* is a second edition of *A Brief Examination* with added writings.

²⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 19.

torturing him because of the Quakers' "sin of slaveholding."²⁴⁹ He retired in 1731 on a small farm near the city, where he remained an outcast until his death in 1733, at the age of forty.²⁵⁰

During his final illness, Ralph Sandiford received visits from a fellow Quaker, Benjamin Lay (1681-1759). Lay hated slavery even more than his friend and took up the crusade where Sandiford had relinquished it. Drake says that if Sandiford "lashed Quaker slaveholders with whips, Benjamin Lay chastised them with scorpions."²⁵¹ Edwin H. Cady describes Lay as "a hunchback [who] lived in a cave, bore testimonies for vegetarians, and [was] against the use of animal wool as well as tobacco and the drinking of tea and alcohol."²⁵²

Lay was an eccentric and an extremist and, on one occasion, smashed a set of teacups belonging to his wife, Sarah, "in order to discourage the use of sugar" which, he asserted, was "mixed with the chopped-up limbs, bowels, and excrement of poor slaves." He protested slave labor and the killing of animals by making his own clothes, and avoided the use of any material produced by slaves or by the death of "innocent animals."²⁵³

²⁴⁹Rice, *The Rise and Fall of Black Slavery*, 194.

²⁵⁰Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 43.

²⁵¹*Ibid.*

²⁵²Cady, John Woolman, 72. David Brion Davis discusses Lay in *Slavery in Western Culture*, 321-26.

²⁵³David Brion Davis, *Slavery in Western Culture*, 323.

Slavery was "a Hellish practice," in Lay's opinion, a "filthy sin...the Capital Sin...the greatest sin in the World, of the very nature of Hell itself, and is the Belly of Hell."²⁵⁴ He launched his antislavery crusade against what he believed was the heart of the evil practice of slavery - the Quaker ministers. He writes,

What do you think of these Things, you brave Gospel Ministers? that keep poor Slaves to Work for you to maintain you and yours in Pride, Pride, and much Idleness or Laziness, and Fulness of Bread, the Sins of Sodom: How do these things become your plain Dress, Demure Appearance, feigned Humility, all but Hypocrisy, which according to Truth's Testimony, must have the hottest place in Hell; to keep those miserable creatures at hard Labour continually, unto their old Age.²⁵⁵

He declared that the only answer was for them to become converted and cleanse themselves "from all filthiness of Flesh, as well as Spirit."²⁵⁶ He echoed Sandiford's message but in more forceful terminology:

I know no worse or greater stumbling blocks the devil has to lay in the way of honest inquirers, than our ministers and elders keeping slaves; and by straining and perverting Holy Scriptures, preach more to Hell than ever they will bring to Heaven by their feigned humility and hypocrisy.²⁵⁷

Lay took the example of Isaiah for what can be classed as his one-man guerilla theatrics.²⁵⁸ On one occasion he attended a Quaker meeting in sackcloth

²⁵⁴Benjamin Lay, *All Slave-Keepers that keep the Innocent in Bondage, Apostates Pretending to lay claim to the Pure & Holy Christian Religion...*(Philadelphia, 1937), 10.

²⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 130.

²⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 146.

²⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 85.

²⁵⁸"At the same time spake the Lord by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot.

And the Lord said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for as a

and denounced the wealthy slaveholders. Another time, in the middle of winter, he sat outside the meeting house with one bare leg knee deep in the snow. When people expressed interest for his health, he asked them why they were concerned for him and yet so blind to the sufferings of their poorly clad slaves. At a later date, Lay was ejected from a meeting for causing a disturbance. He then lay in front of the door in the rain and continued to denounce those who owned slaves, forcing the congregation members to step over his body as they left the place.²⁵⁹

His most famous demonstration against the coercion of slavery occurred at the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting which was held in Burlington.²⁶⁰ He wore a military uniform to the meeting with a sword hanging in its scabbard on his side, camouflaged under his traditional long Quaker coat. He had a bladder of pokeberry juice which resembled blood concealed in a hollowed-out "Bible" which he carried.

As he arose and spoke, Lay told the slave masters they may as well throw off the robe of Quakerism as he himself now did. Standing before them in his dress of war and drawing his sword, he said that those who forcibly held their brothers in bondage would be no less justified in the eyes of God than if they plunged a sword

sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia..." (Isa. 20:2, 3).

²⁵⁹Roberts Vaux, *Memories of the Lives of Benjamin Lay and Ralph Sandiford; Two of the Earliest of the Public Advocates of the Emancipation of the Enslaved African* (Philadelphia: Solomon W. Conrad, 1815, reprinted by W. Phillips, 1816), 25-27.

²⁶⁰Duncan Rice says that the demonstration occurred at the Monthly Meeting, but it is most likely that such an exhibition took place at the Yearly Meeting, as both Edwin Cady and Thomas Drake contend. Cady claims the year was 1730 while Drake declares it was 1738. See Cady, *John Woolman*, 73 and Drake,

into the hearts of their slaves. He then drove his sword through his "Bible," and, to the surprise and horror of everyone present, the red "blood" spattered over the unsuspecting Friends nearby. He was removed from the gathering by several Quakers and, according to Drake, was publicly disowned by the Society of Friends at the same Meeting.²⁶¹

Lay wrote a treatise on slavery which was published in 1737, in which his thesis and attitude are set forth in the extended title:

*All Slave-Keepers that keep the Innocent in Bondage, Apostates Pretending to lay claim to the Pure & Holy Christian Religion; of what Congregation soever; but especially in their Ministers, by whose Example the filthy Leprosy and Apostasy is spread far and near; it is a notorious Sin, which many of the true Friends of Christ, and his pure Truth, called Quakers, has been for many Years, and still are concern'd to write and bear Testimony against; as a Practice so gross & hurtful to Religion, and destructive to Government, beyond what Words can set forth, or can be declared by Men or Angels, and yet lived in by Ministers and Magistrates in America. The Leaders of the People cause them to Err. Written for a General Service, by him that truly and sincerely desires the present and eternal Welfare and Happiness of all Mankind, all the World over, of all Colours, and Nations, as his own Soul.*²⁶²

Like Sandiford, Lay used the slavery issue as a vehicle to attack a multitude of evils which he observed among Quakers, with Quaker slave-holding ministers at the top.

Since slavery had long been associated with luxury, idleness, and sexual

Quakers and Slavery in America, 45. The year could not be 1730 because, according to both Cady and Drake, Lay did not move from Barbados to America until 1731. Cady, *ibid.*, 71; Drake, *ibid.*, 44.

²⁶¹See Vaux, *Memories*, 25-27 and Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 45, 46.

²⁶²Lay's *All Slave-Keepers* (1737) was published seven years after Sandiford's *A Brief Examination* (1730).

immorality, to Lay it was also a medium of moral purification. If Quakers would rid themselves of the evil of slavery, they would automatically eliminate other major sins from their midst. However, if they permitted it to remain, it would eventually destroy the Society of Friends. He cautioned that slaves will rise up in the day of judgment and condemn the slave owners.²⁶³

The writings of Sandiford and Lay are charged with emotions of anguish and persecution, the necessity of moral purification, and the inevitability of divine judgment. Both men had been exposed to the evils of slavery (Sandiford was marooned on the Bahamas and Lay lived in Barbados for a time), yet they devoted little effort in their preaching and writings to the Negroes' cause. Slavery became the medium to attack fellow Quakers and served as an outlet for their deviant personalities instead of an opportunity to plead the cause of the slaves.

The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting denounced and expelled Lay in 1738 for disturbing Quaker gatherings.²⁶⁴ He moved to the country and spent most of his remaining twenty years cultivating his garden and writing tracts against slavery, alcohol and capital punishment. It is noteworthy that one year prior to his death in 1759, he was informed that the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting agreed "to disown

²⁶³Lay, *All Slave-Keepers*, 121, 124.

²⁶⁴Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 46. Cady wrote that Lay was expelled in 1730 (Cady, *John Woolman*, 73.) This date is most unlikely since historians agree (including Cady, *ibid.*, p. 72) that Lay did not move to America until 1731 from Barbados (cf. *ibid.*, p. 85, n. 202).

members who bought or sold Negroes, and to encourage those who held slaves to set them free."²⁶⁵

Thus, by the 1740s, there was a growing agitation among the Quakers against slavery. The methods and attacks of the abolitionists were so radical, however, that the arguments were rejected by the majority. It was in this environment that the more gentle Woolman began to speak in a meek "Quakerly" fashion, which brought him a wide hearing.

²⁶⁵Ibid.

CHAPTER SIX

WOOLMAN'S "MOVEMENT OF THE SOUL"

John Woolman became deeply moved against the practice of enslavement as he observed the confinement and mistreatment of slaves, and his crusade for their emancipation increased as he travelled throughout the colonies. Vida Scudder notes that Woolman

was for many Years deeply exercised on Account of the poor enslaved *Africans*, whose cause, as he sometimes mentioned, lay almost continually upon him, and to obtain Liberty to those Captives, he laboured both in public and private; and he was favoured to see his Endeavours crowned with considerable Success.²⁶⁶

In all probability, John Woolman was aware of Hepburn, Sandiford, and Lay, although he makes no reference to them in his writings. When Lay staged his famous "bloody" demonstration, Cady says young John "was almost surely" at the

²⁶⁶Vida Scudder, "Introduction," in John Woolman's Journal, ed. Rhys, 10.

famous 1738 Meeting.²⁶⁷ One thing is certain, Lay and other Quaker abolitionists and their writings were condemned and ostracized by their superiors, while Woolman and his works were widely accepted and even propagated by the Society of Friends. The question is: Why was there such a difference in the Quaker response to the former abolitionists and to Woolman?

By the mid-eighteenth century, when John Woolman began campaigning against slavery, Enlightenment ideas and thoughts were circulating throughout the colonies. The opinions on the natural right of man and equality for all were becoming more commonplace. When Woolman began his travels as a minister and began advocating improved conditions for slaves and liberty, he was not promoting a totally new cause. A number of abolitionists before him had campaigned for emancipation of slaves but they did not receive the same attention. The Enlightenment helped pave the way for antislavery empathy in the colonies and the residents were more open to change and the implementation of new ideas. This is not to argue that anyone could have had the influence Woolman had, for, as Lay and his contemporaries demonstrated, Quakers, and indeed all slaveholders, were not ready to adopt abolitionists' proposals. The time was ripe for such an individual as John Woolman and his message, yet it took twenty-nine years of travelling

²⁶⁷Cady, John Woolman, 73. John Woolman was sixteen years old when Lay's demonstration at the Burlington Meeting occurred.

throughout the colonies, pleading and exhorting on behalf of slaves, to persuade the Quakers to adopt a stance of abolition.

John Woolman was a pioneer in personal confrontation with slaveholders. In his gentle and meek manner, he conversed and debated with them instead of publicly accusing them. While Lay and his antislavery peers denounced slavery and the Quakers' involvement with the strongest possible terminology and demonstrations, Woolman chose a gentle persuasive one-on-one approach which, along with his mild disposition, calm tone, and kindly manner, provided him with many opportunities to dialogue with his Quaker counterparts on the evils and injustice of slavery. He argued from Quaker tradition, from Scripture, and from humanitarian precepts and Enlightenment reasoning that slavery was contrary to the natural right of liberty. He did not condemn nor stand in judgment on the slaveholders but equated himself with their guilt for their atrocities and ill-treatment of slaves.

John Woolman contended with the antislavery advocates in a charitable yet forceful manner. He disagreed with the hypothesis that blacks are a different species from whites, maintaining that both are the same variety.²⁶⁸ He asserted that

²⁶⁸The eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher, David Hume, wrote very candidly on the issue of the inferiority of blacks: "I am apt to suspect the Negroes and, in general, all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites." David Hume, *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, T. H. Green and T. H. Grose, eds., vol. 1, (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1875), 252.

if the ancestors of slaveholders and the slave owners themselves had endured the servitude, the illiteracy, the destitution, and the mistreatment which slaves suffered, they themselves would be as abject and pitiful as their slaves.²⁶⁹ Woolman declared that Negroes, who were classed as property by their owners and who toiled unceasingly to support their masters, "had not the like inducement to be industrious."²⁷⁰ David Cooper, a prominent eighteenth-century antislavery Quaker leader in New Jersey, wrote near the time of Woolman's death:

The low contempt with which they [slaves] are generally treated by the whites, lead children from the first dawn of reason, to consider people with black skin, on a footing with domestic animals, form'd to serve and obey.²⁷¹

While travelling in Virginia in 1757, Woolman records that he met a Friend who claimed that Negroes descended from Cain. The Friend asserted that, following the murder of his brother Abel, God changed the color of Cain's skin from white to black as the special mark upon him. Furthermore, the Quaker claimed, God ordained that blacks should be slaves, since their race originated from such a sinister human being.²⁷²

Woolman refuted the argument, declaring that all the offspring of Cain perished in the flood, since only Noah and his family survived. Noah, he said, was

²⁶⁹John Woolman, "Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes," Part I, 200-02.

²⁷⁰Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 61.

²⁷¹David Cooper, *A Mite Cast into the Treasury: Or, Observations on Slave-Keeping* (Philadelphia: Joseph Crukshank, 1772, microfiche, Evans no. 12322), 111.

²⁷²Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 62-63.

Seth's offspring and came from the line of Abel while the descendants of Canaan sprang from Ham. Woolman employed Enlightenment philosophy in his rebuttal as he declared that blacks have the right to liberty and equality. He records in his

Journal:

I was troubled to perceive the darkness of their imaginations, and in some pressure of spirit said: '...I've no interest on either side save only the interest which I desire to have in the truth, and as I believe liberty to be their right and see they are not only deprived of it but treated in other respects with inhumanity in many places, I believe he who is a refuge for the oppressed will in his own time plead their cause, and happy will it be for such who walk in uprightness before him.' Thus our conversation ended.²⁷³

Woolman chose not to become involved in heated debates or quarrels over the slavery issue. He listened to the proslavery viewpoints with great care and quickly articulated his position and beliefs. The most important consideration for Woolman was the Truth, regardless of his personal convictions.

Woolman campaigned against holding human beings as slaves for a number of reasons. He opposed the exploitation of labor and the oppression of the poor; he believed in the equality of humanity; he regarded slavery as being inconsistent with the Christian religion; he deemed those who bought slaves to be as evil and immoral as those who sold them; he contended that slaves were kept because their owners were lazy and greedy; and he asserted that the ideal society

²⁷³*Ibid.*, 63.

was one in which no individual profited from the servitude of another.²⁷⁴

Woolman's argument rested on the obvious utilization of profits by the slave owners whose primary motivation should have been for the good of the slaves. If slaves were kept because of "a real sense of duty" and "true charity governs us in all our proceedings toward them," Woolman claimed, "then we are so far safe." However, if the minds of the slave owners were inclined to the spirit of this world, which induced one's aspiration for "outward gain more than their real happiness," then slavery is immoral.²⁷⁵

Society's subjugation and exploitation of the impoverished captivated Woolman's attention throughout the years. He saw greed and the desire for affluence as the root of all social evil manifested in slavery. Woolman's plea was for a return of his beloved Quakers to a simple lifestyle, which he believed would bring an end to their avarice. He argued that slaves are "our fellow creatures, and their present condition amongst us requires our serious consideration."²⁷⁶ Woolman pointed out that

his [God's] care is over his smallest creatures; and a multitude of men escape not his notice: And though many of us are trodden down, and despised, yet he remembers them: He seeth their affliction, and looketh upon the spreading increasing exaltations of the oppressor.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴Ibid.; also John Woolman, "Some Considerations," Part II, 233.

²⁷⁵John Woolman, "Some Considerations," Part II, 220.

²⁷⁶Ibid., 237.

²⁷⁷Ibid.

Following his recognition by the Quakers as a minister, he made thirty journeys throughout the eastern American colonies during the next twenty-nine years. It is questionable if any eighteenth-century antislavery leader travelled as widely as Woolman. He journeyed as far north as Massachusetts, down through Rhode Island, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, the Carolinas, and through his home province of West Jersey.

Woolman's first ministerial journey (1743) was a two week excursion through West Jersey. Three years later, he made his first southern journey through Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina, covering a distance of approximately fifteen hundred miles over a three month duration.²⁷⁸ He writes in his *Journal* that he rode "about 1500 miles and sailed about 150" in his northern journey through Rhode Island, Newport, Dartmouth, Dover, and Long Island the following year (1747).²⁷⁹

In his travels Woolman called the Society of Friends to peace, purity, and the proper treatment of slaves. This proved to be an effective order to move the Quaker discipline in the direction of full emancipation of their slaves.²⁸⁰ In 1752,

²⁷⁸See Appendix , 150.

²⁷⁹Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 42.

²⁸⁰Scherer, *Slavery and the Churches*, 172.

Woolman became clerk of the Burlington Quarterly Meeting of Ministers and Elders,²⁸¹ conferring greater authority and power to his antislavery campaign.

Woolman was sensitive to the feelings and emotions of his fellow Quakers. He was always conscious that his speech must be in the spirit of humility and meekness and "in the love of the gospel."²⁸² Yet he was cognisant that if he were honest in declaring the truth, he could not please everyone, including himself. He records in his *Journal*, "[I] laboured to be content in the way of my duty, however disagreeable to my own inclination."²⁸³

In Woolman's view, the prevalent narcissism and luxuries of the world had invaded the church through the institution of slavery. The widespread hostility and animosity he perceived in the churches also weighed heavily upon him. He notes in his *Journal*:

Instead of the spirit of meekness, gentleness, and heavenly vision, which are the necessary companions of the true sheep of Christ, a spirit of fierceness and the love of dominion too generally prevailed.²⁸⁴

He observed that such a spirit dominated the slaveholders and this caused much of their mistreatment of slaves. He labored to bring peace and unity into the Society of Friends and to lead them into a state of purity.

²⁸¹Cady, John Woolman, 78.

²⁸²Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 34.

²⁸³*Ibid.*, 52.

²⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 64.

During his journey to Virginia in 1757, Woolman was deeply troubled over the mistreatment of slaves. He registers in his *Journal* that Negro marriages were frequently destroyed because husbands and wives were sold separately on the market; men with whips followed slaves in the fields as they did their work; slaves had insufficient food to eat - their diet was composed of "one peck of Indian corn and salt for one week with some few potatoes;" parents had barely enough clothes to cover their nakedness; and boys and girls ten and twelve years old were often seen stark naked amongst their master's children. On the other hand, the masters and their families had abundance to eat, were dressed in the finest garments and enjoyed their liberty.²⁸⁵ Such injustice and cruelty vexed Woolman and enhanced his vision for emancipation.

Another concern of Woolman was the neglect by masters to educate their slaves. He states that slave owners denied slaves schooling and many disapproved of educating them. He reminded the masters that their wealth and luxurious lifestyles were the result of their slaves' labor and they owed them an education. He writes,

These are a people who have made no agreement to serve us and who have not forfeited their liberty that we know of. These are souls for whom Christ died, and for our conduct toward them we must answer before that Almighty Being who is no respecter of persons.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵Ibid., 65.

²⁸⁶Ibid., 65-66.

In 1760, Woolman made a journey to Newport, Rhode Island. Cady says that, paradoxically, this "thriving seaport was a center of both Quakerism and the infamous African slave trade."²⁸⁷ Woolman informs us that

the great number of slaves in these parts and the continuance of that trade from there to Guinea made deep impression on me, and my cries were often put up to my Father in secret that he would enable me to discharge my duty faithfully in such way as he might be pleased to point out to me.²⁸⁸

Woolman was deeply afflicted when he learned at the Yearly Meeting in Newport that numerous slaves had arrived from Africa and were being auctioned by a Society member. In his *Journal*, he writes that he experienced "many cogitations and was sorely distressed." He equates his feelings with those of the prophet Habakkuk, "When I heard, my belly trembled, my lips quivered, my appetite failed, and I grew outwardly weak. I trembled in myself that I might rest in the day of trouble" (Hab. 3:16). Following the Yearly Meeting, Woolman met with a number of leading elders in a private home. He tells us that his "exercise was heavy and [he] was deeply bowed in spirit before the Lord...and the subject was handled in a calm and peaceable spirit."²⁸⁹

These Yankee slaveholders were more difficult to deal with than southern farmers. Woolman yearned to meet privately with his hosts but was "favoured to

²⁸⁷Cady, John Woolman. 101.

²⁸⁸Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 108.

²⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 109, 112.

give up thereto."²⁹⁰ It appears that Friends who were visiting with him advised him, for some unknown reason, not to confront these northern slaveholders at that time.

Woolman felt compelled in his spirit to visit the country where the work of George Fox and his associates had transpired over one hundred years earlier. There were probably several reasons for Woolman's journey to England. He wished to personally visit the areas where George Fox had ministered; he wanted to see firsthand the condition and treatment of slaves in England; he wanted to meet his English Quaker peers; and he planned to spread his antislavery message throughout the country. Upon reading his *Journal* one senses a kinship of Woolman with George Fox and a devotion to his cause. They had similar ideals and goals: both propagated Quakerism and Quaker theology, they were itinerant Quaker ministers, they advocated abolition in their writings, and both travelled in the interests of slaves. Woolman urged Quakers to return to their paradigm of the Inner Light and follow the dictates of the Spirit, as Fox had advocated.

In 1772, Woolman embarked upon his ministerial visit to England. He sailed on the *Mary and Elizabeth* with Samuel Hemlin Jr. whom he calls his "beloved friend." He was irritated over expensive carvings and furnishings in the cabins which, he claimed, were vain and increased the cost of his passage on the ship. He records in his *Journal*, "I felt a scruple with regard to paying my money to

²⁹⁰Ibid., 107.

defray such expenses." He refused to sleep in a cabin, not out of poverty, but because he believed it represented vanity, and chose the steerage where the sailors slept in much discomfort.²⁹¹ This is simply another illustration of how his principles caused him to continually search his heart in order to lay aside his own desires and obey what he believed was the will of God. As a Quaker, he chose to live a simple lifestyle exemplifying the proper use of resources, even if it meant physical discomfort and misunderstanding.

Upon his arrival in London forty-nine days later, Woolman "went straightway to the Yearly Meeting of Ministers and Elders [in Devonshire House, London] which had been gathered about...half an hour."²⁹² Janet Whitney describes his strange attire as he entered the Meeting:

His dress was as follows - a white hat, a coarse raw linen shirt, without anything about the neck, his coat, waistcoat and breeches of white coarse woolen cloth with wool buttons on, his coat without cuffs, white yarn stockings, and shoes of uncured leather with bands instead of buckles, so that he was all white.²⁹³

Woolman was rather conspicuous among his English counterparts in their black, brown, and plain gray suits, with spotless linen at the neck and wrists, their knee breeches, and their buckled shoes.²⁹⁴ He had no time to previously introduce

²⁹¹Ibid., 163, 164.

²⁹²Ibid., 181.

²⁹³Whitney, John Woolman, 393-94.

²⁹⁴Ibid., 393.

himself to the ministers and elders, since he made his appearance late and unannounced. The English Quakers were not inclined to accept such an odd-looking American Friend, even though he had an official certificate from the Society of Friends back home.

An English Friend suggested that Woolman return to America. The visitor sat in silence for a while, undoubtedly greatly affected by the rebuke, and waited for the Spirit to guide him. Eventually he arose and addressed the meeting, advising the Friends that he was willing to work, but he must travel in England and needed their blessing. Frederick Tolles writes, "When he closed, the Friend who had advised against his further service rose up and humbly confessed his error, and avowed his full unity with the stranger."²⁹⁵ Woolman had convinced the English Quakers of his genuineness and the authentic nature of his visit and received their full endorsement.

After leaving the meeting, Woolman began a tour of Northern England. He walked all the way to York, traversing over four hundred miles by foot. He refused to ride the stagecoaches because of the overexposure and overwork of both horses and men. When he arrived in York (9 September 1772) he showed symptoms of smallpox, the disease which he often mentioned in his *Journal* and

²⁹⁵Whittier, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 208-09, footnote.

most feared.²⁹⁶ Following a short illness, he died on 7 October 1772 and was buried in Bishophill graveyard.²⁹⁷ Returning to the cradle of Quakerism had cost him his life, yet even in death he sought to be consistent to Quaker ideals.

John Woolman was an intelligent, conscientious individual beyond the common level. He had earned the trust and respect of thousands of Quakers in the American colonies and throughout Northern England. He did not impose himself or his views on others but his lifestyle and unoffensive manner were very forceful and appealing. Wherever Woolman journeyed he had an audience. He brought slaveholders, through his personal encounters, face to face with the broader consequences of slavery and, in his own gentle and unassuming manner, sought to secure liberty to all innocent people in bondage. His ideas were advanced in such a way as to appeal to most Friends, including those who held slaves. Slaveholders, as well as slaves, were victims in Woolman's view and he demonstrated great concern for both wherever he travelled. "To have concern for another person is, above all else, to experience a feeling, 'a movement of the soul'," Tom Kitwood writes in *Concern for Others*, "in which that person's being is honoured and respected as if it were one's own."²⁹⁸ Freedom for slaves and release from guilt for slaveholders was

²⁹⁶Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 189.

²⁹⁷Trueblood, *The People Called Quakers*, 166.

²⁹⁸Tom Kitwood, *Concern for Others: a New Psychology of Conscience and Morality* (London and New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1990), 10.

Woolman's vision and his untiring vocation and can be classed as his "movement of the soul."

CHAPTER SEVEN

WOOLMAN'S LITERARY WORKS

John Woolman's significance extended beyond his Quaker lifestyle and role as a travelling minister. He was not only a well-spoken preacher, he was also a skillful writer and his well reasoned works had a considerable impact upon the Quakers' successful conclusion to their involvement in slavery. His literary proficiency is evident in his *Journal* and *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes*, Parts I and II, which were amongst the most extensively circulated and widely read works in the eighteenth-century American colonies.

It was common for early colonial leaders and religious figures to keep journals or records of their travels, works, and experiences. George Whitefield (1715-70) and David Brainerd (1718-47) kept accounts of their ministries, which differ from John Woolman's in several respects. For example, Whitefield constantly employs action verbs in his writings, whether it's nature erupting in a

violent storm, a calmness, his acts of mercy, or his preaching endeavors. There are no moments of boredom, idleness, or passivity, nor are there discouraging times such as Woolman describes, although one may assume he experienced such seasons.

The largest portion of Whitefield's journal is occupied with his ongoing saga with a band of fierce warriors and the ship's crew during his ocean voyages. He employs the ocean, storms, and the ensuing smooth periods to provide the background and pace of his ongoing efforts to calm the soldiers and sailors, and eventually turn many to Christ. Whitefield modeled himself after numerous biblical images, having Paul as the most outstanding, with whom he especially associated himself in persecutions. He repudiated Wesley's denunciation of slavery in Georgia and urged its legality. Whitefield used his *Journal* as a medium to build his reputation and maintain his presence in England and her American colonies through his preaching and charitable acts.²⁹⁹

David Brainerd's *Journal* is chiefly about his devotional life and his intense desire to know and serve God in a greater way. It demonstrates the contrast of true religion and artificial piety, of sincere worship and mere emotionalism.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁹Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism*, Library of Religious Biography (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 51-65.

³⁰⁰See Richard A. Hasler, *Journey with David Brainerd: Forty Days or Forty Nights with David Brainerd* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975).

Brainerd, the young missionary to the American Indians, who died at twenty-nine years of age, takes his readers to the neglected natives of his day and instills a compassion and empathy in them for the often forgotten and overlooked people of society. His writing is an excellent example of a man who inwardly was a mystic but outwardly a model of action and social reform.

The Journal of John Woolman stands as one of the most significant of its genre in the eighteenth century. Tolles, in his introduction to the *Journal*, describes it as a "classic example of the Quaker spirit at its best."³⁰¹ The theme of love - heavenly, divine, universal - gently and insistently flows through its pages. Cady says that Woolman's *Journal* is a literary classic for three reasons. First, it communicates and expresses the best "atmosphere, values, and living inwardness of a singular and interesting culture." Second, it "presents a personality of extraordinary human sweetness and spiritual beauty." Finally, it is a unique "triumph of style."³⁰² Upon reading it one experiences a Quaker culture that is

³⁰¹Frederick B. Tolles, introduction to *The Journal of John Woolman and a Plea for the Poo*, The John Greenleaf Whittier Edition Text (New York: Corinth Books, 1961 [originally published 1774]), v.

³⁰²Cady, *John Woolman*, 128, 129. The noted historian on John Woolman, Amelia Mott Gummere, informs us that the *Journal*, "couched in such unique and delicate English," has been employed as a text book at Princeton University "for the purity of its English, and in 1920 the State of Pennsylvania required it of its candidates in the public school examinations." It also stands second in choice on the famous "Book Shelf" of the late President Eliot of Harvard. See Amelia Mott Gummere, ed., *The Journal and Essays of John Woolman* (New York: The Macmillan company, 1922), ix, and Amelia Mott Gummere, *The John Woolman Memorial* (Mount Holly, NJ: n.p., n.d.), 7.

embedded in receiving the Inner Light, learning the Truth, and feeling the Love which emanates through Woolman's being and life.

Woolman's *Journal* reveals a man of extraordinary humility, meekness, and strength, who persevered in great adversity, especially in his often wearisome travels. One journeys in imagination for hundreds of miles with him in his itinerant ministry on horseback, sleeping under the stars in mosquito-infested woods, sailing in open boats through tempestuous waters, and walking day after day over all manner of terrain. It depicts a humble Quaker bringing his own lifestyle, along with that of his fellow Quakers, to what he perceived was a true biblical antislavery position. Like his forerunner, George Fox, he sought to make a difference for God in his world and left a record of his struggles and accomplishments.

The *Journal* may be properly classed as a devotional and religious work. The author continually employs biblical imagery such as "spring of pure love," "wells of living waters," and "baptize."³⁰³ Woolman provides an example of such imagery during his first trip to the South:

So we took the meetings in our way through Virginia, [and] were in some degree *baptized* into a feeling sense of the conditions of the people....Through the goodness of our Heavenly Father, the *wells of living waters* was at times opened, to our encouragement and the refreshment of the sincere-hearted [*italics mine*].³⁰⁴

³⁰³Moulton's Glossary says the term baptize means to "initiate, acquaint, make aware, enrich spiritually." See Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 314.

³⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 37.

John Woolman's first essay on slavery entitled *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes*, Part I, was written following his major journey to the South in 1746, where slavery was more prevalent than in the North.³⁰⁵ He adopted as his starting point the scripture text, "Forasmuch as ye did it to the least of my brethren, ye did it to me" (Matt. 25:40). Prior to his death in 1750, Samuel (John's father) expressed concern to his son for the slaves. "I have all along been deeply affected with the oppression of poor Negroes," he said, "and now, at last, my concern for them is as great as ever."³⁰⁶ He was deeply interested in *Some Considerations*, Part I and, after reading it, proposed a few changes which John accepted. He was very pleased that John had written about the Negroes and encouraged him to have it published. It remained in John's private possession for another four years because he believed the time was not ripe for publication. In 1754, however, he presented it to the Overseers of the Press of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting where it was officially sanctioned and published the same year at the Society's expense.³⁰⁷ David Byron Davis says that the intervening years between 1746 and 1754

represented a turning point in the history of Western culture. To both religious and secular writers the period brought an almost explosive

³⁰⁵Part I is composed of twelve pages in Moulton's ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 198-209.

³⁰⁶Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 45.

³⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 13.

consciousness of man's freedom to shape the world in accordance with his own will and reason.³⁰⁸

The effects of the Enlightenment were abounding in America during this period and a number of works by Enlightenment thinkers were being circulated throughout the colonies. Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des lois* (published in 1748) and James Foster's *Discourses* (1752) challenged traditional justifications of slavery. In 1755, Hutcheson's *System of Moral Philosophy*, Rousseau's *Discours sur l'inégalité*, de Jaucourt's first antislavery article in *Encyclopedié*, and Franklin's conjectures on the economic extravagance of slave labor caused Americans to consider the resourcefulness of the whole practise of slavery. When Woolman published *Some Considerations*, Part I, the institution of slavery was being questioned in the North and the South.

The religious material for the Quaker slavery debate was provided mainly by John Woolman. *Some Considerations*, Part I, centers on the slaves and their bondage to white masters and proposes the thesis that liberty is the right of innocent people. Woolman argued that the principles of brotherhood and the golden rule apply to blacks as well as whites. The essay offers a brief insight into the semantics that identifies "black" with slavery and "white" with liberty. If slaveholders

³⁰⁸Davis, *Slavery in Western Culture*, 485.

endured the same maltreatment, sufferings, and atrocities as the slaves, Woolman contended, they would act and live in a similar manner.

Woolman called for humane Christian treatment of all people without respect of persons. "What then shall we do when God riseth up;" Woolman asked, "and when he visiteth, what shall we answer him?"³⁰⁹ Woolman did not specifically make mention of his fellow Quakers, yet they could not help but apply the message personally.

According to Thomas Drake, *Some Considerations*, Part I, received a wider distribution than any previous antislavery work ever written. It was a forerunner of later writings on slavery and the slave trade and prepared the way for antislavery pronouncements by the Society of Friends.³¹⁰ By 1756, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting decided to ban Quakers from importing blacks or purchasing them for a term of life. Two years later, they condemned the slave trade and required Quaker slaveholders to withdraw completely from public office.³¹¹ It is evident that Woolman's first essay had a major effect on Quakers in promoting the abolition of the slave trade, both in Britain and the American colonies, and in their decisions concerning changes to Quaker involvement in slavery.

³⁰⁹John Woolman, "Some Considerations," Part I, 207.

³¹⁰Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 56.

³¹¹*Ibid.*, 59-60.

Some Considerations, Part II, was written in 1760 and printed by the Society two years later.³¹² This time Woolman refused the Society's offer to pay printing costs and defrayed all expenses himself. He surmised that slave-owning Friends would object if their funds provided payment for its publication and would reject its message. He also thought that if his work were purchased it would reach a more attentive audience. Woolman offered the books for sale at cost, sending some to Virginia, New York, and Newport, "where there appeared prospect of doing it to advantage."³¹³ Woolman employed Deuteronomy 1:17 as the focus for Part II: "Ye shall not respect persons in judgment, *but* ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's." While Part I focused on slaves, the heart of Part II was the slaveholders and their ill-treatment of the slaves. Part II was stronger and more forceful in its call than Part I.

There are two great themes which flow through *Some Considerations*, Part II. The first is in the form of a question: Could the slaveholder place himself in his slaves' place and give approval to a system that stole African people from their families and homeland? The second is that slave owners had become absorbed in the pursuit of luxury, wealth, and materialism, and had succumbed to greed. Slaveholders, by their example, were depraving the minds of their young

³¹²Moulton's edition of Part II contains 28 pages in Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 210-37.

³¹³*Ibid.*, 117-18.

children and "their hearts [were] becom[ing] in a great measure shut up against the gentle movings of uncreated Purity."³¹⁴ David Brion Davis writes,

God's displeasure was already manifest in a succession of wars and calamities. And it was the prophecy of John Woolman that if Americans continued to be unfaithful to their high density, their descendants would face the awful retribution of God's justice.³¹⁵

In this essay - his last on the slavery issue - Woolman focused on the slave trade, slavery and slaveholders and attacked them from a new direction. He denounced the trade as inhumane, condemned the prevalent notion of slave children suffering for the sins of their parents, and reproved the hypocrisy of masters who lived off their slaves' labor while they pretended to follow the "True Shepherd." At the same time, he identified himself with the slave owners and their sins against their slaves. Woolman concluded with these words, "Negroes are our fellow creatures and their present condition amongst us requires our serious consideration."³¹⁶

In his writings, Woolman used the old antislavery arguments in a way which transformed them. One way he successfully accomplished this, as Sydney James points out, was to "attach slaveholding to the root stocks of all evil acts, self-will."³¹⁷ This was in contrast to doing God's will which was paramount in Quaker

³¹⁴John Woolman, "Some Considerations," Part II, 237.

³¹⁵Davis, *Slavery in Western Culture*, 493.

³¹⁶Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 327.

³¹⁷Sydney V. James, *A People Among Peoples: Quaker Benevolence in 18th Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 133.

theology. Woolman viewed self-will as the problem of the colonists and asserted that they kept slaves because of their slothfulness and greed. They were passing that inheritance on to their children who would continue the practise of slavery unless the present generation of slave owners abolished it.³¹⁸

Woolman's literary works got results. Not only had the slaveholders, many of whom were Quaker ministers and leaders, read his writings, they also sanctioned and distributed them throughout the colonies. Woolman's essays were more widely read than those of other writers because he had travelled so widely and many inhabitants had seen him and heard him speak in Friends' meetings. He presented the antislavery position through his personal appearances and writings in a clear, simple, straightforward manner and convinced many of the evils of slavery.

Woolman also made Quakers feel guilty for abandoning their simplicity and openness. He believed that such ideals could be regained only by self-crucifixion or what he called "daily dying." Part of his agenda was to bring Friends face to face with the guilt of slaveholding and show them it was sinful. By disassociating themselves from the world and its evil practises, Quakers believed they could be purified by the inner movings of the Spirit through the Light within. Woolman called them back to Fox's model of following the "Light," for that was

³¹⁸John Woolman, "Some Considerations," Part I, 205.

the only way they could have a clear conscience. Woolman's efforts were rewarded as many Quakers came to agree that slaveholding was sinful in the eyes of God.

Another reason why Quakers heeded Woolman was he employed a typical eighteenth-century Quaker style in his writings. As a typical Friend, he omits all marks of honor in his works, such as "My Lord," "His Excellency" and "Your Grace." He also excludes such terms as "Sir," "Madam" and "Master" (meaning Sir) which were unacceptable to, and not practised by, Quakers. The names of the days and months are omitted since their origins are in heathenism and, instead, he uses First Day, Second Day, etc. He writes in a similar manner for the months, such as First Month, etc. Thomas Clarkson, a non-Quaker and contemporary of Woolman, says that Quakers did not use the expression "Christian name" because they did not practice baptism and therefore were not "christened."³¹⁹

In his writings, John Woolman quotes frequently and regularly from the Scriptures. Cady says that he cites the Bible "perhaps four hundred times in writing, quoting obscure texts readily, but concentrating on familiar ones."³²⁰ He employs both the Old and New Testaments fairly evenly, quoting principally from Matthew and John from the New Testament in his second essay, and Isaiah and Jeremiah from the Old Testament in his first. This is not surprising, since

³¹⁹Thomas Clarkson, *A Portraiture of Quakerism*, vol. 1 (London: [Samuel Stansbury], 1806), 298.

³²⁰Cady, *John Woolman*, 56.

Woolman had read the Bible regularly from his childhood and most likely had memorized major portions of it. Thus he provides a strong biblical argument so much respected by his contemporaries.

In this, there is a shift from George Fox's traditional Quakerism, which placed the Inner Light above the Scriptures, to a greater dependence upon the Bible.

Woolman believed that the Light within gives guidance and direction to the believer, but he does not appear to place the Inner Light above the Scriptures. In this sense, Woolman is embracing Puritan theology and moving away from traditional Quakerism. He did not make an issue of his theological stance as George Keith had done in 1691, and maybe that was why he continued to be widely accepted in Quaker circles.

The golden rule, alleged Woolman, is the best criterion by which we ought to judge our own conduct and that of others.³²¹ He believed that all people, including black slaves, fall under the scope and obligations of this rule. No one ought to look down upon another, regardless of class or status in society, because, according to Woolman, all humanity has been created in God's image and in God's likeness, making all equal.³²² This view of equality reiterated that of earlier

³²¹Woolman, "Some Considerations," Part I, 203. The golden rule states, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7: 12).

³²²Ibid., 200.

antislavery writers, such as George Fox, Samuel Sewall, and John Hepburn, as well as contemporary Enlightenment thinkers.

Woolman asserted that, since all nations are of one blood, this makes all part of one general brotherhood. He often quoted Simon Peter's experience in the home of the Gentile, Cornelius, at Caesarea, where Peter learned that all people are equal before God.³²³ Woolman claimed that to consider anyone less than a brother or to favor one nation and exclude another "plainly supposes a darkness in the understanding."³²⁴

Woolman preached that children must not be enslaved because of the cruelty or evil of their parents. He maintained that when families suffered because of parent's transgression, as the Scriptures sometimes recorded, it was probably due to what he calls the "degenerate Jews'" misunderstanding of God's ways. "Degenerate Jews" claimed that succeeding generations must suffer for the sins of their fore parents. Woolman stated that each person must pay for his own sins and children were not to receive punishment for the sins of their parents.

As a writer, Woolman used his literary skills to assist the abolition cause and spread his message of liberty. His *Journal* and *Some Considerations*, Parts I

³²³"Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34, 35).

³²⁴Woolman, "Some Considerations," Part I, 202.

and II, provide insight into his soul and his cause. His works portray a man who looked within himself and examined the wisdom that lay deep in his inner being. He then put his beliefs and concepts into words, believing that the Light within had provided the urgent message from his pen. At the end of *Some Considerations*, Part I, he writes,

To conclude, 'tis a life most certain, that a life guided by wisdom from above, agreeable with justice, equity, and mercy, is throughout consistent and amiable, and truly beneficial to society.³²⁵

All of Woolman's literary works are well written and exemplify his writing skills. His *Journal* and his *Some Considerations*, Parts I and II, present antislavery arguments on behalf of slaves in plain language and in a flowing style. One senses that his words are charitable but forceful. Woolman was aware that he was absorbed in a delicate matter when writing about slavery, but he believed it was his duty, as he says, to "offer some...considerations on this subject."³²⁶ Woolman's appeal to Quaker simplicity, peace, liberty, and especially Scripture, and his use of Enlightenment language and thought, was being heard and changes were evolving in the Society of Friends' practise of slavery.

³²⁵Woolman, "Some Considerations," Part I, 209.

³²⁶Woolman, "Some Considerations," Part II, 212.

CHAPTER EIGHT

QUAKERS REJECT SLAVERY

The Quakers made their first move away from slavery in 1755, one year after John Woolman published his now famous *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes*, Part I. Drake notes that in the same year, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting agreed to admonish Friends who either "imported slaves or purchased them locally." Some groups reported that their membership had discontinued "importing Negroes or purchasing them for term of life."³²⁷

Woolman states in his *Journal* that, three years later, he attended the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. He records the substance of his address to them concerning slaveholding:

Many slaves on this continent are oppressed, and their cries have reached the ears of the Most High. Such are the purity and certainty of his judgments, that he cannot be partial in our favor. In infinite love and goodness he hath opened our understanding from one time to

³²⁷Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 59. The quote is from a minute of the 1757 Burlington Monthly Meeting, New Jersey, in Ezra Michener, *A Retrospect of Early Quakerism* (Philadelphia: [T. E. Zell], 1860), 346.

another concerning our duty towards this people, and it is not a time for delay. Should we now be sensible of what he requires us...neglect to do our duty in firmness and constancy, still waiting for some extraordinary means to bring about their deliverance, God may by terrible things in righteousness answer us in this matter.³²⁸

The pleas of this man, who was held in high esteem, were seriously heeded as he implored Friends to act quickly on the slavery issue.

The ministers and elders did not procrastinate any longer. While they were not prepared to adopt a policy of emancipation, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting decided to exclude from their business participation any Friend who continued to buy or sell slaves and urged owners to liberate those whom they possessed. This was an unprecedented move among Quakers. Drake records that the following Yearly Meetings also adopted a policy which prohibited the buying and selling of slaves: Maryland (1759), Virginia (1768), New England (1770), and New York (1774).³²⁹ Woolman visited the western parts of Maryland and Pennsylvania in 1768. He states that he attended "the Yearly Meeting at West River," but does not say if this was the Maryland or Virginia Meeting. It is likely that it was the former.

Woolman records in his *Journal* that a number of other "weighty matters" were considered at the 1758 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

³²⁸Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 93.

³²⁹Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 60, 64, 65.

Several Friends expressed their desire that a visit might be made to such Friends who kept slaves, and many Friends declared that they believed liberty was the Negro's right, to which at length no opposition was made publicly, so that a minute was made more full on that subject than any heretofore, and the names of several Friends entered who were free to join in such a visit to such who kept slaves.³³⁰

The Philadelphia Meeting thus took the initiative to appoint John Woolman, along with three friends - John Scarborough, John Skyes, and Daniel Stanton - to visit slaveholding Friends. During the same year, Woolman and his associates visited many Society Meetings, families, and slaveholders in adjacent counties around Philadelphia and along the New England coast.³³¹ Woolman records in his *Journal* that the Quarterly Meetings which he attended in New England were "large and sat near eight hours."

Here I had occasion to consider that it is a weighty thing to speak much in large meetings for business. First, except our minds are rightly prepared and we clearly understand the case we speak to, instead of forwarding, we hinder business and make more labour for those on whom the burden of the work is laid.³³²

Woolman writes of the mixed reception which he and his colleagues received from the slaveholders in the Northern Colonies:

Some whose hearts were rightly exercised about them appeared to be glad of our visit. And in some places our way was more difficult, and

³³⁰Moulton, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 92, 93.

³³¹*Ibid.*, 94-105.

³³²*Ibid.*, 95.

I often saw the necessity of keeping down to the roots from whence our concern proceeded.³³³

The committee, with Woolman as leader, often met with resistance as it visited the homes of slave owners and personally confronted each one on the slavery issue. It was a common practice during these travels for Woolman to have "family meetings" which, he relates, were times of "precious reviving opportunity...where the channel of gospel love was opened." He also met with slaveholders privately. "Sometimes by a few words," he notes, "I found myself discharged from a heavy burden."³³⁴ The travels took their toll upon Woolman and his health but he did not swerve from accomplishing his mission.

The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting continued to forge ahead on the slavery issue. In 1759, its members conceded that emancipated slaves should be compensated for loss of liberty which they had endured. A number of Philadelphia slaveholding Friends refused to follow the ruling of the Yearly Meeting for some time. The other American Yearly Meetings rejected the Philadelphia accord.³³⁵

The quest for the emancipation of slaves was not yet completed for John Woolman and the Quaker abolitionists. While antislavery sentiment was growing in America, there was still much work to do. Woolman continued his itinerant

³³³Ibid., 95-96.

³³⁴Ibid., 94, 97.

³³⁵Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition 1760-1810* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1975), 211.

ministry for the next thirteen years. He made a four month journey to New England, via New Jersey and Long Island (1760), he visited numerous Quakers in and around Philadelphia and New Jersey, including a visit to Indians at Wyalusing, PA (1761-63), he travelled alone on foot to Delaware and made two trips to Maryland (1767-68), and he sailed to England (1772). He entreated his fellow Quakers, in both group and personal encounters, to treat their slaves in a Christian manner and restore their liberty.

Woolman's influence among the Society of Friends continued even after his death. In 1774, the same year they published his *Journal*, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting "made disownment the penalty for selling or transferring slaves for any reason but to set them free."³³⁶ Two years later - the year of the Declaration of Independence and four years after Woolman's death - the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting "marked the moment of the final abolition of slavery."³³⁷ Slavery was no longer an accepted practice among members of the Philadelphia Meeting. They also adopted a new Query which asked,

Are Friends clear of importing, purchasing, disposing of, or holding mankind as slaves? And do they use those well who are set free and necessarily under their care, and not in circumstances, through nonage or incapacity, to minister to their own necessities? And are they careful to educate and encourage them in a religious and virtuous life?³³⁸

³³⁶Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 71.

³³⁷*Ibid.*, 65.

³³⁸*Ibid.*, 72.

The Yearly Meetings of New England, New York, Baltimore, Virginia, and North Carolina were quick to follow Philadelphia's example in adopting emancipation. The Philadelphia Yearly Meetings of 1778 and 1779 recommended that local Meetings appoint committees to attend to the temporal and spiritual well-being of their former slaves. This included assistance in education, religious instruction, practical advice, and pecuniary compensation.³³⁹

Meanwhile, Quaker slaveholders found it difficult to liberate their slaves. Liberty meant that the planters' capital would be greatly diminished and their labor supply threatened. There was also the problem of what to do with elderly slaves and those too young to fend for themselves.

The question is asked, Why did Quakers emancipate their slaves? The historian, Herbert Aptheker, advocated the view that it was primarily from a fear of Negro revolts.³⁴⁰ It is possible that such a motive may have pervaded the thoughts of some Friends but it is unlikely that such an incentive brought liberty. It is more likely that freedom came as a result of moral and religious ideals propounded by John Woolman and his fellow-Quaker abolitionists, who charged that slaveholding obstructed the Inner Light, which was the basis of Quaker theology. Amelia Mott Gummere may be correct in stating that,

³³⁹Ibid., 77.

³⁴⁰Herbert Aptheker, "The Quakers and Negro Slavery," in *Journal of Negro History* XXV (1940): 331-62.

More than any other one man, Woolman aided the English speaking nations to throw off the disgrace of slavery; and although so late as 1800, there were still 12,442 slaves held in New Jersey, of these, thanks to the labours of John Woolman, almost none were held by Friends.³⁴¹

Of all the various dissenting sects, the Quakers alone, before the Revolution, was the only religious group to free their slaves.

The basis of the slavery controversy was, Can one human being hold another in servitude? Both sides of the debate defended their positions from the Scriptures. Those who argued for slavery had the vast majority of the population with them. Yet, the minority antislavery proponents did not lessen their struggle for freedom of the oppressed. John Woolman campaigned for their liberty for twenty-nine years throughout the American colonies, preaching, persuading, and imploring Quaker slaveholders to relinquish their stronghold on slaves. It was a long battle for the Quaker antislavery advocates to persuade their fellow antagonists that slaves should be emancipated. The idea of the equality of all people in the eyes of God, which Drake calls the "touchstone to the Truth," promulgated by John Woolman, eventually brought freedom to the Quakers' slaves.³⁴²

³⁴¹ Amelia Mott Gummere, "The Early Quakers in New Jersey," in *The Quakers in the American Colonies*, ed. Rufus M. Jones (New York, 1962), 397; quoted in Paul Rosenblatt, *John Woolman*, 39.

³⁴² Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 5.

CONCLUSION

One must ultimately pinpoint those who changed history. There has never been a reform of any kind that has lacked pioneer advocates - those who have cried in the wilderness as forerunners of others, who have been heard and accepted in later generations. It would be ludicrous to claim that John Woolman was the sole instrument in changing Quaker attitudes towards slavery. Friends, however, became more receptive to antislavery thought between the time of his first journey in 1743 and his death in England in 1772 as a result of his travels, his encounters with slaveholders, and his writings on the slavery issue.

There were several landmarks in Woolman's life which encouraged him to become an intercessor for slaves. The concerns of his father, Samuel, for the enslaved became his concerns. Writing the famous slave bill of sale for his employer brought him to the realization that he believed slavery was inconsistent with Christian principles and his own beliefs. His many experiences in slaveholding homes and with the masters themselves heightened his aversion to the practise. And his acquaintance with Enlightenment writings further enhanced his belief that exploitation of the underprivileged, especially slavery, was wrong and must end.

Twenty-nine of Woolman's fifty-two years were devoted to ministry with the Society of Friends. From house to house, town to town, and colony to colony he gently but powerfully reminded slaveholders of their responsibilities to their slaves and to God. He earned the trust and respect of Friends during his travels up and down the Atlantic seaboard, as he campaigned for better treatment and the emancipation of slaves. He had a distinct voice within the Society of Friends and, when he spoke, people listened to what he said. He played a major role among Quakers in assisting them to return to the Inner Light, to reveal the danger of spiritual bondage which, he believed, was engendered by materialism, to stimulate Quaker pacifism, to render proper treatment to native Indians, and to abolish slavery. Elton Trueblood aptly sums up John Woolman's life as one of "reverence, simplicity, frugality, and toil."³⁴³

The eighteenth century was also a time of uncertainty for Quakers as war was threatening the colonies. The Quaker slaveholders, many of whom were government officials in Pennsylvania, were being torn between their pacifist beliefs and a call from colonists to help them resist the invading Indians. Added to this, revolution and the War of Independence loomed on the horizon. John Woolman convinced the Quakers that the sin of slaveholding was bringing God's retribution upon them and the result was war. When Quakers were seeking a way out of their

³⁴³Trueblood, *The People Called Quakers*, 153.

dilemma, Woolman provides the answer - return to their pacifist tradition and a pure lifestyle. The paradox of John Woolman "is the paradox of something small making a very great difference in the world," writes Elton Trueblood. "It is the paradox of 'holy boldness' combined with a sensitive tenderness."³⁴⁴

Throughout the American Society of Friends, Woolman spread what has been called "the infection of an uneasy conscience."³⁴⁵ His quiet manner and charitable discussions provided opportunities for dialogues which few other ministers experienced. He relentlessly proclaimed a gospel that challenged all who kept slaves or oppressed any individual to identify with their victims and treat them with Christian kindness and true charity. Quakers found it difficult to refute his use of Scripture, keen arguments, sharing the guilt of slaveholders, and his personal dedication to his cause. David Brion Davis points out that the secret of Woolman's success was "his sense of personal involvement in slavery," his ability to see slavery as a social evil, and

his conviction that he shared the profound guilt of all America....In the face of stiffening resistance, he had led the way in visiting and exhorting slaveholders to cleanse themselves of corruption.³⁴⁶

John Woolman was not the founder of a religious sect like George Fox, nor a daring protestor and accuser like Ralph Sandiford or Benjamin Lay. Yet in

³⁴⁴Ibid., 167.

³⁴⁵Sperry, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 161.

³⁴⁶Davis, *Slavery in Western culture*, 489-91.

his quiet way he demonstrated against the evils of society with symbolic action. He left his business enterprise because it interfered with his moral convictions on a plain lifestyle; he paid money to slaves in homes where he observed that they received improper treatment; he declined the use of dyes and other products produced by slave labor; he refused the comforts of a ship's cabin in crossing the Atlantic Ocean and chose the steerage, identifying himself with the underpaid sailors in their sufferings and hardships; and he walked hundreds of miles in England instead of riding in coaches, because horses and workers received abusive treatment and care. John Woolman described himself as one who has

gone forward, not as one travelling in a road cast up and well prepared, but as a man walking through a miry place in which are stones here and there safe to step on, but so situated that, one step being taken, time is necessary to see where to step the next.³⁴⁷

He was never sure where his next step would take him, but he knew it would be for the improvement of slaves and for their emancipation.

During his ministry, he was concerned for the oppressor as well as the oppressed and gently urged a conversion of heart in his listeners. His personal faith and humility motivated others, including slaveholders, to emulate his lifestyle. Slave owners found that though Woolman did not condemn them, yet, because of his message, they came to condemn their own ways and to turn from them. His

³⁴⁷Whittier, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman*, 222.

love for his fellow creatures caused him to embrace the evildoer - the slaveholder - while he hated the evil - the practice of slavery. His ultimate goal for the oppressed was liberty, for, he declared, "liberty is the right of innocent men."³⁴⁸

Historians have generally celebrated Woolman as a saint. He tried to understand the dynamics which led well-intentioned men and women to corrupt themselves with slavery. Barry Levy claims that

of all the reformers, and perhaps of subsequent historians, Woolman analyzed best how the history of the...Quakers and their family system slowly led to the corruption of 'holy conversation' [or holy lifestyle].³⁴⁹

Woolman led American Quakers where they really wanted to go by providing the security of their Quaker past and by making himself a model of vigilant and selfless devotion. What he succeeded in achieving in his lifetime is not measurable nor can it be measured as long as men and women can still be influenced by his teaching and example.

³⁴⁸Woolman, "Some Considerations," Part II, 236.

³⁴⁹Barry Levy, *Quakers and the American Family: British Settlement in the Delaware Valley* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 257.

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APPENDIX

WOOLMAN CHRONOLOGY

(Journeys and visitations were with one or more companions, except as otherwise noted.)

- 1720 (October 19) Born at Rancocas, Burlington County, New Jersey.
- ca. 1736-1739 Spiritual conflicts, culminating in firm religious vocation.
- ca. 1741 Began living in Mount Holly, New Jersey, where he first attended to customers and kept books for a shopkeeper, and later became an apprentice tailor.
- ca. 1742 Expressed his call to the public ministry by speaking in meetings.
- 1743 First religious journey, to points in New Jersey (2 weeks).
- ca. 1746 Began working independently as a tailor, gradually developing also a retail trade.
- First southern journey, through Pennsylvania into Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina (3 months, 1500 miles).
- Journey to points in New Jersey (22 days, 340 miles).
- 1747 First journey through Long Island and New England (4 months, 1650 miles).
- 1748 Journey into New Jersey and Maryland (6 weeks, 550 miles).
- 1749 Married Sarah Ellis, "a well inclined damsel."
- 1750 Death of his father, Samuel Woolman (1690-1750).
- Birth of his daughter Mary (1750-1797).
- 1751 Journey to upper part of New Jersey, probably alone (9 days, 170 miles).
- 1753 Journey to points in Pennsylvania (2 weeks).

- 1754 Publication of *Some Consideration on the Keeping of Negroes*.
- 1754, 1755
and 1756
(winters) Several weeks visitation in Chesterfield, Shrewsbury, and Burlington areas of New Jersey (partly alone).
- 1755 An epistle composed by Woolman and signed by fourteen Quakers, advocating the pacifist position, sent to "Friends on the Continent of America."

An epistle of Tender Love and Caution sent to Quakers throughout Pennsylvania by twenty-one Quakers, including Woolman, presenting the case for refusal to pay taxes levied principally to support war.
- 1756 Journey to points on Long Island (24 days, 316 miles).

Gave up his too successful retail merchandising business, to rely on tailoring and orchard-tending as his chief gainful occupations.
- ca. 1756 Began writing MS. A of the *Journal* (based upon MS. C and possibly other notes written earlier).
- 1757 Second souther journey - into Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina (2 months, 1150 miles).
- 1758 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting adopts formal minute urging Quakers to free their slaves, arranging for the visitation of slaveholders, and decreeing that any who buy or sell slaves are to be excluded from participating in the business affairs of the church.
- 1758 and
1759 Visitation of many Quaker meetings, families, and slaveholders in Philadelphia and adjacent counties (partly alone).
- 1759 A epistle composed by Woolman sent to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to its constituent Quarterly and Monthly Meetings, urging Quakers to be true to their spiritual heritage.
- 1760 Second journey into New England, via New Jersey and Long Island (4 months).
- 1761-1763 Visitation of Quaker meetings, families, and slaveholders around Philadelphia and central New Jersey (partly alone).
- 1761 Decided to give up wearing dyed clothing.

- 1762 Publication of *Considerations on Keeping Negroes: Part Second*.
- 1763 Journey to Indians at Wyalusing, Pennsylvania (3 weeks).
- 1763-1764 Much of *A Plea for the Poor* - not published until 1793 - may have been composed around this time.
- 1764 and 1765 (winters) Visitation of Quakers and others near Mount Holly and along the New Jersey coast.
- 1766 Journey on foot into Delaware and along the eastern shore of Maryland.
Visitation of Quakers in upper New Jersey.
- 1767 Journey on foot, alone, into the western part of Maryland.
Visitation of Quakers in Philadelphia and Mount Holly areas, partly alone.
- 1768 Journey on foot, alone, into Maryland (5 weeks).

Probable date of publication of *Considerations on Pure Wisdom and Human Policy*.
- 1769-1770 Seriously considered making a religious visit to the West Indies; then decided to defer it, at least for the time being. Also considered, and deferred, a trip southwestward to Carolina.
- 1770 Severe attack of pleurisy.

Publication of *Considerations on the True Harmony of Mankind*.
- ca. 1770-1772 Revised and rewrote the *Journal*, preparing it for publication: also prepared his brother Abner's writings for the press.
- 1771 Marriage of Mary, John Woolman's daughter, to Samuel Comfort.
- 1772 Composed *Considerations on the True Harmony of Mankind*, not published until 1837.

Composed, shortly before sailing for England, "An Epistle to the Quarterly and Monthly Meeting of Friends," a personal letter that was published later in the year, apparently in early autumn.
- (May 1) Embarked for England.

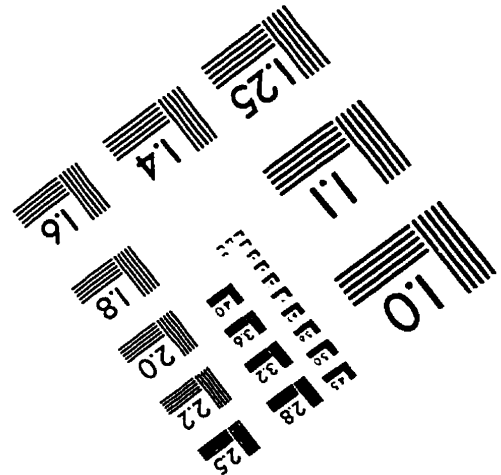
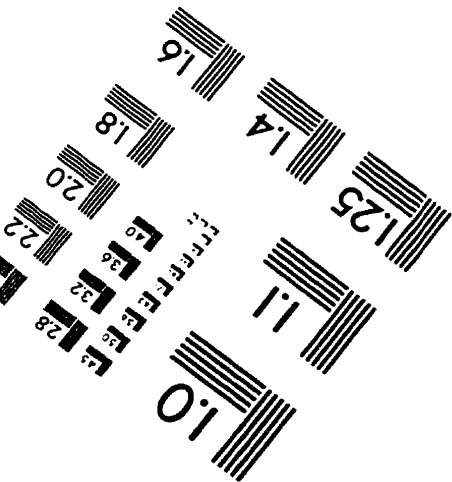
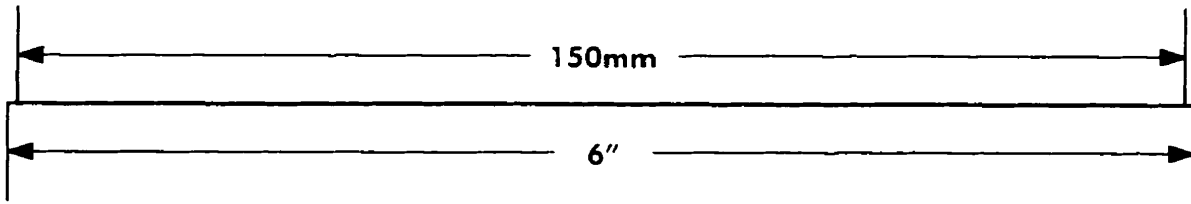
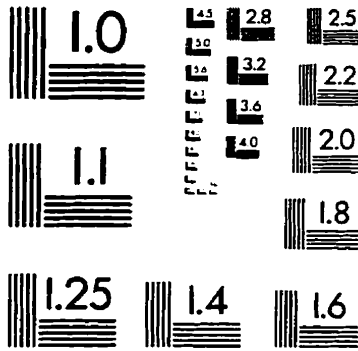
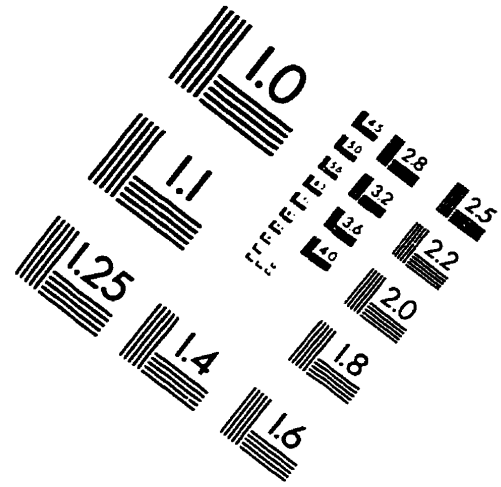
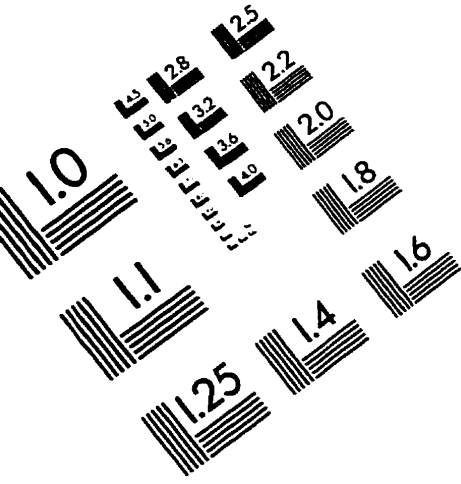
(June 8) Arrived in London.

At sea and in England, composed five short essays: "On Loving Our Neighbors as Ourselves," "On the Slave Trade," "On Trading in Superfluities," "On a Sailor's Life," and "On Silent Worship." These were published posthumously in 1773 under the title *Remarks on Sundry Subjects*.

(October 7) Died of smallpox in York, England.

"Woolman Chronology" is extracted from Phillips, ed, *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, 17-20.

IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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