

Flavas - Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Notes/Talking Points

(Prepared by Bill Samuel for Cedar Ridge Community Church Young Adults, 3/8/06)

Beginnings

- Mid-17th century (sometimes stated as 1652) in north of England
- George Fox – wandering seeker who found something, and traveled widely preaching the Everlasting Gospel
- “Valiant Sixty” of men and women who traveled the world

Why something new?

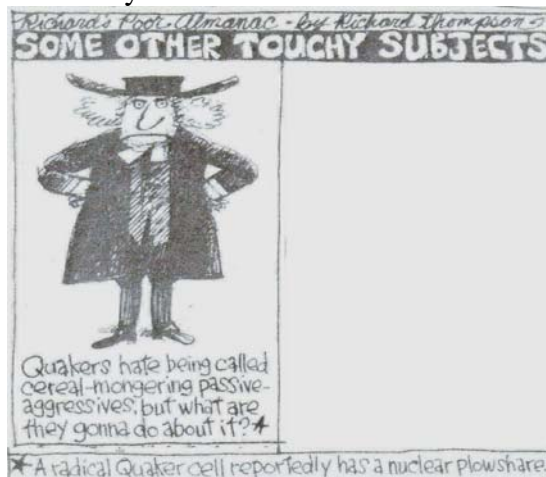
To return to “primitive Christianity” without the accretions of “manmade religion” – rituals, hierarchies, elaborate theologies beyond scripture and direct revelation, accommodations to the world, etc. Believed Christianity had been in the apostasy for many centuries.

Basic Beliefs and Practices

- “Christ has come to teach his people himself.” Jesus Christ as directly available to each person, and as our priest, bishop, etc. instead of human clergy. Christ is the Word of God (see John 1:1-14)
- **Perfection** – Christ saves us from our sins, not in our sins. Power of Christ to completely transform our lives in the here and now. There is a “Day of Visitation” for each individual but the transformation process is ongoing.



- **Worship** without human priests, rituals, outward symbols or pre-planned program. Christ is seen as the end of all types, figures and shadows, and therefore we are to receive directly from Christ without intervention of any outward trappings. Friends traditionally gather in silence. Out of the silence, Christ may move any present to offer vocal ministry, vocal prayer, or some other expression.
- **Church business** is done on the basis of unity, rather than voting. The belief is that Christ speaks to all of us, and is consistent, and if we are patient to listen to His voice, all in the congregation will be clear on His will and in unity.
- **Peace.** “we certainly know, and testify to the world, that the Spirit of Christ, which leads us into all truth, will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdoms of this world.” (from 1660 Declaration) Friends are one of the Historic Peace Churches with a traditional discipline of non-participation in war. Friends received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947 for their relief efforts for those suffering from the effects of war.



- **Equality.** Quakers believe God speaks to all, and does not favor people due to gender, race, wealth, etc. From the beginning, Quakers recognized the ministry of women. Quakers refused to treat people considered higher class by the world as any better. This

was reflected in the refusal to use honorific titles for anyone, the refusal of “hat honor” and “plain language” which used the familiar form of the third person (thee, thou) in addressing all rather than using the formal plural form (you) to those ranked higher.

- **Integrity.** Quakers believe in honesty and integrity at all times. They follow the scriptural injunction against oaths. It is largely in response to this Quaker practice that we have the alternative of affirming rather than swearing for judicial testimony and other circumstances. The Quaker reputation for integrity led to success in business ventures, as people preferred Quaker merchants because they knew they would be treated fairly. Quakers introduced the “one price system” where there was a fixed price for goods and services, with all being charged the same price.
- **Simplicity.** Quakers believe in living simply, avoiding material and other distractions from faithfulness. This was one of the reasons why they long practiced “plain dress.”

Prominent very early Friends

In addition to George Fox, some of the most prominent early Friends were Margaret Fell Fox, Isaac Pennington, James Nayler, Robert Barclay and William Penn. Penn is the best known outside of Friends. He was the Proprietor of Pennsylvania and prime mover behind its being a “Holy Experiment” of governance in right order according to God, as well as probably the most prolific early Quaker writer.

Some prominent 18th & 19th century Friends

- **John Woolman** (1720-1772), who has been called the “quintessential Quaker.” He was known for his deep spirituality, his humility and his example of living his faith. He reduced the scope of his business to be free to follow God’s leading, which included many travels in the ministry. He refused to wear dyed clothes because the dyes were produced with slave labor, refused to pay taxes for war, insisted on riding steerage when crossing the Atlantic so that he could experience the life of the poor, and insisted on walking everywhere while traveling in England because the horses used to draw carriages were badly treated. He was a key leader in freeing the Society of Friends from slaveholding generations before slavery was abolished in the United States.
- **Elizabeth Gurney Fry** (1780-1845), the “angel of Newgate Prison.” Born into a wealthy British Quaker family, she was moved by the horrible conditions in prisons and devoted much of her life to work in the prisons and for prison reform.
- **Lucretia Coffin Mott** (1793-1880) – abolitionist and women’s rights leader
- **John Greenleaf Whittier** (1807-1892) – poet
- **Walt Whitman** (1819-1892) - poet
- **Edward Hicks** (1780-1849) – sometimes considered American’s greatest folk painter, known for his many Peaceable Kingdom paintings

Some prominent 20th & 21st century Friends

- **Herbert Hoover**, prominent in Quaker war relief efforts after World War I, and later the 31st President of the United States
- **Philip Noel-Baker** – British politician who helped create the League of Nations and the United Nations; winner of the Nobel Peace prize in 1958
- **Thomas Kelly**, author of *A Testament of Devotion*

- **Richard J. Foster**, author of *Celebration of Discipline* and other devotional works, and founder of Renovaré
- **Bayard Rustin**, civil rights leader – organizer of the 1963 March on Washington
- **D. Elton Trueblood**, author of 33 books, including *The Company of the Committed* and *The Incendiary Fellowship*; founder of the Yokefellow movement

Developments Among Friends

Like many other religious groups, over the centuries Friends have split and gone in different directions. Today Friends have a wide theological range, from conservative evangelical to a universalism that sometimes seems more sympathetic to other major faiths than to Christianity. There is also a very wide range of worship styles, ranging from unprogrammed to a wide range of Protestant worship patterns. Many Quakers feel they have less common ground with other Quaker groups than with some non-Quaker groups.

Worldwide Distribution of Friends



What Can Other Christians Learn from Friends?

- That we can live in the reality of Christ leading and teaching us
- The value of a listening spirituality and the use of silence to focus on God without distractions
- That we can live Christ's gospel of peace even in today's violent world
- That Christ speaks to everyone, without need of an intermediary

Some Web sources of more information

www.quakerinfo.com www.quakerinfo.org www.fum.org www.quaker.org

Feel free to e-mail me at wsamuel@comcast.net with any further questions.