

# QUAKER ANTISLAVERY IN COLONIAL PENNSYLVANIA

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## INTRODUCTION

Friends, better known as Quakers, have been regarded as pioneers of the antislavery movement. The history of American Friends' antislavery activities can be divided into three periods. The first period covers the whole colonial period and comes to an end about the American Revolution when they finally decided to abolish slavery among the members of their church, the Society of Friends (the official name of the church of Friends or Quakers). The second period includes the founding era of the United States and continues until the 1830s when the antislavery movement became radical. After the Society of Friends succeeded in extinguishing slaveholding among its members, those individual Friends who were concerned with antislavery (but not necessarily the Society of Friends as a religious body at this stage) began to appeal to non-Friends. Friends took lead in organizing manumission societies. Mostly through these societies, Friends worked on state legislatures and on Congress for the prohibition of slave importation and for the gradual abolition. They were also active in the colonization scheme and antislavery journalism. Friends dominated the antislavery movement during this second period. The last stage of Quaker antislavery from the 1830s on is not as glorious as the previous ones. When the opposition to slavery assumed a violent tone and "Garrisonian abolition" came to the front, Friends withdrew from the antislavery movement.<sup>1</sup> Among these three, it is the first period that has attracted historians' attention. Writings on Quaker antislavery hitherto have mostly been devoted to this period.

Friends had not been against slavery from the very beginning of their settlement in America. They accepted slavery as a matter of course; they were involved in the slave trade and slaveholding. Their antislavery sentiments were fostered in the interaction between the teaching of Quakerism and the realities of the New World. As it was the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting<sup>2</sup> that played a leading role among American Yearly Meetings (New England, New York, North Carolina and Maryland), the examination of this Yearly Meeting is regarded as a guide to understand the origin and development of Quaker antislavery as a whole.

In his book examining the origin of Quaker humanitarianism, Sydney V. James directs his attention to the importance of the French and Indian War and to its subsequence that Quaker Assemblymen withdrew from the Pennsylvania government in 1756 for their peace testimony. According to James, Quaker humanitarianism was an alternative for political activities, or a compromise between religious principles and desire for worldly significance.<sup>3</sup> James asserts that

Quaker humanitarianism, part of which was antislavery, had its origin not in Quaker teachings but in the unfavorable political circumstances. In this context, the rise of Quaker antislavery was one of the incidental results of the Quaker trial during the French and Indian War.

While most of the later historians have accepted James' interpretation, some Quaker historians do not entirely agree with James. Edwin B. Bronner criticizes that James exaggerates the contrast between Quaker attitudes towards society before 1755 and those of after 1755, and points out that he has not provided enough evidence. Besides, J. William Frost denies to observe the casual relationship between Friends' withdrawal from the Pennsylvania government and the vitalization of Quaker antislavery. For example, it was in 1754, almost a year before Braddock's defeat, that the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting declared its new position that not only the slave trade but also slavery itself was evil. Instead, Frost stresses the continuity of Quaker antislavery throughout the colonial period and suggests that Quaker antislavery developed of its own accord.<sup>4</sup>

This paper aims to investigate into the process in which Philadelphia Friends gave up slaveholding: namely, how the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting dealt with slavery problems and how it came to demand its members to set their slaves free. The development of antislavery in the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting until the American Revolution is divided into two parts, 1688-1754 and 1754-1776, for two reasons. First, the goals of antislavery were different. The earlier efforts were concentrated on the prohibition of any transfer (importing, buying and selling) of slaves. Antislavery of the latter period was directed to the prohibition of slaveholding. Another reason is the difference of intensity in dealing with the slavery question. We will first follow the gradual spread of antislavery from 1688 to 1754, and then analyze its full development in the 1750s, 1760s and 1770s. A special emphasis is placed on the interaction between the Yearly Meeting on one hand and its subordinating Meetings (including individual Friends) on the other. This way it is hoped that this paper will offer a more precise history of Quaker antislavery in the colonial era and that some of the distinguished features of Quaker antislavery will be introduced.<sup>5</sup>

## I. ORGANIZATION OF THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

We need some preliminary knowledge about the organization of the Society of Friends to see the development of Quaker antislavery through the interaction between the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and its subordinating Meetings.

The Society of Friends held Monthly, Quarterly and Yearly Meetings. Among these, the Monthly Meeting was a basic organizational unit which had the most immediate contact with individual Friends. It had Friends' gatherings for worship in a certain geographical area under control. The Monthly Meeting supervised its membership; it had the authority to discipline and disown those who did not keep Quaker testimonies. The Quarterly Meeting was simply a regional affiliation of Monthly Meetings and did not have substantial power. The Monthly Meeting chose delegates to the Quarterly Meeting; then the Quarterly Meeting appointed and sent representatives to the Yearly Meeting. The Yearly Meeting was charged with the utmost authority in each district. Yearly Meeting sessions consisted of two parts. One was the meetings for worship in which every member could participate. The other part was the sessions for business. They were open only to ministers, elders and appointed representatives. Ministers and elders were supposed to be more influential than delegates in the Yearly Meeting, for there was a turnover in delegates each year.<sup>6</sup>

Monthly Meetings and Yearly Meetings functioned for making decisions. Decision-making in Quaker meetings was very unique. Friends did not trust numbers. Decisions were dependent on how the clerk read the “sense of the meeting” or the “weight of the meeting.” The decision was regarded as a unanimous consent. Very often the decision was postponed to reach unanimity. There was much room left for the discretion of the clerk. In the worst case, there was a danger that the clerk would control a decision of the meeting.<sup>7</sup>

The religious conviction that there is “that of God in every man” and that man should be free to follow His direction, in fact, implied a possibility of falling into spiritual anarchism. The ideal of Quaker meeting was that Friends in a group would counterbalance the excesses of individualism and share mature deliberation. But what would happen when one’s perception of God’s leading was different from the consensus of the meeting? Some Friends did claim their righteousness and deny the infallibility of the meeting. They denounced other Friends openly, generally making use of tracts. To prevent this, the “Overseers of the Press” was devised. The members of the Overseers of the Press read all the submitted manuscripts, decided whether the manuscripts were to be printed or not, and made revisions if necessary. They further determined whether the manuscripts should be printed anonymously or with the approval of Friends. Ignoring the supervision of the Overseers of the Press meant disownment.<sup>8</sup>

Friends had integrated their Meetings into a most centralized church system. Their decision-making relied on unanimity; searching for unanimity sometimes proved a difficult task. While they much valued the insight of each individual, Friends worked out the mechanism to suppress it. All these—the Quaker meeting system, the Quaker way of decision-making and the Quaker church’s prime concern to keep harmony among its members—had a great influence on the development of Quaker antislavery.

## II. EARLY QUAKER ANTISLAVERY (1688-1754)

We will follow the increasing opposition to slavery till 1754 in this chapter, dividing it into four periods. Each period represents a certain aspect of Quaker antislavery in the colonial era.

### 1. 1688-1696

William Penn, who was a Quaker and the founder of Pennsylvania colony, and many of his followers were involved in slavery in newly settled Pennsylvania. Some of other earliest immigrants, however, did express their displeasure at the sight of the hopeless bondage of slaves. They were those Friends who were attracted by the vision of Penn’s “Holy Experiment” and immigrated to Pennsylvania. The early antislavery protests in America—the Germantown protest and the Keithians’ opposition—were not unrelated to their high expectations of life in the New World.

In 1688, the Friends of Germantown, Pennsylvania presented their opposition to slavery in a document, which is regarded as the earliest antislavery protest in the English colonies. These Friends had recently come from the Rhineland. Black slaves were very unfamiliar to their eyes, and they could not reconcile slavery with their religious conscience. While it pointed out evils associated with slavery (such as man-stealing and separation of a family), the Germantown protest appealed to Christian teaching and pacifism. Germantown Friends’ experience that they had suffered from religious persecution in their homeland might have made them articulate the liberty of slaves. They

were also very proud of Quaker Pennsylvania. Therefore, they insisted that Friends should behave uprightly, all the more because “Especially where ye Europeans are desirous to know what manner ye Quakers doe rule in their province ; —and most them doe look upon us with an envious eye.”<sup>9</sup>

The Germantown protest was presented to the Dublin Monthly Meeting, and then forwarded to the Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting. But this Meeting passed it on this time to the Yearly Meeting for the reason that the problem was “too great a weight for this meeting to determine.” The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting just temporized the matter because many Friends kept slaves especially in other colonies.<sup>10</sup>

The slavery problem was combined with religious heresy during the Keithian controversy (1691-1692). A conflict within the Quaker community revealed itself about ten years after the foundation of Pennsylvania. The Keithian controversy originated in a theological dispute. George Keith, a leading Quaker minister, a Scotsman who came to America in 1684, was alarmed to recognize that young Friends had little knowledge of the Bible and that Friends departed from orthodox Christianity in the environment of the New World. He started emphasizing the importance of historical Christ and Bible teaching. He proposed to adopt the articles of faith and create a new church order of elders and deacons. Keith’s proposals were unacceptable to most of Friends, who spiritualized Christ and valued the Inward Light above the Bible. Keith and his followers started to meet separately and named themselves “Christian Quakers.” Keith began to denounce Quaker involvement in slavery after the split became apparent between him and other Quaker leaders.<sup>11</sup> George Keith and his schismatic Quakers emancipated their slaves and attacked the slaveholding orthodox Friends. Keith published *An Exhortation and Caution to Friends concerning Buying and Keeping of Negroes* in 1693, which is said to be the first antislavery pamphlet printed in America. Keith’s proposition in this pamphlet was manumission with expediency. Slaveholding Friends should teach their slaves to read and provide them with Christian education while the slaves were in their hands. But they finally had to liberate their slaves after the slaves served for a reasonable period. Keith insisted that Friends could prove being “true Christians” only by freeing their slaves.<sup>12</sup>

And yet Keith’s attack on slavery simply left bad effects on the development of Quaker antislavery. His arrogant temper and uncompromising attitudes disturbed the unity among Philadelphia Friends. Orthodox Friends avoided arguing against slavery just because antislavery was one of the reforms that Keith agitated for. The fear of schism and the devotion to order overshadowed the slavery question among Philadelphia Friends after the Keithian controversy.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. 1696-1700

Until 1696, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting was silent about slavery. However, in that year, a few individual Friends submitted papers on slavery to the Yearly Meeting.

A leading Quaker minister, Cadwalader Morgan presented a paper to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. It was a personal confession of why he gave up buying a slave. He needed a help in his farming work and ordered a slave. But he became worried, “If I Should have a bad one of them, that must be Corrected, Or would Run away, Or when I went from home, & Leave him with a woman or Maid, and he Should desire or Seek to Commit Wickedness.” It was likely that a slave would turn out a bother rather than a help to him. When he seriously thought about the troubles that slaveholding accompanied, Morgan was awoke to that slavery resulted from a desire for selfish gain.<sup>14</sup> Robert Piles, a wealthy farmer in Chester County, having his English servants retired, was planning

to buy a black. Like Morgan, however, he became dubious about the the legitimacy of slaveholding. One of the days he was worrying about the problem, he had a dream, in which he found that he could not climb an upright-standing ladder to heaven with a black pot in his hand. Piles' paper was unique in that it offered a concrete program for manumission. He proposed that respective Quarterly Meetings should decide the date for manumission by calculating labor rendered by him, and boarding and lodging which he owed his master.<sup>15</sup> One other Quaker opponent to slavery was William Southeby. He was a prominent Quaker minister who served at the Governor's Council and the Assembly. He also presented an antislavery paper to the Yearly Meeting, which is not extant now.<sup>16</sup>

These three Friends—Cadwalader Morgan, Robert Piles and William Southeby—were all leaders of good standing in Quaker communities. They were influential enough to move the Yearly Meeting. In response to their antislavery papers, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting which had not referred to the slavery problem announced its official position for the first time in 1696 :

Whereas Several papers have been Read Relating to the keeping and bringing In of Negroes, which being duly considered its the Advice of this Meeting, that Friends be Careful not to Encourage the bringing in of any more Negroes, and that such that have Negroes be Careful of them, bring them to Meetings, or have Meetings with them in their Families, and Restrain them from Loose, and Lewd Living as much as in them lies and from Rambling abroad on First Days or other Times.<sup>17</sup>

The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting allowed buying and keeping slaves for private use, but judged that the slave importation as a business venture was wrong. The living conditions of slaves looked "Loose, and Lewd" to Friends ; their "Rambling abroad" might have been a threatening sight. The Yearly Meeting urged its slaveholding members to watch over slaves' lives and to offer them religious opportunities. From this advice of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1696, we can get a hint that Philadelphia Friends became uneasy about the existence of the black population by this time.

The increasing black population was a serious problem especially in the city of Philadelphia. The sight of "the selling of Negroes at the public market place" was unbearable to Friends there. The minute of the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting on September 30, 1698 tells that a paper was read about this. The Monthly Meeting suggested that Friends ought not to sell blacks in such a manner. At the same meeting, it was decided to write to the Friends in Barbados, from where most of the blacks came, not to send any more slaves to Philadelphia. At the meeting of the following month (October 28, 1698), the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting encouraged slaveholding Friends to bring their slaves to "the public Meetings of worship." If the slaves had not come to the public Meetings, they might be "restrained or prevented from Meeting together in Companies."<sup>18</sup> In 1700, in answer to William Penn's request, the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting decided to appoint special meetings for blacks and Indians. The meeting was planned to be held once a month.<sup>19</sup>

Friends such as Cadwalader Morgan and Robert Piles questioned slavery only after they thought of buying a black and deliberated over the troubles slaveholding would bring about. The fear that they could not discipline black slaves dominated their considerations. The decisions of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting were much prompted by the anxiety about an increasing black population. At this stage, racial fear or racial extraneousness obviously motivated Friends to avoid their involvement in slavery.

## 3. 1700-1728

Slavery most prevailed in the earliest few decades of the 18th century in Pennsylvania.<sup>20</sup> Those who denounced slavery did exist during this period, and yet their voices were subdued by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

It was Friends in Chester County that continuously pressed the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting for the prohibition of buying imported slaves during the years of 1711-1716. In 1711, rural Chester Friends (the Chester Quarterly Meeting) expressed their "dissatisfaction with Friends buying and encouraging the bringing in of Negroes" and asked the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to face up again to the moral problem of slavery. To this urgent protest, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting repeated its minute of 1696 not to encourage the importation of slaves.<sup>21</sup>

While it rejected taking any new step to discourage buying imported slaves, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting sent the London Yearly Meeting an epistle in search for counsel on the slavery question. As Friends in other provinces were also involved in slavery, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting found it very difficult to get a conclusion on the matter independently. It, therefore, referred the slavery question to the London Yearly Meeting which exchanged epistles with all the Yearly Meetings in America.<sup>22</sup> Responding to this epistle, the London Yearly Meeting wrote that the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting should first consult with other Yearly Meetings in the British colonies and then report its opinion to London.<sup>23</sup> In this way, both the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and the London Yearly Meeting abstained from taking leadership in the slavery question.

In 1715, Chester Friends again expressed their regret that some Friends were still involved in "the practice of importing buying and selling negro slaves." The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting appointed three Friends to prepare a reply to this plea, and they drafted an epistle to subordinating Meetings. The epistle repeated the former advice of the Yearly Meeting against importing slaves, stating that those Friends who were concerned in the slave importation should be advised to give up the practice. It also urged slaveholding Friends to treat their slaves with "humanity and a christian spirit." At the same time, the epistle suggested that "all do forbear judging or reflecting on one another either in publick or private concerning the detaining or keeping of them Servants." This was an attempt of the Yearly Meeting to keep its members away from further arguments on the slavery question.<sup>24</sup>

Chester Friends did not stop their protest, however. In 1716, they brought up again the problem of buying imported slaves, and requested that no Friends should buy imported slaves in the future. The Yearly Meeting replied that it could not find any difference between this petition and that of the previous year, and simply reconfirmed the conclusion of 1715.<sup>25</sup>

There were three Friends who articulated the opposition to slavery during this period of 1700-1728, but they were ignored, threatened with disownment or virtually disowned. These three were William Southeby, John Farmer and John Hepburn. William Southeby, who had been working for the cause of antislavery, again in 1714, sent a paper to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. It requested the Yearly Meeting for an action independent of the London Yearly Meeting, saying that "we ought to be exemplary to other places..." Southeby also criticized the members of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting who had put down the antislavery protests from Chester Friends and from him.<sup>26</sup> Southeby's paper in 1714 resulted in nothing, and his practice was instead condemned for its "tendency to division." The minutes of the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting to which Southeby belonged indicate: Southeby was warned against three times thereafter with the threat of disownment, for publishing and spreading his papers without the approbation of Friends.<sup>27</sup> John Farmer,

a visiting Friend from England, worked for the antislavery cause in New England. He came to Philadelphia after he was disowned in New England. Friends in Philadelphia, who had been much alarmed by Southeby, wanted to escape from the arguments over slavery. Farmer was disowned systematically by the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting and the Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting. In 1718, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting approved his disownment for "certain practices... in reading and publishing papers tending to division and contrary to good order used among Friends."<sup>28</sup> Neither Southeby's writing nor Farmer's has survived to this day. John Hepburn's *American Defense of Christian Golden Rule* was written in 1715. John Hepburn came from England to Pennsylvania or New Jersey as an indentured servant. Hepburn wrote his book in America, but published it in England. Its preface tells that the mention of antislavery became almost prohibited as slavery settled itself firmly. Farmer had been hesitant to publish his book for thirty years, but he only found that slavery had been carried on "in profound silence." He was afraid that "the Negro-Masters will take it [slavery] the harder to be opposed now." He also refers to the earlier antislavery publications, and points out that "But the most of all those writings I doubt are destroyed by *Negro-Masters*, that the reader will find them almost as scarce to be found as the *Phenix Egg*." Hepburn and his work were, however, just unnoticed; they did not evoke any response in the Yearly Meeting.<sup>29</sup> The experiences of these three Friends show that the opposition to slavery was suppressed during this period.

Although the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting repeatedly advised against the slave importation, Philadelphia Friends did not stop importing slaves and buying imported slaves during these earliest few decades of the 18th century, the period of expansion of slavery in Pennsylvania. The Yearly Meeting advised against the slave importation again in 1719.<sup>30</sup> After this, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting minutes do not speak of slavery till 1728. Philadelphia Friends seem to have fallen into inactivity about this matter.

#### 4. 1728-1754

In the 1730s, 1740s and early 1750s, Pennsylvania attracted many German and Scotch-Irish immigrants.<sup>31</sup> With this abundant supply of white indentured servants as well as with the repeated warning, most of the Quaker merchants withdrew from the slave importation in the 1730s.<sup>32</sup> As early as in 1728, to a query from the London Yearly Meeting concerning the importation of blacks, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting answered that "no Friends that we know of within the Extent of this Meeting, are concern'd in that practice."<sup>33</sup>

When Chester Friends resumed their request for the prohibition of buying imported slaves in 1729, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting turned out more receptive to their proposal. Requested by Chester Friends that Friends should be restricted not only from importing slaves but also from buying imported slaves, the Yearly Meeting deferred its answer for a year. It suggested that respective Quarterly Meetings should discuss the proposal and report their opinions. Some (Glouster and Salem, and Shrewberry) stood for Chester Friends' proposition. One of the Quarterly Meetings (Burlington) reported that buying slaves was to be restricted because it would encourage the importation of slaves. Yet this Quarterly Meeting recommended that the restriction to be made should be "Advice and Counsell" but not "Censure." Others (Philadelphia and Bucks) were uncertain. After reviewing the previous decisions, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting reached the conclusion:

that Friends ought to be very Cautious of making any such Purchase for the Future; It being Disagreeable

to the Sense of this Meeting. And this Meeting recommends it to the Care of the Several Monthly Meetings, to see that Such who may be, or are likely to be found in that Practice may be admonish'd and caution'd how they offend herein.<sup>34</sup>

This caution of 1730 against both importing slaves and buying imported slaves was issued again in 1735. And the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting repeated this caution every year till 1742 except in 1740. The Yearly Meeting requested a return account on the caution against importing slaves and buying imported slaves from its subordinating Quarterly Meetings in 1737. The answers were summarized in the minutes of 1738: "There is so little occasion of Offence."<sup>35</sup> And in 1743, this declaration against importing slaves and buying imported slaves was inserted to the queries:

Do Friends observe the former advice of our Yearly Meeting, not to Encourage the Importation of Negroes nor to buy them after Imported?<sup>36</sup>

By being added to the queries, this advice was to be considered at every Monthly and Quarterly Meeting. The responses to the query indicated that almost no Friends bought or sold slaves in the 1740s.<sup>37</sup>

Between 1730 and 1754, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting was almost successful in prohibiting its members from importing slaves and buying imported slaves, probably because of the abundant supply of white servants. Philadelphia Friends might have expected that slaveholding would extinguish among them automatically just by avoiding buying slaves.<sup>38</sup>

In the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, the Friends who opposed slavery existed constantly throughout the period between 1688 and 1754. But the authority of the Yearly Meeting tended to suppress their voices. The Yearly Meeting did issue the advices and cautions against importing slaves and buying imported slaves, but they were without sanctions on the violators. Only with the abundant supply of white servants, the Yearly Meeting could prohibit importing slaves and buying imported slaves.

### III. VITALIZATION OF QUAKER ANTISLAVERY (1754-1776)

Quaker antislavery observed its full development during the third quarter of the 18th century. While the earlier Quaker antislavery was a sporadic and stagnant minority movement, that of this period was drastic enough to involve the whole Philadelphia Yearly Meeting into the disownment of slaveholding members. In this section, we will first follow the process in which the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting decided the abolition of slaves and then examine some factors which contributed to liven up the antislavery movement.

#### 1. 1754-1776

The slave importation revived in Pennsylvania in the 1750s. With the outbreak of the French and Indian War in 1754, the British army began recruiting in the fall of 1755. It became difficult to employ white servants. For the fear of losing white servants by the enlistment into His Majesty's forces, moreover, those who needed labor turned their eyes to blacks. As a result, Pennsylvania faced the greatest increase of the slave importation from 1755 to 1765. The Pennsylvania Assembly passed a prohibitive £10 import duty in 1761, which was apparently aimed at preventing any more influx of blacks.<sup>39</sup> Even if this rapid expansion of the slave importation at the middle of the 1750s

was not a direct impetus for promoting Quaker antislavery between 1754 and 1776, it would make those Friends, who had been working for the cause of antislavery, extremely alarmed and worried. If Friends had supposed that the prevention of slave purchase would gradually extinguish slaveholding among them, the revival of the slave importation in the 1750s might have awoken them to the obstinacy of slavery. The opposition to slavery was heightened during this period (1754-1776), which finally led the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to declare the disownment of slaveholders in 1776.

The colonists in Pennsylvania relied on black slaves when they faced the difficulties of employing white servants. Friends were not the exceptions to this.<sup>40</sup> The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting issued a special epistle, "An Epistle of Caution and Advice, concerning the Buying and Keeping of SLAVES" in 1754. The Yearly Meeting observed "with sorrow" that the number of slaves was "of late increased amongst us." This epistle declared the revolutionary antislavery position of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting that not only buying slaves but also slavery itself was wrong. The Yearly Meeting urged slaveholding Friends to emancipate their slaves. However, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting did not provide punishments on the offenders at this point. The Yearly Meeting printed the epistle and distributed it among its subordinating Meetings to make this judgement widely known.<sup>41</sup>

When the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting revised its queries in 1755, the query against slavery was reconsidered. It showed a strong concern for the treatment of black slaves for the first time.

Are Friends clear of importing or buying Negroes, and do they use those well which they are possessed of by inheritance or otherwise, endeavoring to train them up in the principles of the Christian Religion? With the revision of the queries, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting appointed a committee to visit all the Monthly and Quarterly Meetings to make sure that Quaker testimonies were maintained. Although it was not exclusively interested in enforcing the antislavery policy, this committee watched over whether the testimony against slavery was supported or not.<sup>42</sup>

All did not accept the antislavery position. Some Philadelphia Friends bought blacks in the summer of 1758. To confront this situation, the Yearly Meeting held in the fall of 1758 decided to punish those members who bought and sold slaves. They were regarded as violators of the discipline :

The respective Monthly Meetings to which they belong should manifest their disunion with such persons by refusing to permit them to sit in Meetings for Discipline, or to be employed in the Affairs of Truth, or to receive from them any Contribution towards the Relief of the Poor or other Services of the Meeting. Although the violators were not disowned, they were excluded from attending at the monthly business meeting and were prohibited from contributing funds. (And yet this decision later turned out vague to be put in effect.) It was a kind of half-way disownment. Several Friends offered to the Yearly Meeting that they would visit all the slaveholding Friends under the supervision of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and persuade them to give up their slaves. This proposal was adopted by the Yearly Meeting.<sup>43</sup> It is at this stage of 1758 that the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting started disciplining the offenders against its antislavery position and also took the first step for manumission.

Between 1759 and 1765, excepting 1764, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting minutes record that more and more of its members were ready to avoid selling, buying and keeping slaves. In 1765, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting required its subordinating Monthly and Quarterly Meetings to give the answers to the 1755 query on slavery. In the succeeding years (1766, 1767, 1769, 1771), the responses to this query tell that the prohibition of importing, selling and buying slaves was observed but that

the religious instructions to slaves were mostly ignored.<sup>44</sup>

In 1774, the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting requested the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to clarify the wording of the 1758 statement. The Bucks Quarterly Meeting also asked for advice as to the treatment of violators against this statement. The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting stated that “our Christian Testimony may be more extensively held forth against the unrighteous Practice of enslaving our fellow Creatures...,” and concluded that any transfer of a slave was disownable. The prohibition on any transfer was applied to those who accepted slaves as “Gift or Assignment” as well as to those who were involved in importing, selling or buying slaves. The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting also advised against “hiring Slaves on Wages” and “acting as Executors or Administrators to such Estates where Slaves are bequeathed, or likely to be detain’d in Bondage.” In addition, the Yearly Meeting appointed a joint committee of each Quarterly Meeting and its subordinating Monthly Meetings to labor with slaveholders to emancipate their slaves.<sup>45</sup>

In 1776, the committees reported the results of their endeavor. Even though many were ready to liberate their slaves, there remained some who did not accept their persuasion and kept slaves in their possession for worldly gain and selfish interest. The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting appointed a committee to find “the most effectual religious Means for perfecting a Work.”<sup>46</sup> This committee, after hearing various Friends’ opinions and examining the reports from the Quarterly Meetings, prepared the following proposal :

... where any Members continue to reject the Advice of their Brethren, and refuse to execute proper Instruments of Writing, for releasing from a State of Slavery such as are in their power, or to whom they have any claim, whether arrived to full Age, or in their Minority, and no hopes of the Continuance of Friends Labour being profitable to them, that Monthly Meetings after having discharged a Christian duty to such should testify their disunion with them.

This was accepted by the Yearly Meeting, and accordingly the new query was agreed to substitute the previous one :

Are Friends clear of importing, purchasing, disposing of, or holding Mankind as Slaves ; And do they use those well who are set free, and are necessarily under their Care, and not in Circumstances through Bondage, or Incapacity to minister to their own Necessities ; And are they careful to educate, and encourage them in a religious, and virtuous Life [ ? ] <sup>47</sup>

It was also suggested that the Monthly Meetings should keep a book of recording manumission. In this way, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting finally declared that slaveholding Friends were to be disowned.

The opponents of slavery constantly existed in the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Quaker antislavery in colonial Pennsylvania, however, was not substantial until the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting took a step in prohibiting slaveholding in the 1750s. Why the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting started moving towards the abolition of slaves at this time is to be examined next. The internal history of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting was one factor that promoted it. The intellectual climate of that time which made the antislavery persuasion more acceptable was another. In addition to these, two Friends made a great contribution to lead Friends’ antislavery sentiment to certain decisions.

## 2. Internal Factors

When the number of slaveholding Friends increased owing to the French and Indian War, the opposition to slavery gathered momentum. The outbreak of the war affected the Philadelphia

Yearly Meeting in other ways. It forced Friends to withdraw from the Pennsylvania government for their peace testimony. At Braddock's defeat in the summer of 1755, the pro-French Delaware Indians started attacking the frontiersmen in Pennsylvania. These frontiersmen appealed for more aggressive war measures to the Assembly in which Friends were a majority. The Assembly enacted both bills to tax estates for war purposes and to raise militia. These bills were apparently against the Friends' peace testimony. And furthermore, Governor Morris and his Council declared war against the Delaware Indians. Pennsylvania got more directly involved in war. In these circumstances, the Quaker Assemblymen, voluntarily or under the pressure from the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and the London Yearly Meeting, resigned their seats. The same 1758 Yearly Meeting that renounced its members' involvement in politics and required them to resign their official positions completely, determined to punish those Friends who bought and sold slaves.<sup>48</sup>

The church discipline was tightened during the same period. Jack D. Marietta's study on the disciplinary documents of the Monthly Meetings in colonial Pennsylvania indicates the increased concern with discipline between 1755 and 1776. The Monthly Meetings began applying their ethical standard more rigidly and enforcing their punishment on all the offenders of Quaker testimonies. Consequently the number of disowned members was more than doubled between 1755 and 1760.<sup>49</sup>

With its stricter antislavery position, withdrawal from politics and recovery of disciplinary order, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting seems to have undergone a wholesale reforming and self-purifying experience in the 1750s. J. William Frost discerns "two phenomena" in "one revival movement" and recognizes the different social and economic backgrounds between the two. One reforming phenomenon was led by English ministers and prosperous Philadelphia Friends, who were worried about "the corruption of Quaker practices" symbolized by marriages out of unity. The other reforming movement was represented by John Woolman and Anthony Benezet. It appealed to farming Friends who possessed few slaves and had no trust in Philadelphia Quaker merchants. The supporters of this movement denounced "slavery" and "mercantile riches." After 1755, they protested against Quaker involvement in government and against paying war taxes. Frost asserts that the sense of crisis which the leaders of the two groups shared led their movements to be merged into an ever drastic reform in the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.<sup>50</sup>

According to Frost's interpretation, antislavery was an important part of the whole reforming movement in the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. At the same time, one conclusion that is to be drawn from this interpretation is that Philadelphia Friends' withdrawal from politics cannot have directly caused the rise of antislavery and the recovery of disciplinary order.

### 3. External Factors

Hitherto the development of Quaker antislavery has been presented as a unique experience quite independent of the outside intellectual climate. But some non-Quaker colonists had also supported antislavery by the middle of the 18th century. Even though nobody questioned slavery in the 17th century, by the early 1770s, David Brion Davis affirms, the dominant intellectual trend had already started moving to antislavery.<sup>51</sup> Rationalism, benevolence, sentimentalization of the family and the Great Awakening are supposed to have played important roles in the general repulsion against slavery.<sup>52</sup>

The investigations into tax records and probate inventories endorse this intellectual climate. Jean R. Soderlund's study shows the following facts. After 1740, Philadelphia Presbyterians, under the influence of the religious egalitarianism of the Great Awakening, began to manumit their

slaves; otherwise they just did not buy any. Even Anglicans joined them by the 1760s. Although relatively few were freed before 1740, Philadelphians—both Friends and non-Friends—manumitted at least 75 slaves in their wills between 1741 and 1770. Since some freed their slaves before their death, the figure would be higher if they were included. Hundreds of slaves were freed by Friends and non-Friends in the 1770s. Gary B. Nash points out that the number of slaves possessed by Philadelphia taxpayers underwent a significant decline between 1747 and 1775. Soderlund's research into probate records indicates the same decrease of slaveowners from over 20% (1760s) to 13% (1770s). The population of free blacks was increasing in Philadelphia as a result. The population was estimated at about 150 in 1770, which then swelled to about 250 on the eve of the American Revolution. Manumission was possible in Philadelphia because of the limited nature of slavery and the spread of antislavery thought.<sup>53</sup> Thus, Philadelphia Friends shared the cause of antislavery with other colonists.

#### 4. Individuals

Finally, the appearance of two Friends, John Woolman and Anthony Benezet, gave an impetus to Quaker antislavery in the 1750s. They took the opportunity of promoting the antislavery movement when Friends had become more receptive to it.

John Woolman is regarded as “the greatest Quaker of the eighteenth century” and known as “the most Christlike individual” that Quakerism has ever produced. Woolman awoke to the evilness of slavery when he was ordered to write the bill for the sale of a black woman. He quietly labored with slaveholders through sincere private persuasion in the 1740s.<sup>54</sup> It was in 1746 that Woolman wrote some account on slavery after his trip to the South. Yet he left his manuscript unpublished. When the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting appointed entirely new members to the Overseers of the Press in 1752, at least three of the five members of this committee were Woolman's friends. This fact must have encouraged Woolman to present his manuscript. Woolman's *Some Considerations of the Keeping of Negroes* (1754) was the first antislavery exposition published with the official approval of Friends within the limits of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.<sup>55</sup> It was Woolman who led the 1758 Yearly Meeting to take sanctions against buying and selling slaves. In the same year, he joined the committee which visited slaveholding Friends and persuaded them to manumit their slaves. While earlier antislavery advocates mostly ignored the Quaker official channels for protest, Woolman never forgot respect for the authority of Meetings.

While Woolman's antislavery activities were essentially for his fellow Friends, those of Anthony Benezet's were beyond the denominational line. He was active in publishing pamphlets and books. In 1754, the Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting presented to the Yearly Meeting a paper denouncing slavery as a sin. It was drafted by Anthony Benezet. The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting endorsed this paper and distributed it as “An Epistle of Caution and Advice, concerning the Buying and Keeping of SLAVES” among its subordinating Quarterly and Monthly Meetings. It is this paper that directly led the whole Yearly Meeting to strengthen its antislavery position. Benezet was also concerned with the education of black children and he successfully urged the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to open an “African School.”<sup>56</sup>

Slavery had been a moral problem for Philadelphia Friends throughout the colonial period. But most of them did not support antislavery until the 1750s, when their church underwent a reforming experience, when the external intellectual climate upheld it and when two Friends took the leader-

ship in the opposition to slavery.

## CONCLUSION

Mainly through focusing on the interaction between the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and its subordinating Meetings, this paper showed that Philadelphia Friends' antislavery had its own history independent of the unfavorable political circumstances in the 1750s. In the process, the Yearly Meeting proved to have held the predominant role in the advance or stagnation of the antislavery movement. It also turned out that the Yearly Meeting's prime concern had always been with the peace of the church.

If the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting held the decisive power over the slavery problem, we need still closer examination of the leadership and politics of this Yearly Meeting. Quaker attitudes towards slavery are supposed to have been varied according to geographical and socio-economic differences.<sup>57</sup> J. William Frost has suggested the socio-economic differences between antislavery Quaker leaders and other Quaker leaders in the Yearly Meeting. This paper has referred little to the development of Quaker antislavery thought. The growth of humanitarianism, the spread of the philosophy of the Enlightenment, and the interaction between Quakerism and these, also need investigation. These subjects are to be researched in order to get a more comprehensive view of the history of Quaker antislavery in colonial Pennsylvania.

## NOTES

- 1 The best survey of Quaker antislavery is Thomas E. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America* (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1965).
- 2 This Yearly Meeting was comprised of Friends in Pennsylvania, West Jersey and Delaware. When the name of Philadelphia Friends is used in this paper, it refers to the members of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.
- 3 Sydney V. James, *A People among Peoples: Quaker Benevolence in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), particularly chapters VII, VIII, XII; also refer to "The Impact of the American Revolution on Quakers' Ideas about Their Sect," *William and Mary Quarterly* (WMQ), 19 (1962), 360-82. The present author discusses this incident with a special emphasis on the rise of Quaker peace testimony; "The 'Crisis of 1755-56' in Colonial Pennsylvania History," *The American Review*, 16 (1982), 174-98.
- 4 Edwin B. Bronner, book review of James' *A People among Peoples*, *Quaker History*, 52 (1963), 41-42. J. William Frost, ed., *The Quaker Origins of Antislavery* (Norwood, Pennsylvania: Norwood Editions, 1980), 21; "The Origins of the Quaker Crusade against Slavery: A Review of Recent Literature," *Quaker History*, 67 (1978), 43-44.
- 5 The main primary sources examined here are the minutes of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, those of its subordinating Meetings, and the tracts and others written by Quaker advocates for antislavery. J. William Frost has edited most of the materials related to Quaker antislavery in the colonial era in

- The Quaker Origins of Antislavery*. This paper owes much to his collection.
- 6 *The Quaker Origins*, 7-8.
  - 7 *Ibid.*, 7.
  - 8 *Ibid.*, 8-9.
  - 9 "Germantown Friends' Protest against Slavery, 1688," in *The Quaker Origins*, 69.
  - 10 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Minutes, 1688, in *The Quaker Origins*, 74.
  - 11 Gary B. Nash, *Quakers and Politics : Pennsylvania, 1681-1726* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1968), 144-180 ; J. William Frost, ed., *The Keithian Controversy in Early Pennsylvania* (Norwood, Pennsylvania : Norwood Editions, 1979), i-xx ; Jon Butler, " 'Gospel Order Improved' : The Keithian Schism and the Exercise of Ministerial Authority in Pennsylvania," *WMQ*, 31 (1974), 431-52 ; Edward J. Cody, "The Price of Perfection : The Irony of George Keith," *Pennsylvania History*, 39 (1972) , 1-19.
  - 12 George Keith, *An Exhortation and Caution to Friends concerning Buying or Keeping of Negroes* (New York, 1693), reprinted in *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography (PMHB)*, 13 (1889), 265-70.
  - 13 Frost, *The Keithian Controversy*, xx ; Jack D. Marietta, "Ecclesiastical Discipline in the Society of Friends" (Ph. D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 1968), 112.
  - 14 Drake, 28-29 ; Cadwalader Morgan, "Pap. Presented to the Yearly Meeting," 1696, in *The Quaker Origins*, 70.
  - 15 David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1966), 311-12 ; Drake, 20-21 ; Henry J. Cadbury, "An Early Quaker Anti-Slavery Statement," *Journal of Negro History*, 22 (1937), 491-93 ; Robert Piles, "Robert Piles," in *The Quaker Origins*, 71-72.
  - 16 Drake, 28-29 ; Marietta, 113-14 ; Kenneth L. Carroll, "William Southeby, Early Quaker Antislavery Writer," *PMHB*, 79 (1965), 416-22.
  - 17 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Minutes, 1696, in *The Quaker Origins*, 74.
  - 18 Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, Minutes, 7/30/1698 (September 30, 1698), 8/28/1698 (October 28, 1698) , in *The Quaker Origins*, 73 ; "To the General Meeting off ffriends In Barbadoes : These from our Monthly Meeting at Philadelphia, the 30th of 8th mo., '98," in *The Quaker Origins*, 72 ; Henry J. Cadbury, "Another Early Quaker Anti-Slavery Document," *Journal of Negro History*, 27 (1942), 210-12.
  - 19 Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, Minutes, 1/29/1700 (March 29, 1700), in *The Quaker Origins*, 73.
  - 20 Nash's study of the burial statistics finds the heaviest black polulation in Philadelphia in the third decade of the 18th century, while Jean R. Soderlund's investigation of probate inventories recognizes

it in the second decade : Gary B. Nash, "Slaves and Slaveowners in Colonial Philadelphia," *WMQ*, 30 (1973), 226-27 ; Jean R. Soderlund, "Black Women in Colonial Pennsylvania," *PMHB*, 107 (1983), 50.

- 21 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Minutes, 1711, in *The Quaker Origins*, 74 ; Darold D. Wax, "Quaker Merchants and the Slave Trade in Colonial Pennsylvania," *PMHB*, 86 (1962), 156 ; Cadbury, "Another Early," 212-13.
- 22 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Minutes, 1712, in *The Quaker Origins*, 76 ; London Yearly Meeting, "Epistles Received, Epistle from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1714," in *The Quaker Origins*, 76.
- 23 London Yearly Meeting, "Epistles Sent, to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1713," in *The Quaker Origins*, 76.
- 24 Drake, 26 ; Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Minutes, 1715, in *The Quaker Origins*, 75.
- 25 Drake, 27 ; Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Minutes, 1716, in *The Quaker Origins*, 75.
- 26 "William Southeby," *The Friend* (Philadelphia), 28 (1855), 301, quoted in Carrol, 425 ; also quoted in Drake, 28.
- 27 Carrol, 427 ; Drake, 28-29 ; Marietta, 113-14.
- 28 Drake, 32 ; Marietta, 114.
- 29 John Hepburn, *American Defense of Christian Golden Rule (1715)*, in *The Quaker Origins*, 82-122 ; Drake, 34-36 ; Henry J. Cadbury, "Quaker Bibliographical Notes," *Bulletin of Friends Historical Association*, 26 (1937), 41-42.
- 30 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Minutes, 1719, in *The Quaker Origins*, 131.
- 31 Nash, "Slaves and Slaveowners, 227-28.
- 32 Worldly considerations might have contributed to this withdrawal of Quaker merchants. Darold D. Wax contends that unprofitableness and inconveniences which accompanied the slave importation rather than moral or religious considerations led them to give up the slave importation. There were yet some who were still involved in importing and selling blacks as late as the middle of the 18th century : Wax, "Quaker Merchants," 151, 157.
- 33 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Minutes, 1728, in *The Quaker Origins*, 131-32.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 1729, 1730, in *The Quaker Origins*, 131-32.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 1738, in *The Quaker Origins*, 131-32.
- 36 In the previous year, 1742, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting again requested Quarterly Meetings to give reports about whether they were following the caution : *ibid.*, 1743, in *The Quaker Origins*, 131-132.

- 37 *The Quaker Origins*, 21.
- 38 Quaker agitators for antislavery during this period were Ralph Sandiford and Benjamin Lay. Both openly challenged the authority of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and were finally disowned. Especially Lay's denunciation was quite eccentric and demonstrative. There are a lot of anecdotes about his inciting disturbances: Drake, 39-46; Marietta, 116; Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 320-24.
- 39 Nash, "Slaves and Slaveowners," 229-32; Darold D. Wax, "Negro Import Duties in Colonial Pennsylvania," *PMHB*, 97 (1973), 35; "Negro Imports into Pennsylvania, 1720-1766," *Pennsylvania History*, 32 (1965), 256.
- 40 Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, Minutes, 8/26/1757, 7/27/1759, 1/25/1760, in *The Quaker Origins*, 178-180.
- 41 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Minutes, 1754, in *The Quaker Origins*, 167-69.
- 42 Quoted in Howard H. Brinton, *Friends for 300 Years* (5th ed; Lebanon, Pennsylvania: Pendle Hill Publications, 1964), 104. Drake, 58; Marietta, 117.
- 43 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Minutes, 1758, in *The Quaker Origins*, 170.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 1759-1771, in *The Quaker Origins*, 238-40.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 1774, in *The Quaker Origins*, 240-42.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 1776, in *The Quaker Origins*, 243-46.
- 47 *Ibid.*
- 48 Kawahara, "The 'Crisis of 1755-56' in Colonial Pennsylvania History," 176-79.
- 49 Marietta, 155, 163; *The Quaker Origins*, 20-21.
- 50 Frost, "The Origins of the Quaker Crusade against Slavery," 56-57.
- 51 Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 291-493.
- 52 *The Quaker Origins*, 18-19.
- 53 Nash, "Slaves and Slaveowners," 236-37, 240-41; Jean R. Soderlund, "Black Women," 62, 67.
- 54 John Greenleaf Whittier, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman* (Secaucus, New Jersey: The Citadel Press, 1975); Drake, 51-64, 68-71; *The Quaker Origins*, 9-10; Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 483-93; Philip Moulton, "John Woolman's Approach to Social Action—As Exemplified in Relation to Slavery," *Church History*, 35 (1966), 399-410.
- 55 The first and only antislavery pamphlet published with the approval of an official body of Friends

before this, was Elihu Coleman's *A Testimony against That Anti-Christian Practice of Making Slaves of Men* (1733) with the approbation of the New England Yearly Meeting; Cadbury, "Quaker Bibliographical Notes," 43-44; *The Quaker Origins*, 9, 21-22; *Some Considerations*, in *The Quaker Origins*, 136-66.

- 56 Cadbury, *ibid.*, n. 13; Drake, 54-56, 62, 69; *The Quaker Origins*, 19, 21-22; Nancy Slocum Hornick, "Anthony Benezet and the African School: Towards a Theory of Full Equality," *PMHB*, 99 (1975), 399-421.
- 57 Jean R. Soderlund, "Conscience, Interest, and Power: The Development of Quaker Opposition to Slavery in the Delaware Valley, 1688-1780" (Ph. D. Dissertation, Temple University, 1982) deals with the social factors involved in Quaker antislavery.