



More Tools 3

A Short History of Quakerism in 10 Easy Points

A 25 Minute skit for the YAF Conference in Richmond, IN, May 23–26, 2008

by Maya Wright*

A work that attempts to briefly and humorously answer the query, “How did we get to the point of having such different theologies within Quakerism and what roles did Young Adult Friends play in that history?”

Cast

Twelve people total who will have multiple roles. Bolded roles feature in recap at the end.

- **The Narrator**
- **George Fox** (scene 1, recap), Hicksite crowd member (scene 4), **Hummer #1** (scene 6, recap), Conservative Friend in Worship (scene 7)
- White shirted person (scene 1), Confessor #5 (scene 3, recap), Orthodox crowd member (scene 4), Hummer #2 (scene 6)
- White shirted person (scene 1), Elias Hicks (scene 4), **Richmond Declaration Friend #1** (scene 8, recap)
- Earlham shirted person (scene 1), Confessor #1 (scene 3), **Ms. Orthodox** (scene 4, recap), **EFI Friend** (scene 9, recap)
- Voice of God (scene 1), Confessor #2 (scene 3), **Joseph John Gurney** (scene 5, recap; needs a British accent)
- Earlham shirted person (scene 1), **William Penn** (scene 2, recap), Earlham (scene 5), **Kansas Clerk** (scene 7, recap)
- Earlham shirted person (scene 1), Confessor #3 (scene 3), **Richmond Declaration Friend #2** (scene 8; recap)

* With gratitude to Tom Hamm, Max Carter, Faith Kelley, Aili McGill, and Betsy Blake.



- Earlham shirted person (scene 1), **Confessor #6** (scene 3, recap), Takes \$ (scene 5), Conservative Friend in Worship (scene 7)
- **Margaret Fell** (scene 1, recap), Hicksite crowd member (scene 4), Conservative Friend in Worship (scene 7)
- Judge (scene 1), Confessor #4 (scene 3), **John Wilbur** (scene 5, recap), **Joel Bean** (scene 9, recap)
- **Police Officer** (scene 1, recap), **Hicksite #1** (scene 4, recap), Takes \$ (scene 5), Hummer #3 (scene 6)

Props/Costumes

- A copy of the script for each actor
- Leather britches and hat for Fox; gray dress/bonnet for Fell
- Several Quaker hats and bonnets
- Several White T-shirts
- Several Earlham (or any “Quaker”) T-shirts (These shirts signify the Quakers and could be any Quaker shirts. The skit was originally performed at Earlham and we were all given free shirts)
- Judges robes or wig or a sign saying “Judge”
- Fake Money
- Small signs that say “Ms. Orthodox,” “Kansas Clerk,” “Earlham College,” “Elias Hicks,” and “Joel Bean” and string to hang the signs around necks
- Signs saying FGC, Conservative, EFI, FUM

The Skit

The Narrator: Welcome Friends. I would like to begin by asking everyone to pray for the person sitting next to you. Let’s take a moment to do so in whatever way feels most comfortable to you. Let us ask our ancestors and forbearers to be with us tonight and pray that we can open our hearts and minds to love. Help us remember that our Quaker forefathers and foremothers made the best choices that they could with the information they had, as we each do today. Thank you God for this chance to understand one another. Let us take a moment for prayer.

Narrator and all take a moment for prayer.

The Narrator: Welcome to a skit of ten grossly oversimplified points of creation and division in Quaker history in the form of a (hopefully) comedic



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skit. A lot of important things have been left out, including some of the very awesome influences Quakers have had in the world: towards the abolition of slavery, the promotion of women's rights, service & peace work (Did you know that the American Friends Service Committee was a co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947 on behalf of the peace witness of all Quakers?). But I digress.

My hope for this evening is that we will teach you something, make you want to know more about the rich cake between these layers of historic fruit, and start some conversations. Here goes: The history of Quakerism in ten easy points.

1. *George Fox and the beginnings of Quakerism*

The Narrator: Number 1: George Fox and the beginnings of Quakerism. Once upon a time, in 1640's England, a Young Adult named George Fox was unsatisfied with his life.

While the narrator is talking George Fox, hopefully wearing leather britches and shaggy shaggy locks, wanders about the stage. Fox is singing from the George Fox song:

Fox: "In my old leather britches and my shaggy, shaggy locks, I'm not yet walking in the glory of the Light."

The Narrator: "Said Fox."

Fox first meets up with snooty people wearing white shirts, with whom he mimes conversation. Fox begins looking very hopeful but quickly becomes sad and goes on looking more and more disappointed as time goes on.

The Narrator: Fox had a sense, perhaps a leading, that life had more to offer him than met the eye. When he was nineteen years old, he started off walking around the south of England, asking questions. He met with lots of educated religious men. He wasn't impressed. They just didn't seem to truly be men of God and they could not answer his questions. He was depressed. When Fox was twenty-two, he went wandering again, this time to the North.

Fox then comes upon a group of people wearing Earlham shirts. He looks overjoyed.

The Narrator: This time Fox met some people like him. Fox began working out for himself what it meant to be a Christian. He had an epiphany.

Fox: "When all my hopes were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, oh then, I heard a voice which said,



Voice of God: *An invisible Voice of God from offstage (or hiding behind the Narrator):* “There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition,”

Fox: “and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy.”

The Narrator: Fox kept wandering around. He met up with some seekers who were already having meetings for worship where anyone could preach.

Margaret Fell enters and mimes speaking with Fox.

The Narrator: Soon Fox met Margaret Fell, a strong supporter who would eventually become his wife. Margaret was a very important ally. She helped Fox form the structures to carry on the Quaker movement. Out of fear, the British government altered laws to prevent groups from meeting in case they might be conspiring against the government. Because they would not swear in court or take off their hats to nobility, the Quakers were always getting thrown in jail. Between traveling in the ministry and being jailed, Margaret and George were hardly ever in the same place.

During this a police officer drags Fox and Fell in front of a Judge, who orders them jailed. They are removed from the stage.

The Narrator: But they didn’t give up.

2. Quakers come to America

The Narrator: Number 2: Quakers come to America. In 1655, Elizabeth Harris was the first Quaker to come to the new world. Others followed her, both as missionaries and in search of a home free of the religious persecution Quakers faced in Britain. Of course, there was plenty of persecution in the colonies as well, including being thrown in jail, and in a few cases, killed. In 1681, thirty-seven-year-old William Penn . . .

Penn appears on stage.

The Narrator: . . . a Quaker who was the son of a British navel officer, accepted an enormous tract of land in America as settlement of a debt owed to his father by King Charles II. Penn founded Pennsylvania on Quaker principles. He encouraged the colonists to pay Native Americans for the land they were taking from them, and to generally treat them well.

Penn: “We are too ready to retaliate, rather than forgive, or gain by love and information. And yet we could hurt no man that we believe loves us. Let us then try what Love will do: for if men did once see



Build It!

we love them, we should soon find they would not harm us. Force may subdue, but Love gains: and he that forgives first, wins the laurel.”

Penn exits.

3. Quietism (1682–1776)

The Narrator: Number 3: Quietism (1682–1776). By 1700, the original Quaker leaders were pretty much all dead. The third generation of Quakers was in charge. They became fearful of the negative and sinful influences of the larger society, so they begin to withdraw inward. There was much less spoken ministry in Meeting for Worship. There were more and more rules that could get you disowned from the meeting.

A row of sad people stand on stage in a line. One at a time they confess, as though in AA, what horrible thing they did to get kicked out of meeting:

Confessor #1: I was written out of meeting for ostentatious attire. It was just a tail of my purple scarf escaping from beneath my coat!

Confessor #2: I was written out of meeting because I fornicated with my fiancé

Confessor #3: I was kicked out because I married a non-Quaker

Confessor #4: I just *went* to a non-Quaker wedding

Confessor #5: I was seen with inappropriate company

Confessor #6: I was deemed inappropriate company

They exit.

The Narrator: Despite all the rules, everything was going along pretty well for the Quakers during Quietism. But when Pennsylvania found itself at war beginning in the 1750's, Quakers in the legislature had a dilemma. They suddenly were forced to choose between upholding the Peace Testimony and retaining Quaker control of the colony. Many Quakers left government in order to stay true to their pacifist ideals, which left a majority of non-Quakers in control.

4. 1827–28 split: Hicksite vs. Orthodox

The Narrator: Number 4: 1827–28 split: Hicksite vs. Orthodox. But things seemed to be looking up at the beginning of the nineteenth century...

There is a cluster of people on stage, Hicks emerges from within it. Everyone is listening to him.



The Narrator: Until Elias Hicks became a troublemaker, that is. Of course there were rumblings of discontentment long before 1827, by which time Elias Hicks had been preaching for over fifty years, but he's the favorite scapegoat. Hicks was from Long Island and had been recorded as a Quaker minister. He believed that the external world of reason, rules, scripture and human contrivance would not lead one to God. Only stillness and patience could do that. He felt one's whole spiritual life should be devoted to opening oneself to the Inner Light.

Elias Hicks: "Is it possible that men can be guilty of greater idolatry, than to esteem and hold the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and practice, by which they place them in the very seat of God and worship them as God?"

Ms. Orthodox: (*stepping out of the cluster to argue and wearing a shirt marked "Ms. Orthodox"*) How canst thou deny that the Bible is a signpost, showing the example of Jesus's divinity?

Hicksite #1: Thou, thou, thou are a . . . Methodist (*said like a really mean insult*)
Orthodox crowd makes general sounds of shock. The crowds, already parted, start to back away from one another.

Ms. Orthodox: Well! This from a Unitarian, a Bible hater and skeptic!!

Orthodox crowd: Yeah!!

Hicksite #1: Well, We're going to start our own yearly meeting.
ALL FREEZE with their tongues pointed at one another.

The Narrator: I know I have to give you the simple version tonight but I just can't bear to leave it at this. Of course there were lots of other influences going on here. To give you an idea, I want you to picture in your mind one person at your church or meeting that drives you crazy. I know there is one. Well, imagine that that person is Elias Hicks. Who cares if you like his ministry? You're probably not going to side with him. Say you agree with Hicks but your whole meeting is Orthodox. You love these people and you'd probably keep going to meeting. It's pretty hard to turn your back on your spiritual community. Everyone on every side thought they were doing the right thing to protect the original intentions of Quakerism. Who can blame them?

Now we'll get back to the story.

Everyone unfreezes and exits the stage except for Ms. Orthodox. The Narrator turns to her, waiting.

The Narrator: Yes?



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Ms. Orthodox: How come I get this generic name? I just think it's a little unfair that all these other guys had branches named after them and apparently no one on my side was obnoxious enough to be remembered.

She exits. The Narrator shrugs.

The Narrator: And we call ourselves a peace church. (Pause.) I'm not saying that some people did not feel very strongly about the theological differences at stake here. But I'm betting that people took sides for a multitude of reasons. Most of the meetings in cities and urban areas were wealthier, more connected with non-Quakers and sided with the Orthodox. Nearly every yearly meeting split down the middle, resulting in battles over property like schools and meeting houses.

5. Orthodox split: Wilburite vs. Gurneyite

The Narrator: Number 5: Orthodox split: Wilburite vs. Gurneyite. From 1837 through 1840, English Friend, scholar and recorded minister Joseph John Gurney visited Orthodox meetings in the United States and Canada.

J.J. Gurney enters, looking very confident and pleased with himself.

The Narrator: Gurney was exceptionally well educated for the time, wealthy, philanthropic, and a charismatic and engaging minister. He was likewise controversial. He felt that associations with non-Quaker evangelical Protestants weren't so bad. He also had some new ideas on the best way to achieve salvation. Gurney was an advocate of an immediate, instantaneous new birth experience, faith in salvation through the Blood of Christ. This was then followed by a second, more gradual experience of sanctification. Gurney also gave great authority to the Bible.

John Wilbur enters just before Gurney begins talking.

Gurney: *(with British accent)* "No person is more willing than I am to admit the primary character, in point of time, and the universality in point of extent, of a 'present witness' [or Inner Light] against evil in the consciences of men; but the comparison of this present witness, in point of authority, with the written declaration of the will of God [in the Bible], appears to me to be . . . improper and unsound."

Gurney hands out money distractedly the whole time he's talking. One of the people he gives money to is labeled as Earlham College.

The Narrator: John Wilbur, a Rhode Island Quaker, felt Gurney departed from traditional Quaker doctrine and was a danger to the Society. Wilbur



followed Gurney's tour around the continent, warning Friends against him. Both men were devoted Quakers who valued the Bible and the transforming power of the Spirit in worship. But Wilbur feared influences of the larger society. Wilbur put greater emphasis on the doctrine of the Inward Light than on the Bible. He and many others didn't like change and didn't separate sanctification from salvation.

Everyone exits.

The Narrator: So, there was another split. The Wilburites were a small minority, however. After the separation in 1854, the resultant groups were known as Wilburites and Gurneyites, subsequently distinguished as Conservative Friends and Orthodox Friends, respectively.

6. Revival movement sweeps America

The Narrator: Number 6: Revival movement sweeps America. Gurney set the stage for Quakers to identify with other protestant denominations. In the 1870s and '80s a revival movement swept America. Traveling evangelicals held camp meetings, where people were saved and baptized on the spot, both ideas that were foreign to Friends up to this point. Camp meetings were especially popular with young people, like us.

Three Friends enter and hum a hymn.

The Narrator: By 1890, many Gurneyite meetings were calling ministers to serve as paid pastors, moving toward programmed worship with sermons every Sunday and only short periods of silence. Musical instruments were also introduced to accompany planned singing.

7. Conservative Friends split off

The Narrator: Number 7: Conservative Friends split off. The idea of programmed worship was too much for some Friends. Throughout North America at different times, they split off on their own and eventually reconnected with some of the Wilburites, in order to conserve what they saw as the original form of the Quaker movement, specifically silent worship. Thus they are known today as Conservative Friends, not in the political sense, but in the sense of "conservation."

As the Narrator speaks, Friends come and sit or stand on stage, as if in Meeting for Worship for Business. A Friend is reading.

Kansas Clerk: *(with the Kansas Clerk sign)* I quote from the Kansas Conservative epistle of 1886. "[Friends,] Keep low, keep quiet, mind our own



Build It!

particular calling, our inward condition, and feel the Lord inwardly as the rock and sanctuary where none can make afraid.”

8. 1887 Richmond Declaration

The Narrator: Number 8: 1887 Richmond Declaration. In 1887, a conference of ninety-five delegates appointed by twelve yearly meetings representing the Orthodox branch of Friends across the world met in Richmond, Indiana. This conference met with the goal of stopping the movement of Quakers towards accepting water baptism. The meeting issued a Declaration of Faith, which has been widely used by Orthodox Friends ever since. This is a small excerpt:

1st Friend: *(begins to read the Declaration)* “We believe in one holy,

2nd Friend: *(pops in with the Biblical references which are cited throughout the declaration)* (Isa. 6:3, 58:15)

1st: almighty,

2nd: (Gen. 17:1)

1st: all-wise,

2nd: (Rom. 11:33, 16:27)

1st: and everlasting

2nd: (Ps 90:1-2)

1st: God, the Father,

2nd: (Matt 11:25-27)

1st: the Creator

2nd: (Gen 1:1)

1st: and Preserver

2nd: (Job 7:20)

1st: of all things; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, by whom all things were made,

2nd: (John 1:30)

1st: and by whom all things consist;

2nd: (Col 1:17)

1st: and in one Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son,

2nd: (John 15:26, 16:7)



The Narrator: Quakers have always been good at documentation and record keeping. (pause) The hope was that writing a declaration would give all Friends a common platform on which to unite. Unfortunately, that did not happen.

9. Founding of the umbrella organizations

The Narrator: Number 9: Founding of the umbrella organizations. By 1900, diverse groups of Quakers were organizing themselves, though not in unity with one another. Orthodox Friends founded Five Years Meeting in 1902. The name was changed to Friends United Meeting in 1963. Friends United Meeting has done extensive missionary work throughout the world. As a result of their efforts, the largest Quaker population in the world today is in Kenya.

Friend #1 from above steps forward and holds up a sign that says "FUM."

The Narrator: Though they were fellow Gurneyites, Ohio Yearly Meeting refused to participate in Five Years Meeting. They felt that there needed to be more emphasis on Scripture and salvation through Jesus Christ. Other meetings joined and formed Evangelical Friends Alliance in 1965. In 1989 it became Evangelical Friends International.

EFI Friend comes forward on stage right and holds up a sign that says "EFI."

The Narrator: There are three conservative yearly meetings in the United States: North Carolina Conservative, Iowa Conservative, and Ohio Conservative.

The Kansas Clerk from above also comes on stage with a sign reading "Conservative."

The Narrator: The Hicksites (remember them?) founded Friends General Conference in 1900. The Philadelphia Orthodox also originates from the Hicksites.

Hicksite #1 comes forward stage left with a sign that says "FGC."

The Narrator: Canadian Yearly Meeting was founded in 1955, and is affiliated with both FGC and FUM as many meetings are.

Oh, and then there's me [change to say, "And then there are the independents" if the narrator isn't an independent Friend]. In 1885 Joel Bean, a former clerk of Iowa Yearly Meeting, moved to California and decided he didn't want to be involved in all this infighting anymore.



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Joel Bean, who has been standing on stage right, runs all the way across to the very left.

The Narrator: The movement he started is now three independent, fiercely non-conformist yearly meetings in the Western United States, Intermountain, Pacific, and North Pacific Yearly Meetings. If this is the Quaker tree, we are the Quaker beanstalk. **But change is brewing once again. In June 2009, Intermountain Yearly Meeting approved joining FGC!**

So, let's review. Let's review by fast forwarding from the beginning.

The nine points will be recapped by fast-forwarding through the action with hilarious speed. The narrator counts from 1-10.

The Narrator: #1:

Fox and Fell enter, Police Officer drags Fox off stage. Fell follows looking angry.

The Narrator: #2:

Penn runs onstage and says:

Penn: Let us then try what Love will do.

Penn runs off.

The Narrator: #3:

Confessors 5 and 6 run on.

Confessor #5: I was seen with inappropriate company.

Confessor #6: I was deemed inappropriate company.

The Narrator: #4:

Hicksite #1 and Ms. Orthodox enter.

Hicksite #1: Thou art a Methodist!!

Hicksite #1 stomps off. Ms. Orthodox exits.

The Narrator: #5:

Gurney and Wilbur enter and glare at each other.

The Narrator: #6:

Hummer #1 runs on and hums a bit, then runs off.

The Narrator: #7:

Kansas clerk runs on and says:



More Tools 3 A Short History of Quakerism in 10 Easy Points

Kansas clerk: Keep quiet, mind our own particular calling.

He runs off.

The Narrator: #8:

1st Friend: *(beginning of the Declaration)* “We believe in one holy”

2nd Friend: “Isa. 6:3, 58:15”

They run off stage.

The Narrator: #9:

Four Friends with Four signs (FUM, EFI, Conservative and FGC) plus Joel Bean come forward, and then drop the signs and link arms.

10. So, here we are

The Narrator: So, here we are. Thank you God! But wait, you say. There were only nine points in that skit. It’s true. Because we, here tonight, are the tenth important point in Quaker history. We are, like Fox, young people searching for more out of life, who are working out for ourselves what it means to be a follower of Jesus and a Quaker.

The groups on stage drop their signs and come together in a line with arms around one another.

Group: We are young people searching out what it means to live a life guided by the Spirit, seeking out what we are called to do.

Thank you for joining me on that journey.

Everyone bows.

Author’s Note

Anyone is welcome and encouraged to re-perform this skit, with or without alterations. Please tell me if you do by posting on the website for the Toolkit (www.fgcquaker.org/Toolkit)! Thanks, Maya Wright

