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FRIENDS CONSULTATION ON SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

**Quaker Hill Conference Center
Richmond, Indiana**

December 6-9, 1984

**Sponsored by
Earlham School of Religion
and
*Quaker Hill Conference Center***

PREFACE

This booklet contains the main documents and findings of the Friends Consultation on Spiritual Authority and Accountability held at Quaker Hill Conference Center, Richmond, Indiana, December 6-9, 1984. The Consultation was the fifth in a series co-sponsored by Earlham School of Religion and Quaker Hill Conference Center. The series has included Consultations on Quaker Service in 1980, Ministry in 1981, Eldering in 1982, Membership in 1983, and Spiritual Authority and Accountability in 1984.

The Table of Contents will give an overview of the material included in this report. The main papers presented and discussed are given with minimal editing done. This year more time was spent in small groups than before and there are summaries of the findings of those groups. A summary of the Consultation appears which was prepared and presented at the end by two Participant-Observers, Diana Dille and David Bills. Other material includes the role plays prepared and directed by Candida Palmer, and a number of papers and statements which were sent to the participants in advance.

The title of the Consultation was selected as a follow-up to the previous two in the series which seemed to lack clarification on the issues of authority and accountability among Friends. It should be noted that the term "accountability" is a new term being used by Friends to refer to the age-old issue of freedom and discipline in the meeting. Little current writing has been done on the subject so that only one statement on this appears in the report which was sent to participants in advance. Material on religious and spiritual authority among Friends is much more plentiful and therefore makes up most of the documents recommended for advance reading.

It should be further noted that the theme this year really deals with two interrelated topics which lend themselves to consideration in a single conference. No claims are made to having resolved the many questions which surround these important issues of authority and accountability, but it is hoped that this year's Consultation will add significantly to the ongoing dialogue among Friends. We believe that the answers we give to these questions form the basis of much else that we do in the Society of Friends.

One of the purposes of the Consultations held so far is to bring together as wide a spectrum of Friends as possible to consider important issues in an atmosphere of serious reflection, study, and worship sharing. This year 48 participants came from 18 states and 22 yearly meetings (including London Yearly Meeting) representing all branches of Friends, both programmed and unprogrammed meetings. There was a remarkable spirit manifested in the group gathered which was able to lift us above

our differences, though no claim is made that those differences were erased. But we believe that Friends were brought to a level of love and understanding which makes us more determined to work together on those matters of faith and practice which both unite and divide us. When that can happen we believe that the Consultation has achieved one of its main goals.

We want to thank publicly those Quaker trust funds and yearly meetings which gave financial support to the travel pool for attending the Consultation. If such funding were not forthcoming, it would not be possible to bring together such a representative group of Friends from coast to coast, as well as an occasional Friend from outside North America.

For the Steering Committee,

Wilmer Cooper, Coordinator
of the Consultation

Eldon Harzman, Director of
Quaker Hill Conference Center

Please Note: Additional copies of this booklet and previous Consultations (except for Consultation on Quaker Service, which is out of print) are available for \$5.00 each (postage included) from Quaker Hill Conference Center, 10 Quaker Hill Drive, Richmond, Indiana 47374.

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FRIENDS CONSULTATION ON
SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Co-sponsored by:
Earlham School of Religion
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Quaker Hill Conference Center
Richmond, Indiana

December 6-9, 1984

Clerk: Maurice Roberts

Participants/Observers: Diana Dille and David Bills

Thursday, December 6

5:00 p.m. Arrive and get settled
6:00 Dinner
7:00 Introductions and background of Consultation
7:30 KEYNOTE ADDRESS:
LOUISE WILSON
8:30 Small groups meet (get acquainted)
9:30 Worship Epilogue - Curt Shaw

Friday, December 7

7:30 a.m. Breakfast
8:30 Worship - unprogrammed
9:15 BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON AUTHORITY:
T. CANBY JONES
10:15 Break
10:30 Discussion of Canby Jones' paper
11:15 Small group discussion
12:30 p.m. Lunch
Free time
3:30 THE SOURCES OF SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY:
ELIZABETH WATSON
4:30 Discussion of Elizabeth Watson's paper
5:15 Break
6:00 Dinner
7:30 Small groups meet with assigned task
9:00 Hymn sing
9:30 Worship Epilogue - Mary Moehlman

Saturday, December 8

- 7:30 a.m. Breakfast
- 8:30 Worship - unprogrammed
- 9:15 ACCOUNTABILITY AMONG FRIENDS:
WILMER COOPER
- 10:15 Break
- 10:30 Discussion of Wilmer Cooper's paper
- 11:15 Small groups continue with assigned task
- 12:30 p.m. Lunch
- Free time
- 3:30 Small groups continue with assigned task
- 5:00 Free time
- 6:00 Dinner
- 7:30 Role Plays on "Authority" and "Accountability"
Candida Palmer
- 9:00 Hymn sing
- 9:30 Worship Epilogue - Jack Kirk

Sunday, December 9

- 8:00 a.m. Breakfast
- 9:00 Reports from Small Groups
- 10:00 SUMMARY REPORT by PARTICIPANTS/OBSERVERS
DAVID BILLS AND DIANA DILLE
- 11:00 Closing Worship
- 12:00 p.m. Lunch
- 1:00 Departure

FRIENDS CONSULTATION ON
SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

DECEMBER 6-9, 1984

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS
Louise Wilson

As a background for our time together this evening, I want to open with two stories. One comes from II Kings and the other from my own journal. You will probably remember the time when the Shunammite found her son dead and she went to find Elisha, the prophet, and when she found him she told him to come for her son was dead. And when he came he went in the room and he lay down upon the child. He put his mouth to the child's mouth, and his eyes to the child's eyes, and his arms out and his hands to the child's hands, and his legs down to the child's legs. And the child became warm. Elisha got up and walked out to the other room and then he came back. He lay down upon the child again and the child sneezed seven times. He got up and he called for the mother and she came and he told her to take up her son.

In the spring of 1971, I was going to Woodland, North Carolina, to visit my father. At that time, one of our granddaughters, just a little over 3 years old, lived nearby so I asked her if she would like to ride to North Carolina to see Granddaddy Dave. She said she would. Kerry and I started out for Woodland, about a two hour trip. As we rode along I said, "Kerry, Granddaddy Dave has not been feeling very well and when we get there he will probably be sitting in the den; he will probably have his feet up on the stool. When you go in be quiet in case he is resting." She said, "Grandmama, when I put my hand in his hand he'll turn on his own light." I drove on. When we got there she jumped out of the car as quickly as she could, she ran in the den and there he was sitting exactly as I had thought he would be. Kerry lay on top of him, putting her mouth on his mouth and eyes on his eyes and her little arms outstretched on his as far as they would stretch and her little body on his body and legs down as far as they would go. And then after a moment or two, she jumped up and ran out in the yard to play with the kittens.

These two stories illustrate the mystery of the subject that we are going to be talking about during the next few days. The Shunammite believed that Elisha could bring her son to life and she acted on the spiritual authority that she had in going to get him and he raised her son from the dead. Kerry knew that when she put her hand in my father's hand that he would turn on his own light and she did what she did from the spiritual authority given her. We can't explain what happened in either one of these stories. There is no way to explain it.

Perhaps what we have done is to dilute our spiritual authority by trying to get knowledge or by analyzing or explaining when we could be receiving. We could be receiving the power of the living God. We could be vessels to be filled by his spirit. Or, we could become as a little child.

A few summers ago another of our grandchildren, R. D., who was just a little over 3 years old, and I were at the beach having a great time when there was quite a commotion beside us. There was a family of four children, and the little boy, who looked to be about R. D.'s age, had built a sand castle which was beautiful. When his older brothers knocked it down, he was furious; he was so furious that he started screaming. His mother was embarrassed and she picked up him and held him, she patted him and she told him it would be all right. The more she said, the madder he got and he started kicking and screaming louder. She picked him up and she sat him down away from the crowd. She walked away. R. D. didn't say anything to me; he just got up and went over to the child and he started walking around the child and he walked and he walked and he walked. And the child went from a scream, to a sigh and then finally after a while the child stopped crying, at which time R. D. came back and started playing. He didn't say anything and I wanted to say something, but I am such a good grandmother, I didn't say a word. When he got in the car and got ready to go home, the first thing he said to me was, "Grandmama, I knew what I was doing."

Well, I had no doubt that he did! I did want to know more but I didn't ask, I didn't ask. There again the mystery of inner authority that comes from the Lord.

In our scriptures we read, "And he spoke as one having authority." Very early in Jesus' ministry, his disciples recognized his authority, but there were others who were around him and they never recognized it. Today we have the authority of the Lord, and yet, do we recognize it? Have we dimmed that recognition? Are we like the boy who had died? Are we dead to life? Are we dead to the power of Christ? Do we even want to be awakened? Perhaps not until we come to the place that we can say, "I live and yet not I, Christ lives in me." Do we even want to say that? Perhaps until we are ready to at least talk about these questions, or at least think about them, we are not ready to go further with this subject. Many of us are asleep. We are dead to life. We are trying to change the world, we are trying to change other people, we are trying to change conditions and we are trying to do it in our own strength, and we wonder why not much is happening.

The Lord's power broke forth more and more wonderfully was George Fox's experience. When he heard "there was one, even one, Jesus Christ who can speak to thy condition" he knew for himself the authority. He knew. And he knew that Christ had come to teach people himself by his power and spirit. Are we willing to let our lack of vision and commitment continue to make us people of the world, or are we going to listen and hear God's authority in order that we might live in the world with his power?

I think Jesus illustrates so beautifully in the story of Mary and Martha the one thing that is needed. And again, when He tells the disciples to tarry until they have power on high. Later in his ministry, he gives us the complete understanding of accountability because after the power has come, he took a towel--he took a towel and he washed their feet. The accountability that comes with service after we have waited for

the power. As I have pondered this subject, and believe me I have pondered it, because when the letter came from Wilmer Cooper, I could not even comprehend the title, Spiritual Authority and Accountability. Maybe he didn't mean to put all those words in it, surely there was a mistake; but I found out that it really was the title of the weekend and that I was going to have to look at the whole subject. As I did, I felt like a drowning child; my whole life went in front of me. I remembered times when I had heard, or seen, and I had acted. Times when I had obeyed and I had been accountable to that still small voice. One of the most significant stages in my life was in 1952 when I began taking time each morning before anybody else got up for listening, reading the Bible, praying, and writing. After several months I saw (and I am sure the Lord gave it to me that way because he just had to get my attention) a meeting house and it was so clear that I thought it must mean that I was to leave my husband. After all there was no meeting house at Virginia Beach so I guessed the Lord was going to do one of those great things and lift me right out of my family and I would leave my husband and children and go do good! Of course that wasn't what he had in mind at all. And about that time I thought that he said, "Wait a minute, you ponder what you saw and until every member of your family sees it, you aren't to tell anyone, much less do anything." This meeting house is to be in Virginia Beach. Virginia Beach, in the middle of the military! As I really listened and I kept seeing that meeting house, I knew that that meeting house was to be at Virginia Beach. And to make a story which lasted 6 months very short, each member of our family did see the vision. They didn't see the meeting house just as I did, but one by one, first our son said, "I think we should start a meeting, I am tired of going to that church." There was nothing wrong with that church -- there again, how did this little boy, 8 years old know that there should be a meeting at Virginia Beach? A month or so later our daughter, who was seven asked, "When can we start a meeting?" The children had not heard each other; this is the way the Spirit works when it goes ahead and makes the crooked road straight. It could not have fulfilled the prophesy of the vision if they had all gotten together and I had coerced them. (I wanted to do that but didn't give in!) And then, finally, after about 6 months, my husband came home one evening and he said, "I want to do something for the Society of Friends before I die." And I said, "What?" He replied, "Start a meeting sometime." I said, "Sometime is Sunday." He is a fast Quaker but not as fast as I was on that one. He said, "I didn't mean right now." I didn't tell him all my story for a long time -- several months -- because I just didn't think it was the time. But we did start that Sunday!

I was given another experience that was helpful during those early years of starting the meeting in our home and building a meeting house. (If you start a meeting in your home it is like icing on a cake; you build the meeting house and then you get the challenges as you get into the workings of being a monthly meeting. That's where the real growth comes.) I woke up one morning and there at the foot of my bed was Jesus. The next thing I knew I was standing up and he had his hand on my head. It was like a baptism; even though I have never been baptized with water, it felt like a baptism I am sure. As soon as Jesus

left, I got up and wrote down everything I could remember. This was significant to me because I knew during those times of growth as a new meeting that I was doing what I was supposed to do, it was a confirmation to me. It was on March 17, 1955, that this experience took place, and about 6 weeks later a letter came from Woodland, North Carolina, Rich Square Monthly Meeting (my home meeting because we had not become a monthly meeting yet) saying that on March 17th I had been recorded a minister in the Society of Friends. That was the confirmation I had to have in order to go on. Many times I might not have made it and God knew that I couldn't make it if he didn't give me something to hold on to. He would rather me hold on to him than something else. It was God's grace.

There were times when things were clear, but I think a lot of times, and all of you can identify with this I am sure, when we recognize the authority in the other person like I recognized it in Kerry and R. D. for we don't always get the message ourselves. If we are in tune with the inner authority, when another person speaks or acts with that authority, it doesn't make any difference, it is great. No one has a corner on truth. I will never forget that while we were still meeting in our home, a person stood at the close of meeting and said, "This morning I overheard the Lord say there should be a Friends School at Virginia Beach." There were 10 adults and 4 children present and we said, "Yes, there should be." Each of us heard the authority in her. We named a committee, as good Quakers, and started planning. We opened Friends School in the fall of 1955. An interesting sidelight is that the person who overheard the Lord didn't stay in our meeting any longer than to give the message. You see that didn't matter, she was just in the meeting a few months and then went back to the Episcopal Church because she needed to be able to take communion. She was there at the right time and those of us that heard the spiritual authority in her have stayed and been accountable.

There have been times when I have heard something clearly and there is no doubt about it and I have followed what I heard, but I didn't interpret what I heard correctly. The words were clear but the interpretation was not clear. And because of devotion for God and the desire to do his will, the misinterpretation is used for the highest. In November of 1974, I was vacuuming the living room. I heard, with the vacuum going, a voice saying, "Are you ready to go now?" And I turned off the vacuum and I said, "Yes, Lord." I really heard his voice and I knew I was supposed to go. I didn't know where and, of course, Bob hadn't gotten the message, nobody else had gotten the message; but I heard it and yet, I didn't do what I'd done in 1953; I didn't ponder. I packed my suitcase and I put everything that I was going to take in my car and when Bob came home I told him I was leaving. He said, "What for?" And I said, "Well, I have to go." And I told him what I had heard and he asked me, "Aren't you going to check it out anymore than that?" I said, "No, it is very clear." I was persistent and I did leave. I never expected to come back in the sense of any plan because it so clear that I was to go. I stayed 7 weeks, recognizing almost immediately that I had to cut some ties. I didn't know at the time that Bob had nothing to do with my leaving, and bless his

heart, he didn't know what was happening. It was a pretty horrible thing to do, and I don't recommend it to anyone. But, that was what I did. I gradually began to get understanding that I had all kinds of outward ties that had to be cut; ties with the meeting and school and ties in the community. I thought that I had already done these things, but I hadn't. I also had a lot of inner work to do. You see, the Lord taught me later that I didn't have to leave. I could have done it all and stayed home, but I didn't know it then. It wasn't until much later, just a very few years ago, that I knew what the question was. The Lord said, "Are you ready to go now?" He never, ever has changed the question, but I didn't hear it fully. He was asking, "Are you ready to give up your individualism for membership in the body of Christ?" Of course if he had asked that when I was vacuuming, I would just have passed out. I couldn't possibly have taken all that in at the time and because I couldn't hear fully, I acted on what I could hear. Gradually I came to know what it was that he was saying to me, and he has continued to teach me one thing after another. The thing that is the most amazing is that he didn't really teach me himself until I invited him in. Here is an example. The verse, "I and the Father are one" had always interested me. I felt it to be truth. I had read it over and over, wanting to know what Jesus meant. I said, "Jesus, come and teach me what you mean when you talk about 'I and the Father are one.'" because I want to know for myself. He said, "You know you have always talked to God, you have always prayed to God, you have always looked to God and I have never been hurt a bit because he is my father. All the time that you were having all those personal experiences, I have been right with you. You remember one time when I came to the foot of your bed. I have been with you all the time and I haven't been upset that you always talk to God because I knew sometime you would invite me in and you would call me Jesus." After that, there seemed to be one time after another when I invited him in. Before, I had thought about Jesus more as a seed or the inner light, something that was more vague than personal. It was a long time between when he stood at the foot of my bed in 1953 and when I invited him in. And yet, it could not have happened any sooner because my own heart and mind had not been tendered. And now I am still a babe in Christ. My hair is so white and I am so glad because it must mean that I have accomplished something. I am excited about what is going to happen next even though I don't know what it is going to be, I just know it is going to be good. I came to Quaker Hill for a Consultation on Membership. So many great things had happened the year before I came, I didn't know how much more could happen and yet this year has been the best in my life. When Wilmer Cooper called me and asked me to come last year, I wasn't supposed to come. Our yearly meeting had already named somebody else, but Wilmer said, "Come." You see, I heard that spiritual authority and I thought it was coming from Wilmer and I found out it was from the Lord. Anyway, I came. Last year I realized that all that I had believed in during my adult life, all that I had been awakened to was just about to be taken away. It was being watered down, it was becoming a do-good, a love in, a hang loose, don't hurt nobody, march for peace -- there was no place for the Prince of Peace! He might offend a member or attender. My heart was heavy as I left the Consultation. I didn't leave here discouraged, I left heavy; but I knew this

happening was not the end, I knew it was the beginning. I don't remember any of the words that I said in those meetings for worship a year ago, but I remember the power that I felt. I remember at one of the meetings for worship I saw the body of Christ and knew that the hope for the Society of Friends was membership in that body. Inwardly I understood what I saw; outwardly I didn't understand it. As I left here, I prayed a lot and I listened and I began to realize that those who know Christ, who know the life of the body of Christ, have a conscienceness of him. It is not a doctrinal understanding, not a teaching, not a principle. If we were going to say it about ourselves it would be like the Holy Spirit has borne a witness to our spirit and we know, yes, we know for ourselves that we are children of God. I wonder if this is part of the dilemma of the Society of Friends today. Is it that we can not see -- the veil is so heavy, we can not see the body of Christ? We can not see that we are children of God and therefore we do not have the conscienceness that says, "We know that we have passed from death into life because we love the brethren." I don't think we realize what our blindness is costing us. If we should open our eyes, we could see that love is natural whereas division is unnatural. We would experience hurt when there is any sort of division of that body. The body of Christ saves us from ourselves (that is from self) and from individualism. It gives us an awareness of oneness of the body and we see that all we do is the work of the wholeness of the body. Of course individuals have work to do and in every monthly meeting and yearly meeting, but no one considers the job as belonging to any one person because it is a part of the whole and we see the fellowship that springs from the body and we realize that we are inadequate by ourselves and we do need each other. It seems that as Friends we have gradually moved out of the body of Quakerdom into individual bodies of Quakers whereby each person follows his/her light at the expense of the entire Society of Friends. We often do not realize how we hinder the reality of Christ in our lives by our individualism. I was a master of that. I think that that was why I had to be taken out of where I was so that I could let go of individualism. God is not looking for individual vessels, he is looking for a corporate one. From the corporate worship and business we will know our specific ministry, for he will tell us instead of a nominating committee.

We become accountable to God and ourselves and our meetings and to Quakerism as we give up authority in position, in ordination, in education, in background, in individualism, and it is at this point that we are ready to claim our inheritance in the authority of Christ.

I don't think that anyone here, whether you have known me before tonight or not, would have any doubt but what I am excited about life. I am, and I am filled with hope and high expectations, holy expectations. As the thoughts for this week kept coming to me and I would make a note here and a note there, my prayer was that I would be able to know what it was that I was to say, and that the message would convey how deeply I feel about the subject. In the shower the day before yesterday I got the message! (I don't seem to be able to write a paper because he works with me right up to the end.) I have to tell you first of all that when I was a little girl, my favorite thing to play was

paper dolls. I had a box, a shoe box, and in that shoe box I had all my little dresses, and suits and things were in another box. I had my little family: mother and daddy and 2 brothers and a sister. I would make all their suits and dresses out of wallpaper. Well, you know God speaks to us just where we are about the things that we know about. That is one reason Jesus was such a great teacher. With the parables he taught people where they were, and that is what he does to us today, if we are listening. The shower is a good place to listen, so here I was, and all of a sudden I saw one paper doll and it was the body of Christ. It has to be original to come this way; there it was, the body of Christ, one paper doll. And I looked over in my shoe box and there was a dress, it was mine, me. I picked up the dress and put it on and with a little adjusting here and there, not too much, I got it so it would at least stay on. I looked back in the box and there was another dress and it was the Virginia Beach Meeting. I put it on, and it did not fit very well, it was too loose, but it did not fall off. I thought that was really interesting so I reached down in the box again and there was the Society of Friends. I went to put it on and there was no way -- there were bulges, sagging hemline, the sleeves hung all the way down over the hands (you couldn't even see the hands) the neck was lopsided, there were holes in several places. It was something terrible! About that time I felt somebody try to take it away from me. I said, "No, no, you can't have that!" I thought that I should check the pattern. I looked around and found the pattern. It had Jesus, it had the Bible, it had George Fox, and it had everything you would need for Friends. I didn't see anything wrong with the pattern. I put the pattern over the dress and they weren't even the same at all. So I thought the only thing to do is to cut out another dress. (This is all happening very quickly.) About that time there was a new dress and I put it on. This is the Society of Friends and it fits absolutely perfectly. As I was rejoicing, I looked back in the box and there was another dress, Christianity. I reached for it and I put it on and it fit. It was amazing! I realized that the other churches had been at work too. They had gone back to their pattern and had gotten a new dress. It wasn't just the Society of Friends who were concerned, all of Christendom was concerned and they had all gone back to the pattern! And about that time I saw all the dresses go on the Christ, one by one and they became one and just as they were all one, they all became transparent and there was nothing left except the body of Christ. Nothing else!

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON AUTHORITY

T. Canby Jones

By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth...For he spoke and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth.

Psalms 33:6&9

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

Isaiah 40:28

What do we learn about the authority, strength and energy of God as creator from these two passages?

Say among the nations, 'The Lord reigns.' The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the people with equity. Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with his truth.

Psalms 96:10-13

From this Psalm what do we learn about the authority of God's rule; of his coming to judge the world with righteousness, truth and equity? Listen to the heavens, the earth, to the sea, the fields and all the trees singing for joy at his approach. What kind of blessed authority is that?

You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Exodus 19:4-6

When Israel came out of Egypt...the sea looked and fled, the Jordan turned back; the mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs. Why was it, O sea, that you fled, O Jordan, that you turned back, you mountains, that you skipped like rams, you hills like lambs? Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob.

Psalms 114: 1-7

What do we here learn about God's authority in deliverance, salvation, covenant making and the mountains and hills quaking for joy at his presence?

Promised in Isaiah and born among us in the New Testament is Immanuel, God with us. "To him all authority in heaven and on earth has been given." (Matthew 28:18) Early in his ministry he went into the synagogue at Capernaum on the Sabbath and began to teach.

The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one having authority and not at the teachers of the law. Just then a man...possessed by an evil spirit cried out, 'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are -- the Holy One of God!' 'Be quiet!' said Jesus sternly. 'Come out of him!' The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, 'What is this? A new teaching -- and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.'

Mark 1:21-27

Shortly thereafter he scandalized Pharisees by healing the paralytic, who had been lowered through the roof, to demonstrate "that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." The onlookers then celebrate this exercise of his authority by shouting, "We never saw anything like this!" (Mark 2:1-12)

On another occasion he angrily put down those who accused him of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, by saying, "If I by the finger of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you suddenly." (Luke 11:14-20).

What do we learn from these three incidents about the nature of Jesus' authority? Notice, he doesn't pontificate or philosophize about authority. He demonstrates it.

Or again in Luke chapter 7:18-23 when the imprisoned John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or look we for another?" In answer Jesus got to work and then sent word to John, "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor." Lay it on Jesus! That's the kind of authority we want to see carried out!

In the same marvellous chapter of Luke a centurion comes to Jesus and humbly asks Jesus to heal his servant. When Jesus offers to go and do so, the centurion, aware how it would ruin Jesus' reputation to enter his house, the home of a gentile, asked Jesus to just,

Say the word and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority...When Jesus heard this

he was amazed at him and...said, 'I tell you, I have not found such great faith, no, not in all Israel.'

Luke 7:1-9

One more precious incident from the same chapter of Luke: In a town called Nain, Jesus, his disciples and a large crowd with him joined a funeral procession for the only son and sole means of livelihood of a widow.

When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, 'Don't cry.' Then he went up and touched the coffin, and...he said, 'Young man, I say to you, get up!' The dead man sat up and began to talk and he gave him to his mother. They were all filled with awe and praised God. 'A great prophet has appeared among us,' they said. 'God has come to help his people.'

Luke 7:11-16

Who can match the authority of such compassion?

This same Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life;" and, "the living water welling up to eternal life." Or again he said, "I am the bread of life...come down from heaven to give life to the world;" or in another place, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me...will never die." (John chapters 14, 4, 6 and 11 passim) What do these verses communicate about the authority of God's only begotten through whom He so loves the world?

In another vein we find the disciples James and John, in Mark chapter 10, disputing about which of them should get the best box seat beside Jesus on the coming judgment day. Hearing of their request to Jesus the rest of the disciples were indignant. Then

Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles Lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. Instead whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant...and the willing slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as ransom for many.'

Mark 10:42-45

Surely, this is one of the most important scriptures demonstrating the true nature of authority in the Bible!

With this incident in mind I will begin our attempt to understand authority. From this passage I derive a maxim: "All authority is earned by or derived from servanthood." Think about it. Do you think this is universally true? How about its opposite, "All authority derived from the desire to dominate is illicit"? Is that also true?

Just as Jesus poured out his life in vicarious suffering servanthood for others, we must do the same. He said that we would thereby be required to deny ourselves, take up our own

crosses and follow him, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it." (Mark 8:34-35) Such suffering servanthood is the locus of true authority. The world, the Reagan government, other governments and all who seek to dominate not only will never understand true authority but they will hate it and seek to destroy it.

We cannot, however, clearly understand the nature of true authority without first describing its opposite. All the persuasive, loving, person-affirming things we have been indicating or suggesting by our examination of Scripture are perverted, manipulated and destroyed by authoritarianism, the opposite of true authority. Authoritarianism is practiced by any person, society or institution which arrogates to itself the right or power to coerce or force people to submit to its will. One of the main common definitions of authority is the "the power to enforce obedience." (Oxford English Dictionary, Vol 1, p. 572) When such power is exercised for reasons of pride, greed, lust or ambition there is no authority in it.

A locus classicus in Scripture that depicts the conflict between these two types of authority is Romans 13:1-10. You will remember that in it we are called to be subject to the governing authorities as ordained of God. We are advised that magistrates exist to punish evil doers and to cherish those that do well and that the magistrate does not bear his sword in vain. So we had better submit to the authorities. But such submission is conditional on whether the magistrate obeys the divine law which follows in verses eight to ten. We are told first that magistrates are God's servants and that we are to owe no one anything but to "love one another." "Do not commit adultery." "Do not murder." "Do not steal." "Do not covet." Whatever other commandment there may be is summed up in this one rule, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Magistrates, just like the rest of us, are subject to the true authority of these divine laws and they cannot exercise their power to enforce obedience in violation of them. If the magistrate breaks, or causes any of those subject to him to break these divine laws, his authority is forfeit and we owe him no allegiance or obedience.

Because of our inherent sinfulness all exercise of authority by human beings tends to degenerate into authoritarianism which is the implacable and satanic enemy of true authority.

Authoritarian rule, whether by individuals or institutions, is an evidence of what Thomas Shipley Brown calls, "imposed authority." Imposed authority is contrived, prideful, arbitrary, selfish, capricious, wilful, irresponsible, unaccountable, inadequate and ineffective. It demeans, degrades and dehumanizes both the imposer and the imposed upon. It is against true authority, gospel order and the justice of God. Quakers are allergic to it and rightly so.

To recapitulate, authoritarianism is the self-centered ego-maniac arrogation of authority and power to a single person, social structure or institution without accountability. If power corrupts, how much more so does authoritarianism.

Authoritarianism and its prideful power to enforce obedience are for the fire which cannot be quenched.

But enough of the bad news about false authority. What then is true authority? Our word "authority" is derived from the Latin work, auctoritas, which in turn stems from the Latin, auctor, which is rendered into English as "author". Of the sixteen definitions for auctor which appear in the Oxford Latin Dictionary (pp.205-6) four of them express meanings of true authority as seen in the scriptures cited above.

First, the auctor or author is "the person or thing principally responsible for an action, the prime mover, agent, originator, cause." How marvelously our first series of scriptures illustrates this meaning. God is auctor because through his word and action everything came to be. Through him the world is established and the whole world rejoices that he comes to judge his people with justice and equity. Again, God is the author of deliverance of Israel from Egypt, author of his love covenant with will transform Israel into a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

A second and related definition of auctor is: "The doer of an action: the maker, creator, builder, artist; the giver, the source." I hope you noticed in all the examples of Jesus' authority we gave, save one, Jesus never theorized about authority but acted authoritatively. He forgave sins, healed the lame, gave sight to the blind, cured the sick and compassionately raised the dead. His authority is demonstrated not only through his teaching but even more through his actions.

The third and fourth definitions combine to show that an auctor is "one who persuades, teaches, advises authoritatively; one who favors, advocates or supports." This is the source of Tom Brown's characterization of true authority as "persuasive authority."

True authority never forces, imposes or coerces. It educates, guides, cherishes and teaches. Consider this marvelous "Quaker" passage,

O people of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you. Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teacher will be hidden no more; with your own eye you will see him. Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'
Isaiah 30:19-21

This is authority, the auctor himself at work.

Or again stressing the persuasive constraining nature of true authority, Jesus says, "No man can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. (John 6:44) This is divine persuasive love, the inner constraint, divine authority at work.

Our Latin dictionary, however, fails us on two of the most crucial elements of true authority. The first is the everlasting faithful loving kindness of God or chesed, which he pours out on the wilful, the disobedient and the lost in every nation and culture, seeking to bring them to himself. We hear it in Ezekiel's call for repentance.

Repent! Turn away from all...the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!

Ezekiel 18:30-32

This is how true authority expresses itself.

But climactically it is in the suffering servanthood of Jesus that we see true authority most fully expressed. He poured out his life in compassionate acts of healing, in stern prophetic judgments, in acts of redemption and salvation that lead irreversibly to his death on the Cross and his glorious conquest of death through his rising again from it. It is in this aspect of the love of God and the life of Jesus that true authority is most fully and compellingly acted out. It is because of all that he accomplished that with full and overflowing hearts we can attribute to him that one description of authority as a state or condition: "To him all authority in heaven and on earth have been given."

What must we do then to demonstrate in our lives the same authenticity and authority we experience through him? First, we must "learn obedience in the school of suffering," just as he did. Next, we must follow in his steps. But he gave us an incredible promise that "Greater things than these shall ye do." (John 14:12) Only by living and abiding in the true authority of the living Word himself and the Holy Spirit can we do them. Also, "we must walk in the Light as he is in the Light" and we shall be purified from all sin. (I John 1:7)

Strangely, the most moving appeal for us to demonstrate true or divine authority in our teaching, example and lives comes from the two great commandments our Lord Jesus gave us: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and mind and strength and thy neighbor as thyself." These sum up all the Torah and all the Gospel. If we do these we shall not only live but we shall exemplify and demonstrate true authority.

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SOURCES OF SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY
Elizabeth Watson

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you.

Matthew 20:25-26

I step to a different theological drummer from the other speakers at this Consultation and from many of the attenders whom I know. I hope this is the reason I was invited to present a paper here. Be that as it may, you are entitled to know where I am coming from and what my biases are.

Chance, in the form of a generous scholarship, took me for graduate work to Chicago Theological Seminary and the University of Chicago Divinity School nearly fifty years ago. At the time Chicago was a center for what is known as Process Theology. I believe I made good use of my time there by becoming the disciple of a great process theologian, Henry Nelson Wieman, stretching myself to grasp his thought and trying honestly to think through the implications.

In contrast to the neo-orthodox theology that has its origins in the thinking of Karl Barth that God broke into history only once in the advent of Jesus Christ, Process Theology sees God as a process at work in the universe and in human history making for structures of mutual interdependence and cooperation. It had its origins in the thinking of Alfred North Whitehead whose brief definition of God I find helpful: God is the binding element in the world.

I am grateful for the intellectual discipline involved in trying to construct a carefully reasoned theological framework while in seminary. Process theology underlies my thinking and has been the basis for action through a long life. My thinking has continually evolved out of it and I have never had reason to deny its basic premises. Experience has born out the original insights. "This I know experimentally."

While at the University of Chicago I discovered the Religious Society of Friends, and felt called to a non-professional ministry in the field of race relations, rather than the pastoral ministry for which I trained. Theology has remained a major interest for me, however.

In the last dozen years I have been greatly interested in Liberation Theology and have read widely in the field. This past year at Woodbrooke I had the opportunity to take some formal courses, in particular one taught by Bishop Patrick Kaliombe of Malawe, and among my fellow students were third world people from Africa, Asia and Latin America, many of whom were actively

engaged in "doing" liberation theology. Liberation theologians assert that Christ came to deliver the oppressed, not the rich, not the powerful, not the theologians, and that theology must be done by and with oppressed people in the context of their lives. I find this entirely consistent with Christ's life and teaching. My present major interest is Feminist Theology, which I see as growing out of and part of Liberation Theology. For initial involvement in feminist theology, I must thank Friends United Meeting. In 1973 I was asked to represent FUM on the newly formed Commission on Women in Ministry of the National Council of Churches. It was indeed a consciousness-raising experience for me. Judeo-Christian theology has been based on male experience, seen as normative for the whole human race. Feminist theology is based on female experience. I look forward ultimately to a human theology, neither male nor female, but inclusive of both. But even that is not enough: we need a planetary theology that includes in its concern the other creatures who share our planet - and includes the earth itself.

My interest in theology began early. As a child I struggled to reconcile what I was taught about God with my own experience. Specifically I was told that "God will take care of you." I began to doubt this the night that I heard my little sister coughing her young life away during a whooping cough epidemic. Why was God not taking care of her? Why do "bad things happen to good people"? I struggled with such questions. Later I assumed that I could eventually study theology and get everything figured out neatly, with no dangling loose ends. Then I could go out to preach the truth.

One of the most valuable courses I took at Chicago was in pastoral counseling, taught by a psychiatrist, William H. Sheldon, who later did pioneering work in human morphology at Harvard. Sheldon was given to epigrams and one morning he gave us this one: Maturity is the capacity to tolerate ambiguity and conflict. Till then I had assumed that maturity was knowing for sure. Thus ended my dream of certainty.

I still live with ambiguity, tolerating it pretty well most of the time, and I certainly live with conflict, which is harder. It has made me very wary of anyone who claims to have simple answers, or the truth, and wants to impose them on others.

All we know of God has been filtered through the experience of imperfect human beings. Like the blind men and the elephant in the ancient Indian tale, we touch God at different places and come up with different concepts. The danger comes when people set up their limited ideas as binding on others. Over and beyond our human minds, God is greater, deeper, higher, more complex, more vast than anyone can conceive. God eludes all the nets of words we fling to capture and pin down our comprehension. Paul was right: we see through a glass darkly.

So I set forth my ideas on authority with the caveat that this is how things look to me. This is what I know experimentally. Your experience, your experiments with truth are different. Let us have dialogue, seeking where we can agree, but let none of us claim to have the only truth. Let us live with

and tolerate the ambiguities of our beloved Society of Friends, as well as our individual lives. God keep us all from pride and arrogance. I do not seek to persuade you of my views, but to share how things look to me.

I want to discuss three kinds of authority: authority over others, personal authority, and authority with others.

Authority Over Others

In order for society to function, we need some duly constituted authority; anarchy does not seem to me to be a viable basis for people living together. In a democracy such as ours, we grant this authority to certain people for a limited time and purpose. We elect people to enact legislation and others to carry it out. We accept, for example, the authority of police to regulate traffic, but we set restrictions on their authority to enter our homes without warrant or otherwise interfere with our privacy.

The source of this authority is in the people, authorized by our free elections. As citizens of towns and states and nations we are obligated to vote, to let our representatives know what we think about issues, and to participate in authorizing our government. At the same time, as people of God, we are citizens also of the Realm of God, and sometimes our loyalties come into conflict. When this happens, we should always give the higher loyalty to God and accept the consequences. Where these two loyalties do not conflict, Jesus has succinctly summed up our obligation: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21)

Let us never forget how fortunate we are to live in a democratic society, with limits placed on those who have authority to govern us. For most of the human race, most of the time, including our own, authority is arbitrary, brutal, and self-perpetuating.

Even in our democratic society, however, there is an authority structure not duly authorized or limited as to time and purpose. It is so much a part of our society and our religion that most of us are unaware of it. We think this is the way things were meant to be. I refer to the authority structure rooted in our patriarchal and hierarchical society by which some people assume authority over others by virtue of the accident of birth or dog-eat-dog-competition, and not through earned merit.

In our civilization this authority structure is rooted in the Old Testament. In the second chapter of Genesis, after the world was created, God brought the birds and animals to the man to see what he would name them. Then in the next chapter the man named the woman. Naming gives power.

This story is part of what is known by scholars as the "J" document, and was probably set down about 950 B.C., toward the latter part of David's reign. The children of Israel with their male God were still struggling to impose patriarchy on a

civilization that had had two deities: a goddess known by variations of the name Ishtar, and her male consort Baal. The unknown writer of this part of Genesis had an axe to grind. He wanted to give patriarchy divine sanction. Patriarchy ultimately won out, as we all know, although as late as the fall of Jerusalem in 589 B.B., people told Jeremiah that things had gone better when they worshipped the Queen of Heaven. (Jeremiah 44:16-19)

Psalm 8 suggests a hierarchical ladder. David begins his Psalm in humility:

When I consider the heavens, the work of your hands,
the moon and the stars which You have ordained,
Who are we that You are mindful of us?
and our children, that You visit them?

But authority, like power, corrupts, and David had nearly absolute power, which is said to corrupt absolutely (although later God humbled him). So he goes on, not in humility but in arrogance:

You have made us a little lower than the angels
and crowned us with glory and honor;
You have given us dominion over the works of your hands;
You have put all things under our feet.

He goes on then to name the various kinds of animals subject to man. We see here a hierarchy with God at the apex: then, "a little lower than the angels," man--not generic man in this case, but male human beings. Women, slaves, children, animals, plant life all occupy lower places, and then, under everyone's feet, the earth itself.

So men have assumed authority over the animals, causing many to become extinct or endangered. And what "dominion over the earth" has done to this planet I need not detail here. We all live with pollution and resource exhaustion.

This patriarchal and hierarchical structure underlies even our democratic society. When Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...", he certainly was not talking about "generic" mankind. Specifically he was talking about propertied, white, adult males. Native Americans, black slaves, apprentices, students, and women were not included. Our national history can be read as the struggles of each of these groups to regain their human rights.

Our world has been named by affluent, white, adult males and their views considered normative for everyone. Christian theology has been largely a male, Western, scholarly province until well into the 20th century. Our ideas of God, the universe, nature, human nature and relationships are all filtered through a patriarchal lens. Small wonder that traditional theology unabashedly places men at the top.

Liberation theology calls for oppressed people to take back theology and to take charge of their own lives. Thanks to what it is setting in motion, the Christian Church may yet be saved in spite of itself, and after two thousand years finally fulfill the great mission of Christ to release captives, open blind eyes, and liberate the oppressed.

This subtle, all-pervading insidious authority structure of patriarchal hierarchy in our society and religious tradition is, in my view, contrary to the mind of Christ. Jesus said to his disciples:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many.

Matthew 20:25-28

Paul captures the essence of Christ's non-hierarchical message when he says:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:2

Elsewhere Paul's vision was not quite so clear regarding slaves and women!

As citizens of the Realm of God, I believe we are called to resist this pervasive authority structure in our world, our nation, in Christianity, and in the Religious Society of Friends. It should not be so among us!

Personal Authority

In various places in the Gospels we are told that Jesus "taught as one having authority and not as the scribes." We turn now to personal authority, such as Jesus had in abundance. What is its source? Why do some have it and others not?

Some people have authority on the basis of scholarship and critical analysis and hard work. They are authorities on music, or insects, or history. When they speak or write, we trust their authority, in their field, for the time being. Later discoveries may outdate their authority. As Paul said, "We know in part."

There is also the authority of wisdom, which some acquire from long, full, involved lives. They have a better understanding of issues, and how to act than most of us. We recognize their stature and we give weight to what they say.

Higher than either of these is spiritual authority such as Jesus had. We recognize it in George Fox, John Woolman, Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Mother Theresa, to name a few. What is the source of this authenticity? It comes out of their effort to attend to God's voice and to discern God's will for their lives. "Be it unto me according to your will," as Mary said. It comes from their "practice of the presence of God" and their striving to be "as sensitive as a shadow" in holy obedience, as Thomas Kelly suggests.

I think it also comes out of a struggle to become all God meant us to be. Most of us live only partial lives, never realizing our full potential. I believe God calls us to grow into wholeness, to live to the circumference of our lives.

Some Friends give primacy to the Bible as the source of authority. I am a constant Bible reader myself, have taken courses in it, taught courses in it, and draw on it for strength and comfort and new insights. The Gospels are central to my life. But the Bible is not the ultimate authority for me. The ultimate authority for me is the Light of God within. As Canby Jones pointed out in his paper on "Conflicting Quaker Views of Religious Authority," all Friends, whether liberal unprogrammed, or Conservative, or programmed, acknowledge the authority of the Christ within, though we may call it by other names, as Fox often did.

As Friends we are to attend to the Inward Teacher, through prayer, meditation, Bible study, reading devotional classics, journal keeping, or whatever works for us. We all need to enter into some regular form of self-discipline to shut out the noise and distractions and be in touch with the Source of our being.

From this divine center comes our concerns, leadings, "great openings," and actions. And yet we are human creatures with limitations. How can we be sure that the leading which seems so clear is not a delusion? One thinks of Hitler, or Jonesville. Pride and will and personal desire often color what we think God is telling us. Friends have always recognized the need for checks on our leadings to guard against "notionalism." I suggest several obvious ones.

First, what does your own experience and collective human experience tell us about this leading? What does the experience of the Judeo-Christian community, both Biblical and historical, have to say? If in the light of collective experience, the leading seems strange or far-fetched, pause for a moment. But we must also remember that many leadings which later proved to be right were thought to be delusions when first entertained.

Second, God has given us minds--brains with two halves. Leadings often arise from the right half that has to do with intuition, hunches, feelings. Check out such leadings with the logical, clear-thinking analytical left half of the brain. Or perhaps reason has given rise to a concern. What does the feeling half of the brain say?

Third, is the leading consistent with the life and teachings of Christ? Reread the Sermon on the Mount, the various parables, the things Jesus said and did. Question your leading's authenticity if it runs contrary. Involved in this is what Roman Catholic bishops are calling "the preferential option for the poor." Does your leading or action consider our oppressed sisters and brothers? Gandhi used to have a touchstone for people in doubt about a course of action. He told them to bring to mind the poorest, most humble and oppressed people you can think of and ask if your action would further their gaining control (swaraj) over their lives.

As Friends we are part of a community of believers and seekers. Our time honored tradition is to bring concerns and leadings to our Meeting for confirmation, for support, or for winnowing, or even rejection. Seeking the authority of the Holy Spirit as a group helps to authenticate or weaken our individual concerns.

But sometimes there are prophetic spirits who see beyond their own times. Their minds and spirits cut cleanly through the opacity of their days to eternal truths which even their fellow Meeting members cannot perceive. Theirs is a lonely lot. History is illuminated by their clear-sighted vision, though many were martyrs in their time. If your Meeting has some such clear-eyed soul, God's fool perhaps, be very tender, even though the Meeting witholds support and approval. What John Woolman tries our patience today by continually harping on some social evil that seems trivial to us?

Authority With Others

This brings me then to Authority with others, as contrasted with authority over others. One of the hallmarks of Friends is the authority of the spiritual community, the local Meeting. Early Friends sought to return to primitive Christianity, and compared to other Christian groups we are remarkably non-hierarchical. The authority is always in the local Meeting rather than in wider groups. No one speaks for all Friends. And though it is true that one individual's conscientiously taken opposition to a contemplated action of a Monthly Meeting can prevent action, more often Friends are willing to stand aside. I have many times known a meeting after prolonged seeking for God's will to come out with a better minute or course of action than any one of the opposing groups within the Meeting had brought to it, and everyone accepted that this was so, and that God had indeed been moving in our midst.

"Christ has come to teach his people himself," said George Fox. Out of my experience I would like to propose a model of authority with others which I will call the "learning community,"--in the context of Friends, a group called together to learn from the Inward Teacher.

The learning community is also a concept of Liberation Theology. In particular, Paulo Freire has written a book called Pedagogy of the Oppressed, growing out of his experience with

literacy programs in Brazil. He describes how learning to read helps empower peasants to understand their oppression and to take steps to improve their lot, and expounds the idea of education as dialogue between teachers and learners. It is a difficult book to read, but a very rewarding one.

It is a model made vivid to me by our eight years at Friends World College which justly calls itself a learning community. The College includes a student voice at all levels, and not just a token voice. George's official title was Moderator of the Presidential Council. The Council had three members, one of whom was a student, chosen by a world-wide process of consensus and taking a year's leave of absence to serve as the Student Executive, a full-time paid position. Those eight years were the most intense learning experience of my life, and much of what I learned was from students who continually stretched and challenged me, and loved me even when I was slow to understand.

To be part of a learning community calls for courage and a large amount of humility. I like the Alcoholics Anonymous definition of humility which a Friend shared with me: Humility if the willingness to become teachable. It is believing you can learn from anyone. It is becoming a life long learner. It is giving way in a group when something different from one's own view emerges that is clearly better. It is "giving up the obvious good for the somehow strangely better."

I like to think of the Religious Society of Friends as a vast umbrella, sheltering us all, under which all who truly want to be taught by the Spirit of Christ, by whatever name, can seek, find, and share. I will resist (non-violently, of course) all efforts to establish any kind of creedal basis for membership. Canby Jones, in the paper circulated before this consultation, says of liberal unprogrammed Friends, "Diversity of theological views is considered a virtue by these Friends." I say Amen!

I joined Friends at 57th Street Meeting in Chicago, while still a student at Seminary and it was my spiritual home for 35 years. There I was often ministered to by orthodox Christians (and we had many in that Meeting), but I was also at other times ministered to by universalists, by refugees from Nazi Germany who accepted Christ's teachings, but not doctrines about him. And sometimes some graduate student at the University of Chicago, from the Middle East or Asia, a Muslim, or Hindu or Buddhist, perhaps, who felt at home in our silent worship, would speak, clearly at the moving of the Spirit, and help us achieve a gathered meeting.

I would like to propose the learning community concept as an alternative to the eldering idea in the paper by Tom Brown also circulated for this consultation, and to cite an example from 57th Street Meeting. Ours was a large urban meeting, attracting many kinds of people, and Ministry and Counsel made constant efforts to promote the deepening of our spiritual life together. One year we tried to involve everyone, members and attenders alike, in a worship-sharing group of not more than ten people. Setting up these groups was an enormous job. People were asked to commit themselves to attending the group for eight weeks. The

groups used the queries in Margaret Gibbons' chapter, "Encounter through Worship-Sharing" in the Friends World Committee study book, Break the New Ground, as a start. The first weeks, as people came to know each other, were fairly non-threatening. "What was your family like when you were a child? What is your living situation today?" As people got to know one another in some depth, the questions called for more vulnerability.

In the group I was part of was also a young woman, an attender, who spoke in Meeting compulsively almost every Sunday. I could feel her relax as the weeks went by, although sometimes the questions brought out painful material for all of us. One night the question was: "What were you afraid of as a child? and what are you afraid of now?" Each of us spoke out of the silence, sharing some of the dark things in our lives. When our young friend finally spoke of the fears she continued to live with, we all reached out to comfort and support her and assure her of our love and understanding. From that time on her unacceptable compulsive speaking in Meeting ceased, and when from time to time she did speak, we were all moved. We all grew in grace during those eight weeks. Eldering would probably have driven her from the Meeting, and might well have destroyed her.

There may well be times when some Friend, with the authority of wisdom and deep spirituality may elder someone, if the time is right, and the result may not be devastating. There is danger of spiritual pride in assuming we have such authority. Only the truly humble can speak the truth in love and be heard aright.

However, John Woolman and Gandhi provide us with role models for speaking truth to power, in oppressive situations. They continued to love and be concerned about and honest with the oppressors, rightly seeing an oppressor as a child of God in spiritual need.

One of the hallmarks of a learning community is what I will call "younering"--a willingness by older Friends to listen to children and young people. When George and I first joined 57th Street Meeting, we found several weighty older couples who really seemed to want our brash young opinions, sometimes saying, "You may be right; I'll think about it." I assure you we listened with great respect to their own words of wisdom. It has been a model for us as we have grown older.

Jesus himself provides us an example of his willingness to learn. The story is in Matthew 15:21-28. He and the disciples hoped for a brief respite from the crowds, but a Canaanite woman whose daughter was possessed by a demon made a pest of herself. The disciples urged Jesus to send her away, and he says to her, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But again she pleads with him. This time he says to her, "It is not right to take the children's meat and throw it to the dogs," words which were really an insult. But this woman, with great dignity and personal authority challenged him, using the same metaphor: "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs derive nourishment from the crumbs that fall from the master's table." And this time Jesus responded; "Woman, great is your faith! Be it done as you desire." He had been seeing his mission as only to Israel.

Perhaps it is thanks to her that his mission grew to include us! Jesus was open to new truth from a member of a despised group. Moreover in that male chauvinist world, he listened to a woman. He has given us an example.

Is it possible that God too is an eternal Learner as well as Teacher? If we see God as unchanging, are we limiting God because of our own insecurity and need for certainty? (Can we tolerate ambiguity?) We believe we are made in the divine image. Creativity is one of the hallmarks of humankind, and we are quick to call God Creator. But human beings also grow and learn and can cultivate the willingness to become teachable. Can God do less?

Process theology suggests that God is part of our struggle and our doubt and our agony, bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows. God suffers with us. This I know experientially. At times I catch a distant glimpse of a God who learns along with us, who needs us and finds in mutuality with us, divine redemption. Emanu-el: God with us.

Now in summary: Let us grant limited temporal authority to some that we may live together in justice and peace, but let us remember to render to God the things that are God's when there is a conflict of interests. However, let us not further legitimize the authority implicit in the patriarchal structure of our society, but make our "preferential option for the poor" and the oppressed whoever and however unlikeable we may find them to be.

Let us not judge. That is God's business, not ours. Let us take on the garment of humility, become teachable, sharing in the search for God's will of our own learning community, so that as a group we may speak with authority on the pressing issues of our own time and the eternal questions of human history.

"Christ has come to teach his people himself" in the learning communities of the the People of God. Therein lies the ultimate source of authority for us as Friends.

Please Note: Elizabeth Watson did not attend the Consultation on Spiritual Authority and Accountability because of illness. This paper was read to the participants by Kara Cole.

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ACCOUNTABILITY AMONG FRIENDS
Wilmer Cooper

Introduction

In planning this year's Consultation it was realized that in the last two Consultations, last year on Membership and the previous year on Eldering, there was a common theme and a common problem which did not get worked through in those meetings, namely, the issues of authority and accountability. In order to understand how we should relate to one another in the local meeting, we need to know and understand the conditions and requirements of those relationships which deal with these two issues. The purpose of this paper is to begin to deal with the question of accountability but to do so in the light of our need to be answerable to one another on the question of authority.

There is a generally accepted belief among Friends that George Fox's message was that religious authority and power do not root in the church but in the Light of Christ within. Although this is true, we also have to know that as soon as we consider how to be accountable to one another, we are immediately drawn into the question of the nature of the church, and what it means to be a member of the body of Christ. Therefore, even for Friends we must realize that we come to know the will of God not only from immediate revelation and from Scripture, but that God's will is to be discerned through the leadings and openings that others have in the meeting. It would be presumptuous to think that God speaks only to us individually. Thus we are accountable not only to the Spirit of Christ that reveals God's will to us, but we are accountable to one another in the community of faith. Spiritual discernment is many faceted and is not to be confined to a single source as the way in which God discloses his will and purpose to us. Thus Friends must understand that when we talk about accountability, we are talking about another form of authority, i.e., the authority of the church (or the meeting). Although Friends shy away from, if not shudder at, the thought of the authority of the church, we very badly need to recover it in our faith and practice. It was much more present in early Quakerism than we think, especially in George Fox's frequent reference to "Gospel order," a term almost completely lost to Quakerism today.

For some preliminary understanding of this issue I have been helped by Perry Yoder, a Mennonite, who spoke to the Quaker Theological Conference last June (1984) at Wichita, Kansas, which had as its theme, "Accountability To The Community of Faith." He spoke of accountability in terms of responsibility, commitment and relationship. He suggested that the model of relationship we seek in accountability is the Biblical covenant relationship. Secondly, he says that you can't have any more accountability than you have commitment. And thirdly, that accountability calls for commitment in this relationship. In short, accountability is

directly proportional to our commitment and the quality of responsibility present in that relationship.

Perry Yoder further suggests that accountability does not require homogeneity but rather interdependence. He cites the Biblical images of the "vine" in the Gospel of John, and the "body" in the Pauline writings to suggest that accountability does not depend upon hierarchical relationships but on a relationship of interdependence. Thus the church as the "vine" or the "body" can accommodate diversity so long as interdependence and accountability are present. Trouble arises when interdependence and accountability are disregarded and a state of benign tolerance and anarchy set in. In its extreme form this produces a condition of broken relationships, which theologically speaking is a condition of sin. When we reach that place, says Perry Yoder, we have to turn to the "flip side" of accountability, which calls for repentance and forgiveness in order that the broken relationships can be healed.

The Crisis of Accountability

I would like now to join these introductory remarks with portions of a paper which I read at the Quaker Theological Conference last summer, which was entitled, "The Crisis of Accountability." There are two preliminary things which need to be said about the title. The term "accountability" is to the best of my knowledge a relatively new term applied to a long standing issue among Friends. I first became aware of it in an extended paper which Candida Palmer prepared at Earlham School of Religion as part of her requirements for the M.A. degree. The term attempts to speak to the question of freedom and discipline, or freedom and order, in the religious body of Friends. It addresses the question of how we consider ourselves responsible members one of another in the body of Christ. It is concerned with how we support and nurture one another as a community of faith and as a covenanted "people of God." In other words, the concept of accountability is concerned with church discipline as it applies to the Society of Friends.

The reference to "crisis" in the title is intended to describe our situation with respect to accountability in the Society of Friends today, but that should not suggest that it is a new problem for Friends or that there have not been many crisis situations in the past. We might compare it to the proverbial claim that humankind has been living in troubled times ever since Adam and Eve tasted the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden. Likewise, the same is true of freedom and discipline in the Society of Friends; we have been in a condition of almost perpetual crisis ever since our beginning in the middle of the Seventeenth Century. What is new is that certain conditions prevail now which make our present crisis new in degree, if not in kind. We shall try to deal with some of the conditions and circumstances which cause us to sense a special crisis of accountability just now. Although our crisis may not be basically different, it sometimes seems more foreboding in terms of what is at stake for Friends now and for their future.

The Early Quaker Norm

In order to understand more precisely what we are talking about we need to state a norm which is descriptive of early Friends in order to know whether or in what way that norm has been ignored, violated, or at least not taken very seriously. We could spend the entire paper on this topic, but perhaps it will be sufficient here for definitional and clarification purposes to summarize how early Friends defined their community of faith with such terms (mostly Biblical) as, "The Body of Christ," "the People of God," "Children of the Light," "Publishers of Truth," and what George Fox described as "the Gospel Order." This immediately involves us in a Quaker theology of the church, or a doctrine of ecclesiology from the point of view of early Friends.

Descriptively speaking, Friends came together out of a sense of gatheredness in the Spirit of Christ and were united as the Christian People of God. To be so gathered by Christ as head of the Church provided a structured community of faith out of which Friends lived their lives and went forth in ministry. This is very different from Friends today being gathered out of a special concern, such as the peace testimony or the right sharing of the world's resources. Because the focuses of our concerns are so diverse we often end up being gathered in our diversity rather than gathered into a covenant of accountability to God and one another.

Because a Quaker understanding of the Church and how the will of God is known and acted upon corporately is important, it is necessary that Friends be conversant with their own ecclesiology. One of the best sources for this is to look at the Faith and Life publication, The Church in Quaker Thought and Practice (1979), edited by Charles Thomas, with one of the main articles by him on "Being a People of God." I also recommend an article by John McCandless, "Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Membership Except Why," published in Friends Consultation on Membership (1984), sponsored by Earlham School of Religion and Quaker Hill Conference Center. Drawing heavily on the Charles Thomas article, John McCandless summarizes the Friends understanding of the Church as a "...vision of what it means to be a people of God: a community of the committed, bearing a vision of truth around which the community is organized, demonstrating the power of the Spirit of God, a prophetic people, a worshipping and praying people, a people of mission, a people marked by moral and ethical sensitivity." (p.4)

It should also be noted here that early Friends depended upon a Biblical norm to govern their dealings with one another and those who needed to be subject to the discipline of the group. Like the Anabaptists who preceded them they turned to Matthew 18:15-17 as a guide for dealing with offenders. Robert Barclay refers to this Scripture in his Anarchy of the Ranters, and the 1806 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Discipline cites the same passage as the basis for Gospel Order:

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not

listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Matthew 18:15-17

My intent here is to show that the norm of early Quakerism was that we can all come into a common unity through the Light of Christ within and can become a covenanted People of God responding to his will and purpose for us. This means that as individuals follow their own leadings, they will do so with a sense of responsibility and accountability to one another in the community of faith.

Departure From the Norm

We have already stated that the "crisis of accountability" began very early in the Society of Friends and there have been many instances of it in the Friends' more than 300 year history. Most of the so-called splits in the Society of Friends constituted "crises of accountability" of one sort or another. Certainly the Nayler episode was the first major instance thereof in the 1650's in England. Again in the 1660's there was another crisis over John Perrot and the "hat men" who developed scruples on a number of counts which placed them at odds with the main body of Friends. We cannot in this paper enumerate a long series of these examples where individual leadings took pre-eminence over the corporate group's discernment, but the Perrot controversy will serve as an early example of a disciplinary problem with which the Society of Friends has had to deal.

Perrot after becoming a Friend was confined in prison in Rome during a trip to the East. There he had a religious opening which led him to denounce removal of the hat during time of prayer, as well as condemn the customary handshake of Friends at the close of meeting. He further had a leading that all human arrangements for meetings should be placed under the direction of the Spirit, a practice which would do away with any stated time for meeting for worship. When Perrot took these stands in England, it placed him at odds with the main body of Friends. This was the period just following the Restoration of Charles II to the English throne in 1660, and the period when Friends were often confused with the militant Fifth Monarchy Men and other radical groups so that many Friends were placed in jail, including George Fox's incarceration in Scarborough Castle. By 1666 Friends were united in a specially convened meeting of ministers in London to oppose the actions of John Perrot and his followers. Richard Farnsworth authored a minute which subordinated the individual leadings of Friends to the corporate group. This minute was published in 1666 just after Fox's release from prison and just before the death of Richard Farnsworth himself. William C. Braithwaite marks this as the point when Friends became a Religious Society, coupled with the extensive organizational work which Fox, Dewsbury and others carried out among Friends. From this point on Friends took

seriously the government of the church based on Gospel Order, as Fox called it. Instead of taking their cue from the Scriptures for church organization, they held that the living Christ is the head and the chief orderer of the church. This shows how Friends in the first fifteen years of their beginning dealt with disciplinary matters and held Friends accountable to God and one another.

We need not enumerate other examples which tested the limits of Quaker forbearance and demand for discipline, such as the Wilkinson-Story affair, and the much later separations of Friends, especially in America in the Nineteenth Century, as well as the Beaconite controversy in England. More important for our story is reference to the system of elders which arose, and later overseers, to have oversight of ministry and worship, the moral conduct of Friends, and eventually doctrinal orthodoxy. As we all know the system of elders was well intentioned but finally exceeded the bounds of its authority within the Society of Friends. By the turn of the Nineteenth Century the elders were in the ascendancy and there was a hardening of the spiritual arteries of Friends, and Christian orthodoxy was imposed in such a way as to force a series of separations. This was coupled with the Quietistic influence on Friends and the almost indiscriminate disownment of members for marrying out of meeting or for unorthodox expressions of faith. Hence a hedge of orthodoxy and disciplinary action was thrown around the Society of Friends which took nearly a century for Friends to overcome.

The Threat of Individualism to the Society of Friends

Let us turn now from issues of the past which served to disturb the order and tranquility of the Society of Friends and begin to look at our crisis of accountability today in the light of those things which affect church order among Friends. I want to begin with what I believe to be the key issue, together with some examples of what I am talking about. It is here that I believe our sense of accountability to God and one another is most threatened.

It is a strange paradox that the very principle which helps define the essence of Quakerism, namely, the uniqueness of the individual based on his/her response to the Light of Christ within, is at the same time the principle which can and often does threaten our accountability as a covenanted people of God. Although Quakerism has been plagued with the issue of the authority of the individual versus the group (the Meeting) from the beginning, it continues to be a primary cause of our crisis of accountability today. Extreme examples of such individualism in the Seventeenth Century were called "ranterism." Friends who believe they have a leading of Truth which seems to be at odds with the leadings of others have kept alive the practice of ranterism throughout our Quaker history. Hence such manifestations of individualism constitute the single most destabilizing element of our life together as Friends.

The other side of this coin is that such undisciplined action and behavior make it virtually impossible for Friends to

exercise corporate responsibility in the witness of Friends. In 1969-70 a very important series of articles and correspondence appeared in The Friend (London) on "The Corporate Commitment of Friends." This was initiated in the Yearly Meeting for Sufferings by Hugh Doncaster, which in turn generated extensive discussion and debate. Hugh Doncaster suggested that the situation had deteriorated to the point that "any Friend can believe anything and the Society of Friends stands for nothing." (The Friend, Oct. 10, 1969, p. 1248). Or to put it in Lewis Benson's words, the Society of Friends has become "a refuge for those who want freedom to follow their own individual bent in an atmosphere that is mildly religious and fiercely tolerant." (Quoted by Hugh Doncaster, The Friend, Apr. 10, 1970, p. 414) The growing diversity of the Society of Friends today invariably nurtures this kind of fragmentation. We also need to realize that unbridled individualism when it has found expression in church has been the death knell for meaningful community life in the church. Unless individuals are willing to join with others in the discipline of corporate response to the Light of Christ within that leads into unity, accountability is likely to give way to anarchy, which in the end will spell disaster for the Society of Friends. Let me now give some examples of what I regard as danger points today.

1. Whenever privatism prevails in the practice of religion, namely, preoccupation with individual piety and the search for personal salvation with little, if any, involvement with the community of faith and concern for the needs and welfare of others, then the tendency is to downplay the importance of corporate responsibility in the life of the Spirit, and in the faith and practice of the body of Christ. Such preoccupation with privatism in religion is true both for conservatives in the church as well as liberals who place a high premium on individual freedom in the practice of their religious faith. This threat to corporate accountability affects church people across the board, though for reasons which often differ as one moves across the spectrum of the church, and the Society of Friends in particular.
2. Many Friends affirm their belief in the worth and dignity of each individual person by emphasizing George Fox's claim that there is "that of God in everyone." The problem is that this term has come to mean something quite different from what George Fox intended. As interpreted today it often means that because everyone has "that of God within" there is no corresponding sense that God transcends or stands apart from the "God within." Such a view is a short step from affirming "that of God in everyone," and asserting that "everyone is his/her own God." As you can see this can lead to a form of individualism in authority which is contrary to, if not violates, the corporate sense of being a gathered "people of God." Such an emphasis only serves to undercut our corporate responsibility and accountability to one another in the Society of Friends.

3. Another way Friends extend their individualism has to do with a changed understanding of the Quaker business procedure. What has come to be called "the consensus method" for reaching decisions was historically called the Quaker "sense of the meeting" which was gathered by the Clerk after a corporate search for the will of God made known through the Light of Christ within. A large number of newer meetings among Friends, largely in the unprogrammed tradition, now refer to their method of doing business as that of "consensus." But the problem is that consensus is fundamentally a political model and not a religious model for decision making. It is based on the premise that each individual has a right to be heard (as if he/she had a vote) and that there must be unanimous consent before the Clerk can state an affirmative conclusion. In contrast to this the traditional Quaker procedure is based on a meeting for worship where business is transacted. As friends seek divine guidance together, the expectation is that if the proposed action is in God's ordering there will be a growing sense of the meeting which the Clerk can gather and ask for approval in the form of a written minute. If there are those who do not experience the same leading, or do not agree with the action, they may voice disapproval. When that happens such persons have these options: either stand aside when the Clerk calls for approval, or entrust the decision to the group and thereby relieve one's personal conscience; or in rare cases the individual may feel so strongly led as not to concur and thus disallow a sense of the meeting to be reached. In this instance the matter has to be dropped, or delayed until a future time, or until the disapproving Friend gains new light so as to change his/her objection. The underlying assumption is that there is a common will of God for the meeting and that discernment of this rests upon the meeting's willingness to be patient and seek in prayer and worship a divine leading which can be gathered, verbalized and minuted by the Clerk. Whatever the outcome the key point is that we are not acting as autonomous individuals, casting our Quaker "vote," but we are attempting to act corporately as a body of people who are led by the Light of Christ within. This forms the basis for our accountability to one another. This is the Quaker way of respecting the integrity of the individual while at the same time acting out of the unity which God provides us.

Ways of Strengthening our Accountability Toward One Another

Let us now examine some specific ways we express accountability toward one another in the local meeting. The first is to examine how to become accountable to one another through our membership in the meeting. There is currently a strong interest in the membership question, especially among new meetings, as witnessed by last year's Consultation on Membership

which was oversubscribed with those who wanted to attend and several had to be turned away.

There are those, of course, who think that we should pay even less attention to membership than we do, even to the point of doing away with it altogether. They remind us that at the start of the Quaker movement there was no formal membership until 1737, more than three-quarters of a century after the beginning. It finally came into usage for very practical reasons: First, to keep records of those attenders who should legitimately receive aid and assistance when in need, as over against the "free loaders" who falsely claimed identification with Friends. Secondly, keeping records of births, marriages and deaths was important in order to know who was legitimately affiliated with Friends. And thirdly, when Friends moved from one community or meeting to another, they needed some kind of identification which took the form of transfer of membership.

Of course, as we know, later on guidelines for membership became more restrictive as a means of determining who belonged and who didn't. In the latter part of the Eighteenth Century and into the Nineteenth Century not only behavioral tests but also doctrinal tests were applied to membership. As a result many Friends were disowned for reasons most of us would not endorse today.

Older yearly and monthly meetings today have fairly well set guidelines for membership, some of which could stand revising and updating, while in other cases the meetings need to spell out more precisely what their expectations are, and they need to put these membership requirements into printed form so that all will know. On the other hand, the newer meetings, especially those nurtured earlier by the Friends Fellowship Council and then by Friends World Committee, and those which later came under the care of Friends General Conference, are frequently the meetings today who are seriously wrestling with the problem of membership. Because many of these meetings do not want to be exclusive but to be open and accepting of all who show interest in attending, they are often confronted with the problem of knowing whether to take all comers into membership, or whether minimal standards and expectations should be stated, and if so, what should they be? With the growing diversity among Friends, together with the longstanding urge of Friends to show tolerance toward persons of differing points of view, the issue of membership has reached crisis proportions in some places.

The Consultation on Membership held last year made it very clear that the place to start on this problem is to work out a clear sense of purpose for the Friends meeting, and then to develop standards of membership appropriate to that purpose. We can further confirm this by quoting a couple of paragraphs from the Summary Report of last year's Consultation:

Our first observation is that it needs to be clearly acknowledged that the issue of membership is only "the tip of the iceberg" in terms of the problems facing Friends today. It is a mere symptom of the larger problem of not knowing who we are or what we are about.

It is an expression of the underlying feeling of fragmentation among Friends; a feeling of being so diffuse that we have lost a clear identity. This is evidenced in the dissatisfaction of our active and caring young members in our meetings who are growing into leadership positions. This is also evidenced by the age gap in many of our meetings where we find young adults and older adults but few in between. This is further evidenced by the fact that many of our members are frustrated, apologetic and impeded in speaking about Friends, both within and without our meetings. Further evidence is the defensiveness found on both sides of the spectrum due to our insecurity and lack of conviction of deep solidarity with others in the family of Friends.

Secondly, judging from our observations of the dynamic and process of this consultation it is our conclusion that the Religious Society of Friends must come to terms with those faith assumptions which are basic both in our witness to one another and in our witness to the world. That is to say, we must be able to spell out the common denominators around which we are willingly united.

A second area of accountability among Friends is the need to reconsider the historic role of elders in the Society of Friends. This was the subject of our consultation two years ago. Most Friends know that historically the role of elders was important in maintaining discipline and church order, but the fact is that these same Friends know little more than the negative side of the practice of eldership. In our Quaker history we recall the heavy hand of the elders who set standards which seemed to exclude (by disownment) more Friends than new members taken in. Proof of our disaffection with these practices has been the declining recognition of elders in the Twentieth Century, and even where the name is retained, the function has changed or has little resemblance to historic practice.

A major part of the eldering process by which corporate discipline was maintained was the formulation and use of Friends' Queries and Advices. Their purpose was to establish some common standards of personal and corporate life in the Society of Friends. Thus the Queries and Advices became important means of maintaining accountability to one another. But like the practice of eldering the use of the Queries and Advices no longer has the meaning and significance it once did. Many meetings still read the Queries and Advices on occasion but seldom do they take them very seriously. With few exceptions they no longer prepare corporate answers to them, as was the custom historically.

To recount a bit of Quaker history we need to point out that in the early period of the Society there were three classes of Friends: From 1652 to approximately 1750 the ministers dominated the Society of Friends. During the second century, 1750-1850 the elders dominated the the Society of Friends. Their avowed function, beginning in the Seventeenth Century, was to have oversight of the ministry and worship life of Friends, including

the spiritual condition of the Society. Alongside the elders another group arose, namely, the overseers. It was their function to look after the behavior and moral conduct of Friends. They were responsible to see that the Queries and Advices were answered and the testimonies followed. This included plain speech, marriage after the manner of Friends, non-payment of church tithes, and the testimony against oaths and military service. After 1750 the elders became an even more separated class of Friends who took it upon themselves to be the guardians of the faith and tradition, and to become the interpreters of sound doctrine, including "the approved writings of Friends." Elbert Russell in his History of Quakerism (pp. 220-222) says that the elders were "solid, weighty and experienced" Friends appointed by the monthly meetings to sit with the ministers (called Select Meeting) to consider the state of the ministry, to aid young ministers, and to have oversight of the spiritual condition of the Society. Together with the overseers the elders were charged with making Friends accountable to one another by applying the corporate disciplines of the meeting. But during the Quietistic Period (1750-1850) the Society began to build a "hedge" around itself, and the elders and overseers began to abuse their authority. As a result they became oppressive to Friends as they began widespread disownment of members for marrying out of meeting, or for any number of other infraction of the disciplinary standards of the Society.

In the next century (1850-1950), however, there developed an almost complete reversal of this situation, so that now, the traditional roles of elders and overseers, as described above, have come into disuse, except for some isolated cases. With the liberal trend of Friends in the Twentieth Century there has been a call for tolerance with differing views of faith and practice. Quaker pluralism and individualism have called for the removal of almost all boundaries with respect to faith and practice in many quarters, so that even reference to a common discipline of faith and practice often seems unacceptable. The Quaker pendulum has swung in the opposite direction, so that now we are the heirs of a generation of Friends who would rather forget about the role and function of elders and overseers, together with the corresponding function of answering the Queries and Advices. It is against this background that Ralph Rose suggested a few years ago that Friends need to recover "the lost art of eldering."

It is significant that both the 1982 and the 1983 Consultations here at Quaker Hill referred to the importance of Friends exercising accountability toward one another in the corporate life of the meeting, which clearly calls for another look at the need for order and discipline, and a revival of the function of eldering, as the proper way to effect suitable guidelines for Quaker faith and practice today. As one Friend has expressed it, "We need to be called out of disorder into the 'Gospel Order.'"

For the Consultation on Eldering in 1982 Sam Caldwell prepared a very important short paper because of his last minute inability to attend. He began by saying that the context for eldering is Christian discipleship, rather than the usual understanding of it in the context of misbehavior and doctrinal

conformity. He quoted from London Yearly Meeting Church Government (1968) which speaks of eldering:

Elders are primarily concerned with the nurture and the spiritual life of the group as a whole and of its individual members, that all may be brought closer to God and, therefore, to one another, and may become more sensitive and obedient to God's will.

Sam Caldwell then proceeds to deal with the positive elements of eldering in five categories: "exemplary cause," "discernment," "mentorship," and "truth speaking." His aim is to show that a very important function of the elder is to affirm and help nurture the spiritual gifts and ministry of others in the meeting, and only secondarily should eldering be understood in its traditional role as guardians of the Discipline with respect to the faith and practice of Friends. This theme needs to be further stressed and developed as a way of helping Friends to further expand their sense of accountability toward one another.

A related area where Friends are sensing a need to exercise accountability is the recently revived and slightly altered practice of the Clearness Committee, or Committee of Concern as London Yearly Meeting calls it. Historically, Friends' Clearness Committees were intended for persons contemplating marriage and to inquire whether there was clearness in Friends' minds about the marriage. The monthly meeting would appoint a small committee to consult with the couple and perform what we might now call a marriage counseling service on behalf of the couple and the meeting which was to have oversight of the wedding. More recently Friends in North America, especially in the unprogrammed tradition, have instituted Clearness Committees for persons seeking counsel and advice on a variety of questions, including changing jobs or vocations, traveling in the ministry under special concern, or dealing with personal and/or family problems. Let me quote rather fully from a 1978 New England Yearly Meeting document: Living With Oneself and Others (p. 49), on the subject of Committees of Concern or Clearness:

The spiritual strength of a meeting finds important expression through the loving community of its members. Out of awareness and responsiveness of its members to each other grow the bonds of trust and love that allow the Meeting to find coherence in its spiritual life and unity in its actions.

It is appropriate to the development of this spiritual life that members of the Meeting should feel free to approach the Meeting for assistance in dealing with major turning points in life, including such matters as career decisions, lack of funds to live on, terminal illness, withholding of taxes, marriage, separation, or divorce. One way that Meetings could respond to this desire for help is through committees of concern, appointed by the Ministry and Counsel committee of the Monthly, quarterly or Yearly Meeting in conjunction with, and at the request of, the individual or individuals seeking help.

A committee of concern or clearness would meet with the individual or family, not as professional counselors nor as friends discussing a problem and giving advice, but rather as caring Friends, drawing on the resources that bind us together in our Meetings for Worship. Maintaining a spirit of openness and prayerful waiting, the committee seeks to help the individual become clear about an impending decision by serving as a channel for divine guidance. They are there to listen without prejudice, to help clarify alternatives and their implications, to facilitate communication if necessary and provide emotional support as an individual or family seeks to find God's will. The size of such a committee and the number of times it would meet with those seeking to make a decision would depend on the circumstances. The committee would normally be a Monthly Meeting committee, but there may be times when members of the Monthly Meeting find themselves to be too close to the decision to be helpful or when special resources available at the Quarterly or Yearly Meeting levels would make a committee drawn from a larger body more appropriate.

Committees may come into being in different ways depending on the situation. Those seeking clearness should feel free to use whatever method seems easiest and most comfortable.

Still another group practice developed among Friends in this century has been the formation of "worship-sharing groups." To the best of my knowledge these were first used as parts of the conference structure of Friends World Committee gatherings. Since then they have come to be used more widely among yearly and local meetings, and gatherings such as Friends General Conference and Friends United Meeting. The intent of a worship-sharing group is to gather in the spirit of worship, usually beginning with silence, and as Friends feel led they may share out of the silence with the expectation that others will likewise speak, sometimes in the mode of response, or perhaps enlarging on the point just made. Often the group finds itself in discussion, but a discussion free from debate and argument. If "worship-sharing" is properly done, it will be carried out in the spirit of worship, believing that meeting and sharing in the presence of God can help make the divine presence a part of the experience. The reason for mentioning this type of meeting along with Clearness committees is to show yet another way that Friends can enrich their efforts to be accountable to one another in the life and work of the meeting.

Finally let me recount briefly an experiment tried by a group of students a few years ago who were enrolled in Earlham School of Religion. They decided to form a group for worship and common discipline in which they could maintain a sense of accountability toward each other and could corporately support each other. They met on a regular basis, I believe once a week in the evening, and they agreed to three common disciplines which they would keep faithfully. 1) They would gather in the name of Jesus Christ; 2) They committed themselves to attending every

time unless prevented by serious illness; and 3) They agreed to elder one another in love. Thus, they agreed to submit to the authority of the group rather than giving priority to their own individual liberties. They freely chose this because they believed that only by covenanting together in this common fellowship with these stated disciplines could they be fully answerable to God and one another as an avowed Christian group. It is difficult to say how the experiment fared. While the students were in close proximity with each other it seemed to succeed, but inevitably students move on and so they were not able to stay together over a long period of time. It may be looked upon, however, as exemplary of how a Christian Quaker fellowship might conduct themselves. Whether a meeting could ever achieve this level of common commitment is doubtful, even if we felt such were desirable.

Here then are a few ways in which Friends might consider new patterns and ways of relating to each other in the corporate life of the meeting or in small fellowship groups. If we are to recover a sense of discipline and accountability among Friends today, it is important that we continually explore new and creative ways to enter into relationships of commitment and accountability with one another. By establishing such durable relationships of interdependence and community support, perhaps we can better fulfill our larger purpose as a Society of Friends. Surely it will avoid the kind of individualism which threatens to tear us apart.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to address some issues of accountability as they relate to church discipline in the Society of Friends. We began by examining the historical developments of Quakerism which led to various divisions and separations of Friends, accompanied by a general breakdown of church discipline. We then critically examined the development of undisciplined individualism in the Society of Friends, especially at it is manifested in certain quarters of Quakerism today. From there the main thrust of the paper has been to explore ways in which we might recover corporate discipline as a legitimate expression of religious authority in the Society of Friends. This calls for our need to reclaim the proper role of elders and overseers in the pastoral care and nurture of the spiritual life of our meetings. Too often in the good name of "continuing revelation" we have abandoned many of these practices in order to satisfy our own predilections to modernize our Quakerism. But in doing so we have lost sight of the early Quaker vision which emphasized both the Light of Christ within the individual, and the need for group discipline as embodied in what George Fox called "Gospel Order."

But as we seek to recover the positive elements of these earlier practices and update them to fit our needs and our situation today, we should avoid the pitfall of being overtaken by a new formalism and legalism which would be equally antithetical to the spirit of Quakerism. Our aim should be to seek a balance between freedom and order in our life together as

Friends. As we pursue this course we would be well advised to be guided by the first statement ever issued by Friends in 1656 at Balby on the matter of church organization and discipline:

Dearly beloved friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all with the measure of light which is pure and holy may be guided, and so in the light walking and abiding these may be fulfilled in the Spirit,--not from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.

If, then, we can proceed in this same Spirit I believe great gains can be made for the Society of Friends by recovering a sense of accountability toward God and one another in both the faith and practice of our Quakerism.

ROLEPLAY I
SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY
Candida Palmer

The Situation: Running Water Friends Meeting is an old, rural meeting that has recently experienced a surge of new life with the development of the area: industry, housing developments, consolidation of public schools, a branch of the State University, a shopping mall, all have brought in many new people. Some Friends moved into the county from other sections of the yearly meeting or from other yearly meetings. "Seekers," old and young, have been attracted to Running Water Meeting and invited into membership.

This is the time for discussion and eventual approval of the yearly meeting's Book of Discipline and Faith and Practice. Some informal discussions were scheduled for considering the proposed revision, and portions of the draft circulated. The Faith and Practice section of the draft is being discussed tonight so that a recommendation can be approved at the next monthly meeting.

The statement on "Spiritual Authority" proves difficult. Whereas the meeting has been thriving in many aspects, little attention has been focused on Quaker belief, practice, or history. What do Friends mean when they cite the "authority of the Spirit" as in the passage quoted below that is included in the draft as descriptive of Quaker belief?

(from Faith and Practice, Philadelphia YM, 1972 revision)

Dear Friends, keep all your meetings in the authority, wisdom and power of Truth and the unity of the blessed Spirit. Let your conduct and conversation be such as become the Gospel of Christ. Exercise yourselves to have a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men. Be steadfast and faithful in your allegiance and service to your Lord, and the God of peace be with you.

(Paraphrased in earlier disciplines from materials contained in the epistles of the Yearly Meeting of Pennsylvania and the Jerseys, 1694 and 1695.)

The Task: Your task is to help move the very disparate and often inexperienced elements toward a sense of the meeting and approval or amendment of this section of the draft.

Participants: Seven likely participants represent a wide range of Quaker thought. They are introduced to you, the actor, with a "characteristic" statement so the the other players "know where you are coming from." You are not required to use the same

words; the characterizations are intentionally somewhat exaggerated.

1st Person: Clerk of Ministry and Counsel -- one of the few Runningwater birthright members. "We didn't use to have problems with the Faith and Practice... I'm not sure that I see any need for a revision. Usually we just follow Philadelphia's..."

2nd Person: Clerk of Monthly Meeting -- newly appointed, first-time clerk; nervous, a bit flustered and unsure how to proceed in face of strong differences that have been registered throughout these discussions. "I'm so sorry the weather's turned bad, or I'm sure many more would have come. Where do you think we should begin today?"

3rd Person: Young parent attender -- in charge of First-day School program this year. "I'm not a member, but I want my children to be taught to believe something definite -- like about the Inner Light, John Woolman and slavery, William Penn, and President Herbert Hoover...they'll need that in civics class. I don't really know what Friends believe, but there must be some authority by which you know."

4th Person: Jewish Friend, recently joined -- a doctor or nurse at the new local hospital. "The more I read the proposed draft, the more I'm concerned about being a Friend. I'm really a Jew, you know -- we just don't have a synagogue yet -- and I really do appreciate your fellowship and peace work...I guess this all sounds too Christian."

5th Person: An old-timer -- "My grandfather and father never thought much of the Discipline or the Bible. They always told us that all the authority we'd need resides inside each of us -- it's really like conscience, you have it and own it and it tells you what to do, or you don't have and pay no heed."

6th Person: Another seasoned Friend -- a teacher, transferred to Running Water about a year ago. "What about the Bible? What about Friends' tradition? The Holy Spirit teaches us all things, and we can't just ignore what the Spirit taught all those before us and what they wrote down."

7th Person: Student "Seeker" -- regular attender who has been approached but sees no point in formal membership. "The Hebrew word for spirit also means breath. God breathes in and out through our actions, that's for sure. And we inhale God. When you learn to do that, you get to feel who's in charge -- and that kind of 'breathing/spirit' authority is all I'd ever want."

ROLE PLAY II
ACCOUNTABILITY
Candida Palmer

The Scene: Smallgoals Friends Church is a long and well-established, stable congregation in a town of 50,000 population. Smallgoals has a Sunday attendance of 100 to 150 persons, including a number of local professionals and civic leaders. Smallgoals owns a fine plant and provides all the customary programs for youth, shut-ins, singles, Christian education, choir, missions, etc.

A new pastor, in his first six months, has introduced an entirely different emphasis -- that of accountability in the professions and practice of Friends' faith: All the traditional programs are not reaching the heart of the spiritual life; for that members need to be committed in small Spiritual Life cells of about six to eight. Such a group sets up its own disciplines of prayer commitments, intercession, tithing, fasting, meeting regularly, and encouraging mutual confession. Each group is further subdivided into prayer fellows who keep in daily touch and help one another similar to AA members. These Spiritual Life cells are the place where the whole loving community, the Body of Christ, grows in grace and faithfulness; where members become mutually accountable in the practice of their faith -- something that can't easily happen in the Sunday and various social programs.

Smallgoals Spiritual Life Committee is gathered to discuss the meaning and desirability of such intimate accountability within the church. The pastor has been called away to the bedside of a dying Friend. In the pastor's absence Friends express their reservations freely.

The task: To move toward a closer, deeper church community without going faster or farther than the congregation is ready for at this time.

Participants: Seven members of the Spiritual Life Committee represent a wide range of response to the suggested accountability and spiritual growth plans. Here they are introduced to you, one of the actors, with a "characteristic" statement so that all players know where each one "is coming from." You are not required to use the same words; the characterizations are intentionally somewhat exaggerated.

1st Person: Clerk of Spiritual Life Committee -- an older, longtime Friend, open to new ideas but feeling that too much is being asked. "How will parent of young children and those who

don't like to come out at night arrange so many extra meetings besides all the Sunday activities? Everyone is so very busy these weeks right before Christmas."

2nd Person: Choir Director -- "I don't think people are going to do this. Do you think Friends ought to discuss their income or family problems, or business deals with members? That's what we have a pastor for. Anyway, we have choir rehearsal every Thursday night -- so that's out."

3rd Person: A Friend on the recent pastor search committee -- "I knew we should have gone for the other one -- that one liked us as we were. Smallgoal Friends didn't really ask for all these changes in our job description -- this one's always going in the fast lane, seems."

4th Person: A new member on the committee -- "Let's try it and see if it'll work -- I mean, see if people really go for it. If it goes, I can see all the little house churches (and that's what they'd be) becoming more important than Sunday church. The pastor might end up preaching to empty pews; that would be a joke!"

5th Person: A trustee -- "I suppose we have asked people every year to be accountable in stewardship, but that's as far as Friends ever go, to my knowledge...That's why we don't have creeds. Quaker religion is very private...it's the inner light, remember."

6th Person: A younger friend -- "I'm not sure I'd fancy telling a spiritual life group or fellow about my personal life..I'm not sure I could handle that...Though I probably need to look at how I live the peace testimony, my racial beliefs, simplicity...I'm not sure what I think about the idea."

7th Person: A traditional member -- "Smallgoal Friends are pretty much like everyone else around here in the way we think about things. How I practice my professed religion is nobody else's business, I reckon -- just as politics is my own business and we have a secret ballot. Getting to services Sundays is O.K. Giving aid to the needy is O.K. -- but for heaven's sake let's keep it circumspect. All this accountability and small group stuff feels like an intrusion on the way I practice my own private religion. We need to be real careful if this involves members' confidentiality."

SUMMARY OF SMALL GROUPS DISCUSSIONS

An important part of the Consultation was the small group discussions. Participants were divided into groups of six or seven each with as much geographic and yearly meeting distribution as possible. The groups met for fellowship and in-depth sharing, discussion of the papers presented to the plenary sessions, and work on an assigned task. Also, each group was asked to formulate three Queries related to authority and accountability to be shared with the entire Consultation. These Queries were compiled and are included in the Participants/Observers summary report, which appears on pp. 57-61.

GROUPS TASKS

Your group is the ministry and oversight or ministry and counsel. You have just been factually informed that a prominent and loved member of your meeting has been

a. embezzling money from the meeting/church.

It is known by your committee members that this family is having financial problems. What are you going to do about it?

OR

b. severely abusing his children over the past few months. What are you going to do about it?

(Each group choose either (a) or (b) for your assignment.)

Groups 1, 2, 3 deal with the situation in terms of accountability to God and to the "body."

Groups 4, 5, 6, 7 deal with the situation, identifying by what authority you assume the right to correct this situation.

Group I

1. Problem definition - physical child abuse, accountability, FDS coordinator, Robert Word, no doubt about truth of abuse charge.
2. First step - pray for clarity in discerning right action; high standard for consensus; absolute confidentiality.
3. Ask Robert to meet with a visiting committee soon; ask him to begin family counseling; involve yearly meeting counseling service ahead of time; think about safe houses for children.
4. Visiting committee should be firmly grounded Biblically on discipline of children, as well as knowledgeable of Queries and Advices regarding family life.
5. Ministry and oversight will meet for prayer at meetinghouse with visiting committee before the appointment with Robert, and will continue a prayer vigil until the committee returns. The committee will literally stay with Robert as long as it takes for way to open.
6. Visitors are advised to be mindful of the example of the Epistles of Paul, which begin with an affirmation of Paul's love, continue with an expression of his concern, and end with the assurance that he shares his concern because he loves deeply.

We care for Robert now, and will continue to love him whatever happens and whatever he decides to do over the next days and months.

7. We expect Robert to stay on as FDS coordinator until he is moved to resign or is irreconcilably resistant to our concern.
8. Ministry and oversight sees the need for monthly meeting to make money available to allow the Wood family to attend some retreats and other events that can be healing for the entire family. Every member of ministry and oversight commits himself/herself to think of tangible ways to show care for Robert and his family and to act on this care.
9. Accountability
 - a. Robert is accountable, as a parent, to God
 - b. We are accountable, as believers, to God for the suffering we fail to alleviate.
 - c. Ministry and oversight is accountable to Robert, to hold him accountable for his actions, with the patient enduring love of Jesus. We hope to bring Robert to a sensibility of his own accountability and responsibility not by exercise of authority,

but by patiently and persistently witnessing to our love for him in Christ. We have faith that this witness will have its affect; Robert can be reconciled to his family, faith community, and God, and that the Word family will be healed.

GROUP II

Our first day school clerk, Ambrose, has been arrested for severe child abuse.

After considerable shock and confusion, Friends regained their composure and began to deal sincerely with the issue.

Noting that he has not requested help from ministry and oversight, we decide immediately to go to him to offer support and the assurance of forgiveness and redemption. Our committee is willing to assume responsibility for short-term financial support and long term emotional help, simultaneously providing the same kind of support for his wife and children. We offered a home to Ambrose and we are willing to accompany him to his arraignment. The committee is willing to help in finding adequate counseling for the whole family as well as provide a place of sanctuary for Ambrose's family. Finally, we decided to suspend Ambrose from his meeting responsibilities.

Our committee began to question.....Why had we not recognized the problems before now? If we had noticed, what might we have done as individuals, as a committee, as a meeting to alleviate the stress and subsequent storm? We felt unable as a committee to deal adequately with the problem before it came out in the open, and pondered whether in a pastoral meeting the pastor might find it easier to spot the growing conflict and perhaps stem the tide of destructive behavior.

We want Ambrose and his family to know that healing is possible and that the meeting is willing to provide time and the support of small groups of Friends, perhaps the help of Friends who may have been involved in a similar experience; helping the family to discover alternatives and be able to escape a repetition of the child abuse.

We considered again how, as a meeting, we could be more attentive to the problems and concerns of individual members and their loved ones.

Our committee decided to institute an "active listening group" made up of meeting members who show a concern and gift for listening and providing some kind of sounding board for friends who need to share their problems.

At later gatherings we began to discuss anger and its manifestations. We discussed righteous anger and abusive anger, and began to examine the range that these two extremes can cover.

We began to confront the possible dissolution of Ambrose's family and the continued affect this dissolution might have on the meeting.

Ambrose must be helped to accept his accountability for his actions. His wife and family, as well, should consider their part in this drama. All of us - Ambrose, his family, the larger meeting family - must confront the evil that has crept in. It can only be dealt with through confession, prayer, love and a certain willingness to take this problem and hold it in the light.

GROUP III

Our group chose to deal with George and Mary Fox. George, for reasons unknown to the group, has been abusing his son physically. He is a "prominent and loved" member of our meeting.

As our ministry and counsel group met, we began to discuss in very general terms, just how we viewed this act, and what we could or should do about it.

We suggested that we "felt" accountable to George, Mary, the child, our meeting, and to God. However, we felt some fear at the prospect of dealing with such a situation. We began to discuss our feelings, and our ideas about how to handle the situation. We discussed the scriptural advice on such matters, but were not settled about whether it was adequate to simply apply some scriptures to George and then feel we had accepted our responsibility.

At this point our decision was to have a period of quiet worship to seek clearness from God.

After worship together and more discussion, we felt clear in adopting an agenda for our discussion.

Our first action was to identify our own feelings and emotions about this child abuse. We felt this was an important step, because this act of child abuse is so serious. We discussed that we had a full range of feelings, from compassion for both George and his son; worry about the mother's condition; anger at George's actions and our being inconvenienced; and fear that George and his family would leave our community of faith, and that our meeting would suffer from their grief.

Our second action was to decide if we were accountable to do anything, and if so, to whom? Our decision was that George had stated his desire to be accountable to us, and we to him by his membership in our meeting. Also, our meeting had made us accountable to them by appointing us to ministry and counsel. We felt clear that we were accountable to God to "love one another." We also felt accountable to George's immediate family - particularly his wife and abused son.

Our third action was to ask ourselves, "What would Jesus do?" We believe that Jesus would be forgiving and accept repentance. We observed from numerous Gospel accounts that Jesus acted with firmness toward evil, but always with love; that he was patient with his disciples (his community of faith) when they were divisive. He was concerned about innocent victims. He advised the community to pull together in love.

Our fourth action was to decide on a course of action using Jesus as our example. Our decision was to choose loving persons from our meeting who know George and Mary's family, and ask them to go to George, Mary, and their son, separately or together - as conditions warranted; to be firm, but loving, trying to understand their agony, but also to guide them.

At the same time we felt a need to minister to our meeting's turmoil and hope that George will understand our need to speak to one another about his "private" life, to comfort one another because we share his family pain.

Our fifth and last action was a decision that we were indeed accountable to act on this problem and should do so without delay, with a sense that our actions should be in love and not in judgment.

Having planned a course of action, we discovered we were left with some feelings which we wanted to identify.

We were concerned that we might display an element of pride and/or arrogance as ministry and counsel members who think they have all the answers, and could direct the outcome.

We felt a need that our meeting share but were unsure about the proper place and time for this to happen. We expect that in small groups, or in meeting for worship, a sense of love and understanding for the family would be shared. If this did not happen spontaneously, the ministry and counsel would find ways to encourage such sharing.

Finally, we decided on two goals. First, our goal for the family is to meet them in their present condition, to stay close to them, share their pain, but also to lead them.

Last, our goal for the "Body of Christ" is to face the struggle of accepting this family and the burden of helping them. Let Christ teach us.

GROUP IV

Choosing the situation: one member experienced meeting embezzlement in an extended family and preferred not to address that situation here. Another person experienced a child abuse problem in their own meeting and they were still working on it, and another was especially concerned about child abuse. We chose

child abuse. It was clear that we - and ministry and counsel - would need to recognize and talk about our own feelings.

1. Ministry and counsel recognize and talk about their own feelings - anger, betrayal, disgust, fear, guilt, criticism.
2. We assume professional help is taken care of - medical, social work, shelter.
3. The meeting's role is spiritual - caring for and supporting the family in their distress.
4. Ministry and counsel pray to discern who would be the right people to visit the family, and continue in prayer to support those who visit.
5. Approach to the family (or to each member if they are no longer all together) - would be open, listening, ready to be silent or pray or hug as way opens: "Is there anything we can do to help?" (The abuse is unacceptable behavior, but this is not the time to speak of that.)
6. If there were another kind of meeting, this family might have asked for help before things got this bad.

Our group came back to this problem next morning, after reflection and physical rest. Out of our sharing came the following thoughts:

Abuse is a symptom of deep inner problems.

We shared a need for prayer - we go as fellow sinners, recognizing this particular sin in love.

The abuser would feel, "I don't belong anymore; I don't have a right to go to meeting."

There must be acceptance of the abuser by the meeting; a continuance of covenant relationship.

Penitence by us - did we have a part in the problem?

There is no accepted way for formal confession if abuser desired to share with the whole meeting.

We couldn't go much beyond first visit in planning, except for continued love and prayer.

GROUP V

Our group began on Friday by considering the source(s) of authority as we recognized that ministers act under a delegated authority. So, who (or what) delegates? There are those who

believe authority comes from position. Others believe the scriptures to be the authority. And still others believe group consensus delegates authority. We believed that the obvious authority was from God.

We discussed distribution of authority. Does God give the same potential for authority to all? We compared terms: power, in charge, and authority.

We considered how we respond to our own potential for authority. How does it feel? What are the results of allowing power to come through us? Do we arrange our lives to allow time for the devotions that lay a foundation for the use of that authority? Why do we shy away from real spiritual relationships that allow for giving and receiving authority?

We recognize that we, as Christians, often put on a shield or pretense that we are strong and confident in our faith. We are often afraid to show anger or confront problems. We lack faith in where loving confrontation will lead. And, we fail to allow space for each other to experiment with their authority. We need to affirm each other more. "Authority can't have a channel if we are afraid to make mistakes." After all, we are saved for the exercise of our gifts.

Then we received the task that asked from us the use of our delegated authority to resolve a problem where bodies and spirits were in ill health. We knew that TRUTH was our authority, that God needed our help with this problem.

First, we stated what our initial reactions might be:

1. I hope we can handle this without the county welfare people finding out.
2. Let us take time to consider this situation.
3. We must act immediately.
4. This is too difficult to handle, let's get professional help.
5. (in a pastoral meeting) None of us can do that, let the pastor take care of it.

Then we decided we had the authority and expanded our sources to include:

1. The established tradition of some ministry and counsels to already have appointed members to do family visitation.
2. The expectations of some congregations that ministry and counsel should respond to such situations.
3. George Fox's quotation of Psalm 127:30 "Children are a Heritage of the Lord."

4. The ultimate authority through the two great commandments.
5. The experiences of our own receiving of love, acceptance, and forgiveness from God.

We spoke of the great need for discernment in this situation. Through discernment we decided to send two friends to visit with the family. We each considered whether we, ourselves, could be the ones to go. We tried to be realistic in facing the possible results of our action, such as:

1. Getting involved would mean accountability is a long term commitment which might involve much time and energy.
2. The possibility of our concern being rejected.
3. The response from the rest of the congregation and even the community.

We asked ourselves "When you don't know what to do, what do you do?"

We knew we could LOVE and PRAY. We believed we should go, not to accuse, judge or find our details as the court would do, but to minister. We discussed whether to deal with this problem as an illness or as a sin.

It was said that following a leading and discernment must coincide. We suggested that our meeting should accept some responsibility for the fact that this problem had reached such extent and suggested programs should be initiated for our families to help prevent these occurrences.

By the last gathering of our group we were ready to explain some other dimensions of authority, especially in regard to accountability to God and then to others. We considered how we might handle failure in being accountable. What if we fail to minister, or minister poorly? We recognized that spiritual discernment sometimes requires an individual's immediate response, but perhaps for greater demands on authority, a spiritual community was essential for support and testing.

One member of our group shared openly a personal hurt resulting from an attempt to minister and the group members effectively exercised their authority to channel love, healing and encouragement to enable the person to continue growth as a minister. It was stated that there is necessity in becoming vulnerable, that God's power works through vulnerability.

GROUP VI

We began the task through role play, giving details of a situation, including actually naming the people in the family.

As we assumed our responsibility as members of the ministry and oversight committee, our roles, as well as the family situation, became powerful realities. We felt a responsibility to seek the Truth. Through our corporate concern for the family, two individual members of the ministry and oversight committee felt led to visit to express our loving concern and to determine the family's needs. We felt a need to pray for the family and ourselves and agreed on a common time for daily prayer. There was a realization that this concern would go on for sometime. We recognized immediate as well as future needs of the family that might include child care, financial support, and the demonstration that they were still an important part of our community. The committee recognized that not only the family would require care but the meeting as a whole would need to be the focus of loving concern.

We felt called to these actions from two bases of authority. The first was our appointment by the meeting to oversee the spiritual concerns of members. The second and more important basis was that we felt united in obedience to Christ's commandment to love one another. We started out as a committee acting on the authority of the church and in a sense we moved into being the church acting on the authority of Christ with us. We experienced what it's like to live in the Body of Christ and to be accountable one to another.

These words cannot convey the pure feeling of love that was felt among us and went out to the family and beyond. There was a sense of healing among and beyond ourselves. The growing unity in Christ that developed during our first session of sharing with each other continued to surprise us, especially considering that we represented seven different yearly meetings.

Recommendations

1. It is essential that the committee act out of love and to wait if necessary for the unity of that Spirit.
2. The role playing process is recommended to committees of ministry and oversight as a way of coming to know each other in the Spirit.
3. Corporate prayer and worship is seen as central not only in coming to know how to meet specific needs but also in nurturing the spiritual life of the committee.

GROUP VII

As a group composed of people who didn't know each other as we began, we felt that something very special happened among us. We quickly achieved a deep level of trust and openness which we realized, on reflection, was a gift of grace that had been given us.

As a task, group seven chose to minister to a beloved member of our meeting who had been severely abusing his children for several months. Our own process of coming to clarity about the task involved a lot of brainstorming and playing around with the sparse information which we had been given in order to create for ourselves a real person and family to which we could minister in love. We didn't want a stereotyped or labeled person, but a real, flesh and blood one whom we all knew and cared for. This process might be especially important when dealing with problems and people in our own meetings, even when we think we know them well. We also determined that what we knew about this problem was factual.

The man whom we created had been left by his wife several months earlier. He had two early elementary school age children and had been under great stress and begun to act in ways which were not usual for him. The abuse was brought to our attention by his neighbor, also a member of our meeting. No report had been made to the authorities, and no one else in the meeting knew about it yet.

As a result of our discussions, our feelings about what had happened, how it would affect the meeting, and so on, a set of goals and priorities were established upon which we would base our actions. All committee discussions and meetings would be held following a time of prayer. The goals seemed to emerge in a prioritized order and were to:

1. Insure the safety of the children.
2. Get help for the abusive father.
3. Minister as necessary to each other, to the person who had contacted us about the problem, and to the meeting as the news eventually got around.
4. Promote reconciliation and healing at all levels (personally and corporately).
5. Examine the life of the meeting in order to find a way to prevent this and other estrangements from occurring in the future.

We also thought about what authority we were proceeding from. We thought that we were operating as part of the body of the church and from the authority of Christ as the head. We questioned whether we would be using scriptural authority. We would be drawing on our member's relationship with the meeting and our personal relationship(s) with him. But the two most important sources, we felt, were the love of God reflected in our love for each other, and from a sense of servanthood, which had to be already operable among us.

Finally we came down to deciding exactly what we would do and how. We decided to:

1. Determine what our legal obligations were.

2. Call an experienced counselor in order to get a clearer understanding of the problem and how best to proceed.
3. Call on the member with two people, at least one of whom he knew well and with whom he had a good relationship.
 - a. The visit(s) would be carefully planned (as far as possible).
 - b. We would offer concrete assistance.
 - c. We would follow-up as necessary after each meeting.
4. Depending on the outcome of the meeting(s), we might have to inform the authorities.
 - a. We would tell him so if we did this.
5. We would stand by the member and his children through thick and thin, whatever happened with the authorities, the meeting, or the family.

We then role-played the first visit to the member. After playing the initial phone call to set up the visit, we decided to start with prayer among committee members and to have them hold the visitors and the member in the light until the visitors returned to the committee. The role-play helped us to see how difficult, yet still possible, it would be to minister lovingly and appropriately to our member. The team member who played the part of the abusive father reported feeling lovingly ministered to on a personal level that transcended the role and situation which we were enacting.

Since this task did not take up all of our time, we were able to bring our own real life problems, questions, and ideas forth for discussion, assistance, and reflection. We felt that something unusual had happened among us through these past few days.

FRIENDS CONSULTATION ON
SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

SMALL GROUPS

Group 1

Evans House Long Room
Lloyd Lee Wilson, Convener
Leanna Roberts
Dee Rodgers
Marian Baker
Walter O'Neal
Jack Kirk

Group 5

Friends Central Office
2nd Floor Conference Room
Judy Dennis, Convener
Marian Alter
Sylvia Graves
Terry Smith-Wallace
Sam Caldwell
Eldon Harzman
Ed Balogh

Group 2

Evans House Lounge
John Bradshaw, Convener
Maurine Pyle
Winifred Walker-Jones
Marilyn Bell
Gilbert George
Tom Ewell
Wilmer Cooper

Group 6

Woodard Lodge Conference Room
Donna Moore, Convener
Wanda Knight
Hannah Gosling
Louise Wilson
Maurice Roberts
Richard Hall
Curt Shaw

Group 3

Evans House Library
Barbara Snipes, Convener
Tracy Booth
Kara Cole
Keith Haworth
Philip Buskirk
James Terrell
Wayne Anson

Group 7

Woodard Lodge Lounge
Damon Hickey, Convener
Dorothy Garner
Eleanor Hammond
Mary Moehlman
Thom Jeavons
Willard Gaeddert

Group 4

Friends Central Office
1st Floor Conference Room
Mary Cadbury, Convener
Margaret Stanley
Jo Farrow
Candida Palmer
T. Canby Jones
Francis Helfrick

Note: Participants/Observers
David Bills and Diana Dille
will float from group to
group.

PARTICIPANTS/OBSERVERS SUMMARY REPORT
David Bills and Diana Dille

On December 6 through December 9, 1984, 48 Friends from 18 states and one Friend from London, representing 22 yearly meetings, gathered at Quaker Hill Conference Center for a consultation on Religious Authority and Accountability. We held no illusions about reaching agreement on the issues but had agreed to openly consider and discuss them. An underlying question for some was whether or not the presentation and discussion would take place on an academic and intellectual level or deal with the practical aspects of the issue of authority and accountability.

Consultation Overview

From the beginning the Consultation had the mark of a group of very diverse and yet congenial Friends coming together for a special time of learning and sharing. There was an openness and acceptance among this group as they considered together the importance of exercising spiritual authority and the calling to accountability. It was this openness and acceptance that led to the building of community within the group and brought a strong sense of unit.

At this point it seems appropriate to mention our appreciation to Eldon Harzman and Wilmer Cooper for their efforts in planning the Consultation. Their prayerful consideration of subject, organization, and participants contributed to this positive experience. Maurice Roberts served as an effective clerk.

The specific subjects examined by lectures and discussion were "Biblical Perspectives on Authority," "The Sources of Spiritual Authority," and "Accountability Among Friends." These presentations, in addition to a keynote address were greatly enhanced by the discussion sessions. Frequently the discussion sessions were conducted more on the level of worship sharing as the participants spoke from their heart. Often as one member spoke there was audible approval to what was being said. Strong statements were made regarding the current status of Quakers as well as our faithfulness to our Quaker history and tradition.

The small group sessions provided a more practical way to grapple with the issues. These group sessions also included periods of programmed as well as unprogrammed worship and much spontaneous conversation. All of these elements added a great deal to the whole experience.

As the Consultation began there was a mood of anticipation which eventually developed into a sense of satisfaction at having dealt with a central issue of Quakerism in a positive manner.

Several individuals on a variety of occasions expressed a feeling of being famished for some kind of accountability in their spiritual lives. There was a disparagement of excessive individualism among Friends of earlier times as well as now. These friends seemed to be implying that they were not simply interested in a philosophical discussion of these issues, but that their desire was to really effect Quakerism in their local meetings.

The Presented Papers and Discussion

Louise Wilson presented the keynote address on Thursday evening. Her address was rich with personal illustrations and descriptions of visions which spoke powerfully to the subject of authority and accountability. She contends that Quakers have hindered the reality of Christ by maintaining their independence. She stated, "God is not looking for individual vessels. He is looking for a corporate one!" Her concern is that Friends have moved out of the body of Quakerdom into the body of each and every Quaker. We have followed what we've called our inner light at the expense of the entire Society of Friends. She suggests that we become accountable to God, ourselves, or meetings and Quakerism as we give up authority in individualism.

The second paper, entitled "Biblical Perspectives on Authority," was presented by T. Canby Jones. After sharing several scripture passages he presented these maxims: "All authority is earned by or derived from servanthood." and "All authority derived from the desire to dominate is illicit." In other words, the suffering servanthood described in Mark 8:34-35 is the core of true authority. This is an authority which persuades, teaches and advises. It is as the suffering servant that Jesus expresses true authority. He suggests that we can achieve true authority by following the two great commandments which direct us to love God and neighbor.

In the follow-up discussion, Thom Jeavons expressed appreciation for the way authority had been connected with compassion. Louise Wilson brought to the group's attention the need to be sensitive as to when to serve and when to be served.

A paper, "The Sources of Spiritual Authority," written by Elizabeth Watson, unable to be here due to illness, was presented by Kara Cole. While there were several points made in this paper, the concluding thought sparked the most discussion from the group. She tells us not to judge, but to be humble, teachable, and to search for God's will so that we may speak with authority.

There was considerable discussion regarding these elements of her paper: process theology, the concept of judgement as it relates to accountability and the proposal of the learning community concept as an alternative to the eldering idea in the paper by Tom Brown. These concepts are the only areas that provoked spirited questioning rather than affirmation.

The final paper was presented by Wil Cooper. It was entitled "Accountability Among Friends." The final portion of this paper dealt with ways of strengthening our accountability toward one another. He states three ways that this can be achieved. The first is membership. It was his suggestion that a meeting set forth its purpose and from that point establish standards for membership. Secondly, he suggests that Friends look again at the role of elders in the meeting/church as a means of accountability. Thirdly, he proposed the idea that Friends be accountable in the life of the meeting through Clearness Committees and Worship Sharing Groups. It is his suggestion that in modernizing our Quakerism we have lost sight of early disciplines.

In the discussion which followed, Thom Jeavons seemed to express the feeling of many in the group when he stated the need for a community that would help him abide by his commitment. That is not binding but instead is very freeing and liberating. Candida Palmer added the idea that occasions need to be created where we can be open to one another's counsel.

Small Groups

The participants were divided into seven small groups. The first two sessions were given to getting acquainted and to sharing on a personal level. There was a noted absence of barriers to communication. Friends willingly shared their ideas about authority and accountability. The first two sessions were rewarding, but were only a glimpse of what would come in the later group meetings as the Spirit of the Lord moved among us.

The leadership of the convenors was appreciated because of their sensitivity and their ability to bring out the deep and valuable concerns of the participants.

All the small groups were given a task to work with which involved them practically in a situation where a decision was required regarding authority and accountability. As participant/observers we spent time with each group and were impressed by the sensitivity that was shown in dealing with this matter. Various techniques such as role playing were used to give a real feeling to the problem they were solving. In several cases the problem moved from being a hypothetical case to being a real situation bringing with it all the emotions that that would involve. Some groups found themselves dealing with anger, guilt, sadness, and shock. The dynamics that took place in some groups were truly amazing. This task drew the groups into deep sharing in some cases and even into prayer for members of the group as well as for people who are really experiencing this problem situation in their lives. We sense on the part of the groups a spirit of thankfulness and appreciation for the powerful sense of unity that was brought about through the presence of Christ/God.

Queries Arising From This Consultation

The following Queries were written by the convenors of the small groups and bring forth the important points of this Consultation as well as serving as a reminder that authority and accountability deserve our continued attention.

1. Do I identify and share the ways that God works in my life?
2. Can we continue to explore, in our own meetings, the religious authority we share, and to explore the nature of our accountability to one another?
3. How can we encourage others in the authentic exercise of spiritual gifts? Will this involve granting them authority over us in some way?
4. Do we acknowledge and affirm the authority of Christ in our lives and our decisions by being accountable to one another, openly and in love?
5. Are you willing to submit to the discernment and spiritual authority of other members of the meeting?
6. Do you strive to nurture and maintain an interdependent fellowship in your meeting that opens the way for mutual encouragement and accountability in the life of the Spirit?
7. Do we encourage and accept the use of spiritual authority in both the corporate body and in individuals of our meeting?

NOTE: The following Queries were also written by convenors of the small groups but not included in the oral report.

8. Do we in our meetings allow members to experiment with their spiritual authority? Do we encourage and accept the use of spiritual authority in both the corporate body and in individuals of our meetings? Do we accept that the highest authority comes from the Living Christ within us and then practice that?
9. Do we acknowledge and affirm the authority of Christ in our lives and our decisions by being accountable to one another, openly and in love?
10. Do you identify and share the ways that God works in your life? Are there opportunities for others to share? Do you listen carefully?
11. What is the authority of the Body of Christ in the world? How does the community of faith witness to the power of God in Christ that breaks the bonds of oppression and sets free the poor?

Appendix A.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is a relatively new term in our Quaker vocabulary. It speaks to the long-standing issue of freedom and discipline which has plagued the Religious Society of Friends from the beginning. It addresses the issue of how we live out our faith and practice as members one of another in the community of faith, and how we nurture and support one another as we witness to our Quaker testimonies in the world. For most of three hundred years a strong ecclesiology and tradition tended to foster uniformity of response by Friends, characterized by the practice of eldering in matters of church discipline. The Queries and Advices, the accumulated wisdom of the Society, were taken seriously as a standard by which to live.

Today the problem is that Quaker pluralism and individualism have allowed our faith and practice to become severed from that tradition. Except for isolated cases we no longer know ourselves as the People of God and the Body of Christ in the tradition of what George Fox called the Gospel Order. Thus the question arises whether there are any parameters to our diversity? Are we to accommodate all comers and all points of view without setting any limits? Or, must we search out those essential elements of faith and practice which enable us to re-establish our Quaker identity and at the same time keep us in a living response to God's call today?

These are the issues which a discussion of accountability must address. The outcome of such a discussion may well determine the survival or the demise of the Society of Friends.

Please Note: This statement on Accountability is taken from the program announcement of the Friends Conference on Accountability to the Community of Faith held June 19-22, 1984 at Friends University, Wichita, Kansas, and sponsored by the Quaker Theological Group.

Appendix B.

FREEDOM, AUTHORITY, AND SUBMISSION IN THE CONTEXT OF ELDERING --
AS UNDERSTOOD BY ONE FRIEND

Thomas S. Brown

Eldering, like ministry, assumes not only that the Holy Spirit is carefully and lovingly active among us, but also that we are capable both of clearly understanding its leadership and of communicating its admonitions to one another with authority. Such assumptions distinguish eldering from counseling and therapy although both of these may on occasion be Spirit-led. Likewise occasionally what passes for eldering may well have its origins in something other than the leadership of the Spirit, such as busybody nosiness.

Several factors seem to me to be responsible for the dissolution of eldering among us as a recognized and integral part of the life of a Friends meeting. Such factors, of course, have different weight in different meetings, but in general the result is apparently the same.

One factor is the difficulty that many Friends now have in accepting wholeheartedly that the Holy Spirit, the Inward Light of Christ, the Inward Healer, really is carefully and lovingly active in interpersonal relations. There is also the privatism of modern life: "What I am and what I do is my business in the light of my conscience; and since I intend to respect what other people are led to do, I expect others to respect my leadings. Don't bug me." And a third factor, closely related, is the current and widespread refusal to become involved in the agonies and needs of another: "I've got enough problems of my own, thank you." As a consequence we hand over our own and other people's problems to the experts, who have the time and are paid to listen, advise, and make us addicts to the great variety of therapies now available. But rarely are these centered in the meeting as a community of faith.

When I come to discuss freedom, authority, and submission as they refer to eldering, I realize that I may not speak of these as "Friends understand them." I am only too aware of the spiritual confusion and credal diffidence among Friends in the United States. We have over the generations acquired respectability, education, and tolerance, and simultaneously have become a minor sect in a pluralistic society whose governing values are hedonism and materialism.

This situation suggests to me that the future influence of the Society of Friends for good in the United States is inextricably linked to the shaping of a common discipline for a once-again peculiar people, a discipline shared by all Friends in the United States. I use the word "discipline" in its broad sense of the characteristic structures of belief and practice of a field of human/divine endeavor, as, for instance, in the scientific disciplines. Scientists make affirmations about the

reality of objects to be observed, about the appropriate methods of observation, and about the responsibility for unbiased reporting of results, which determine whether or not a person can fairly be called a member of the scientific community. Nobody has to be a scientist, but persons who choose to join the scientific community must accept its disciplines. The undisciplined scientist is very promptly ignored. Why should the Society of Friends be any less honest, any less disciplined?

I dream of a discipline shared by all Friends to serve as a basis for each Yearly Meeting to build on according to its special needs. It would stress the primary importance of direct, inward spiritual experience of the Light of Christ -- interpreted and illumined and responded to and acted upon with careful attention to scripture, the history and traditions of the Christian Church and of our own Society, of other great religions, and of the revelations through the sciences.

Let me acknowledge at once the dangers and difficulties of such a movement toward a common discipline. In addition to the fact that the essential authority in a yearly meeting rests in its local monthly meetings, there is also the fact that some Friends are so bridle-shy that the very word "discipline" spooks them and others have words and practices that must not be meddled with.

But Quakerism is too powerful, too important a message of hope, for Friends to be justified in hiding the Light under the bushel of our current provincialisms, our defensive and pejorative stereotypes. We must read again with attention and openness Paul's lambasting of the existence of factions in the Church at Corinth. We must pray for the humility as well as for the understanding and courage to apply what we read of those in Corinth who claimed, "I belong to Paul" or "I belong to Cephas" or "I belong to Christ." We must heed his admonitions about the destructive spiritual pride inherent in "special knowledge." We shall have to renounce our idolatries of forms, of formulas, of derivative testimonies and witness. More difficult will be the renunciation as idolatrous of both the cult of the individual and of the cult of diversity while acknowledging the importance both of the individual and of diversity of gifts and insights. We must always struggle against all the ways we worship ourselves under our many masks. We must come to terms with the fact that we have power and are responsible for its use.

With such a fresh start, we can, I believe, come more nearly to recover as a national, perhaps even international Society of Friends, the liberation and fulfillment in worship and service available to Friends as disciplined members of a community of faith.

The development of a common discipline among Friends, if undertaken in the right spirit, would surely provide a most helpful framework for the expanding of nurturing, creative eldering for the building up of individuals and meetings, and in part also for their chastening as well. But eldering in its origins and essential function is the empowerment, the nurture,

the support of children, men, women in their many ways of ministering to themselves, their families and meetings, and to the world.

There is in the growth of the Society a curious and ironic twist. The people who flocked to become Friends in the 17th century were fleeing from empty religious formalism and compulsory credal confession into the Society of Friends as a community of faith with a clear, unflinching, four-strand Christian gospel. This was a Society made up of transformed and empowered individuals who were united in declaring the importance of direct, inward spiritual experience interpreted and illumined by their reading of the Bible and who were likewise united in responding to the call for evangelism and for social reformation.

Today, as we all know, that four-strand Christian gospel has come unraveled. As yet too many Friends are caught behind the sound barrier created by the children of Darwin, Marx, Freud, Einstein, and Mead to be able to reweave anew that gospel with textures and patterns appropriate to our times. Nevertheless we must continue to stress that the Hebrew/Christian faith stands alone in its capacity for change and development and as Friends we have insisted on the validity of continuing revelation. As a consequence of our uncertainties in spite of our traditions, some meetings are content to be attractive because of the vagueness of corporate belief and practice and so serve as refuge camps for those sent fleeing by their dislike for creeds, sermons, hymns, Bible study, and ecclesiastical machinery, taken singly or in combination. Gerald Priestland in his 1982 Swarthmore Lecture, Reasonable Uncertainty, comments on such a meeting.

...a newcomer in our midst finds it hard to make out what we believe, if anything. One gets the impression that the average Quaker Meeting consists half of people who are resting (perhaps permanently) from the doctrinal battlefield and half of people who have smuggled in their own favorite doctrines from other Churches and are quietly picnicking off them in the Meetinghouse -- for there is little to be found in the Meeting's own larder.

Other Friends have succumbed to the temptation to wrap themselves in a narrow gospel of individual salvation as a protection against the stresses of diversity.

Let's face it -- those who would work toward a creative unity among Friends face an awesome task. To begin with there is the truism that no institutions, including meetings, can be effective and enduring unless they have not only a clear definition of their essential purposes, beliefs, and related practices but have as well structures with sufficient authority and power to determine who and what contribute to the essential purposes of the institutions and to determine what courses of action are appropriate to encourage, guide, nurture, and restrain persons and practices within those institutions. Friends today are asked to build and maintain a religious institution: 1) with discipline in beliefs but without credal conformity; 2) an institution with authority and power but without an authoritarian

structure; and 3) an institution with disciplined members without mere outward conformity in speech, behavior, and dress. We are asked, furthermore, to create an institution with members who know themselves to be free and autonomous yet feel themselves to be members one of another and deeply responsible for those others; and institutions both with members who know themselves to be in a life-giving relationship with God but are free from self-righteousness and spiritual pride and with members who are unwilling to make such a claim for themselves but are able, as Paul says, not to be "puffed up with the conceit" of knowledge.

Other religious bodies share these problems of corporate authority and individual freedom, most obviously within Roman Catholicism. Their struggles make clear that hierarchical directives have limited success in achieving the desired unity in faith and practice. As Friends we seem not to have had persons in recent years of the stature of William Penn and George Fox to deal effectively with the Perrotts, the Wilkinsons, the Storys, the Keiths, and the Ranters of our own times. Nor have we shown ourselves to be willing to be supportive followers when potential leaders have appeared. I suspect that the schisms of the last century that swirled around leading individuals (with or without the intent of those individuals) have made us wary of leaders as such.

Yet let me cite what seems to me to be a normative example of eldering in recent years. A woman Friend I know well has a very clear gift in the ministry and is recorded as a Minister by her meeting. She is also an able educator with a deep concern for the religious life of the students in a nearby Friends school. The weight of this concern led her for a time to speak in the school's meeting for worship almost weekly. She was aware that she was speaking too frequently, was also aware that such regularity can be counterproductive. Yet she was also convinced that few other adults would take up the burden of the ministry. As she struggled with this dilemma, she was visited by two Friends whom she knew and respected, people who later confided that they had come in very real fear and trembling. After a time of worship together, these two Friends urged the woman Friend to lay aside for a time the burden of the ministry in the school meeting, encouraged her to trust that others would be lifted up in the ministry, and if not, to accept the fact that a succession of wholly silent meetings might well be in right ordering.

Her immediate and lasting response has been one of immense relief, of liberation, of gratitude for the eldering she received; and the bonds of friendship are deeper than ever.

This occasion seems to me, as I have said, to be normative. There was a community of faith whose implications and expectations were clearly understood and freely accepted as authoritative both by the visiting elders and by the woman visited. The concern expressed by the two elders corresponded to the woman's own inward struggle. None of the three was trapped in ego trips; no one came away humiliated or unfulfilled; there was neither victor nor vanquished, only joy and wholeness. What resulted was a fruitful change in behavior and a deeper religious life for all three.

There is today a real resistance among Friends to any infringement upon individual freedom by the authority of the meeting, a mood reflecting not so much the impact of new truth as of the temper of the times. We live in a period in which it is fashionable to depreciate institutions, resist authority, and distrust those who offer themselves as leaders. It is also clear that few human beings can survive in the great loneliness of such freedom, and we have as a reaction the growth of totalitarian movements. As a nation we just might come to experience not so much the deliberate enslavement of the people by scheming leaders as portrayed in Orwell's 1984 as the piteous cry of the masses of people for release from freedom so disturbingly prefigured in Dostoevski's parable of the Grand Inquisitor in the Brothers Karamazov.

To speak more temperately, however, liberty or freedom, beyond certain minimal limits, is a state of mind, a way of viewing one's circumstances. I am as free as I feel myself to be. Socrates, on death row in Athens, felt himself to be so free in his terms that he would not allow his friends to set him free as they understood the term. Not a few American adolescents (of whatever age) on the other hand, seem to feel themselves to be Gullivers in Lilliput, chained down by a myriad of pygmy whims. It follows that the higher the level of autonomy that I feel I have got to have, the less likely I am to respond to the corporate guidance of the meeting. And one may also somewhat wryly observe that this urgency for freedom from individual restraint tends to be transmuted into the "great cause of religious liberty" to use Penn's phrase.

We recognize, of course, that the absence of all restraint is not freedom but unproductive confusion and uncertainty out of which no significant change or growth can come unless some element of authority and power is introduced. Absolute freedom turns life into the Russian roulette of random choice. But the very longing for such freedom, regardless of its attainment, is destructive in itself since it is an idolatry of the self.

For most of us, the level of one's freedom depends upon the nature and quality of the alternatives among which one is free to choose. The freedom involved in the choice of chicken or cheese for lunch is not so significant as the freedom to choose where to live and have a job and own a house and send children to school. But how significant would the choice be for Friends if they were compelled by law (with drastic consequences for recusancy) to attend the local nationalized church every Sunday? What would be the grounds for choices made?

If one thinks of freedom, however, as "moving easy in harness," to use Robert Frost's phrase, the interchange we call eldering has some chance of functioning as intended, for there is implicit in that phrase an acceptance of acknowledged authority beyond oneself. Crudely defined, authority functions either by imposition or by persuasion: by imposition when the consequences of disobedience are known to be serious and can be enforced regardless of individual preference or insight; by persuasion, when the individual in the light of preferences, knowledge, and insight accepts the leadership of another person or of an

institution in whom the individual sees some desirable superiority. A citizen of Poland under martial law is an example of one extreme and a member of the Penn State Choral Society under Douglas Miller is at the other. Most of us live most of the time under both types of authority. Cicero cites as "nobilem in primis" the philosopher/teacher Xenocrates, who when asked what his disciples were struggling to achieve, replied "To bring themselves to do of their own accord what they were required to do by law."

When eldering occurs within the framework of imposed authority as has surely happened among Friends both in marriage's and in meetings, the one being eldered has to choose some level of rebellion or submission. If on the other hand, such eldering occurs within the persuasive pattern which acknowledges the validity of both individual and meeting authority, eldering may release great spiritual energy both in individuals and in the meeting.

If individuals and meetings find themselves at odds over the beliefs or actions on the part of one or the other, the only alternative to browbeating by one or the other is an appeal to a mutually acceptable arbiter, at best not disembodied quotations from scripture or Fox or Woolman or Faith and Practice but a shared search in worship for what Fox called "openings." Human nature being what it is, such a search may take time, patience, and forbearance.

I am led at this point to ask with some trepidation whether the term "submission" is adequate to describe the hoped-for response to eldering at its best when a meeting's authority and individual freedom of belief and action do indeed clash. If after eldering, a Friend whose business practices have been unduly sharp changes his ways; or similarly, a Friend who has been consistently derogatory of members of other races cleans up his tongue; or if a Friend hitherto given to a free-wheeling sex life discovers the beauties of fidelity -- are these changes after eldering to be designated as "submission?" To what or to whom have these Friends "submitted?" Is such submission "submissive?" Is submission good for you? Is there in the term a suggestion of Puritanism or of the Catholic virtue of obedience?

On the whole issue of submission I must, however, proceed tentatively. I have experienced authority and freedom first hand. But given the usual connotations of the sentence "I submit," as distinct from "I submit a manuscript," I find not only that the aftertaste of the word is unpleasant but also that its religious implications are foreign to my experience. I would prefer to say that as a teacher in a boarding school I accepted the restrictions of dormitory life and have lived within them; I "acknowledge" the necessity of traffic laws and usually obey them; I have "conceded" the wisdom of another's advice that on occasion had involved a painful reversal of intention and behavior; I have on occasion done what I felt led to do. But in all honesty and I hope humility, I have not had the experience of "submitting," which as I use the term implies the

acknowledgment of a superior force, a will imposed on me willy-nilly. If that experience be essential and normative, I have not experienced the Cross.

Therefore what I say about submission must be tentative and limited, open to the deep experience and consequent wisdom of others. In that light let me share what I do feel. If our eldering, like our ministry, is assumed to be prophetic, that is, the word of God mediated by the human voice with more or less mumbling in individual cases, ideally the one being elderered listens to the elder's words as Fox read scripture "in the Spirit in which they were given forth." Since the Christ Within is one and the same for both elders and elderered, the occasion at its best would not be one of submission but rather of mutual response and collaboration, or, I suggest as more apt, an occasion of synergy. Synergy describes those occasions when the release of energy significantly exceeds what could have been anticipated by simply taking the sum total of the component parts.

I think also of the First Letter of John in which the writer stresses that "Perfect love casts out fear." In an atmosphere marked by love and trust, the response most to be hoped for from a session of eldering is not best described, I believe, as submission, a term not applicable to mature love.

Yet Augustine uses all these terms when he says: "Man cannot be more free than when he succeeds with God's help in submitting himself through love to the rule of God." Does Dante imply submission in his dictum that "In His will is my peace"? Is Thomas á Becket in T.S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral submitting when he calls his impending martyrdom "That decision to which my whole being gives its entire consent"? And how shall I read Job's "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord"?

Let me try another approach even as I remember T.S. Eliot's lines from "East Coker" in his Four Quartets: "...every effort is a wholly new start and different kind of failure." Eldering is the disciplined defense of Truth and the active response to its promptings. Truth in this sense is not a body of objective facts and so-called laws; neither is it an absolute Idea, out of time and space. But Truth as here used, derived as it is from "truth," is not an object as Parker Palmer of Pendle Hill has so ably demonstrated, but is fidelity in relationship, utter fidelity in the relationships of individuals and the community of faith as well as the political and social community; fidelity between individuals within the communities of family, meeting, town; fidelity to the stranger outside the community. Since the same Spirit pervades all of these relationships, the Truth in essence is one. And it is worth remembering the Biblical insistence of God's faithfulness (note, for instance, II Timothy 2:13). Eldering, therefore, can be thought of as guarding the Truth in the community of faith, of nurturing fidelity in all the complex relationships within the bounds of that community.

Where there is no community of faith, there can be no eldering, only counseling, which can, of course, be most helpful. Eldering is sure to fail also even in communities of faith such

as marriages and a meeting if there is present the timid reticence of those who are unable or are unwilling to speak the Truth in love to another, or if there are those who timidly conform to cultural expectations or those who subscribe to the fashionable and deceptive half-truths about moral and religious relativism. In this group could be included those who, learned and thoughtful, have been programmed to think without assent, without personal commitment on matters of real importance. Though it may be good libertarian doctrine to let a person go to Hell in his/her own way, such a doctrine has no place in a Quaker community. Undisciplined meeting members, like undisciplined children, may well have been denied the love they desperately need -- perhaps long for -- and are certainly owed.

A meeting without discipline will have little authority, and discipline is lost when it is assumed that individual freedom of belief and practice takes priority over all other authority and that applicants' desire to join the Society of Friends is sufficient ground for accepting them into membership regardless of the content of their religious belief (or lack of it) and their manner of life. A meeting without authority may generate good feelings, warm friendships, and helpful projects, but it is in grave danger of becoming insipid, fragmented, and ineffective; it will certainly have not good news for a country that is hungering for a living word of hope and empowerment to break out of the strait-jacket of sterile individualism and to conquer the despair of meaninglessness.

Equally unproductive are those meetings which are in fact communities of a faith so frozen that individual and corporate doubt, questioning, seeking, yearning for newness of life are held immobile by a narrow loyalty to traditional forms, language, expectations, or leadership; these are communities where the priest has strangled the prophet.

Instead, a lively, disciplined, and effective Society of Friends grows out of the endless tension between the leading of the individuals who have freely and knowingly joined the meeting as a community of faith and the authority of the meeting as an entity with a life of its own, the Body of Christ, to use Paul's term, also under the leading and empowerment by the Light. At its best this is a tension within which authority and submission are caught up together "as in a net" in the liberating, disciplinary, and nurturing love of God.

Please Note: This paper was presented at the Friends Consultation on Eldering, December 9-12, 1982.

Appendix C.

CONFLICTING QUAKER VIEWS OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

T. Canby Jones

In order to say something useful about conflicting Quaker views of religious authority I would like to list the main points of the faith of George Fox, examine the implications of those points about the nature of authority, then look at authority as I see it expressed by the five major contemporary groups of Friends, and finally make a few suggestions for an inclusive view of authority for Friends today.

The faith of George Fox clusters around seven major convictions. His primary faith lay in the sovereign and overcoming power of God in Christ. Secondly, he experienced and believed in a great ethical gulf existing between God and Satan, good and evil, light and darkness. In the third place, Fox was convinced of man's basic sinfulness. "All men", said Fox, "are plunged into Adam's death, and imperfection, and darkness."¹ All the evils of mankind are the fruits of the sinful nature which has infected man since the disobedience of his first ancestor. A fourth and distinctive tenet is Fox's belief that the light of Christ, a measure of his grace, is to be found in all men no matter how depraved. Therefore, in the fifth place, Fox had tremendous confidence in regenerate persons. The one who has been turned by repentance, grace, and obedience to Christ's light has found such a power that through grace and obedience he can walk in Christian perfection, free from sin in this life. In the sixth place, the collective fruit of this power over sin is the restoration of God's true covenant people. It is in this fellowship that Christ has come to teach his people himself and to restore them to the condition of the garden before the fall. But God's covenant people are not called just to enjoy spiritual bliss. They are called in the seventh place to enlist in the Lamb's war and share the victory of God. The Lamb's war is a cosmic struggle against evil on every level of existence in this present world until the end of history. It is led by the Lamb who has already conquered death and sin and we are called to serve in his army.

Authority for George Fox focussed on the on the preeminence of God in Christ. One of his favorite scripture passages was Matthew 28:18, "All authority in Heaven and earth has been given to Him." A marvellous combination of Scriptures in the following quotation from Fox expresses his dynamic concept of Christ's authority:

The Lord God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son...who hath all power in heaven and on earth given to him...that thrones and rule and government should be subject to him who is Lord of lords and King of kings...upholding all things by his word and power.²

In commenting on Hebrews 1:1-2 Fox says:

Mark, the worlds were made by the Son of god, and God was Adams and Eves Teacher in Paradise; and now the same hath spoken unto us by his Son, by whom the worlds were made. So he is the Quakers first Speaker, and is the last, the Son of God being the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his Substance.³

In stressing that Christ has come to teach his people himself and that Christ is the prophet who speaks from heaven Fox underlined Christ's authority by frequently quoting Hebrews 12:25,

See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.

Notice that this is the authority of a living teacher, a living voice, a living Spirit. Fox loved to insist that early Friends lived in the same life and power in which the prophets and apostles lived. God as Father, Son, and Spirit makes himself known to men as a living, dynamic, saving presence and it is in faith encounter with God in Christ that final authority and the very power of God is found. One reason Fox rejected the use of outward sacraments was his fear lest the authority of outward elements be confused with the ultimate authority of the Spirit changing men's hearts within them. Curiously, on some lesser matters such as taking oaths, Fox is willing to rely on the verbal and literal command of Christ that we swear not at all as his final authority. The redeeming light of Christ in the heart experienced in faith and regeneration is the locus of ultimate authority for George Fox. This inward light is in turn just another phase of the transcendent power of God in Christ to whom all authority has been given. The three final points of Fox's faith, his confidence in the ability of regenerate man to live free from sin, his belief in the full restoration of God's covenant people, and his confidence in the final triumph of the Lamb's war are all derived from these two loci of final authority, the first one transcendent, the power of God in Christ and the second one immanent, the Christ within and both of them alive.

Authority for Fox and the early Friends was also expressed through the collective judgment or consensus of the group as led by the Spirit. The guidance of each person to some act of witness for truth needed in each case to be checked with the meeting for its appropriateness and wisdom.

Concerning the Scriptures, Fox considered them to be an inspired and authoritative guide but as secondary in authority to God the Father, Son and Spirit who brought them forth and even now gives them life to speak to the condition of men. As a negative check against error, Scripture is finally authoritative and when a vehicle of the Spirit is always so.

Authority then rests finally in the life of God as expressed through Father, Son, and Spirit, transcendent in the universe and history and immanent in the hearts of men. Such final authority is also reflected and seen in conjunction with the revealed will of God to the covenant community and through his living book, the Scriptures. Such authority is consilient or mutually interdependent.

What then of the place of authority in the five flavors of Friends today? If we first consider together the independent unprogrammed Friends and the more traditional liberal unprogrammed Friends we find two primary loci of authority. Deriving from the early Quaker emphasis on the Spirit as final authority comes their emphasis on the ultimacy of Spirit revealed in the lives of contemporary men and women. The other primary focus of authority is in the individual, expressed often as "that of God in every man." It may be noted that in early Quakerism the leading of the individual was always checked against the authority of the leading of the community and against Scripture. In liberal Quakerism the authority focusses on the individual and one's direct access to God through the Spirit. The concept of human nature as essentially good is also a norm of authority for most liberal Friends. Some of them go so far as to claim that human beings are essentially divine thus making their single norm of authority divinized man. Corollaries of faith in man and in the individual's access to God through the Spirit are the great emphases of liberal Friends on the peace testimony and service to others. Diversity of theological views is considered a virtue by these Friends. Christ no longer plays a central or mediating role in the concept of authority among liberal Friends. He is merely a way to the Father not the way, the truth and the life. The same attitudes holds for Scripture. The Bible is very useful as a guide to a profound life of commitment but since its claim to unique revelation and salvation is denied, its authority is basically on the same level with any other devotional classic which the Spirit has inspired. Pacific Yearly Meeting has made one of the better statements expressing the divine-human locus of this point of view:

A true meeting in the Quaker sense is a meeting of men which is also a meeting with God. So far as this divine-human meeting takes place, there is order, unity, and power.⁴

Even though it may seem incongruous to some, I think it is possible to group the Conservative unprogrammed Friends together with the Friends United Meeting Friends on questions of authority in religion. According to William Taber, Jr., the locus of authority for Conservative Friends is the inward prompting of the Holy Spirit and an attempt to be faithful to the tradition of the early Friends. Included in that tradition is a clearly Christ-centered faith and an awareness that the Spirit to whom we seek to be very sensitive is none other than the Spirit of Christ within. In recent years Conservative Quakers have broken out of their withdrawal from the world and have come to have increasing fellowship with other types of Friends. But dependence on the leading of the Spirit of God as revealed in Christ and in Holy

Scripture remains the ultimate norm of authority for the majority of them.⁵

As David Stanfield expresses, then the norms of authority are very similar for the Friends United Meeting. There is the same emphasis on God's revelation of himself through the Spirit to anyone, his guidance in business meetings, stewardship and peace activities, and his leading us to a balance of evangelical, mystical, rational and social concerns. Stanfield sums up the position in three sentences:

We believe in and rely upon the continuing revelation of the Holy Spirit of God who would guide us in our day-to-day affairs as well as usher us into the Life Eternal. We emphasize the redeeming Grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. We believe in the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. Our statements of faith are based on the life and teaching of Jesus Christ and upon our own experiences of God.⁶

I think you will agree with me that there is more evangelical emphasis in the nature of ultimate authority suggested by these statements about the Friends United Meeting. It is dependence on the same Spirit and the same Lord as final authority but there is more concern for missions and winning people to Christ than we found in the conservative emphasis. But the same Lord and the same Spirit are the ultimate norm for both. Some one has said, and it may have been David Stanfield, in a conversation with the author of this paper, that the Society of Friends has always shown its greatest power when it exhibited evidence of intimate acquaintance with two authorities: the authority of immediate experience of God in the lives of individuals and the group and the authority of Holy Scripture as internalized and dynamically expressed in the society of that period.

Arthur Roberts sums up the position of Evangelical Friends in his summary of the statement of faith of the Evangelical Friends Alliance:

The statement of faith acclaims the Bible as the inspired rule of faith, subject to the Holy Spirit as true interpreter. Clearly expressed are the sovereignty of God, the vicarious atonement offered in Jesus Christ through His death and resurrection, the work of the Holy Spirit experientially with men to bring them to salvation. Man is shown as sinful but redeemable; salvation is stated to comprise both forgiveness and sanctification. The church is acknowledged as the visible expression of Christ and its fulfillment in the final resurrection and judgment affirmed. The "spiritual realities" of inward and corporate communion and the baptism with the Holy Spirit are stressed, and the Christian witness through word and deed elaborated in terms of general and particular ministry.⁷

There is a greater stress on the objective elements of final authority in the position of Evangelical Friends. The Bible is the inspired rule of faith. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob known through the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ, His Son, and experienced through forgiveness and regeneration of His Spirit in the heart is both ultimate and living authority for these Friends. Thus we have two loci of authority; the inspired and living record of God's mighty acts, the Scriptures and the Actor himself, God in Christ known to us through the Spirit.

Is there conflict between these various Quaker positions on authority? I think there is but at only two major points. The first and most important is the authority of the Biblical revelation. For the last three groups of Friends we have examined, the authority of God in Christ known through Scripture and Spirit is with varying emphases ultimately normative. Evangelical Friends have been most unequivocal in this claim but it is shared by the other two. The other area of difference concerns the view of human nature and the need for salvation. There is a tendency as we have seen among liberal Friends to exalt the inherent goodness of man and among some even to divinize him. It can be seen at once that this view has little in common with the early Christian, early Quaker or contemporary evangelical understanding of authority or the Gospel. Faith in inherent human goodness makes the unique saving history witnessed to in Scripture unnecessary and therefore, obviously, with no ultimate authority.

In our search to rediscover a normative view of authority for Friends, what shall we do? First, we must go back to the Scriptures. But in doing so let's treat it as the book of Life, not as an abstract set of laws established by some ancient imperial authority. Don't get me wrong. When God commands, "Thou shalt not kill," he means it, with no if's, and's, or but's. But why do we obey his commands? Because he loved us and brought us out of Egyptian bondage with a mighty hand? God can speak to and deliver us in the same living way that he spoke to Moses and the children of Israel 3200 years ago. The Bible is a living book because it is a witness of faith to a living God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with a thousand generations of those who love him and delight in his precepts. The best way to hear the Bible is when it is welling up from the heart of some dear saint who has so memorized and internalized Scripture that the only language adequate to give expression to his own faith experience is the language of Sinai, of the prophets, the Psalms and of our Lord and his disciples!

Secondly, to rediscover ultimate and living authority we need to steep ourselves in the writings, faith, and experience of the early Friends. It's no accident that I began this paper with an outline of the faith of George Fox. Very few Friends today have any real idea of what Fox and the early Friends really had faith in. The two things about Fox's faith that thrill me the most are his exalted vision of the transcendent sovereignty and authority of God in Christ as known in the heart of very person as the Christ within. The other thing is that Fox is steeped in the Bible. You never met anybody who was such a walking example

of internalized Scripture. The Bible breathed through everything Fox said. That's the way to be authentic, today!

There's one other thing I should stress about the nature of living authority in Fox that we must appropriate for ourselves, that's Fox's supreme confidence that God does give power to live free from sin, that his restored covenant people can and will point the way to salvation for everybody, and that the Lamb's War in which we are enlisted with Christ at the head is going to win the final victory. All these "minutemen" and "John Birch men," are scared that communism is going to win. They're crazy. We're engaged in the war of the Lamb and with the weapons of the Spirit he's going to win in history, for all authority in heaven and on earth have been given to him!

Finally, to rediscover the true authenticity of the author and finisher of our faith, we must know him in our hearts through faith and the marvellous redeeming action of his grace. When you know that your Redeemer lives for you, then you're ready to enlist in the Lamb's War. Then you know him whom you have believed. You know existentially that he is the Alpha and Omega and of his authority and kingdom there shall be no end.

FOOTNOTES

¹Fox's Journal.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴E. Bronner, Editor, American Quakers Today, Philadelphia, Friends World Committee, 1966. Isabel Bliss, "Unaffiliated Friends Meetings," Chapter 6, p. 91.

⁵Ibid., William Taber, "Conservative Friends," Chapter 5, pp. 72, 75, 78, 81, 83.

⁶Ibid., David Stanfield, "Friends United Meeting," Chapter 2, pp. 36-37.

⁷Ibid., Arthur O. Roberts, "Evangelical Friends Alliance," Chapter 4, p. 58.

Please Note: This paper was prepared for the Friends Conference on Doctrine at Rockcleft Camp, Green Mountain Falls, Colorado, July 8-12, 1966. The conference was sponsored by The Association of Evangelical Friends.

Appendix D.

ON THE EXERCISE OF AUTHORITY IN MINISTRY

Thom Jeavons

...One of the essential requirements for ministry to be effective, regardless of the setting or context, is that it be exercised with authority...

It seems to me that...what the example of Jesus' ministry says about the relationship between authority and ministry is that those exercising ministry in any form must evidence authority in that ministry, and those to whom the ministry is directed must accept that authority as genuine, if that ministry is to be effective.

In speaking of giving evidence of authority, in this context, I mean that the ministry being carried out must manifest authentic spiritual authority; that is, it must manifest the power, truth and love of God. In speaking of accepting that authority as genuine, I mean that those being ministered to need to understand what is being done as being powerful, truthful and loving because it is, in fact, in harmony with God's will -- and God's will is, in this case, being manifest in the words or deeds of a particular individual, or perhaps, of the community as a whole.

It may be insightful to note that, when taken to its Greek roots, the word which is translated as "authority" in Matthew 7:29 -- "he taught as one with authority" -- could be understood to mean literally "of (or from) the essence," "ex-ousia." The teaching of Jesus was self-evidently true and astonishing because it was "of the essence" of Truth -- "Truth" with a capitol 'T' as Friends have used this word historically. Jesus' teaching and ministry was authoritative because it was derived of the essence of life; that is to say, derived from his participation in God's life; and this participation in God's life was a function of his intimate relationship with God.

If our ministries are to resemble Jesus' in giving evidence of the same authority his did, then they too must be derived "of the essence." Our ministries must be rooted in the life of the One who is the creator, sustainer and lover of all life. Only as our lives are transformed by our participation in God's life -- or, to put it another way, only as we are transformed by our openness to God's participation in our lives -- only then will our ministries have "authority," give evidence of being "of the essence," be able to convey God's power, truth and love.

Of course, in the structure of the church as it came to be formed by tradition before the development of Quakerism, the authority for ministry was generally assumed to be given to a person by virtue of his credentials, status or position. Thus the pastor was accepted as having the authority to preach and teach by virtue of his position as the pastor, or by virtue of

his training; the bishop was accepted as having the authority to administer the diocese by virtue of his status as bishop, and so on. This is often still the case in some denominations with hierarchical structures.

Friends have rightly rejected this premise, asserting instead that the authority for ministry was given to a person only with the evidence of the Holy Spirit, or the "living Christ," working in and through that person.

Friends did still, at one time, acknowledge and affirm the authority for ministry in an unprogrammed setting by placing those who evidenced the working of the Spirit in them in positions where their ministry was facilitated, i.e. by recording ministers, and by selecting elders and overseers for their meetings. Thus, when the workings of the Spirit were so evident, the person's ministry was affirmed and expected to be accepted as authoritative.

We have generally discarded these practices; now as a rule we have no provision for any formal (or even informal) acknowledgment or affirmation of the authority or validity of someone's ministry. This has brought us to a position where we should see an irony about "authority," which in turn should illuminate a fundamental hindrance to the vitality of ministry among unprogrammed Friends today.

The irony about authority is that it must be accepted and acknowledged to be established. One can exercise power over others without their consent. The very concept of authority, however, is hollow without the presumption of consent.

A government, for instance, has the capacity to "author" or dictate certain elements of the context of our lives because we imbue it with the capacity to do so by granting it the right to do so. Even in the concept of "civil disobedience," when it is correctly understood, we still grant in general the government's right to dictate or "author" the consequences of our rejection of its dictates in regard to some particular aspect of our existence.

When, however, we simply refuse to accept its right to "author" any element of the context of our lives, the government actually loses the capacity to do so. It may by coercion attempt to enforce certain consequences upon us, but by our resistance or evasion we can alter, sometimes dramatically, the particulars of that enforcement and/or avoid those consequences. In such a situation the government's "authority" is, in fact, disestablished by a person's denial and rejection of that authority.

This comprehension of the concept and dynamic of authority is important because it applies in the context of our religious community and points, as I implied before, to what seems to be a fundamental hindrance to the exercise of a more vital ministry, as well as any sort of leadership, among unprogrammed Friends today.

I would assert that the fundamental difficulty in exercising any of the ministries we spoke of before -- of administration or preaching, of teaching or pastoral care -- lies in the fact that most unprogrammed Friends will deny and reject the authority of any person to exercise these ministries insofar as they require one's submission to another's guidance or direction.

It may overstate the case to suggest that we have moved from the legitimate assertion of the reality that there is "that of God in everyone" to the operative assumption that "everyone is their own God," but I wonder. I would contend that the latter statement far more accurately reflects the way unprogrammed Friends function in terms of our processes for discernment of and direction in matters of moral and religious concern than does the former statement.

This dynamic plays itself out in two obvious ways that I have seen or experienced. One of these is in matters of administration in the meetings and institutions of unprogrammed Friends. The other is in the effort to develop and exercise a common discipline in matters of faith and practice among unprogrammed Friends.

In the first instance, for example, we have Friends hiring persons to head up institutions, or releasing other Friends to serve Meetings and Yearly Meetings because of their particular skills and/or qualities of leadership; and then find them creating job descriptions, institutional structures and various procedures which effectively ensure that the individuals cannot exercise those skills or leadership qualities. We find these persons will be given responsibility for the efficient handling of fiscal concerns, or for ensuring the smooth functioning of personnel; but then will be given no authority to make decisions or follow through in these matters.

In the second instance, we may find persons released for service because of their capacities to think clearly through the spiritual and practical concerns which affect the life of the meeting, and for their ability to articulate their analyses and solutions clearly and powerfully; but then will find they are often given strong signals that to articulate their observations and solutions would be somehow "out-of-place," seen as an unacceptable effort to influence the decision-making process. In this situation it may be the case that such persons have been released to serve a meeting in part because of the clarity of their spiritual vision, but they often then discover that to act in their ministry on what that vision reveals to them may be perceived as an attempt to impose their views on the meeting.

Even where the persons who are attempting to exercise legitimate leadership, or who are offering helpful ministry or insightful guidance in spiritual and moral concerns, are not staff persons or released Friends, we still often find the qualities of leadership or authority are in and of themselves threatening or offensive to many if exercised clearly. Some members will undermine or resist any effort on the part of another to exercise those qualities.

Thus many unprogrammed Friends Meetings are deprived of the opportunity of engaging the services or following the leadership of a member who may be gifted with true spiritual vision, who may be following on the leading of the Holy Spirit her or himself, and could be providing the meeting as a whole important direction or guidance.

It is not hard to understand how we have come to such a place. Most unprogrammed Friends Meetings are full of persons who can be characterized as having (what I would call) a "refugee mind-set." That is to say these meetings are full of persons who have come to us because they have found in our atmosphere of tolerance and our emphasis on the validity of individual experience a refreshing change from dogmatic religious traditions and communities.

Many of the persons who have found our meetings in recent years are inclined to be highly reactive to and rejecting of any notion of external authority because they have either: 1) had experience with another church where the warrant for "spiritual authority" was perceived to be inauthentic, and such authority was misused or abused, or: 2) are conditioned by experiences in secular settings where, as is all too common in our culture, secular authority has been frequently abused, and any claim to authority is thus subject to immediate distrust.

These kinds of backgrounds, and the innumerable reinforcements in our secular culture for acceptance of the priorities of "individualism," contribute to the spiritual formation of persons who feel that finally they have the right to claim for themselves unmitigated authority in all matters of moral or religious discernment as apply to their own lives. This is to say they finally disavow any and every external authority as having true significance and importance in religious or moral concerns.

Such a stance is, of course, directly contradictory to the basic, historic assumptions of Christian and Quaker belief, which maintain that the final authority in all matters is God; and while there may be "that of God in everyone," nevertheless there is still more of God which transcends all. Therefore, God's desires and intentions for us must sometimes come to be known through external media of revelation -- that is, through other persons and events. Accordingly, while the individual mind and spirit are extremely important as the receptors of divine revelation; the discernment of the meaning and the implications of such revelation has to be undertaken in the context of and with the guidance of the religious community, and against the background of and with the illumination of the living tradition of the faithful.

If the purposes of ministry are to "prepare God's people for works of service," and to build up the body of Christ, then in our ministries we must witness to the fact that God is indeed the final authority in all that matters in our lives, and should be acknowledged as the final authority in all that matters in all lives. We must witness to the need for this authority, God's authority, to be discerned and acknowledged as being vested in

some significant way in the common life of our communities of faith, and to be accepted as being exercised in and through the ministry of individual members of those communities of faith as they are empowered and equipped by the Spirit.

Now, having painted such a discouraging picture of the likelihood of many of the members of the average unprogrammed meeting accepting or understanding such a witness, let me go one to suggest how we try to make such a witness and exercise faithful, fruitful ministry in such a setting anyway.

I believe that to fruitfully and faithfully make this witness to authentic spiritual authority; and to fruitfully and faithfully exercise our callings to ministry, preparing God's people for service and building up the body of Christ, requires two things of us.

First, we must strive to abide in the life and power of God from which, as we said before, any authority for ministry must come. We must wait patiently and expectantly for guidance, and never attempt to exercise any ministry out of that life and power. Only in this way can our ministry bear good fruit, and only in this way can we expect that the warrant we claim for the authority of the ministry we offer will always be self-evidently authentic.

If we act without this patience and obedience, we will run the risk of reinforcing the negative experiences and prejudices of those in our midst who now deny the authority of the Spirit, and who undermine all attempts to provide authoritative ministry and leadership in our fellowship because of their previous experiences that such claims to authority were inauthentic, and subsequently abused.

The Constitution and Discipline of Northwest Yearly Meeting, in its section on "The Bestowment of Gifts," says that "the One who calls 'persons into ministry' will empower them, will equip them, and will lead them into avenues of blessed usefulness." We must both believe this is so, and minister in ways that demonstrate this is so. Any authentic, authoritative warrant for ministry will come through a calling from the Lord, because we have a vital relationship with God, and no warrant can be authoritative without that calling and that relationship. We will demonstrate the way God's authority can be self-evidently manifest in the ministry of individuals only when we are faithful and obedient to the Lord in our calling in our own ministries, and we steadfastly refuse to attempt any ministry outside of the bonds and empowerment of this fidelity and obedience.

What can we do so that we are prepared and most likely to exercise our callings in this way, and thereby make this witness? It will help if we strive always to root our ministries in the disciplines of prayer, contemplation, and devotional reading.

In the discipline of prayer we acknowledge in humility our need to be in continuing relationship with God; accepting our dependence on God's grace, seeking God's support for our efforts to be able instruments of that grace for the service of others,

and giving thanks for the opportunities for service and fulfillment God has already opened to us.

In the discipline of contemplation we attempt to be still in the presence of God in such a way that we might learn to see ourselves and the world in which we live through God's eyes, in God's perspective. In whatever measure we can attain that perspective, we are to that measure enabled to see the ways which are opened to us to serve in the power, truth and love of God as instruments of God's grace for others.

I also believe the discipline of devotional reading helps to refine that perspective as it helps us examine and consider the character and continuity of our experience of God's calling to devotion and service in relation to the experience of others.

The second thing we must do to witness to the reality and importance of authentic spiritual authority as an essential element of fruitful, faithful ministry is to affirm and submit to whatever ministry is exercised by others with such authority. We must model affirmation of and submission to authentic spiritual authority in order to demonstrate its value and efficacy in building up the community of faith as the body of Christ.

We move towards creating an atmosphere where authoritative ministry and authentic spiritual leadership are valued by showing that we value these things when they are exercised by others in our meetings. We need both to say clearly and publicly that we value this kind of leadership; and to act as if this is so by accepting it and affirming it.

When we see another Friend providing guidance or oversight for our meeting (or for us as individuals) in some particular concern or endeavor by his or her clear following of the Holy Spirit, let us affirm his or her Holy Obedience by following his or her guidance, or accepting his or her oversight. As persons who are called to the ministry, we can provide a particularly valuable and efficacious modeling of this affirmation of and submission to spiritual authority by actively seeking out the discernment and oversight of others in respect to our own lives and ministries.

By way of a personal example, I have now been involved for more than a year in a "covenant fellowship," a small group of persons active in the ministry who have made a commitment to hold one another in prayer, submit to one another's guidance and oversight in relation to our spiritual lives and ministries, and to offer to one another whatever insight and wisdom our collective discernment may provide.

This has been, and continues to be, a very challenging commitment, one that can involve a great deal of personal vulnerability, but one that is ultimately deepening my own spiritual life immensely. I sense this commitment is, in fact, enriching my ministry and providing greater clarity for me; and is generally making my life in faith a more joyous journey.

I cannot help but believe that as those whom I encounter in my own community of faith see how this kind of commitment yields good fruit in my life, they will then be opened to accepting the understandings on which it is based; i.e. the understanding of the value of acknowledging and submitting to authentic spiritual authority as that is vested in and manifest in our meeting and in the ministries of various members of the meeting.

I cannot help but believe that this pattern would hold true throughout the fellowship of unprogrammed Friends. The more "covenant groups," the more models of affirmation for the value of spiritually authoritative ministry and leadership which can be created in our fellowship, the more likely all unprogrammed Friends will be to recover real vitality in their ministry, in their meetings and in their institutions -- the vitality which issues from the acceptance, affirmation and exercise of authentic spiritual authority in living ministries.

It is my sense that all too often those who speak in our meetings for worship and meetings for business speak as "teachers of the law." Wouldn't it be refreshing to be amazed, as the multitudes were, by finding persons in these settings speaking "with authority," with authentic spiritual authority.

Now, of course, we very seldom have "multitudes" in our meetings to hear any speaker. But if the ministry in our meetings began to convey such authority, began to convey the awesome quality of the real presence of God; and this was celebrated and affirmed, then that situation might change. The power, truth and love of God is immensely enticing to true spiritual seekers.

We would find, I think, the attendance and commitment of such persons in our meetings vastly increased if this power, truth and love was reflected in all the varieties of ministry in our fellowship. We might find all sorts of exciting, enriching, compelling transformations taking place in the fellowship of unprogrammed Friends if ministry and leadership rooted in true spiritual authority were actually welcomed, encouraged and exercised with creativity.

We who yearn for this to come to pass can help it come to pass by conducting ourselves as if we expect it to be true now. (I have a sense of this being much like our living "as members of the kingdom of God" in the present, even though we know the kingdom is yet to come in its fullness.)

We can begin by accepting and affirming such ministry and leadership and leadership as it is exercised with true spiritual authority wherever we find it in our fellowship now. We begin by following Paul's advice to the Thessalonians where he tells them,

to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers (and

sisters), warn those who are idle, encourage the timid,
help the weak, be patient with everyone.

Thessalonians 5:12-14

We can add to this in the exercise of our own gifts for ministry by following the advice of the first minister amongst Friends, George Fox, as he wrote to early Friends: "In the life and power of the Lord wait, and from it none walk...If any be moved (who are turned to the Light) with the power which comes from Christ to any service for the Lord, to be obedient."

If we can do these things -- acting with true spiritual authority whenever we are granted it and wherever we are called; and acknowledging and affirming such authority whenever it is evidenced in the ministry of another -- then we will be moving in the fellowship of unprogrammed Friends to truly "prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." We will be moving towards that day when in our fellowship we may yet "reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Please Note: These excerpts are from an address Thom Jeavons gave on "Spiritual Authority, Ministry and Leadership," to a group of unprogrammed Friends at Earlham School of Religion in 1983.

Appendix E.

MATERIAL PREPARED FOR MINISTRY & COUNSEL RETREAT
Orville Winters and Diana Dille
Friends Community Church, Fresno, California
November 1984

For some time Ministry and Counsel at Fresno Friends has been in a state of confusion relative to their purpose, roles and responsibilities as elders of the Meeting. The following is a summary of their efforts to correct that situation by taking a serious look at biblical models of spiritual leadership.

The Theology of the Church

The first principle is that the church is an organism of which Christ is its head. That's a pretty basic thought and one that is usually assented to but not taken seriously. Instead, churches generally make something or someone else its head. Catholics consider the Pope the head. Episcopalian-type churches make the hierarchy the head. Baptists make the pastor the head. Quakers make the congregation the head. All this because we feel that somebody has to be in charge. To take seriously the fact that Christ is the real head and not just a figurehead means that we really do believe that nobody except Christ owns the church or tells it what to do. "We will, in all things grow up into Him who is the head, that is Christ...from Him the whole body...grows and builds itself up in love." (Eph 4:15-16)

As "head" Christ owns the church and is the only one concerned about the success or failure of the church. If Ministry and Counsel fails to appreciate that fact they will soon bog down with administrative detail. They will make every effort to make sure nothing fails even if they have to keep programs and committees alive through artificial administration. It comes down to a matter of trust and in practical terms that means that Ministry and Counsel cannot allow itself to become involved in the administrative detail of running the church.

The second principle is that the purpose of the church is to prepare people for their ministry. "He gave gifts...for the perfecting of the saints for the work of ministry." (Eph. 4:12) That means that Ministry and Counsel is to work with persons, not with the administrative machinery. The development of love within the church is the primary concern of Ministry and Counsel. When people in the congregation really feel loved, they will more readily discover their gifts and employ them with enthusiasm in ministry.

For example, a Ministry and Counsel that tries to run the Sunday school will likely deal with an understaffed Sunday school program and low morale among the teachers. However, a Ministry and Counsel that encourages, strokes, supports and prays for

persons involved in Sunday School will discover that recruitment is easier and enthusiasm is characteristic of the Sunday school program.

A careful reading of Quaker history will suggest that meetings gave such loving support to the members of the meeting that they felt God's call, answered that call, and returned to the meeting to tell them what had happened. Ministry began to shut down when elders and meetings felt they should control those who were called to any given ministry.

Here are some practical implications of this. The church must operate as an organism, not as an organization. This must be literally true and operative. Christ is its head and, therefore, is the one who calls persons into ministry and guides them in the fulfilling of that ministry.

The crux of the matter is this: Those responsible for ministries make their own decisions regarding those ministries. If God calls a person into a ministry, then he also directs them as to how that ministry should be carried out. God calls people to ministry (women's ministries, music ministry, education ministry, visitation ministry, etc.). The church does not own those ministries. The person God has called to those respective ministries own them and they, not the church, may be concerned about the success or failure of those ministries.

The Leadership of the Church

The responsibility of Ministry and Counsel, then, is not to manage the church but to care for the believers so they will have confidence to manage their own ministries. "I am glad I can have complete confidence in you." (II Cor. 7:16) In short, Ministry and Counsel is to spend their time developing personal relationships with persons throughout the meeting so that those persons find their own ministry and feel the total support of Ministry and Counsel for their ministry at a personal level.

Here's how. Jesus provides our best model for eldering. John 4:4-29 is a classic example of how to build an "eldering" relationship.

First, Jesus built a relationship with one person--a woman at the well near Sychar. He did it by talking to her and by asking questions. He never imposed his answers on her. He let her talk until she formed her own answers. A Ministry and Counsel member serious about developing relationships will find persons involved in ministry--or who may yet be involved in ministry--and will talk to that person. Talk about anything--but talk just for the sake of talking. He/She will pray a lot for those persons in ministry. He/She will be knowledgeable about what is happening in that person's particular ministry and will be able to report to Ministry and Counsel what God is doing through that ministry.

Second, Jesus spent time being with this woman just by taking time to talk to her when no one else would. A Ministry

and Counsel member who truly understands the primacy of building relationships will spend time with persons involved in ministry. He/She will send notes of appreciation, flowers, buy lunch-- anything that will build the relationship. He/She will do more than just "bump into" these persons. They will deliberately plan ways of getting together. A good Ministry and Counsel member will have a good imagination at this point.

Third, Jesus taught this woman. She was shortly to become God's evangelist to Samaria but Jesus never told her how to do that. He taught her about life and "living water" and about a God who could be so close to her she would know how to do the work of an evangelist. So the Ministry and Counsel member will be slow with the "how to's" and will teach all he/she can about relationship with Christ and that all ministry flows out of that relationship.

Finally, Jesus turned her loose. She returned to Sychar to tell the people about Jesus and Jesus hadn't even hinted that she should do so. Neither did Jesus follow up on her to see whether or not she did it right! All we know is that there was a church in Samaria because of her. Ministry and Counsel's task is to turn the people loose and cheer them on. This is a hard thing to do but it must be done. People in ministry must have the freedom to be imperfect in what they do. If Christ is truly the head of the church then that is okay. If Ministry and Counsel is the head of the church then it becomes their job to see that everything is done perfectly. That frustrates everybody. Christ alone can make our imperfect ministry effective in the lives of other people.

In summary, elders build relationships with people in ministry and encourage others to find their ministry. They give advice when it is asked for by people in ministry. However, the advice given should be that which encourages others to accept the responsibilities of their own ministry and learn to depend on the Spirit for direction and power. Elders grant freedom to persons in ministry by remembering the distinction between the church itself and its ministries. Ministry and Counsel articulates the values and philosophy of the church but then gives freedom for ministries to function within those values.

Pastors then are free to carry on ministries to which they have been particularly called. They do this with freedom and confidence. They receive direction and guidance from the Holy Spirit and are effective, in part at least, because the Ministry and Counsel fulfills their ministry of encouragement.

Think about it. Don't long and exhausting Ministry and Counsel meetings result from trying to run the church perfectly? But what if we truly trusted Christ to be the real head of the church? What if Ministry and Counsel gave themselves to developing caring, loving, and supportive relationships?

Probably our churches would become such caring places that people would do anything to be a part of such a live and vital organism. Christ would be free to build his Church in his way.

Appendix F.

AUTHORITY IN THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS PREPARED FOR LONDON YEARLY MEETING FRIENDS

Where and how do Friends have authoritative experiences?

There are four centres of authority in the Society:

The Local Worshipping Group

The life of our local meetings, the beloved forgiven communities, is the Society's engine-room. The only real power we have is the informed loving hearts of Friends. The structures of the Society (occasionally experienced as falsely authoritative, see below at C) exist to facilitate our group life.

Admission to group membership with the assurance of acceptance is the function of the local group - in traditional Christian theology, this is the power of Peter's keys, of binding and loosing. By welcoming the new attender (or rewelcoming the lapsed member) and being friendly and accepting, we together declare God's forgiveness, without using Christian language, and make a new start possible. In John's Gospel the first act of the risen Jesus in the fellowship of the disciples is to give the Holy Spirit, to give authority to his friends, and to declare their authority to forgive.

The power of the keys is a power of binding as well as setting free. Who can tell Friends to stop it? Correspondence in the Friend before 1982 Yearly Meeting shows that Friends see clearly that self-discipline is the only method for us, though our behaviour does not always accord with our perception.

The Experience of the Individual

Each person's experience of "the beyond in the midst" is a controlling factor in their life. It may be experienced in religious imagery or language, or in entirely "secular" terms, e.g. gardening, or politics. The insights of psychology are valuable here to help us distinguish between constructive and destructive experiences of transcendence and authoritative experience. Friends with psychiatric experience have told us of the burden of guilt which many Friends carry. Self-knowledge in this area can be helped by the silence of Meeting and the wisdom and forgiveness of the group, so that we are freed from a wrong ascription of authority to non-authoritative people or ideas. To some, the Society appears as a parent, to whom they have to be deferential, and to whom their real self is not revealed in case it is too violent, too untidy, too full of life to be really Quakerly. The silent rejection of any attempt to make Friends accept a corporate commitment to all our testimonies is a

rejection of this parental authority. We have to learn to accept diversity in the experience of individual Friends.

The Society's "Order" of Meetings for Business and Administration

Yearly Meeting is authoritative in so far as it is a source of corporate inspiration, a shared experience of learning and a place where a concern grips us all. The function of Meeting for Sufferings is perhaps to direct and sustain the flow of the stream of concern, and at times when the wells run dry to direct Yearly Meeting to new sources of inspiration. Suffering itself should not try to be a secondary source.

It is in the area of administration that problems have arisen in the Society and in the Church. What we all fear is authoritarianism, the exercise of power without humility, of discipline without love. Friends have been preserved from the excesses of the papacy, or the misuse of the pulpit. Yet Douglas Steere tells of a Friend who became an Anglican in later life, because, he said, he wanted to belong to a Church where the bishops were visible. Perhaps one problem for Friends is that we have refused to have visible individuals who are foci of authority, and therefore the people who are inevitably seen as foci, e.g. the Recording Clerk, Committees at Friends House, Treasurers, Directors of Studies, etc., are deprived of the safeguards which the other churches have developed to keep authority figures humble. For instance, a well-known principle declares that the priest who hears confessions and declares God's forgiveness must have a regular discipline of going to confession himself. How many Elders and Overseers meetings look at the needs of individuals in their Meetings and then say together "What about us? What are our needs?"

Perhaps the best way to avoid the pitfalls of administrative work is to see it as a form of service, and to serve not as individuals but as a group. Our appreciation of committee spirituality is helpful here.

Quaker Service, Including Teaching

Like Jesus' service to his friends, Quaker service is marked by authority and humility. It derives its authority to help others from its closeness to the Life, and from its fruitfulness in the past. How often have we been able to act and speak with power in the world today because of the rightness of Quaker work and methods in the past.

We know that we teach ourselves and each other in a group exploration, not a handing down of magical formulae from the initiated to the lesser breeds. There is a tension between the authority of the individual's inner witness and the teaching authority of the gathered experience of the 350 year old group, which can be a creative dialectic. It is quite possible for Quaker history to be given a false authority. It is perhaps best seen, like the Bible, as a source of shared imagery.

A Note On Language

We often speak of seeking the will of God together. When we feel we have arrived at a common understanding, do we respond obediently to that understanding as if it were the authoritative will of God for us? What authority do we give God?

Authority in the Society of Friends is experienced not as related to status or as limited to one person in each group. We see it as functional. It is enabling and facilitating, sustaining the life of the group and of individuals. The functions of authority can be divided between group members, and are not allotted permanently. Many religious communities behave like this.

Our highest picture of authority is of Jesus washing his disciples' feet. and going to his death with love and forgiveness. God, the Author and Creator of all that is, cannot be less loving than that. Jesus' Spirit and his type of authority is active today in our gathered community.

...the will of God for us? What authority do we give God?

Please Note: These are excerpts from a document of London Yearly Meeting and made available by Jo Farrow, a participant in the Consultation on Spiritual Authority and Accountability.

This article was taken from Quaker Understanding of Christ and Authority (Faith & Life Study Series) edited by T. Canby Jones, 1978.

DEAN FREIDAY:

The Early Quakers and "Authority"

with special reference to the place of the Bible

To ask what authority the Bible had for early Friends is to ask a question which, from their point of view, would be poorly stated. It would be somewhat like asking them what role bishops had in relation to laymen in Quaker polity. Just as the very phrasing and categories of that question suggest an entirely different type of church, we are in a different ecclesiastical world when someone inquires about the Authority of the Bible. Almost automatically we seem to be dealing with the Bible's place among the "sources of Revelation," and "Revelation" in that usage usually overemphasizes disclosure as a series of "theses" or "propositions" about supernatural truth.

This would seem to be the reason that Robert Barclay's description of Scripture as a "secondary rule that is subordinate to the Spirit" has been such an unsatisfactory explanation. Barclay and other early Friends felt constrained almost immediately to add high praise to make it clear that they were not downgrading the Scriptures. In dealing with Proposition 3 in his *Apology*, Barclay says, in the very first sentence following the thesis itself, "In spite of what has been said, we consider the scriptures *undoubtedly* and *unequivocally* the finest writings in the world."¹ [italics added]. A little further on he adds, "but we cannot go to the length of those Protestants who derive their authority from the virtue and power that is in the writings themselves."

Wittingly or unwittingly Barclay "bought" the wrong categories, and to fit the Bible in among the "sources of Revelation" he had to move the Holy Spirit, rather than the Christ whom the Spirit reveals, to the center of the stage. The foundation had been laid for the gradual phase-out of Christ altogether,

This essay represents in part an abridgment and in part a summary of a fully documented paper with numerous quotations from early Quaker writers which appeared in *Quaker Religious Thought*, Vol. 15, No. 1, Autumn 1973 (Alburtis, Pa., S1). Only 17th century quotations which do not appear in that paper are given source references here.

or the reduction of him to a great ethical practitioner which took place in some later understandings of Quakerism.

The early Quaker view

For the early Friends the Bible was not of value principally for constructing a system of dogmas from whatever texts were most congenial to a particular type of ecclesiastical structure. While the early Friends did not sacralize the book itself and make claims about its Infallibility, miraculous preservation, and the Inspiration of every single word, they nonetheless had the highest regard for the content of the Bible. And it was to the content that they were usually referring when they used the word "Scripture." For them, Scripture was a very special literature which recorded God's Revelation of himself in the past, and served as a clue and guide to the ongoing Revelation of his Will for his People in their current situation.

And it told them who their living Lord was in terms of the life he had lived, the things he had done and said, who he claimed to be, and who his disciples said that he was. Following his death and resurrection, his Presence with his People continued through the Holy Spirit.

The early Quakers did not "chop to pieces and criticize" Scripture "into crumbs and bits" to make its message fit a "certain topick or common-place," as Samuel Fisher with considerable justification maintained that Protestant neo-Scholastics did. In contrast, the early Friends tended to see Scripture whole. In doing so they could not have arrived at some of the subtle nuances which emerge when the individual theologies of the various writers are studied first, and then the common ground that exists between them is developed.

But, on the other hand, their way of prayerfully considering the Bible's meaning in relation to key areas of thought under the tuition of the Spirit of Christ — on balance — more than made up for the loss of some fine points. Their central interpretative principle could be described as bringing the whole background of years of Bible reading together in silent meditation and waiting for Christ to "open" its meaning to them.

This did not lead to a purely situational interpretation (analogous to situation ethics) in which only the affairs of the moment were of any consequence. It led also to some broad principles which became the basis of more detailed disclosures and a growing body of Revealed Truth. This could be and

was, when required, stated in terms of both "professed" and "confessed" beliefs. Take a look at Fox's letter "For the Governor of Barbados," since it is easily accessible, and a quite orderly and satisfactory statement of Quaker beliefs about Christ. A superficial count shows nine times that "we believe" recurs in that letter to introduce aspects of faith pertaining to God, Christ or the Scriptures.

We are apt to forget that the full title of Barclay's *Catechism* is *Catechism and Confession of Faith*. Fox opens a "paper" which was "to be dispersed amongst Friends" with the words "All you believers in the light."² Another "paper" which Fox considered a "warning to all Friends" is headed "To all that profess the Truth of God."

Such statements were "creedal" in content, however much that raises the hackles of some Friends. That is to say, they were "creedal" in describing what Quakers believed — stating who was Lord of their lives, and how commitment to him made them willing to undergo great monetary loss (£100,000 in the single year 1690 for Irish Friends alone),³ or to endure all sorts of physical suffering, even death.

Although creedal, these statements were not "creeds" — words which had to be memorized and recited, and which were supposed to give the only correct unheretical interpretation. But they do indicate an important aspect of theology which was frequently neglected in Quaker expressions of thought. Within a very few years of Quakerism's beginnings, Quaker theological writing became almost wholly preoccupied (except for the more academic literature of defense and debate) with the way in which Grace is appropriated.

Appropriation of Grace and "profession"

Appropriation of Grace, in simple everyday English, means the way in which you take possession of God's loving concern for you; it also deals with the way in which God transforms you into a new person, who thereby in a sense "exceeds himself." If the operation is a success, you begin to exhibit some of the qualities of Christ himself and find genuine self-fulfillment in doing so.

With these clues, if you will re-examine the statements which the early Quakers made about "professors," you will make a surprising discovery. They were not *against* "professing" — i.e., making a statement of belief. In fact, their beliefs

about Christ were so deeply ingrained and, in many ways, so orthodox that they assumed that they could be taken for granted.

They thought they could begin instead with *how* this Prophet, now ascended to heaven, still speaks to men and teaches them himself, without any intermediaries, without the need for elaborate philosophical constructions, without the need for a vast and authoritarian church structure to interpret Christ to them, without the need of a "clergyman" to communicate with God for them, and, above all, without the need to approach the Bible as an authoritative operating manual containing instructions on everything — from what to do in church, to what rate of interest distinguishes Christian credit from unchristian usury.

Most of these things which the People of God declared they could do without could be described as "notional religion." Man's ingenuity had somehow intervened, and in the process, things had gotten a bit mixed up. True faith, instead of stopping with "head knowledge," should go on to make beliefs not only "heart knowledge" (the individual's own) but put them into action as well. "Professors" should become "possessors" and "walkers" as well. For if "you profess Christ in words, but in works deny him" you are worse than the barbarous people, who make no such claim. But when "all the members walk in Christ" they "adorn their profession."⁴

"Profession" was not a place "to be rested in," but the place from which people had to be taken further, until they reached Christ. Then it was possible to "leave them there." They were not only in good hands, but in direct touch with "the author and finisher of his church's faith."⁵

Now, once you are in Christ's hands in that sense, you can begin to talk about Authority — about the Son, who speaks for the Father, and in whose hands all authority in heaven and on earth resides. This is the Prophet to whom you must listen, and whom you must obey. He will teach you all things, and his Spirit will bring all things to your remembrance.

You are then in the right kind of Succession — a Succession beginning with the Patriarchs, the Prophets, and the Apostles (not just an "Apostolic Succession"). For all of these had *seen God*, either directly, or through his Son. And in this Succession of "authentic experience" the Spirit will reveal the Son to you, and through him, the Father's Will for his People. Obviously, this kind of Revelation is neither one of paper, nor earthly ordination, nor philosophical speculations.

The biblical categories

If those who make high claims for biblical Authority would talk in biblical categories, they would ask about the early Quaker view of Power rather than Authority. It is true that the word "Authority" does appear in the New Testament some 29 times. But if you look up the word *exousia* in the standard Arndt-Gingrich Greek Lexicon, you will find that the word actually represents five different kinds of authority ranging from: (1) *freedom to act*; (2) *capability* (both as competence and as permission to act); (3) *absolute power or warrant*; (4) *official power*; to (5) a single instance whose meaning is not quite clear — but which is in the area of *womanly dignity or aplomb*.

Actually "power" is a more frequent translation for *exousia* than "authority" — 69 times, against 29. And *dynamis* adds 77 more occasions for the English word "power." There are also two less frequent Greek words that are so translated. In all, the word "power" occurs 154 times in the New Testament in comparison with only 29 times for "authority." In the Old Testament there are 17 different Hebrew words that account for 103 translations as "power." One of these is a synonym for God. And indeed scattered Old Testament assertions that Power belongs to God become such a major New Testament theme that John L. McKenzie, S. J., uses *The Power and the Wisdom* as the title for a book dealing with the major themes in the biblical theology of the New Testament.

When Power and Wisdom are coupled with constant references to Grace, or the Holy Spirit or Christ Spirit (which the biblical authors did not compartmentalize sharply), we have the Source of all Power by which the Christian prophet speaks and acts. And it is another major New Testament theme that the Christian is in the succession of the prophets. Prophecy, in the sense of "speaking from the Spirit of truth — is not only the particular responsibility of pastors and teachers, but it is a common privilege of all believers."⁸

Even if one uses the modern philosophical concept of authority as a structural framework to be imposed on the Scriptural evidence, the infrequent references do not add up to a major biblical concern. Authority for Scripture begins and ends with God (to be read either as Father, or Son, or Spirit in various places). God is not only the source of life and terminates it according to his Will, but all genuine Wisdom and

Knowledge proceed from him. He is the Source of Power to act in obedience to his Will. Truth, Justice, Righteousness, and consistency in compassion are the marks of his Authority. Nonetheless he is a jealous God "who will brook no co-partners in power and no co-rivals for his glory."

This kind of Power is radically different from most secular understandings. The phrase "power structures" has become very useful in identifying the ways in which secular power operates. It is a kind of power which puts its faith in numerical majorities or dictatorial minorities. It speaks of legal rights more than Righteousness or Justice. It places ultimate reliance on armed might and technically superior weapons. It even invades Church matters, where it places great reliance on customary ways of doing things, and/or on a succession of authoritative offices. These then are duly recognized by being properly installed and accorded places and titles of honor.

A philosophical digression

While the early Quakers did not find that philosophy was a necessary part of theology, they probably would not have objected to using it to clarify terminology — in other words, what it is that we are talking about. This should not be construed, however, as liberty to distort the biblical evidence to make it fit categories that were not only unknown to the biblical writers, but uncongenial to them.

Both Scripture and some classical philosophy shared the view that the ultimate reference of all authority is to God. Not only is man's existence finite, but societies also pass away. Only God is Infinite. God is also Truth and Justice and concerned with the becoming of man — his fulfillment as a human being, a new creation. This is the Good News for modern man as well as of old. Religious activity seeks to establish communication with God. The purpose, aside from sheer devotion and enjoyment of his Love, is the right ordering of personal values (i.e., man's salvation — both material and spiritual).

The authority question, and the one over which there have been such great arguments, centers on how God's values are *transmitted*. Peter's authority in the Church is not the only issue, because transmission as it relates to the nation-state has been even more variously construed.

In fact, as it relates to secular practices and structures, we are more properly dealing — except in the rare instances of

conscious theocracy (e.g., modern Israel or Puritan England) — with *reflection* rather than transmission, or some admixture of the two. Anglo-Saxon law is usually termed the embodiment of the values of Christendom. Similar claims could probably be made for other legal systems. The substance of such claims is that these legal systems reflect God's values whether the line of transmission is clear or not.

Once legal values have been constitutionalized, the lines of transmission of authority become clear. They are observable in laws, by-laws, and directives. They are tested and applied through judicial decisions. We are then dealing with a structured, visible, recognizable, and enforceable authority. Its special concern is to moderate the tension between individual freedom and the needs of society. We must draw heavily upon the adjectives juridical, official, and institutional in describing it.

When this kind of authority breaks down it is replaced by an authoritarian coercive use of power. In sub-national situations "power structures" energize police or national guard units. At the international level military forces embody it. Unfortunately the Christian church as a whole has dealt ambiguously with the question of divine values in relation to the breakdown of peaceful commerce between nations. In so doing the church compromised its role as prophet and judge in relation to such ultimate tests of civil power.

The minority voice of St. Francis and the Historic Peace Churches is being increasingly heard in the Roman Catholic Church, and the World Council of Churches recently authorized a re-examination of the "just war" theory. The 1864 Syllabus of Errors of Pius IX laid the groundwork for some of this, when it condemned the proposition that "authority is nothing but the sum-total of numbers and of material forces."

In a recent Catholic encyclopedia of theology, Waldemar Molinski states that "real authority does not compel but persuades." He adds that "authority begins where it is freely recognized, and ends where it becomes power," and "an earthly authority which does not point beyond itself becomes demonic and will show itself as arbitrary naked power." Furthermore, it "has a right to exist only insofar as it possesses and mediates perfection."⁸ It wins assent by its respectability — in the best sense of the word — and its credibility.

Credibility in turn depends heavily on competence and authenticity. Scripture values Truth so highly that it makes it almost synonymous with God. If we ask about the transmission of this kind of authority, which is usually called Knowledge or Wisdom in Scripture, it is Revelational. And from time to time God has exercised his Authority to intervene in the human sphere. He did so most notably when he sent his Son. A major purpose in sending him was to make clear the values in his Law, which became distorted when the Law became an end in itself and the real Authority behind it was forgotten.

Another kind of "Authority"

The early Quakers did not believe that Christ died to institute a neo-legalism authorized by a book, one which would be administered *for* him until the Second Coming, when he would return briefly to rule and to judge before both heaven and earth pass away.

With Pentecost, Christ assumed a new type of Presence with his People: a Presence administered from heaven, yet as near as breathing. His identification with his People was so close that in the vision where he appeared to the Apostle Paul the question is not, why do you persecute my Church, but "Why do you persecute me?"

Through his Spirit, Christ is present to guide his Church himself in all matters, and the true Church consists of those who faithfully reflect Christ's values and teachings, those who are obedient to his Will. To the true Church, Christ grants power to do all things which he requires to be done. To him alone belongs all power, and power which has its roots in any other claims is false and potentially diabolical.

1. *Barclay's Apology in Modern English*, Dean Freiday, ed., p. 46.

2. Fox, *Journal*, Bi-Centenary ed., Vol. II, p. 473.

3. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 503.

4. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 486, 441.

5. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 439.

6. Barclay, *op. cit.*, Prop. X, Section 25, p. 212.

7. *Ibid.*, Prop. XI, Section 10, p. 266.

8. *Sacramentum Mundi* (New York: Heider, 1970), pp. 129-133.