A Response to Orthodoxy: The Hicksite Movement In the Society of Friends

THE most striking characteristic of the 1827 Hicksite-Orthodox Separation in the Society of Friends is its complexity. That complexity has, however, frequently been obscured by the sheer drama of the struggle between Elias Hicks and the Philadelphia elders. Regardless of the importance of that struggle, it is, perhaps, time to look at the Separation from a more analytical viewpoint. Hopefully, this kind of approach will provide new insights into the Separation and will place it more meaningfully within the history of Quakerism and early nineteenth-century America.

The major weakness of the narrative approach to the Separation is in its tendency to overemphasize the role of Elias Hicks. Thus, the story of Hicks and the elders becomes the basis for understanding the Separation as a whole. Hicks appears to be the focal point of the schism and his ideas seem to form the basis for the Hicksite movement. This narrative approach presents only partial truths. The Hicksite movement was not the result of unified support for Elias Hicks but rather grew out of a revulsion to the ideas and activities of Orthodox leaders in Philadelphia. It was the Orthodox leaders who provided the dynamic factor in the Separation, not Elias Hicks.

Any endeavor to understand the Hicksites must, then, begin with an examination of the nature of the challenge presented by the development of Orthodoxy. Orthodox Friends were in fact not orthodox in their Quakerism. The label is an anomalous one which tradition has assigned to a group which sought to alter Quaker belief and practice. This movement was led by a small group of well-to-do Quakers in Philadelphia. Its leaders, men like Jonathan Evans, Othniel Alsop, Samuel Bettle, and Thomas Stewardson, were mutual friends of

long standing. They lived near one another, frequently engaged in business together, and their families were closely related. Orthodox leaders seem to have been deeply interested in the world and were disturbed by the traditional barrier which Friends had placed between themselves and the world. Their interests and ambitions encouraged them to challenge that barrier.

Orthodox concern for acceptance in the world meant that its adherents were especially subject to religious ferment outside the Society. They were drawn to Orthodoxy because it would both forward their efforts to overcome the Quaker barrier against the world and at the same time associate them with a widely popular form of religious belief. Psychologically comforting and socially proper, the doctrines of Orthodoxy had strong appeal.

Orthodox responses to this appeal were unconscious. Orthodox Friends did not rationally calculate the advantages of Orthodoxy. Nevertheless, as the strength of their acceptance grew, they began to try to alter the Society to fit the tenets of their new faith. In particular, they tried to tighten the organizational structure of the Society in order to perpetuate their leadership and at the same time they endeavored to impose a formal code of belief upon all Friends within the jurisdiction of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

The code defined by the Orthodox leaders emphasized: (1) the divine inspiration of the Bible; (2) the use of a literal interpretation of the Bible as an absolute guide to God's unchanging revelation; (3) Christ's divinity and the importance of His sacrifice as a source of mediation between man and God; (4) the Trinity; and (5) faith as a means of seeking religious truth. Orthodox enthusiasm for this code was so strong that its adherents came to believe that it should be made the means of testing a man's religion. Belief in the code rather than personal deportment became the criterion of Orthodoxy.

Within Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, the Orthodox group met with at least moderate success in its attempt to reorganize the Society and impose a code of belief upon it. By the mid-1820's its leaders controlled most of the positions of influence within the Society and had begun to discriminate between "weighty" Friends and the general membership. They were also using belief as a test for membership and had, in 1822, very nearly obtained endorsement of their doctrines for Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

Probably the best way to interpret the Hicksite movement is as a multiple reaction to these Orthodox successes. Those Quakers became Hicksites who were in some way alienated by Orthodox personnel, activities, and beliefs. In this respect, the unity of the Hicksites was negative.

One source of alienation from Orthodoxy was the personal characteristics of the Orthodox leaders. Orthodox leaders were vulnerable to social enmity. They were wealthy, refined, urban-dwelling businessmen. These characteristics, regardless of the doctrines associated with them, made Orthodox leaders the subject of considerable suspicion. To rural Friends, they represented the corrupting influence of the city. To urban-dwelling artisans, they were members of a nonproducing privileged class which was just then being widely criticized. To affluent, established Friends like Clement Biddle and William Wharton, the Orthodox represented the new rich. All these antagonisms were present at the time of the Separation and all of them can be found in Hicksite writings both before and after the actual split of 1827. In this sense, some of the antipathy toward the Orthodox leaders can be attributed to their social characteristics.[1]

It is also significant that at this time awareness of social position was heightened by the growth of a widely influential egalitarian ideology. This ideology attacked privilege and inequality in all forms. Because it emphasized social differences, it tended to act as a wedge between the various levels of society. Within the Society of Friends, it made Friends increasingly conscious of social issues. Some Hicksites found the idea of egalitarianism useful. They argued that the Separation represented a struggle between the good people and the evil aristocrats—between aristocracy and democracy. Although urban in origin, this sort of thinking also affected the views of rural and semirural Friends. It certainly supplemented urban resentment of the well-to-do and rural suspicion of the city. It also closely resembled traditional Quaker emphasis upon man's equality before God. In this sense, the Hicksite movement takes on another dimen-

[1] These themes are expressed in such contemporary accounts of the Separation as: Benjamin Ferris, "A Historical Review of the Rise and Progress of the Separation," and "An Account of the Separation," Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College; James Cockburn, *Cockburn's Review* (Philadelphia, 1829); Halliday Jackson, "A History of the Separation," Friends Historical Library; *The Berean, A Religious Publication*, III (May 15, 1827), 322-323.

sion as part of a widely pervasive egalitarian impulse, comparable, perhaps, to the contemporary anti-Masonic crusade in New York.[2]

The wedge between various segments of the Society was driven even deeper by the general religious ferment of the period. Religious enthusiasm ran high in the early nineteenth century. It exerted strong pressure on Quaker tradition through both written and oral denunciations of the Society of Friends and thus it added to the uneasiness developing within the Society. Furthermore, it offered a variety of religious alternatives at a time when many Friends were restive under the restraints imposed by eighteenth-century Quietism.[3]

In general, the ferment outside the Society provided a frame of reference through which the participants in the Separation could understand their role in that struggle. The Hicksite-Orthodox schism should not be equated with the Unitarian controversy in New England, yet it is important to realize that both Quaker groups saw their differences as being analogous to those in New England. Therefore, one should be aware of a positive interaction between Hicksites and Unitarians as well as the negative one between Hicksite and Orthodox. This is not to call the Hicksites Unitarians but rather to suggest that there was a largely unconscious interchange of values and ideas between the two groups.[4]

The tactics of the Orthodox leaders were also a source of alienation. Orthodox efforts to control and change the Society of Friends frequently took the form of personal attacks upon Friends who dis-

[2] On egalitarianism see Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy* (New York, 1963). Examples of Quaker use of egalitarian ideas can be found in *Cockburn's Review*, 57; *The Berean*, III (Mar. 6, 1827), 241–242; *ibid.*, (May 1, 1827), 305; Edward Hicks, *Memoirs* (Philadelphia, 1851), 110; Benjamin Ferris, "An Account of the Separation," 1; and Thomas McClintock to William Poole, February, 1827, Ferris Papers, Friends Historical Library.

[3] Some understanding of the general ferment in American religion can be gained from Alice F. Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment* (Minneapolis, 1944), and W. W. Sweet, *Religion in the Development of American Culture, 1765–1840* (New York, 1952). Also important is Whitney Cross, *The Burned-Over District* (Ithaca, N. Y., 1950).

[4] Hicksite liberals were more interested in the Unitarian controversy than the two other groups. The liberals saw the Unitarians as allies in the struggle against the broad-based orthodox conspiracy. At least one of the liberals, Benjamin Ferris, had some understanding of the social and theological complexities of the situation in New England, but the majority of the liberals did not. They simply felt that the two movements had identical aims. Liberals felt a similar affinity for Thomas Jefferson because of his role in religious disestablishment in Virginia. See Benjamin Ferris, "An Account of the Separation," 70; *The Berean*, I (Feb. 23, 1824), 6–8; I (Feb. 1, 1825), 359, 362–366; II (Sept. 20, 1825), 98–102.

agreed with them. Elias Hicks was the most important of the individuals subjected to these attacks but he was by no means the only one. To some extent, the word "attack" is too strong, for the Orthodox usually remained within the tradition of privacy and brotherly love. On the other hand, they sometimes ignored these limitations and engaged in vindictive and insulting harangues upon other members of the Society, breaking with both propriety and tradition in doing so.

Early nineteenth-century Quakerism represented a closely knit community. Business, friendship, and marriage all were circumscribed by the bounds of the Society. Thus, an attack upon any individual inevitably involved Friends who had no direct connection with the issues involved, but who were friends of the individual, friends of his relatives, relatives of his friends, and so on.

This complex network of personal relationships undoubtedly had a strong influence on the course of the Separation. For example, all of the eventual Hicksite leaders were friends of Elias Hicks before the first attack was made upon him in 1819, but they did not all endorse his doctrinal opinions. Many of them had lived near one another in Philadelphia, had attended Meeting together, and were also related by marriage. To be sure, some families and friends were split by the Separation, but the percentage thus affected was extremely small.[5]

The religious views of the Orthodox were, however, the most significant source of alienation. Especially important in this respect was the widespread belief that Orthodox doctrine represented a serious departure from Quaker tradition. Orthodox emphases were clearly something new, and to some members of the Society newness was anathema. Friends like Samuel Comfort, Halliday Jackson, and John Comly wished to preserve the past. They resented efforts to introduce changes in Quaker organization and belief. These men might well be termed traditionalists in that they looked to the past and to Quietism for their values. They were traditional in another sense too for they resisted secular changes as well as religious ones. Even in temperament they appear to have been conservative.

[5] I have traced some of the effects of family on the Separation through a random sample of the characteristics of more than 1,000 Friends. The best way to understand the complex relationship of the Hicksite leaders is to read their correspondence in the Ferris Papers.

The traditionalism of Halliday Jackson and Samuel Comfort is not difficult to explain. Both had chosen farming as an occupation after brief periods as teachers. Both were small farmers who did not prosper economically. Both were suspicious of the city and its values and believed in the virtues of an agricultural way of life. Both were active in social reform. Quietism was well suited to their needs. Orthodoxy was not. Thus the two men sought to preserve their old beliefs in the face of Orthodox deviation. Much of the rural and semirural support for the Hicksites was undoubtedly of this Jackson-Comfort variety.[6]

The case of John Comly is more complex. Comly was a teacher and author who spent much of his adult life in Byberry in the outskirts of Philadelphia. Never wealthy, Comly was, nevertheless, economically secure. Despite his occupation, Comly does not seem to have had an active, volatile mind. His *Journal* has a solid, flat quality which is probably a reflection of Comly himself. Comly does not seem to have seriously entered into the controversy between Hicks and the elders until just prior to the split in 1827. Nor does he seem to have been deeply concerned about the ideas involved.[7]

Comly would not of himself have precipitated a split. He wanted to resolve peacefully a dilemma which already existed and was the result of the immoderate activities of others. Comly saw himself in the role of a healer. He says in his *Journal* that he favored Separation because he deplored controversy. He wished to preserve the decorum of Meeting—to do things in a proper Quaker manner. He also points to Orthodox efforts to gain control of Yearly Meeting as the primary source of contention. Comly thus reveals himself as a temperamental conservative. In the eighteenth century he had committed himself to a Quietist view. He was not about to change his mind in middle age. He resented Orthodox tinkering as something new and as an unnecessary intrusion into Meeting. Comly wished to return Quakerism to the tranquility of eighteenth-century Quietism and the only way he could envision doing so was to secede from Orthodox control. This was his quiet retreat from a scene of confusion.

Hicksite support was not all rural nor all conservative; other sources of Hicksite antagonism with Orthodoxy are to be found. Within the cities, the Hicksites were strongly supported by people

[6] Journal of Samuel Comfort and Halliday Jackson, "A History of the Separation," *ibid.*

[7] *Journal of the Life and Religious Labours of John Comly* (Philadelphia, 1853).

whose occupations and incomes placed them in middle and lower positions in society. There were cabinetmakers like Abraham Lower, laborers like Isaac Townsend, and such voiceless figures as James Boustead (currier), George Coffee (sprig cutter), James Conway (blacksmith), Thomas Tucker (tailor), and Caleb Canby (plumber). In all, some forty per cent of Philadelphia Hicksites were artisans. These artisans form a second group within the Hicksite movement—a group which might well be called sectarian in that its members felt a need to preserve Quaker emphases upon works and a behavioral code.

James Mott, an active Hicksite, is representative of the sectarians. Struggle as he might, Mott could not achieve material success. After working (and failing) in several business ventures, Mott wrote to his parents:

> Happy is the man who has a good farm clear of debt, and is therewith content, and does not know how to write his name! A person thus situated knows little of the anxiety attendant upon a mercantile life, when perhaps the hard earnings of many anxious days and sleepless nights are swept away by failures and losses on almost every hand. I say to those who have been brought up in the country, stay there.[8]

Mott's anxiety about his secular affairs was undoubtedly repeated in the minds of many Philadelphia artisans. If one can judge by the labor movement in Philadelphia in the 1820's, artisans were undergoing considerable strain in their secular lives. Often they were being by-passed by socio-economic change and, as a result, felt insecure in the face of the impermanence which surrounded them. It is natural that Hicksite artisans might seek outlets for their insecurities within the sectarian orientation of the Society of Friends, and that they found the Society's emphasis upon behavior and rejection of the world's values particularly comforting.

The values to which these sectarian Friends attached so much importance were precisely the ones which the Orthodox had found un-

[8] James Mott to his parents, July 6, 1819, cited in Anna Davis Hallowell, *Life and Letters of James and Lucretia Mott* (Boston, 1884), 68. On sectarianism and the Separation see Robert W. Doherty, "Religion and Society: the Hicksite Separation of 1827," *American Quarterly*, XVII (1965), 63–80.

comfortable and were trying to change. Thus, those Friends who felt a need for a sectarian religion were alienated from Orthodoxy because it weakened the barrier between Friends and the world.

The object of these sectarians, like that of the traditionalists, was primarily conservative, an effort to cling to the ways of the past. These two groups—sectarian and traditionalist—made up the bulk of support for the Hicksite movement. The religious beliefs of the two groups were similar but their motivations were not.

Orthodox doctrine and organization disturbed yet another group of Friends who felt that Orthodoxy in general represented a serious threat to religious liberalism. These religious liberals—men like Benjamin Ferris, Joseph Parrish, Clement Biddle, John Moore, and William Gibbons—were highly vocal and thus exerted an influence out of proportion to their small numbers. They were interested in reform and the future and possessed temperaments which were both broadly tolerant and congenial to change. Perhaps more important, they had a deep faith in the possibility of improving the human condition and felt a responsibility to do so.[9]

For some of the liberals, motivation seems to have come from a commitment to principles of tolerance and free inquiry. Benjamin Ferris is the best example of such an individual, but other liberals seem to have been similarly inspired. Benjamin Ferris was a versatile man. Born in Wilmington in 1780, Ferris was apprenticed to a Philadelphia watchmaker when he was fourteen. While learning a trade, he spent most of his time reading and talking. In addition to American and English subjects, Ferris became interested in France and the French Revolution and apparently spent some time conversing with French émigrés.[10]

Ferris remained in Philadelphia almost twenty years and then, in 1813, moved to Wilmington where he made his home until his death in 1867. The years spent in Philadelphia were important ones. The intellectual environment was certainly stimulating. Undoubtedly Ferris' brilliance found outlets in the city which might otherwise

[9] The best expression of the Hicksite liberal viewpoint is in *The Berean*, I–IV (Wilmington, Del., 1824–1828).

[10] On Benjamin Ferris see clipping of "Memorial Presented to the Historical Society of Delaware," *Papers of Delaware Historical Society for 1903*, and Jean McClure, "Benjamin Ferris," a typed manuscript, both in the Friends Historical Library.

have been unavailable. His later activity as artist, poet, and historian undoubtedly stems from this period.

While in Philadelphia, Ferris also formed lasting personal ties. He attended Green Street Meeting, which later became the center of the Hicksite movement in the city, and made friends with people who were to be active in the Hicksite cause. The extent of these personal ties is difficult to determine, but given Ferris' outgoing, personable manner it seems likely that his range of acquaintance was broad.

Ferris' temperament was not such that he was long content with watchmaking and once in Wilmington he took up conveyancing and surveying. Ferris must have been skilled at his work for he quickly accumulated a small fortune and retired in 1835. He spent the last thirty years of his life studying and writing.

Above all else, Benjamin Ferris was a man of principle. He refused to vote for president because the president was commander-in-chief of the army (all men should live in peace; a vote for president was an endorsement of war). He was active in efforts to aid the Indian, Negro, blind, and deaf and dumb (all men were equal and important in the eyes of God). He rejected invitations to enter into money-seeking business ventures (the affairs of the world should not assume priority in men's affairs).

Some of Ferris' strongest commitments were to liberal, rational (but not deistic) theology, tolerance of diversity, and freedom of inquiry. His opposition to Orthodoxy stems from these commitments. He felt that Orthodox Friends were intolerant, opposed free inquiry and accepted religious doctrines which were wholly irrational. Thus his opposition to Orthodoxy.

Convenient and accurate as this explanation of Ferris' behavior may be, it leaves the reasons for Ferris' commitment to principles unexplained. Why did he believe in principles? Why in some principles and not others? The answers to these questions are hidden within the inner self of Benjamin Ferris. He and those like him were the "altruists" of the Hicksite movement.

Like Ferris, other liberals saw Orthodoxy as a threat to their values and commitments. They feared that a vast and conspiratorial attempt was being made to destroy religious freedom in the United States. Evangelical organizations were attempting to build a Christian political party. The evangelists sought to control the schools;

they formed Bible and tract societies; they sent out missionaries. In short, it seemed to the liberals as if certain religious organizations were trying to destroy freedom of conscience.[11]

Liberal fears increased when the Society of Friends became the subject of evangelical attacks from outside, but they were even more upset when those attacks began to come from sources inside the Society. The response of the Hicksite liberals to the Orthodox group was, then, only one phase of their general response to what they felt was a broadly based dogmatism and intolerance. The struggle of Quaker liberals was a continuation of a struggle which had begun much earlier and had been directed toward the preservation of religious freedom in America.[12]

On the whole, liberal objections to the growth of Orthodoxy among Friends were based upon their concern for tolerance and freedom of worship. Liberals felt that all men had the right to believe and worship as they wished. All men should be guaranteed the opportunity to seek religious truth for themselves. In the minds of the liberals, Elias Hicks had a right to believe and say whatever his spirit led him to believe and say.[13]

Nevertheless, the liberals were not content with general statements of principle. They also launched a direct attack upon Orthodox doctrine. Specifically, they denied the validity of the Bible as a guide to God's unchanging revelation, the concept of Christ's atonement, and the idea of the Trinity. Hicksite arguments against the Orthodox creed show that they were familiar with such European religious scholars as Johann Mosheim (1694–1755), and also with the concepts and techniques of comparative religion. However, the primary basis for their attacks upon Orthodox doctrine was not European scholarship. Rather it was their belief that communion between man and God was continuous and that this communion could be pursued individually through the spiritual union of the Meeting. The spirit of God was in all men. Neither Christ nor priest, neither creed nor

[11] See, for example, *The Berean*, I (Mar. 22, 1825), 399–400; II (Sept. 20, 1825), 98–102; II (Dec. 13, 1825), 187.

[12] *Ibid.*, III (July 10, 1827), 385.

[13] *Ibid.*, I (Apr. 20, 1824), 78–79; II (Oct. 3, 1825), 97–98; II (Oct. 17, 1825), 115; II (Dec. 27, 1825), 195–196. Also important are Thomas McClintock to William Poole, n.d., Ferris Papers, and *The Advocate of Truth*, I (March, 1828), 67.

ceremony was the key to salvation. That, they thought, was contained in the spirit within, the Inner Light.[14]

Liberal belief in the Inner Light was directly connected with faith in the perfectibility of man. If the spirit within could be cultivated to the point where it controlled the actions of men, it would be possible for men to create a good society here on earth—a society dedicated to brotherly love, freedom of conscience, and human equality.[15]

Liberal ideals held their adherents in constant tension between what is and what ought to be. Liberal efforts at social reform were a natural corollary of this tension. Furthermore, the liberal faith in perfectibility caused them to become interested in the secular reform activities of people like Robert Owen and his son, Robert Dale Owen. Inevitably, these secular reform programs were rejected but the liberals did express both interest and sympathy.[16]

If the theme of a response to Orthodoxy is momentarily abandoned and the Hicksites are examined in terms of leaders, active participants, and followers, the importance of liberal influence is apparent. While a few leaders were drawn from among traditionalists and sectarians, it was the liberals who dominated Hicksite leadership. Furthermore, liberals determined the content of the theological response to Orthodoxy through such publications as *The Berean* and exercised preponderant control over anti-Orthodox activities before and after the Separation.

The importance of the liberal leaders should not, however, obscure the profoundly conservative motives of most Hicksite followers. The vast majority of the Hicksites were traditionalists and sectarians and were driven by a desire to preserve old ways of worship.[17]

14 The best and most sophisticated attack upon Orthodox doctrine is in Benjamin Ferris and Eliphalet Gilbert, *The Letters of Paul and Amicus* (Philadelphia, 1823). Similar material is scattered throughout *The Berean.*

15 *The Berean,* II (Sept. 6, 1825), 69; II (Mar. 7, 1826), 274; III (May 15, 1827), 322–323.

16 References to Robert Owen are scattered throughout the 1825 and 1826 issues of *The Berean.* For example, see *The Berean,* II (Sept. 6, 1825), 168–169; II (Nov. 15, 1825), 145–146; II (Jan. 24, 1826), 243. The neat tripartite division of the Hicksite movement into liberal, traditional, and sectarian is, in some respects, excessively simplified. In actuality the distinctions outlined here were blurred. Certainly no clear-cut separation can be established between traditional and sectarian factions. Despite its limitations the overall framework is both valid and useful. At least it suggests the main outlines of the complexities of the Hicksite movement.

17 It is interesting that the Hicksites seem to be expressing the same pattern of nostalgia and progress which characterized society at large. See Marvin Meyers, *Jacksonian Persuasion* (Stanford, Calif., 1957).

The complexity of the Hicksite movement did not prevent the development of a religious consensus among its participants. Despite their diverse motivations, the Hicksites were generally agreed as to the proper character of religious structure and belief. They all desired a loosely knit structure which would preserve the sectarian characteristics of the Society of Friends. That kind of religion would fulfill the needs and aspirations of traditional, liberal, and socially dislocated elements within the movement. All segments accepted an individual religion based upon continuous revelation in which the cultivation of the inner spirit was emphasized rather than specific outer belief.[18]

The two key elements in the Hicksite synthesis were a weak central organization and an emphasis upon behavior, not belief, as a measure of a man's religion. To some extent, Hicksite endeavors to create a weak organization stemmed from tradition and a belief in equality. They were also a result of a negative reaction to the Orthodox proclivity for centralization. Since Orthodox efforts to manipulate the Society had centered in the Meetings for Sufferings, Select Meetings and Yearly Meeting, Hicksites endeavored to weaken the influence of all these institutions. They sought to decentralize and diffuse power. They tried to take authority away from a hierarchy and place it in the hands of the general membership.

A variety of suggestions were made as to how this sort of organization might be achieved. The strongest recommendation was one which urged the abandonment of the Meeting for Sufferings. Other proposals were made to: (1) limit the term of office for members of the hierarchy; (2) impose the principle of rotation of office; (3) prevent the Meeting for Sufferings and Select Meetings from influencing the selection of their members.[19]

These proposals were not irresponsible criticisms of Orthodox power. In the years immediately following the Separation, the Hick-

[18] The best guides to the Hicksite consensus are in the statements of protest written by the Hicksites immediately following the Separation. Most of these statements can be found in *Cockburn's Review*. Also helpful are the minutes of the various Hicksite Meetings (1828–1832). Microfilm copies of these minutes can be found in the Friends Historical Library.

[19] Minutes of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (Hicksite), 1828–1832; also William Poole to Benjamin Ferris, Apr. 18, 1826, William Wharton to Elias Hicks, Mar. 8, 1827, and Thomas McClintock to William Poole, February, 1827, Ferris Papers; and *The Berean*, III (May 15, 1827), 324–326.

sites did weaken the authority of institutions beyond the local level of the Preparative Meeting. For example, study of the appointees to Yearly Meeting (1828–1832) suggest that the principle of rotation of office was followed. During that short period, several hundred representatives were appointed. Most of the representatives received only one appointment and almost no one was appointed for all five of the years. Furthermore, those who did receive several appointments do not seem to have been the most influential members of Yearly Meeting.[20]

The other half of the Hicksite synthesis—an emphasis upon behavior—is, perhaps, more important than the desire for a weak central organization. Repeatedly, the Hicksites stressed the importance of behavior, not belief, as a measure of a man's religion. The use of a belief to determine religious qualifications seemed to them to lead to a shallow religion which dealt only with externals. It bred a sterile formality which eased the conscience of the believer without affecting his spiritual improvement. Such a religion allowed its adherents to call themselves holy men without their seeking to become holy.

The Hicksites felt that religion should embody a set of eternal values that its members should seek to fulfill. They stressed the importance of drawing behavioral guides from religious rather than general cultural standards. This meant that they continued to emphasize the importance of maintaining a barrier between themselves and the outer world, that both as individuals and as a group, Quakers should hold themselves apart from worldly things and should live in simplicity and humility, work hard, and focus their attention upon the needs of the spirit. In addition, they must exemplify in their every action the Quaker faith in the worth and equality of all men before God.

For some Hicksites this emphasis upon a code of behavior probably represented an escape from the world. It did provide a nonsecular frame of reference in which those members who were alienated from the world could find solace and security. Nevertheless, the code also emphasized that a man must live in the world and fulfill his obligations to his fellow man. Those Friends who sincerely adhered to these beliefs were held in a state of tension. The code which they endorsed

[20] Minutes of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (Hicksite), 1828–1832.

was not an easy one to live with. Almost every facet of it pointed in two directions at once; a man must work hard but not become too involved in the fruits of his labor; he must reject the values of the world but continue to live in that world and seek to improve it; and he must direct his actions toward unrealizable goals.

The principles contained in the Hicksite consensus were subject to a variety of interpretations. They left the way open for each group of Hicksites to fulfill its own needs in its own way. For example, to traditionalists, they represented a continuation of Quietism; to liberals, a basis for tolerance and reform; and to sectarians, a source of relief from secular anxiety. It is also interesting to note that most of the ideas of Elias Hicks fall within the scope of this consensus. Indeed, his ideas seem to have been interpreted in so many ways that liberal and traditional alike could find comfort in them. Hicks's actual role in the Separation is unclear, but it is apparent that he and his ideas were not the primary basis for the movement which took his name. The Hicksite movement was the result of a heterogeneous response to Orthodoxy.

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