

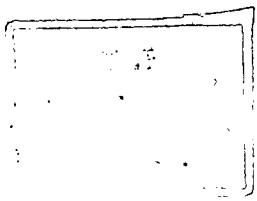
**FROM  
THE SUBLIME  
TO  
THE METICULOUS**

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**A reappraisal of the changing roles of women within the Quaker Movement in England through the establishment of separate Women's Meetings in the 1670s.**

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### **Declaration**

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any higher degree or graduate diploma in any Tertiary Institute, and to the best of my knowledge and belief contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text of the thesis.

Avril D. Caney

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## ABBREVIATIONS

MMM	Men's Monthly Meeting
WMM	Women's Monthly Meeting
WQM	Women's Quarterly Meeting
SWMM	Swarthmoor Women's Monthly Meeting
LYM	London Yearly Meeting

**Note:** Unless otherwise stated, the 1952 Cambridge edition of George Fox's *Journal* has been used in footnotes.

## INTRODUCTION

Quakerism emerged as one of the radical sects of the English Civil War years. Following the 16th century Reformation, radical Protestants and mainstream Protestants all over Europe could be distinguished very largely by their contrasting attitude to the existing political systems and social structures in which they operated. Mainstream Protestant churches, such as Calvinists, Lutherans, Anglicans and Scottish Presbyterians came to terms with the institutions shaping society by entering into an official relationship with the State. The multifarious strands of radical Protestantism were united only in their general opposition to the State. Some, including Quakers, experienced a militant or activist phase during which they pressured governments with demands for reform or even attempted to precipitate revolution. Ultimately most of these sects became reconciled to considering themselves a godly remnant within an evil society, and concentrated on preserving internal purity.

Having dislodged the ancient and all pervasive authority of the Roman Catholic *corpus Christianorum*, Protestants of all persuasions continued to use the Bible as a primary source both for modelling their own religious structure and attacking others. Because of the wide spectrum of biblical interpretation, no common Protestant platform could ever be agreed upon. A secondary source of authority can also be identified within some sects, in the form of individual or corporate reliance on the Holy Spirit to convey the will of God, usually through a prophetic or charismatic ministry. Quakerism was one the few sects to rely heavily on direct spiritual guidance while continuing to acknowledge the authority of the Bible.

Where Bible literalism was strictly followed, as in Calvinism and Presbyterianism, it was difficult for women to break through the patriarchalism of the Old Testament and certain explicit Pauline teachings. But where a broader Scriptural hermeneutic was encouraged along with freer expression of spiritual experience, women were more demonstrative. This was true of some strands of Anabaptism, of the Familists, and in the pseudo-religious Ranters and Fifth Monarchists. Women tended to be vocal and prominent in the formative stages of the more charismatic or revivalist groups and this was evident as far back as the early Lollards.

It has long been noted by historians that early Quaker women both acquired and also sustained a public platform within their ranks not only during their formative years, but consistently ever since, something that remained out of reach for women in general for generations, perhaps centuries to come.

Two particular perspectives have been developed in recent decades that enable us to understand this as more than just an interesting or surprising phenomenon of the mid to late 17th century. Christopher Hill's work on the radical and minority sects of the Cromwellian era has shifted the focus away from political protagonists to explore the grassroots level of English society. He has observed that the attitudes of the so-called 'lunatic fringe' of one period can be rescued and made plausible by successive generations of historians, for so often what is perpetrated by a minority of radicals becomes progressively more respectable and acceptable.<sup>1</sup> This perspective has been further developed by Barry Reay, and Keith Thomas.<sup>2</sup>

The second valuable perspective is the emergence of feminist history, which has been reading between the lines of official histories examining the often obscured records of women's lives. Susan Mosher Stuard notes that *feminist history provides us with tools for understanding Quaker women*, by offering a woman-centred stance.<sup>3</sup>

For Quaker historians, both male and female, past and present, their dramatic beginning simply heralded an unbroken tradition of women's public involvement that has characterized the Society of Friends to this day, and of which they are justly proud.

Thomas Clarkson in 1806 claimed, *The Quaker women, independent of their private, have that which no other body of women have, a public character. This is a new era in female history.*<sup>4</sup>

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1 C.Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (London, 1972), pp.13-14.

2 See bibliography.

3 E.P.Brown and S.M.Stuard, *Witnesses for Change* (New Brunswick 1989), pp.3-4.

4 T.Clarkson, *A Portraiture of Quakerism, vol.3*, (London, 1806), p.288-9. Clarkson was not a Quaker but a clergyman and philanthropist who greatly admired and sympathized with Quaker philosophy. He worked with them during his long anti-slavery campaign.

A century later, the most reliable and respected of Quaker historians William Braithwaite added, *This venture, in the case of the women's Meeting, was a daring one, and taxed 17th century feminine capacity to the utmost, but this only adds to its significance as a landmark in the movement for giving woman her true place of equal partnership with men.*<sup>5</sup>

Most recently, Stuard (1987) gives this acknowledgment further significance: *The history of Quaker women is then both remarkable and inspiring, and only in its initial stages of development. By examining Quaker women we can learn what is necessary to move society beyond the restraints of debilitating gender ideology. We learn that women can effect the changes necessary to transform their social roles.*<sup>6</sup>

Feminist historians such as Bonnelyn Kunze, Patricia Crawford, and Phyllis Mack challenge the conclusions of Hill and Thomas who are dismissive of any lasting measurable contribution to female emancipation being achieved as a result of the Quaker stand on gender equality. Feminist historians are not only linking isolated strands of emancipation evident in society, but more importantly reassessing female influence and activism in society and showing how women could make a system that was demonstrably repressive and discriminatory work in their favour.

Helen Crosfield (1913), Mabel Brailsford (1915) and Isobel Ross (1949), early biographers of Margaret Fell-Fox,<sup>7</sup> tend to place her beyond reproach, the perfect 'helpmeet' of George Fox, the acknowledged founder of the Quakers. Non-Quaker historians are less susceptible to hagiography. Kunze (1994) uncovers some of Fell's indiscretions and shortcomings and, in order to establish a stronger profile for Fell, is more concerned with the influence that she had on Fox than the reverse.

In fact both Kunze and Crawford, in recent re-appraisals of Quaker women, open up new areas of their significance. In her study of the Nayler case, Crawford shows how gender played a more noteworthy role than has been previously acknowledged in the Quaker search for authority and leadership.<sup>8</sup>

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5 W.C.Braithwaite, *Second Period of Quakerism*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge 1961) p.274.

6 E.P.Brown and S.M.Stuard, *Witnesses...*, p.22.

7 See bibliography.

8 P.Crawford, *Women and Religion in England 1500-1720*, (London, N.Y. 1993) p.166-180.

Early Quaker historians praised their women with just a hint of patronage, emphasizing that equality was 'given' to them by George Fox. Contemporary historians suggest a more activist role by women in taking the initiative both in evangelism and organization.

Early Quaker historians accepted without question that curious amalgam of the histrionic, volatile preacher and earnest, pragmatic committee member, as existing not only within the same generation of Quaker women, but even within the same personality. Contemporary historians, with sociological and psychological insights, are prising apart this extraordinary and unlikely 17th century Quaker prototype.

"From the Sublime to the Meticulous" tracks the changing mood of these Quaker women by examining the formation of the Women's Monthly and Quarterly Meetings, both as an integral part of the new organizational framework of the Movement, and as the main vehicle of change for women. I will review the earlier years and contrast them with a profile of Quaker women at the end of the century, seeking to establish what was gained or lost thereby. This paper proposes that, while assuring them of a continuing public voice and long term influence, the establishment of the WMM actually resulted initially in a lower profile for Quaker women.

Quakers writings, both primary and secondary sources, are prolific. Where possible I have used the published journals, letters and accounts of 17th century Quakers, in conjunction with a cross section of secondary literature including past and contemporary Quaker and non-Quaker histories of the period.

## Chapter 1.

### A FAVOURABLE CLIMATE FOR WOMEN'S MINISTRY

In order to understand the opinions, the motives, the strategies and the events underlying and surrounding the formation of the separate Women's Meetings we must first describe the religious and social context out of which Quaker women had succeeded in building for themselves such a prominent and public platform. This is attempted in chapter one.

Secondly we need to be aware of any gender tensions that had been generated as a result of the atypical gender roles fostered within the Movement during its formative years, and suggest connections between these and the apparent change that occurred in the women's ministry in the 1670s. These will be discussed in chapter two.

For a sociological explanation of the phenomenon of Quakerism, we turn to the social turbulence of the civil wars, and the political novelty of the Protectorate, which produced a range of extraordinary behaviours and beliefs among fanatical religious sects.

According to Christopher Hill, *A revolt within a revolution* was unleashed through *the attempts of various groups of the common people to impose their own solutions to the problems of the time in opposition to the wishes of their betters who had called them into political action.*<sup>1</sup>

Hill speaks of the growing numbers of *masterless men*,<sup>2</sup> individuals not answerable to either an overlord or the church. These formed a remarkably mobile community of itinerants through whom propaganda and programmes, religious or political, could be transmitted. Between 1640 and 1660 censorship was lifted and this prompted a publication boom especially of pamphlets. There was a corresponding freedom for groups to hold formal or informal, private or public meetings virtually whenever and wherever they chose.<sup>3</sup>

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1 C.Hill, *The World...*, p.11.

2 *ibid.*, p.32-37.

3 C.Hill, Quakers and the English Revolution, *Journal of the Friends Historical Society*, vol.56, no.3 (1992) p.167.

Since the Grand Remonstrance of 1641 in which the king and his ministers had been publicly criticized, there was a growing feeling that politics rightly belonged to the people and not the overlords. In a world in which a divinely appointed king could be declared a traitor and executed, in which the House of Lords and the Bishops had been abolished, and the church disestablished - anything was felt to be possible, even the abolition of the hated tithe payments which became a major campaign on the Quaker agenda.

Given the prevailing gender order in early modern England emphasizing the disparate functions and roles of men and women across the institutions of family life, the church and society in general, and given the perpetuated belief of the inferiority of the woman and her dependence upon and subordination to the man, the very fact that the women of the radical sects dared to preach, publish and petition in the public arena is evidence of the extreme social disorientation experienced between 1640 and 1660.<sup>4</sup> That they continued to do so in the face of violent persecution, I think supports the idea that there was an irrational and fanatical spirit abroad in England at that time. More importantly, it also supports Phyllis Mack's view that far from being an 'ego trip' or emotional outlet for repressed women, the prophetic outpourings transcended the individual's natural cravings and sense of self. Such preaching, she describes as *that light or voice of conscience... catapulted from the depths of the soul, through layers of temperament, appetite and habit, finally bursting through the individual's outer husk - her social status, her physical shape, her gender...*<sup>5</sup>

Gender equality is acknowledged in the basic matrix of Quakerism. Its philosophy centres around a very egalitarian principle - *that of God in every person*, often expressed as the *inner light, or seed of God*. Mack describes it as *a shard of universal truth, God's voice embedded in the self*.<sup>6</sup> Essential truth about God and guidance for life is accessed through this divine osmosis, and is available to every man, woman, child, regardless of intellectual ability, education, social class, or race.

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4 C.Hill, *The World...*, p.186 ff., argues that initially Quakers embraced and propagated political doctrines similar to the Ranters, Levellers and Diggers.

5 P.Mack, "Gender and Spirituality in Early English Quakerism" in E.P.Brown and S.M.Stuard, *Witnesses...*, p.37.

6 *ibid.*

This was a complete break from the Anglican or established Church, which ordained priests as intermediaries between God and the layperson. It was also a diversion from the mainstream Protestant traditions which used the Bible not only as the ultimate authority for behaviour and doctrine, but as a rule by which all individual spiritual insight must be validated.

In this respect Margaret Fell's own account of her conviction is significant. Initially she is convinced - not of sin and the need for redemption, nor the authority of the Bible - but of the indwelling of the spirit of Christ and, in particular, the authenticity of her own voice and convictions. In her testimony to George Fox after his death she recalls his words on the first occasion she heard him preach, which had taken place at her home church of Ulverstone. *Christ saith this, and the apostles say this; but what canst thou say?*<sup>7</sup> This conviction enabled her to break not only from the power of the local priest<sup>8</sup> but from the self doubt and introspection of the Puritan tradition with which she was imbued, and move into religious certainty which fuelled and sustained a life of positive religious activism.

Undoubtedly the greatest source of inspiration for a Quaker woman was this belief that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit gave her an authentic voice alongside that of the Quaker male. The fact that women met with so little opposition in the early years was due primarily to the enormous emphasis laid on intuitive and spontaneous ministry, and secondly because of the absence of power structures within the movement.

For almost 20 years Quakers resisted all formal structures and regulations in their churches. They rejected ordination, denied the efficacy of the sacraments, refused to establish any church hierarchy, discouraged property acquisition, demerited educational qualifications and emphasized the authenticity rather than the authority of the Bible.

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<sup>7</sup> *The Testimony of Margaret Fox in The Journal of George Fox*, Leeds Ed. (1836), p.LXII.

<sup>8</sup> Fell's relationship with her local parish priest Lampitt prior to her conviction seems to have been an ambiguous one, but not atypical. As a deeply religious woman of Puritan principles she deferred to his spiritual advice, but since the Fells represented the gentry class in his parish, Lampitt would have deferred to the family in many parish matters, and until Margaret's conviction, seems to have been a regular and respected visitor to Swarthmoor Hall.

In this way they removed any formal framework or strategies by which men could either vie for positions of authority between themselves, or subordinate women and uneducated men. In addition, their levelling behaviour, such as refusing to doff or remove the hat, and failing to observe the thou/you distinction, meant that very little social disparity was observed.

In other Protestant churches where some form of hierarchy or ordination was retained, or scriptural authority observed, it was necessary to define gender role boundaries, often in the face of conflict. Joyce Irwin offers a number of examples.<sup>9</sup> Both the Lutherans and Anglicans, following Catholic tradition, allowed midwives to baptize infants - but only in emergencies. Luther's acceptance of the doctrine of *the priesthood of all believers* compelled him reluctantly to accept that in the unlikely event of no men being present at worship services, a woman might be called upon to preach. Calvin, however, believed that the biblical injunction for women to keep silent in church was binding in all situations. It was the lack of scriptural precedent that fuelled Bunyan's opposition to women's meetings explained in *A Case of Conscience Resolved*,<sup>10</sup> although he backed his arguments by asserting that women lacked the necessary skills and disposition anyway, and that such action was a way of *usurping authority* over the men, particularly the elders.<sup>11</sup> Mennonites, Puritans and Separatists disagreed over whether the office of deaconess, which was offered only to widows of mature age and reputation, should be consecrated or not.<sup>12</sup>

To clarify the way in which the Quaker ethos discarded distinctions and nullified controversy, several areas of women's possible involvement in the public aspect of church life can be identified:- the right to preach or teach to a mixed congregation; the right to prophesy or pray aloud in worship services; in disciplinary matters the right to admonish or reprove in church; the right to vote; eligibility for office bearing or ordination; the right to hold separate meetings for either for worship or business.

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9 J.Irwin, *Womanhood in Radical Protestantism*, (New York, 1979), p.159-160.

10 In *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan*, vol.4, (Oxford 1989), intro.p.xliii, p.310ff.

11 *ibid.*, p.304-310.

12 J.Irwin, *Women....*, p.161.

Quakers endorsed the first three of these ministries for women, with certain reservation in matters of discipline. This was in keeping with their belief that it was the Holy Spirit communicating God's message, and not the opinions of the speaker, male or female. The question of voting was not relevant since agreement was reached through consensus.<sup>13</sup> Ordination was not an issue either since Quakers considered the priesthood a blasphemous practice. The only offices that came to be recognized by the 1670s were those of elder and minister, and George Fox strenuously defended the right of women to hold those positions.<sup>14</sup> Finally the legitimacy of separate Women's Meetings was taken for granted while they operated at a local level, and although they were never suppressed, they attracted opposition in some quarters.<sup>15</sup>

Dissident and separatist churches generally were anxious to emulate the New Testament patterns to the last detail and tended to be more suspicious of texts of emancipation.<sup>16</sup> In the informal spirit of the early years Quakers embraced without reservation these liberating principles.

This brings us to three particular doctrines that facilitated a prominent place for women in the movement. One of the most dominant radical doctrines which permeated early Quaker thinking was millenarianism, a belief that was both political and religious and shared by many of the radical sects of the Cromwellian era, in particular the Fifth Monarchists.<sup>17</sup> Its value to women was in distracting attention away from the Puritan obsession with domesticity and replacing this with a vision of Christ's Coming - so urgent, so sublime, so transcendent that all earthly relationships and pre-occupations faded into insignificance.

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13 Early or purist forms of Quakerism were highly individualized and not overly concerned with reaching consensus, since it was believed that no one could ultimately define truth for another person.

14 (See Appendix 2). G.Fox, *A Collection of Epistles*, vol.2, (London 1698), epistle no.291 (1672) p.323-324.

15 See below, ch.3 passim.

16 Acts 2:17-18 (A.V.): *I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy... And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit...* Also Galatians 3:28 (A.V.) *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*

17 C.Hill, "Quakers and the English Revolution", p.169.

The impermanence of the present world system was keenly felt, particularly since contemporary Biblical exegesis on prophecy pinpointed the 1650's as the likely transition into the millennium of Christ's reign on earth.<sup>18</sup> These were heady, euphoric, spiritually orgasmic years in which women, no less than men, were transported beyond their natural, physical, socially determined conditions.

Fox adopted the doctrine of pre-lapsarian harmony early in his ministry. It was an idea derived from, or shared with both Ranters and Diggers.<sup>19</sup> Male and female had been created equal, and the domination of man over woman appeared as a result of the Fall - the sin that corrupted men's hearts. The salvation of mankind, brought about through Christ, abolished the inequality, and through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, harmony between the sexes is restored and demonstrated through true Christian marriage.<sup>20</sup>

Another doctrine that had some impact on the movement in its formative years was the perfectibility of the Christian.<sup>21</sup> Eve's fall into temptation in the Garden of Eden had been accepted by many Protestants as a demonstration that women were the morally weaker sex. The Puritan obsession with the Adam and Eve story fuelled their conviction of the inferiority of women. They observed that not only was it Eve who succumbed to the temptation first, but the cunning serpent had approached her deliberately when she was alone knowing her to be the weaker sex.<sup>22</sup> In contrast, the idea fostered by Quakers that a heart completely open to God could not be corrupted, may well have given the women a corresponding sense of confidence, rooted in the efficacy of their religious experience.

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18 *ibid.*

19 C.Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution*, (New York, 1977) p.118.

20 G.Fox, *A Collection...*, vol.2, (London, 1698), ep.no.264, p.280.

21 C.Hill in "Quakers and the English Revolution" links the doctrine of perfectibility with Quaker militancy and the radical political aspiration of the rule of the saints, p.175.

22 C.Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man, John Bunyan and his Church*, (New York, 1988), p.299.

The millenarian dream faded with the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 and grounded the Quakers, and others who had shared the obsession, once more in the problems of the real world. The doctrine of Christian perfectibility, qualifying true 'saints' to share the rule of Christ, was also discarded around the same time, marking an abandonment of their political and revolutionary aims. But the doctrine of pre-lapsarian equality remained a cornerstone in Fox's theology, with its emphasis on creation rather than the fall of man. As late as 1673, when Nathaniel Coleman objected to Women's Meetings in Wiltshire, Fox challenged him with this interpretation of the Fall.<sup>23</sup>

Fox encompassed the feminine not only doctrinally but in his widening of the dimensions of spiritual concepts. In a psychologically oriented study, Mack illustrates how men stepped out of their traditional gender type by using unfamiliar feminine or maternal imagery to express their relationship with God.<sup>24</sup> This flowed over into the intimate, even erotic, language employed by Friends corresponding with each other during times of persecution.<sup>25</sup> Mack describes the emotional and spiritual interchanges between Friends as achieving a fluidity *in a sort of gravity-free zone* <sup>26</sup>.

Apart from the charismatic intensity of the movement and a pervasive millennial vision in its formative years, there are two other aspects of early Quakerism that transcended the tensions and difficulties caused by adopting culturally atypical gender roles. One was the sheer amount of energy channelled into evangelism. Quakers were an urgent, travelling people intent not only of convincing the world of their truth, but of declaiming and challenging every other church.

One might have expected that the travelling nature of evangelism would have precluded most women from this ministry. But the evidence suggests that large numbers rejoiced in the risks and insecurities of this lifestyle. Brailsford describes how servants took literally the prophetic words from Joel, quoted in Acts 2:18, *Upon my handmaidens I will pour out... my Spirit; and they shall prophesy...*, and resigned their positions to become itinerants.<sup>27</sup>

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23 *The Journal of George Fox*, (Cambridge ed., 1952) p.667.

24 E.P.Brown and S.M.Stuard, *Witnesses...*, p.14.

25 B.S.Anderson and J.P.Zinsser, *A History of their Own: Women in Europe*, vol.1, (New York 1988) p.237.

26 E.P.Brown and S.M.Stuard, *Witnesses...*, p.43.

27 M.R.Brailsford, *Quaker Women 1650-1690*, (London 1915) p.95.

William Caton, who had grown up in the strongly matriarchal Fell household as a live-in companion to the only son, George, and greatly respected the family, nevertheless found reasons to speak privately to Fox about *the work of women Friends which sometimes caused special difficulties*. Fox replied cautiously that although *some might cease, yet they would be glad of women or any in these parts* (west country).<sup>28</sup> Like so many revolutionary movements, dedication to the Cause took precedent over every other consideration.

Women featured strongly in the vanguard of Quaker missionary enterprise. Using *The Great Book of Suffering* and the *Dictionary of Quaker Biography*, Mack has counted 235 prophets and writers operating during the 1650s.<sup>29</sup> The first missionaries to America were women. Before 1660 over half of the Quaker ministers evangelizing in Massachusetts were women. Extraordinary feats attempted by women include the first mission to London (from Lancashire), the first Quaker challenge to Oxbridge scholars, overseas missions to Catholic Italy, and eastern Europe, including an attempt to convert the Sultan of Turkey.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps more than has been acknowledged, their enterprises were rooted as much in the militant phase of Quakerism as in spiritual revival. The Quaker women's Parliamentary petition against tithes in 1659 contained 7000 women's signatures and shows the level of agitation against social grievances.

The second - and equally significant gender leveller - was the violent and almost unabated persecution faced by the Friends for about four decades. For the average stay-at-home Quaker refusing to pay his tithes or swear an oath in court, his primary focus was on survival. Women were logistically and emotionally essential in this situation. Both unofficial and organized relief networks operated to provide, over long periods of extreme privation, food and medicine and moral support for prisoners, and also the care of their partners and children on a national scale.

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28 W.C.Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, 2nd Ed. (Cambridge, 1955) p.238.

29 P.Mack, "Gender and Spirituality in Early Quakerism", in Brown and Stuard, *Witnesses...*, p.33, fn.6.

30 H.Barbour, "Quaker Prophetesses and Mothers in Israel" in *Seeking the Light: Essays in Quaker History*, (Pennsylvania 1986), p.44.

This work was effectively begun and sustained through the early years by Margaret Fell from her Swarthmoor home. She initiated the Kendal Fund.

The Fund had been established as early as 1653/4 to collect and distribute money to support travelling preachers from the area, and their families, and later for general relief. Since the North West of England was the primary source of missionaries in the 1650s, the process of distributing money through the Kendal Fund enabled a close watch to be kept on the movements of all the itinerant preachers. Barclay estimates that Fox and Fell monitored the movements of over 70 travelling preachers through the Swarthmoor network in the 50s.<sup>31</sup> Fell herself probably contributed generously, but it was not set up for women to control. Initially her two financial agents were men. The Kendal Fund may have dealt adequately with the problem of relief in the Swarthmoor area in the early days, for Richard Hubberthorne claimed *there was no beggar among friends*,<sup>32</sup> but it was forced to close under the first Conventicle Act.<sup>33</sup>

As the centre of the Movement moved from the north of England to London, two other meetings were set up. The Box Meeting and the Two Weeks Meeting were run by women and effectively operated as relief agencies, and these feature in more detail in a later chapter.<sup>34</sup>

The sharing of sufferings is just one reason why the men may have enjoyed the support of the emancipated Quaker women. A corollary of this was the sharing of one's inner spiritual life with one's partner, or another sister within the group. This aspect of marriage and fellowship had also been fostered by the Puritans. It was a bleak time for the Non-conformist male ego after the Restoration. No longer fired by the spirit of revolution, radical sectarians gradually realized they had gained little. Morale was low<sup>35</sup> and was aggravated by a recognition of their continued disadvantaged position in society - the lack of opportunities for professional livings, educational qualifications and civil status.

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31 R.Barclay, *The Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth*, (London 1879) p.340.

32 B.Y.Kunze, "'Poore and in Necessity': Margaret Fell and Quaker Philanthropy" *Albino*, vol.21, no.4, p.565.

33 H.Barbour, 'Quaker Prophetesses...', p.52.

34 See below, p.31

35 Fox himself suffered some form of breakdown late in 1659 which C.Hill attributes to disillusionment with Quaker militancy, see "Quakers and the English revolution", p.174.

In this slump, when the more spiritually aware Quaker men were seeking the inner consolation of religious faith they were sustained also by an intimate and sympathetic working relationship with wives who shared similar insights.

Undoubtedly each fresh wave of persecution brought new problems for the many families penalized by heavy fines or terms of imprisonment, even in some cases confiscation of property through the dreaded praemunire penalties. The link between persecution, gender roles and the establishment of women's separate business meetings culminates with the 1670 Conventicle Act. This prohibited among other things unauthorized religious meetings of more than five people, and had severe repercussions for Quaker men and women who simply continued to meet and face the disruption, assaults and arrests. Since the earlier London Women's Meetings (The Box Meeting and the Two Weeks Meeting) had been so successful in supporting the persecuted, it is quite likely that Fox and Fell were anxious to set up similar support systems throughout the country.

Yet in view of the apparently spontaneous and involuntary merging of gender roles under the pressure of persecution previously described, the development of separate business meetings can be seen as a retrograde step in that it re-established the lines of demarcation between males and females.<sup>36</sup>

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36 See below, p.41

## Chapter 2

### EARLY GENDER IRRITANTS

In view of the opposition and difficulties encountered in settling the Women's Meetings, and their lower than expected profile in the Movement, it is possible that gender tensions already existed that worked towards this diminished success.

As has already been demonstrated in the previous chapter the prime mover in establishing an equal position and voice for women in the movement was George Fox himself. The irony seems to lie in the fact that by claiming this initiative so unequivocally in his letters and journal, and being praised so effusively by Quaker historians, he actually assumed some undeserved credit for himself, thereby diminishing the credit due to the early female apostles. Kunze debates this extensively in regard to the setting up of Women's Meetings.<sup>1</sup>

It also cannot be denied that the Movement, especially in its militant phase, immediately attracted strong-minded, often unconciliatory women, determined to maintain an influential position. Their heroics have become legendary, and one is scarcely surprised to learn also that such unbridled behaviour provoked criticism. While there were some uncontainable giants, such as Elizabeth Hooten, Barbara Blaugdone and Mary Fisher, whose formidable courage commanded universal respect, the actions of others were interpreted as disruptive and counter-productive. Richard Hubberthorne complained in 1658 that Mary Howgill was *ministering confusion among Friends*.<sup>2</sup> At the same time the Bedfordshire Friends were *burdened by the ministry of a short little maid... more suited for a servant*, and Ann Blaykling was causing trouble - Braithwaite quotes the Westmoreland account of the First Publishers - *for want of watchfulness the enemy prevailed to lead her into singularity and whimseys...* suggesting headstrong and ungovernable behaviour.<sup>3</sup> But Fox was undeterred, never wavering on his stand for full participation by women in the ministry. His stringent efforts after 1666 to get Women's Meetings established in the face of serious opposition demonstrate this.

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<sup>1</sup> B.Y.Kunze, *Margaret Fell and the Rise of Quakerism*, (London 1994) p.144-147.

<sup>2</sup> W.C.Braithwaite, *Beginnings...*, p.345-6.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

But how far was Fox's support of women's ministry a result of divine inspiration, militant expediency, or an attitude that grew out of some early encounters with strong females that occurred very early in his wanderings, during his search for religious conviction? Even before his conversion experience, he had met Elizabeth Hooton, a mature christian and preacher among the 'shattered Baptists' in Nottinghamshire. She is the first person - male or female - in his journal to be commended and named specifically. He records having meetings and discourses with her.<sup>4</sup> From later accounts of her extraordinary courage, energy and outspokenness, she might well have been responsible for the early formation of Fox's uncompromising stand on women preachers - a stand which went on to receive the solid and lifelong backing from Margaret Fell, another forceful personality. The first recorded public stand he took in defence of freedom of speech for women occurred in 1647 when he publicly defended a woman criticized for asking a question during an open meeting in a steeplehouse.<sup>5</sup>

Fox's support of women's public ministry probably opened the issue for many men who might have preferred not to consider it. His support also gave the issue the credibility that his position in the movement afforded. The attitudes taken by John Whitehead and Thomas Story, contemporaries of Fox, show these two extremes. In Whitehead's *Written Gospel Labours* women scarcely rate a mention except for this one cautious biblical explanation of their ministry: *...altho' he (Paul the apostle) did not permit a Woman to Speak in the Church, nor usurp Authority over the Man, yet he did permit the Spirit of God to speak in Women, as we do; for we dare not forbid it, lest in doing so we should quench the Spirit, which they have the Promise of, as well as Men.*<sup>6</sup> In Story's *Conversations, Discussions, and Anecdotes*, the issue is given a higher profile, and he explains to the Countess of Carlisle: *it ought to be impartially observed that the difference of sexes consists altogether in various modifications of body and organical distinctions, and not in any diversity of faculties in the human soul; the intellectual powers being alike common to male and female, and the nature of the mind the same in both, and consequently susceptible of the like and same impressions and impulses.*<sup>7</sup>

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4 G.Fox, *Journal*, p.9.

5 W.Sewell, *The History of the Rise, Increase, and Progress of the Christian People called Quakers*, vol.1, 4th ed., p.27-28.

6 J.Whitehead, *The Written Gospel Labours*, (London 1704) p.142.

7 T.Story, *Conversations, Discussions and Anecdotes*, (Philadelphia 1860), p.38.

This is quite a remarkable statement since it goes well beyond Whitehead's somewhat grudging acknowledgment of the Spirit using women as a vehicle for divine expression.

Both Whitehead's caution and Story's assertion of the intellectual equality of men and women were not fully reconciled in Fox's writings, or through the example of his own lifestyle. He was essentially celibate minded. Unmarried until the age of 45, he continued uninterrupted his itinerant lifestyle, never fathered a child, and never had to provide a home and income for a family. He appears to have encouraged and enjoyed a platonic marriage relationship. He fails to deal comprehensively with gender issues in the way that both Catholics and Puritans had. Catholics incorporated a profession of celibacy that protected and sanctified women, through the female orders. Puritan men wrote at length on the topic with remarkable candour and pragmatism. They saw women's chief act of piety in the breeding and rearing of godly children and they knew exactly where they wanted their women - at home. Quaker women in the early days were left unsure as to whether pregnancy was a hindrance, a blessing, or just a fact of life. And the Quaker marriage contract, instigated by Fox, was achieved by simply standing up and 'taking each other' during a Quaker meeting. Quaker men may have begun married life wondering whether they were to act as head of the new household or not.

As early as 1653/4 when the movement was still in its infancy, Fox laid down the basis for the Quaker marriage contract.<sup>8</sup> In 1666/7 he expanded his directives, giving the initiative of approval to both the men's and women's meetings, with the right of investigation assigned to the women - a source of irritation in the later Wilkinson and Story controversy.<sup>9</sup> Dispensing with intermediaries (particularly priests), Fox emphasized *we marry none, but are witnesses of it*.<sup>10</sup> Basing the contract on the mutual consent of the couple in a bond of reciprocal love, with the blessing of local Friends, a public declaration of intent took place in the presence of at least 12 witnesses. Naturally there was no obedience clause, and marriages were not to be undertaken as a financial contract.

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8 G.Fox, *Journal*, p.519. Fox's efforts to legitimize Quaker marriages would have been helped by Cromwell's Civil Registration of Marriages which gave status to common law marriages and "handfast" marriages, after 1653. A precedent was eventually set in 1661 when the validity of Quaker marriage was upheld in a Nottingham courtcase over inheritance of land.

9 W.Rogers, *The Christian Quaker Distinguished from the Apostate and Innovator*, (London, 1680), p.63.

10 G.Fox, *A Collection...*, ep.no.264, p.281.

Two provisos only were placed on the couple. They were to seek the will of God above their own inclinations, and both parties were to be Friends. In the event of one partner coming from another district, a certificate of recommendation was required.<sup>11</sup>

In a frank account left by Richard Davies (born 1635) of his own courtship we glimpse what could almost be described as a curious spiritual mating ritual of apprehensive approach and withdrawal, hesitancy and assertiveness. Restrained from responding to his natural inclinations he cannot pursue the woman he feels drawn to, so he waits through several encounters for the some sign of divine approbation, feeling *very willing* and *easy*. Finally in some show of male initiative he tells her that - *if the Lord did order her to be my wife, she must come with me*. In fact she entertains some misgivings, and her final acceptance seems based on strict obedience to God rather than a response of love.<sup>12</sup> The marriage, however, was to last successfully for 46 years.

But Fox was not content with a working partnership. His infatuation with the state of innocence enjoyed by Adam and Eve before the Fall - which had given him a base for gender equality - now served to illustrate the nature of the marriage relationship. For each marriage to be a recreating of an Edenic paradise, the mystical and spiritual nature of the union was emphasized, and each union was to illustrate the supreme marriage of Christ and his Church.<sup>13</sup>

In this regard the response to his own marriage, when offered to the church as the supreme example of a spiritual marriage, bears close examination. His marriage intention was not offered to the Bristol Men's and Women's meeting for approval, even though these were going concerns in a thriving congregation at the time, and he is later criticized for this omission.<sup>14</sup> He did however 'clear' the marriage most fastidiously with Margaret's daughters with regard to their provision from Judge Fell's estate and, as required, he gave notice of his intention to marry to the Bristol Meeting three times.

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11 G.Fox, *Journal*, p.577.

12 R.Davies, *An Account of Richard Davies*, (Philadelphia, 1837) p.40-41.

13 G.Fox, *Journal*, p.557.

14 W.Rogers, *The Christian Quaker...*, p.63-5.

Although the marriage was met with widespread enthusiasm from the Fox/Fell supporters, of which there were many in Bristol, Braithwaite draws attention to a subsequent paper addressed to all church meetings of Friends throughout the world, in which Fox appears to use his own marriage as a symbolic way of drawing all Friends into a mystical marriage union.<sup>15</sup> In his journal he explains it *as a testimony that all might come up out of the wilderness to the marriage of the Lamb*.<sup>16</sup> The paper however received a hostile reception and was quickly recalled,<sup>17</sup> only to be used later as fuel for Francis Bugg's condemnation of Quakerism.

The reason for the rejection of this paper is not clearly spelt out. Perhaps the mystical marriage analogy was felt to be presumptuous, or even threatening. Fox could be seen to be using his marriage as the highest and most pristine form of power-partnership. No other Quaker leader could quite match so potent and transcendent a union. Possibly it was seen (and perhaps Fox and Fell intended it to be seen) as the ultimate gender-leveller in the movement, since it pre-empted their drive for the establishment of Women's Meetings, largely undertaken by Fell during Fox's absence in America. In some way the rejection of this paper indicates the limits of Friends' credulity and also points to one cause of the leadership contention that erupted in the 70's.

Fox's pre-occupation with spiritual marriage must surely have made it difficult for the early Quaker to come to terms with the obligations and delights of the marriage bed. There is certainly evidence of confusion. Inevitably celibacy was seen by some individuals as a lofty way of avoiding the issue. Periods of sexual abstinence, and avoidance of procreation were encouraged in some groups.<sup>18</sup>

There appears to be a curious but not totally unexpected subliminal link between sexual gratification and religious ecstasy. I would like to suggest two ways in which the charismatic nature of the sect in its early years enabled its adherents to transcend normal relationships.

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15 W.C.Braithwaite, *Second Period...*, p.263.

16 G.Fox, *Journal*, p.557.

17 W.Mucklow, *The Spirit of the Hat*, (London, 1673), p.42.

18 J.Tual, "Sexual Equality and Conjugal Harmony: The Way to Celestial Bliss", *The Journal of the Friends Historical Society*, vol.55, no.6 (1988), p.171-2.

First, the deep spiritual intimacy that was fostered in a community sense between Friends, and often expressed in spiritually erotic terms in their letters,<sup>19</sup> was able to dissipate the concentration of love upon one person and perhaps transcend the need for a mutually exclusive husband/wife bond. Secondly, physical manifestations, such as quaking, deep internal heat and euphoria, commonly associated with ecstatic religion, almost simulated and therefore could transcend the need for a sexual encounter.

So long as Quakerism remained in the grip of religious frenzy, one is tempted to believe that sexual needs were in some measure satisfied subliminally. In this respect women may have felt safer and freer in that they could move more openly and more publicly in the company of men, experiencing emotional intimacies that might normally have been sought with a marriage partner.

As these ecstatic manifestations began to wane in the 1670s the normal societal and cultural gender barriers that existed in that era would again surface and become operational. This is likely to have contributed to the tensions that arose with the establishment of the more pragmatic, business-like style of the Separate Women's Meetings.

Tual believes that in the controversies of the late 1660s conjugal harmony was at the root of the issue of church government.<sup>20</sup> The obsession with mystical union, and the probable sublimation of sexual desires into religious frenzy did not satisfy all the time and in every situation. In the absence of any specific teaching on Quaker domesticity the balance of power, obligation, and freedom between husband and wife was not clear and couples were left largely to work out their own *modus operandi*. Obedience to God preceded all other allegiances. A husband could not rule over his wife's conscience. In practice, however, presumably much could be claimed as God's will - by either partner - to justify controversial domestic decisions or arrangements.

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19 John Killam's letter to Fell (1655) provides an effusive example of this: *...over mee thou art tender as A nurseinge mother Refreshinge thie tender plant... Oh i am Constrained & my Love toward thee cannot bee Contained... we have unitie together, and lies downe in ye Armes of love embraceinge each the other...* cited in full in Brown and Stuard, *Witnesses...*, p.66.

20 J.Tual, "Sexual Equality...", p.162.

There is evidence of frustration amongst the travelling preachers. Miles Halhead's wife complained, *I would to God I had married a drunkard, I might have found him in the Alehouse*. Halhead's reaction to her complaints was to suggest that the death of her son was God's judgment on her rebellious spirit.<sup>21</sup>

Quaker preachers and prophets, known in the early days as *Publishers of the Truth*, were essentially itinerants, following the example of the Apostles. A female Publisher could not remain in a domestic environment, any more than her male counterpart. Nor could she use her domestic or maternal responsibilities as an excuse to stay home. Probably this accounts for the number of young unmarried women, or older widows in the ministry.

There were no special considerations either if both the husband and the wife were called since they were discouraged from travelling together, unless specifically guided into a team ministry.<sup>22</sup> Fox and Fell did not travel together. And certainly married couples were discouraged from procreating en route as Thomas and Ann Holmes found to their discomfort. The inability of this couple to live separate, celibate lives resulted in much personal heartache, and a woeful neglect of children born and farmed out to sympathetic friends.<sup>23</sup>

Although perhaps surprised by their own boldness, early Quaker women who had stepped out of subservient behaviour in the church and in public arenas were unlikely to step back into it in the domestic scene. Was a women who harangued the king or answered hostile magistrates or faced up to crude gaolers likely to be passively obedient to her husband in the home? And indeed, was that attitude expected? Yet Barbour says *Neither their prophetic nor motherly roles (i.e. mother in the church) implied at first any new status within the family, nor in the economic market nor on the social ladder*.<sup>24</sup>

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21 H.Barbour, "Quaker Prophetesses...", p.43.

22 Ann Audland, Katherine Evans, Joan Killam and Elizabeth Leavens are known to have travelled on preaching missions with their husbands, but also undertook journeys independently.

23 M.R.Brailsford, *Quaker Women*, p.128ff.

24 H.Barbour, "Quaker Prophetesses...", p.41.

Much of the evidence suggests that the man was still regarded by both partners as the head of the household. Keith Thomas claims that Quaker families remained notoriously patriarchal<sup>25</sup>. Nathaniel Coleman in 1673 apparently voiced a general feeling when he challenged Fox to acknowledge that a man had biblical injunction to rule over his wife<sup>26</sup>. Quaker leader Francis Howgill, close to death in prison, writes in terms of deep affection to his daughter Abigail and his advice is ...*do not thou seek a husband, but let a husband seek thee... if thou join to a husband... be obedient to him.*<sup>27</sup>

Several ideas cemented this dichotomy between equality in the church and in the home. First, the public voice of the women prophets was permitted on the grounds that it was the Holy Spirit speaking and not the woman expressing her own views.<sup>28</sup>

Secondly, the image of the marriage of Christ to his church was a very precious one in Quaker ministry, and this mirrored human marriages. Margaret Fell herself endorsed this analogy, writing: *Christ Jesus is the Head of his church, even as the husband is head of his wife,*<sup>29</sup> although how she interpreted this in practical situations is hard to tell in view of the fact that she and Fox spent so little time actually co-habiting. Letters between Fox and Fell are marked by a mutual deference to each other and the will of God.

Thirdly, we have at least two examples of women collectively choosing to accept a weak and subservient stance to vindicate their claims. The Pauline idea of God using the foolish, weak and despised things of this world to confound the wise and mighty<sup>30</sup> was a text appropriated by the Quaker women to their advantage. The women's petition to Parliament against tithes<sup>31</sup> is couched in obsequious language - somewhat surprisingly considering the garrulous polemic generally used in pamphlets and public oratory<sup>32</sup>.

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25 K.Thomas, "Women and the Civil War Sects", *Past and Present*, no.13 (Oxford 1958) p.53.

26 G.Fox, *Journal*, p.667.

27 W.Sewell, *The History of...* vol.2, p.235-6.

28 See above, p.16.

29 M.Fell, *A Brief Collection*, (London, 1710), p.318.

30 1 Corinthians 1:27-8.

31 See above, p.12.

32 M.R.Brailsford, *Quaker Women*, p.268-9.

But the same self-effacing language was used in the late 1670s - in the era of strong Women's Meetings - in the concluding remarks of a strong and mature open letter to Quaker women everywhere from the Lancashire Women's Meeting regarding their agenda.<sup>33</sup> This suggests a dichotomous mentality towards gender equity, and could be taken as women exploiting their subordinate position instead of challenging it. But given the novelty of the Quaker woman's position one assumes it was used genuinely to boost the morale of the women members particularly those of low class and education.

Fourthly, within a society heavily patriarchal, there were no traditions or strategies for equality to operate in the average household. Fell's own situation is slightly unusual. As a widow of gentry status she trained her seven daughters from a young age to manage the affairs of the estate. For example, in 1660-1 she left them on their own for well over a year while she was in London on Quaker business, at which time the eldest was 25 and the youngest only 7.<sup>34</sup> It was not unusual for a 17th century widow with property to show an aptitude for management. But in the rather unconventional circumstances of her own second marriage to a man of a lower social class both Fox and Fell demonstrated what could be achieved in the direction of a non-patriarchal household. The consent of her daughters for the union was sought by Fox, and Fell retained her own property and money. The daughters appeared to thrive well in their independence, only one of them seeking an early marriage, and all of them going on to take prominent places of responsibility within the Movement.<sup>35</sup>

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33 "A 17th Century Quaker Womens' Declaration", transcript by M.D.Speizman and J.C.Kronick, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1:1, (Chicago 1975), p.245.

34 B.Y.Kunze, *Margaret Fell...*, p.37-43.

35 There was one son, George, who was hostile to Quakerism. The customary rule of primogeniture was left unstated in Judge Fell's will. His wife was given use of Swarthmoor Hall and 50 acres until her death or remarriage. During his mother's imprisonment 1664-8, George, deeply humiliated by Margaret's second marriage and the Hall being used as a Quaker centre, attempted to take possession, but died in 1670.

The problem with taking Fell as an example is that she was not typical of the women in the Quaker movement who mostly came from a lower social class. Gulielma Penn, wife of William, was another notable exception, and Kunze again provides a useful comparison between the female roles of these two upper class women. She notes that Gulielma wrote to Margaret with this discreet advice: *methinks if thou foundest a Cleanness and Freedom in the Lord, it would be happie (if) thou wert nearer thy dear Husband and children, but that I leave (to) the Lords ordering, and thy freedom.*<sup>36</sup> Gulielma seems to have stayed close to her own large family, and through her correspondence indicates that she allowed her husband to take the initiative over his visits, and their later emigration, to America.

The apparent confusion over how far equality between the sexes extended perhaps belies deeper male fears. Partnership in suffering and evangelism had its compensations, but in matters of authority and leadership a certain wariness and mistrust is evident.

Possibly the men feared they might be outnumbered in a Movement that encouraged female public involvement. It has been estimated that in the 1660s around 55% of adherents were women.<sup>37</sup> But probably a greater fear was what they perceived to be the passionate and irrational nature of the female sex, of the kind demonstrated by what appeared to be the blasphemous behaviour of James Nayler and his female disciples in 1656.<sup>38</sup> The Quaker association with the Ranters was another cause for nervousness. Ranter women were known to be particularly vocal and aggressive.

Histrionics were by no means confined to the women, but public displays by females aroused stronger disapproval. As with all breaches of a social or cultural etiquette their behaviour shocked and offended even within their own ranks.

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36 B.Y. Kunze, *Margaret Fell...*, p.179.

37 J.Tual, "Sexual Equality...", p.163.

38 Nayler entered Bristol riding a donkey, flanked by women disciples shouting *Hosanna, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord*. In a much publicized and protracted trial the women were blamed for incitement to blasphemy, but it was Nayler who was brutally punished.

Patricia Crawford enquires further into the behaviour of the women preachers and pamphleteers, pointing out that the topics most frequently addressed by the women concerned the moral and political climate of society, and not doctrinal matters.<sup>39</sup> In other words they were, by implication, critical of male power in attacking the bastions of church, government, and legal system, and the failure of national leaders to address social ills and oppressions. Criticisms were perhaps all the more scathing because they were delivered with accompanying threats of divine judgment. If men felt threatened by these attacks which contained accusations of ineptitude, greed, and power-struggle at the expense of justice and mercy, it seems likely that their resentment carried over into the era of Women's Meetings where similar issues were by being addressed by social activism on a local level.

But perhaps the most interesting commentary on the response of men to the public demonstrativeness of women, is developed in Crawford's reappraisal of the Nayler incident.<sup>40</sup> It was true that from the earliest meetings of Quakers, anyone was free to speak out the word of the Lord, but the authority to discern whether the message was authentic in effect lay with the recognized leaders of the Movement who were male. Martha Simmonds, Nayler's closest associate, and the woman most strongly condemned in the aftermath of his symbolic entry into Bristol, sought to challenge this unofficial, yet widely accepted, authority. She used confrontationist methods, by symbolic dramatic demonstrations, by persistent 'singing', and by frequent noisy outbursts of prophesying. Finally she confronted Nayler himself and was accused of power seeking and told to go home. But in Nayler's eventual confession to Simmonds that he had wronged her, Crawford sees a clear though temporary triumph for the authority of a woman and her corresponding 'fall from grace' in the eyes of Fox.

We cannot, however, infer from Fox's rejection of Simmonds that this was simply a male response to so-called female hysteria. In the wider context of the early unofficial leadership struggle between Fox and Nayler, the fact that Simmonds was on the 'wrong' side may have coloured his opinion of her. Generally Fox seems to have remained somewhat suspicious of manifestations of ecstatic religion in both males and females where it was employed as a blockading or attention seeking technique, although he clearly and frequently experienced such phenomena himself and recognized it in others.

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39 P.Crawford, *Women and Religion...*, p.163.

40 *ibid*, ch.8.

The key issue that Crawford sees at stake is *whether public politics and the control of the sacred were to remain male preserves*.<sup>41</sup> This issue surfaced again during the Wilkinson and Story controversy, when opposition to Women's Meetings became entangled with widespread animosity in the north towards Fell.<sup>42</sup>

Tual speaks of the self-assurance Quaker women experienced through being offered an equal place alongside the men's ministry in the early years.<sup>43</sup> But true self-assurance only developed in the Women's Meetings, and was just as likely to lead to prudence as to boldness. The earlier heroics were powered either by a spirit of rebellion and recklessness, or under the compulsion of ecstatic manifestations, and were marked by very little concern for effect or outcome. Yet for all their histrionics, the men seemed to feel less threatened by the presence of female prophets than they did by the operation of separate Women's Meetings. This is something to be explored in the remaining chapters.

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid*, p.175.

<sup>42</sup> See below, p.36-37.

<sup>43</sup> J.Tual, "Sexual Equality...", p.162.

### Chapter 3

#### ESTABLISHING THE SEPARATE WOMEN'S MEETING

In this chapter we examine the formation of the Women's Monthly Meetings in the context of changing Quaker practices and organization, and then focus on the critical events and personalities involved in their settlement. We attempt to answer the questions - on whose initiative were they formed? What purpose were they intended to serve? Was the opposition debilitating?

George Fox's conversion experience occurred in 1647,<sup>1</sup> from which time he commenced preaching. So by 1671 the Movement was barely 24 years old and had survived the transition of political power from the Protectorate back to the throne. In the 1670's it is estimated that 1% of the population of England were Quakers - by far the largest of the radical sects.<sup>2</sup> It also had a very large following in America. In the 70s the Quakers were fuelled less by their opposition to the religious, social and political institutions of English society, and more by the urge for internal discipline and order. Their determination to remain open to the dictates of God through the leading of the individual conscience had initially produced an unusually heterogeneous religious community, but the move towards a corporate identity and control began to affect women's freedom within ministry and membership.

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1 In 1643 at the age of 19 Fox left his employment and family, and travelled the length and breadth of England in search of an authentic faith, visiting a variety of congregations and engaging in discussion with ministers and professors. The revelation he received was, "There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition." *Journal*, p.11.

2 B.Reay, in *Quakers and the English Revolution*, (New York, 1985) p.11, estimates Quakers numbers at between 35,000 and 60,000 at the end of the 1650s. R.Vann, *Friends in Life and Death*, (Cambridge 1992) gives regional percentages for 1700, ranging from 0.5% in areas such as Wales and Devon and Cornwall, and 5% (the highest concentration of Quakers anywhere in England) in the city of Bristol.

Women's Meetings were a significant part of this authority shift - initiated by Fox - and as such they were to form an integral part of a new centralized organization. In the late 1660s Fox had worked towards a much tighter multi-layered national network that provided men's local monthly, county quarterly and national yearly meetings, each one accountable to the next, and each feeding into a central London headquarters. Other subsidiary meetings with more specific functions were also introduced. He envisaged a parallel system operating for the women, as his letters indicate.<sup>3</sup>

Both Braithwaite<sup>4</sup> and Kunze (Fell's most recent biographer)<sup>5</sup> and others suggest that 1671 was the year of the big push for Women's Meetings, and a watershed for the future direction of women's ministry. Although the events of that period indicate a transition from what seems to have been a multifaceted public female ministry towards a singular and less demonstrative focus, the change was gradual and not uniform across the country. There is also evidence of a corresponding modulation of female public behaviour around this time.

In August 1671 Margaret Fell, now two years the wife of Fox, returned to her Lancashire home of Swarthmoor after farewelling her husband on his trip to the New World, and immediately began a campaign for establishing separate WMMs and WQMs in the north of England.

It has been suggested in the previous chapter that attitudes to women's ministry were ambiguous and complex, and that the Fox/Fell marriage was interpreted by their opponents as an elevation of Fell to an official position as co-leader of the Quakers. We have yet to discuss evidence of resentment in the Wilkinson/Story camp towards Fell. But this demonstration of impregnable marital unity seems to emerge as one cause of friction over the legitimacy of the separate Women's Meeting. The timing of the marriage places it at the culmination of an intense nationwide drive by Fox to put the local Quaker groups on a solid basis of regular business meetings. At the same time he set up Meetings for Discipline, issued marriage regulations and established schools.

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3 G.Fox, *A Collection...*, *Epistle nos.* 249 (p.235), 291 (p.323), 316 (p.357).

4 W.C.Braithwaite, *Second Period...*, p.273.

5 B.Y.Kunze, *Margaret Fell...*, p.155.

Whatever immediate plans he and Fell may have shared following his marriage were quickly thwarted by Fell's imprisonment at the end of 1669. It was the beginning of a difficult 18 months.

It has already been noted that the Conventicle Act of 1670 precipitated a fresh wave of persecution which lasted until 1685<sup>6</sup> and alerted Fox to the need for a more substantial support network, something which had been undertaken previously for the most part by informal women's groups. But he appears to have succumbed to a complete physical and mental breakdown at this time, which he interpreted as an intense spiritual suffering on behalf of his persecuted people.<sup>7</sup> He was immobilized with total loss of sight and hearing for several months, but recovered early in 1671 and wasted no time in continuing his programme. Fell was released from prison in April and the two conferred in London for several weeks.

The next event into which Fox channelled his energies was the London Yearly Meeting held in June 1671, and to understand the significance of this we need to survey briefly the types of meetings already in existence, their relationship to each other, and the kind of overall structure that was emerging.

A series of 4 Annual Meetings for ministers began in 1658,<sup>8</sup> after which the intensity of persecution and subsequent imprisonment of Fox interrupted the pattern. Ministers from all over England met again in 1666, 1668, and 1670, but it was at the 1671 Annual Meeting in London that a decision was taken to form a central body, by representation from all counties, convening annually for Whitsun week to oversee the affairs of Friends.<sup>9</sup>

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6 A brief but major reprieve was experienced in 1673 when Charles II's Great Pardon released 500 Friends and other Separatists from gaol.

7 G.Fox, *Journal*, p.570-1.

8 *ibid*, p.339.

9 W.C. Braithwaite, *Second Period...*, p.275-8.

Although women ministers and women Friends attended the general meetings during this important gathering, they were not included in the select committees of representatives who dealt with the business. Neither were they included in the other key executive bodies formed later in London - the Morning Meeting (inaugurated by Fox in 1673 to deal largely with Quaker publications) and the Meeting for Sufferings (a body set up in 1676 to record and advise on legal matters regarding persecution).<sup>10</sup>

Twenty six years were to pass before efforts were made in 1697/8 to accommodate women ministers in the LYM and also to allow them to hold their own Yearly Meeting. The reluctance of the Morning Meeting is revealed in their minutes of 1701. The women were required to give prior notice when they wished to speak at committee meetings, and were requested to *be careful not to interfere with their brethren* and to be *tenderly cautioned against taking up too much time in our mixed public meetings*.<sup>11</sup>

The history of business meetings at the local level goes back as early as 1653 when the Cumberland Elders requested a monthly meeting.<sup>12</sup> By 1657 Fox was actively encouraging Men's Monthly Meetings across the country, with poor relief being the main business.<sup>13</sup> It was probably around this time that the Box Meeting and the Two Weeks meeting for women were set up in London.

Ten years later in 1667, when Fox resumed the drive for monthly meetings, a new concept of corporate consciousness undergirded the initiative. He now firmly believed that the sovereign authority of God was inherited by the body of the church. The local monthly and the district quarterly meetings were vehicles through which this authority was exercised, and these now included a system of discipline for errant Friends.

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, p.280-6.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, p.287. Cited by Braithwaite who also notes that the Women's Yearly Meeting in England was not fully established until 1784, but was operational in Ireland and in the American Colonies in the 1670s.

<sup>12</sup> W.C.Braithwaite, *Beginnings...*, p.143.

<sup>13</sup> G.Fox., *Journal*, p.284-5.

Consistent with his theology Fox automatically included women in this inheritance of Gospel power and exercise of group consensus, but possibly it took a year or two before he finally decided that maximum effect would be achieved if women operated their own monthly meetings, in tandem with the men's. In his initial tour of England in 1667, he had concentrated only on settling the MMMs. Some Women's Meetings, however, were already in existence.

Kunze challenges the traditional view that Fox was the prime initiator of the earliest Women's Meetings.<sup>14</sup> Although he takes considerable credit in his journal, Kunze points out that early references in letters etc. convey *the sense of a community-recognized need that resulted in a women's meeting by common consent*.<sup>15</sup> The independent Box Meeting, formed during a year of intense persecution, met weekly for the collection and disbursement of relief money. The women, acting as trustees, handled their own funds, which were considerable and grew to include property assets, and they were not accountable to any men's meeting or particular local Quaker group.<sup>16</sup> The other meeting was the Two Weeks Meeting, which was formed (according to Gilbert Latey<sup>17</sup>) at the request of the Men's Meeting, and was answerable to them. According to Isobel Ross the agenda of the Women's Two Weeks Meeting gradually broadened to include a policing of internal moral standards.<sup>18</sup> It was this meeting that formed the blueprint for the later women's meetings.

It is known that in the 1660s a strong Women's Meeting was operating in Bristol (a Quaker stronghold), and according to Braithwaite there were others.<sup>19</sup> For example, Mullet quotes a letter of 1668 which carries a greeting that indicates their activity in Yorkshire - *given forth by the Women friends at their Yearly Meeting at York, being a tender salutation of love to the Friends and sisters in their several Monthly Meetings in this County and elsewhere*.<sup>20</sup>

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14 See above, p.15.

15 B.Y.Kunze, *Margaret Fell*..., p.146.

16 A.Lloyd, *Quaker Social*..., p.109.

17 R.Hawkins, "Life of Gilbert Latey", *The Friends Library*, vol.1, ed. W.& T.Evans, (Philadelphia, 1837), p.189-190

18 I.Ross, *Margaret Fell, Mother of Quakerism*, (London, 1949), p.285.

19 W.C.Braithwaite, *Second Period*..., p.273.

20 M.Mullett, *Radical Religious Movements in Early Modern Europe*, (London, 1980), p.120. This reference is ambiguous, the term *Yearly Meeting* having different connotations before Fox's official structure was set up in the years following 1669.

A 1666 letter from Fox contains a strong but very general exhortation to women to gather together in Meetings for the service of God.<sup>21</sup> Fox had just been released from prison, and was aware that the Quaker community was being decimated by persecution, plague and the Great Fire of London. The letter precedes his two years of intensive travelling 1668/9 already mentioned, for the express purpose of strengthening the Movement by setting up monthly and quarterly meetings in every county. In his journal I counted at least 14, but in each case he only mentions specifically setting up MMMs.<sup>22</sup>

But in a long 1669 letter he gives the Women's Meetings a high priority at monthly, quarterly and annual levels - *And now Friends, so many Monthly Mens Meetings as you have in your County, you may have so many Monthly Womens Meetings and if once a Year, at least, you had a General Womens Meeting it would be well (for in some Counties they have as many Quarterly Womens Meetings as Men) and in others they have only two in the Summertime, because the Ways are foul and Days short in winter.*<sup>23</sup>

In the same letter he advises that it should be the WMMs that examine declarations of intended marriages,<sup>24</sup> which he could hardly promote if Women's Meetings were scarce. He also advises both Men's and Women's Meetings on how to deal with differences that may arise within the ranks.

In a forceful letter of 1671 he exhorts female Friends to *keep your Women's Meetings in the Power of God*, and goes on to justify (from the Bible) women as elders or overseers.<sup>25</sup>

I noted in his journal, that in contrast with his 1668/9 travels around England where he mentions only setting up MMMs, throughout his 1671/3 tour of the Colonies he consistently and explicitly mentions settling both Men's and Women's Meetings in every place he visits.<sup>26</sup> This seems an indication of a definite commitment and change of policy on his part, and a positive reception on the part of the American Friends.

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21 G.Fox, *A Collection...*, ep.no.247.

22 G.Fox, *Journal*, p.215ff.

23 G.Fox, *A Collection...*, ep.no.264, p.290-1.

24 *ibid*, p.282.

25 *ibid*, ep.no.291, p.323. (See Appendix 2)

26 G.Fox, *Journal*, ch.XXIV passim.

Since the system of recording minutes was not introduced until the 1671 drive, the extent of Women's Meetings can only be surmised through isolated references in letters and journals. I came to the conclusion that WMMs were more than just a novelty before then, but they took on an official role and a wider agenda after 1671.

It might have been expected that Fell herself had mooted the idea of the separate Women's Meeting, but I can find no evidence of this. The initiative appears to have come from Fox and he certainly claims this in his journal. Events suggest, however, that once Fox and Fell had fully endorsed this policy, Fox left Fell to implement it, which she did with alacrity. For substantiation we turn to the events following the 1671 Yearly Meeting.

Almost as soon as this meeting was over Fox put into action his plan for an extensive visit to America. Fell was not part of this venture, and it is plausible to suggest that the strategy was for Fell to remain not only to set up the Women's Meetings, but as the unofficial or acting leader of the Movement. After his departure she returned quickly to Swarthmoor, and in October the first Swarthmoor Women's Monthly Meeting was convened.

Two questions then arise. Why was there no Women's Meeting at Swarthmoor before 1671 - this being Fell's home, and an important centre of the Friends? Secondly - who or what really precipitated the increased emphasis on the Women's Meetings in 1671?

To answer the first question we must look more closely at Fell's activities. After 1660, Fell spent less and less time at her Swarthmoor home, and more time in London petitioning the king for the release of Quakers in prison. She also spent 1664-8 in prison herself. It was during this period of imprisonment that her famous *Defence of Women Speaking* was published, but this document is concerned with the public voice of women, not the legitimacy of separate meetings. Swarthmoor had been the unofficial administrative centre of the Movement during the 50's, but as the action centred more and more around London, and with her daughters placed almost strategically around the country in various Quaker strongholds, Margaret Fell's ties with Swarthmoor may have weakened.

And yet one feels - not that much. The running of Swarthmoor was in the very capable hands of her daughter Sarah who was as outspoken and efficient as her mother. It is equally problematic as to why Sarah did not establish the SWMM during the 60's either.

One is left with the Swarthmoor Estate itself as a possible explanation. The assets of the Swarthmoor Estate, although under threat of praemunire during the 60s, offer an explanation for the Fell family's failure to set up a WMM. First, it is quite possible that their social position may have prevented Fell from seeing any advantage in working together with other women committee-style, many of whom (in rural Lancashire at least) would have been unskilled or illiterate. Secondly, in her article on Female Quaker Philanthropy, Kunze shows from an examination of both the Swarthmoor Hall accounts book (kept by Sarah Fell), and the SWMM minute book, that many of the names of recipients of relief occur in both sources, indicating that nearly all of the Quaker poor of the area were in some way dependent on the Fells for employment or aid.<sup>27</sup>

During her London visits Fell must have been aware of the Box Meeting and the Two Weeks Meeting. She may have worked through them. She would almost certainly have enjoyed a stimulating relationship with other intelligent and enterprising women. But in the economically and socially disadvantaged north, she reigned as a lady. For all her egalitarian principles, Fell's gentry status still gave her a huge advantage in public life over ordinary women, and the private means to deal with local poverty. A separate WMM may not have seemed necessary until the idea of a broader agenda than just relief work was mooted.

While none of these are completely satisfactory explanations for the late establishment of the SWMM, Fell's biographer Kunze describes a gathering of momentum in that direction following Fox's departure for America in 1671.

Kunze describes Fox setting sail from Land's End in August, and Fell returning immediately to Swarthmoor, even neglecting to visit two sick daughters in the west of England en route.<sup>28</sup> By October the SWMM is underway with Sarah Fell acting as recorder or *clerk* as this official position was known and the records of the minutes of the first meeting still exist.<sup>29</sup>

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27 B.Y.Kunze, "Poore and in Necessity...", p.580.

28 B.Y.Kunze, *Margaret Fell...*, p.155-6. According to Fox's Journal (p.579-81) Fell left the boat at Deal in Kent, and not Land's End in the far west. To visit her sick daughters in Cornwall and Bristol would have required a detour of about 300 miles and was certainly not en route to Swarthmoor. Nevertheless her haste in returning north is still evident.

29 I.Ross, *Margaret Fell...*, p.290-1.

We know that Fell and her youngest daughter Rachel travelled 268 miles in 18 days on horseback in Yorkshire the following spring, visiting 15 meetings.<sup>30</sup> Kunze suggests that the purpose of the tour may have been to encourage establishment of WMM in York.<sup>31</sup> However we know that the Women Friends in York already had some form of separate meeting.<sup>32</sup> So perhaps Fell was more concerned with encouraging the women not only to go on meeting, but to meet regularly, broaden the agenda, keep official records, and generally match up to the efficiency of the MMMs. The Kendal WMM, in the county of Westmoreland adjoining Lancashire, began that year also.

But before we look at the scope of this broader agenda, we should perhaps enquire further into her sudden enthusiasm for setting up WMM in the north of England at that particular time, and I start by trying to understand the effects of Fox's two year absence in America.

It seems likely that it was during the London summer of 1671, in conference with Fox for six weeks after his recovery, that Fell came to realize for the first time both the political and personal significance of the WMMs.

Fox's illness in 1670/71 had brought him very close to death. Perhaps Fell, newly married to him, and looking forward to a partnership in leading the Quaker movement, wondered how she would stand in the event of his death. He was obviously going to be absent in America for a long time. The WMM network under Fell's initiative would help strengthen their leadership team in his absence.

How far was this a tactical move? At this time the young William Penn was being cultivated for a prominent place in the unofficial leadership team, but for a while his allegiance to Fox seems not to have been fully accepted.<sup>33</sup> There is more than a suggestion that Fell was as much of a tactician as Fox. Reading between the lines one cannot help feeling that Fell is slightly uneasy about the absence of Fox, and is marshalling her resources to maintain a high profile for him.

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30 *ibid*, p.240.

31 B.Y.Kunze, *Margaret Fell...*, p.156.

32 See above, p.31.

33 B.Y.Kunze, *Margaret Fell...*, p.174. Penn's wife had close family ties with Fox's arch opponent, John Wilkinson.

Why was she uneasy? Again one must read between the lines. It was during Fox's two year absence that the first rumblings of internal controversy were heard. This was to erupt after his return from America into the first serious challenge to Fox's leadership since the Perrot incident.<sup>34</sup> And the threat emanated from the north, in the neighbouring county of Westmoreland, and involved John Wilkinson and John Story. Although it was Fox's policies that they attacked, it was a personal animosity that they displayed towards Fell. From a sequence of later events recorded in Fox's journal one detects the source of her distress during his absence.

Soon after his return from the Colonies in 1673 Fox encounters furious opposition to WMMs from Nathaniel Coleman in Wiltshire but is undeterred and continues setting up the WMM throughout the southern counties.<sup>35</sup> But on reaching Worcester he is thrown into prison and early in 1674 writes to his wife noting her frustration at his imprisonment. Shortly after in May he writes again advising her to stay out of the controversy brewing in Westmoreland.<sup>36</sup> Part of her frustration has to do with the nature of the charge against Fox and with the prolonged difficulties in obtaining an honourable release. But it is reasonable to deduce that the underlying cause of her anxiety at his imprisonment at that time was the growing opposition to herself and towards the WMMs contained within the Wilkinson and Story challenge to Fox's leadership.

I can find no explicit evidence that either Fox or Fell was embroiled in any controversy when he left for America in 1671. Braithwaite only refers indirectly to brewing hostility.<sup>37</sup> In fact in October 1671 Wilkinson had approved the setting up of his local WMM at Preston Patrick.<sup>38</sup> The fact that he later reneged suggests that at this date the controversy had not flared up.

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34 John Perrot was a mystical, highly imaginative and very personable Quaker evangelist who relied exclusively on individual experience and guidance at the expense of group spirit. He objected to set times and places for meetings, and rebelled against Fox's insistence on the removal of hats for prayers. (Braithwaite, *Second Period...*, p.228ff)

35 G.Fox, *Journal*, p.666-8.

36 *ibid*, p.681, 691-2.

37 W.C.Braithwaite, *Second Period...* p.255, 296 (fn.2).

38 *ibid*, p.295.

In the following year, however, Fell read a paper that was strongly critical of John Story. According to John Pearson writing in Fell's defence some 14 years later, her paper was delivered in response to one written against her by Story.<sup>39</sup> The furore aroused by Fell's paper occasioned the writing of part 4 of William Roger's long and exhaustive attack on George Fox and his policies.<sup>40</sup>

The second interesting fragment of light on the situation in the north comes in a letter from a Jean Simcock of the York Meeting to Fell in 1672, in which she alludes to hostile criticism of the WMM there, particularly in relation to their having control of finances.<sup>41</sup>

The full brunt of the hostility around 1675 is described with compassion and concern by the young William Penn in a letter to Fox. *Poor Margt is so much smitt at, and run upon as I believe never woman was...*<sup>42</sup>

It seems clear that when Fell went north after Fox's departure in 1671 she headed into an already festering trouble spot. Whether she was aware of this and being confident of her position within the Quaker leadership attempted to ride over the opposition in a fairly spirited and high handed way, or whether she headed north in ignorance of the brewing situation is not obvious. One rather feels that she knew, or at least strongly suspected, and had decided to take prompt action by marshalling the women of the north as an affirmation of Fox's leadership.

Whatever her motives and inspiration, Fell's urgency in establishing meetings in the north can be seen as a major breakthrough for the WMMs. Her daughters also became prominent administrators in both Monthly and Quarterly Meetings particularly in London, the west country and the northern counties. In 1697, following a joint LYM, the signatures of five of them appear on an epistle as registered Quaker *Ministers*.<sup>43</sup> Without their input and solidarity it is unlikely that the WMMs would have been established so quickly and efficiently outside London.

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39 J.Pearson, *Antichristian Treachery Discovered and its Way Blocked up*, (London, 1686), pt.3, p.87.

40 W.Rogers, *The Christian Quaker Distinguished from the Apostate and Innovator*, (London 1680).

41 B.Y.Kunze, *Margaret Fell...*, p.156.

42 Cited in B.Y.Kunze, *ibid*, p.175.

43 I.Ross, *Margaret Fell...*, p.301.

How far the WMMs followed the agenda guidelines set down by Fox, and how far they took their own initiatives is the next question. One of the most interesting texts is an open letter written between 1675 and 1680 from the Lancashire Quarterly Women's Meeting, probably authorized or composed by Sarah Fell, which contains the agenda of the early WMMs probably in its most explicit and mature form.<sup>44</sup>

The letter insists on proper scheduling of the meetings and stresses the importance of keeping detailed minutes and budget sheets, skills that probably few women possessed at that time.<sup>45</sup>

Aside from the relief work which had always been the particular concern of the women, three other items indicate the scope of the agenda. Policing the internal discipline of the women is a high priority, especially domestic behaviour. This is based on the qualification that the women are *much in our families amongst our children, maids and servants, and may see more into their inclinations*.<sup>46</sup> Obvious as this may seem, it stands in stark contrast to the Puritan ethic in which domestic moral oversight remains the prerogative of the husband. In Sarah Fell's letter there is no reference to deferring to the husband's authority or decision-making rights. This attitude strongly bears the mark of the Fell family domestic situation, which was not only strongly matriarchal, but also encouraged independence and self-autonomy in the daughters. This was also an endorsement of Fox's own justification for WMMs.<sup>47</sup> The disciplinary powers of the WMMs may have extended beyond the family. Isobel Ross makes reference to a Box Meeting Epistle, in which women are asked to police the moral standards of seamen, emigrant Quakers and other travellers professing Quakerism.<sup>48</sup>

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44 (See Appendix 3). M.D.Speizman & J.C.Kronick, "A Seventeenth Century Quaker Womens' Declaration", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1:1, (Chicago, 1975), p.233. The full text of the epistle is published p.235-245.

45 *ibid*, p.243-4.

46 *ibid*, p.242.

47 G.Fox, *Epistle no.291*.

48 I.Ross, *Margaret Fell...*, p.300-1.

A second item on the women's agenda dealt with the preparation of special testimonies or declarations against payment of tithes. Does this say something about the control of purse strings within the Quaker family? Or is it simply, as the writer explains, that the tithe *belongs to women to pay, as well as the men... as pigs and geese, henns and eggs, hemp and flax, wooll and lamb; all which women may have a hand in.*<sup>49</sup> But the WMM's stand against the payment of tithes may have a deeper significance. In view of crippling recriminations by local authorities against non-payment of tithes, Wilkinson and Story had argued for a more lenient attitude. If Fell and her colleagues were looking to broaden the scope of the WMM's agenda, and also undermine the Wilkinson and Story faction, then a campaign of policing non-payment of tithes would be an obvious programme to adopt. According to Lloyd, it remained a major item of their agenda for the next 25 years, for by 1700 house to house visitation with respect to non-payment of tithes was one of the three remaining business items on WMM agendas.<sup>50</sup>

Marriage clearances was the other business handled primarily by women. Intending couples were required to appear separately, first before the WMM, and later before the MMM to be interviewed. Couples that slipped through the system or Friends who married outside the Movement were also investigated by the women. This sharing of responsibility for marriage clearances, with the onus on the WMM, was perhaps designed to break the traditional and patriarchal rule of the father's consent. It is given high priority in the letter from the Lancashire QWM and it was one item that Fox unequivocally and repeatedly assigned to the WMM. Strong objections to this procedure being handled by the WMM were raised by William Rogers,<sup>51</sup> suggesting that it particularly rankled with the Wilkinson and Story faction.

We know that the directness and simplicity of the Quaker marriage agreement was open to abuse. In 1675 Fox complained of couples who failed to submit their intention of marriage to their local meeting but simply stood at the end of an ordinary meeting and declared their union. Such marriages had no firm base, as they were often not registered, and no certification was issued.<sup>52</sup>

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49 Speizman & Kronick, "...Declaration", p.243.

50 A.Lloyd, *Quaker Social History*, (London, 1950), p.117. The two other business items were marriage clearances and local poor relief.

51 W.Rogers, *The Christian Quaker...*, p.63.

52 M.R.Brailsford, *Quaker Women*, p.135-6.

Women eagerly assumed responsibility for marriage clearances. They believed endogamy would preserve the internal purity of the Society and help to strengthen their ranks against contamination by the world. In order to preserve the tradition of gender parity, a more compatible arrangement was likely to ensue if their daughters married Quaker partners. Perhaps no one at that time could foresee the atrophy of religious inbreeding that would be suffered through this practice.<sup>53</sup>

The scope of social welfare work undertaken by the WMMs was immense. It included finding employment and apprenticeships for Quaker children, investigating midwifery practices, oversight of the health and welfare of prisoners, the provision of clothes and fuel for the elderly, and later towards the end of the century, the appointment of teachers in Quaker schools.

Yet, as Margaret Bacon points out with reference to WMMs in the Colonies,<sup>54</sup> the agenda almost exclusively related to local internal affairs. Because of this, QWMs were harder to establish and maintain. They lacked direction and positive action, and simply became an opportunity for exchange of ideas. This may have hindered the development of wider scale programmes, and contributed to the dearth of female influence at the London headquarters. Stuard, however, regards the lateral and local level of organization in a more positive light, suggesting that the women were freer to follow the dictates of conscience in setting their own priorities and agendas according to local conditions.<sup>55</sup> And that after all remains an important tenet of Quakerism.

Although the agenda is spelt out under 10 points in the letter from the Lancashire QWM, twice as much space is given at the beginning to unfolding a vast theological and cosmic backdrop to this agenda, containing generous exhortations and yet another detailed defence of the position of women in the faith. The effect is to enlarge and empower what amounts to practical guidelines for their business.

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<sup>53</sup> See below p.52.

<sup>54</sup> M.H.Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism*, (San Francisco, 1986), p.47.

<sup>55</sup> E.P.Brown & S.M.Stuard, *Witnesses...*, p.15-17.

The very exercise of identifying and listing the business appropriate for the WMM, provided the ammunition for an assessment of their suitability. Whereas in earlier years needs were generally dealt with on an immediate, *ad hoc* basis in a concerted effort by both men and women, this segregation of business led to traces of rivalry, and a certain resentment on the part of the men when they felt too much control was given to women,<sup>56</sup> and a building up of a specifically male agenda for their own meetings which managed to exclude women, among other things, from representation at the LYM, the Meeting for Sufferings and the Morning Meeting.<sup>57</sup>

Letters written in 1674-6 at the height of the Wilkinson and Story challenge reflect Fox's uneasiness. One epistle contains a lengthy and exhaustive justification for separate meetings, something that would hardly have been necessary if the meetings were being set up unchallenged.<sup>58</sup> But the final paragraph refers frequently to *a careless spirit* abroad amongst the women and Fox strongly exhorts them to take up the challenge of service.

Generally the broad agenda guidelines offered by Fox coincide with the those advocated by the women themselves. The minutes of the Swarthmoor WMM suggest a scrupulous attention to detail in monetary responsibility. The letter from the Lancashire QWM advocates meticulous attention to matters of standards and behaviour. Initiative therefore seems to have expressed itself in microscopic analysis rather than macroscopic vision. Given the exclusion in those years from all aspects of Quaker life all creative expression through art, music or drama, the women in particular had virtually nowhere to go except into practical and moral efficiency. The men were similarly affected, but other avenues of innovation and expansion were still open to them. It is interesting that written exegetical treatises of a theological nature remained the prerogative of men.

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56 This is particularly evident in the tone of W.Roger's book, *The Christian Quaker...* passim.

57 M.M.Dunn concludes that *in societies in which gender is most important in defining roles men will dominate in the public sphere...* from "Latest Light on Women of Light", Brown and Stuard, *Witnesses...*, p.77.

58 G.Fox, *A Collection...*, ep.nos.313, (p.349) and 320, (p.368ff). Between 1671 and 1677, at least 10 letters contain explicit and often lengthy references to Women's Meetings, stressing their importance and generally offering strong encouragement. See nos. 291, 296, 309, 313, 316, 317, 318, 320, 333.

Low level and unofficial though it may have been, there also existed a certain managerial responsibility even at the level of the local Meetings, where skills of decision and policy making could be exercised. Although, in principle, all three layers of Quaker involvement recognized by the 1680s - member, minister, elder - were open to women, there is very little evidence of their input in key issues.

Disaffection with the WMMs is shrouded in the Wilkinson and Story controversy, although this was by no means the whole issue, or the only place where opposition was experienced. Opponents were basically unhappy about the organizational framework being constructed by Fox and wanted to return to the authority of the individual conscience before God. William Rogers, complaining on behalf of this faction, wrote somewhat plaintively: *that which was promised to be written in the Heart, were now to be fought after in Pieces and Scraps of Paper; or that Written Orders of any at this Day, should become a Certain Rule.*<sup>59</sup>

Although the origin of Story's dislike of Fell is not known, Kunze's illuminating character study of the owner of Swarthmoor Hall allows plausible conjecture.<sup>60</sup> Her dealings with people seem to have been as provocative, direct and uncompromising as her writing style of which there is ample evidence. She may have appeared intimidating, but she was not hard hearted. Effusive tokens of affection are poured out to her in letters. But her opponents may have detected signs of the imperious or patronizing upper class demeanour which Quakers as a body strove to eliminate. Story may well have felt she was using her social status to unduly influence the course of events in the north of England. A decade later John Pearson struggles to exonerate Fell - *whereas it hath been suggested and reported that Margaret Fell was the cause of the Difference in Westmorland, it was plainly disproved before us by many witnesses who affirmed there were differences about some of the aforemention practices of the Church of Christ long before she was concerned.*<sup>61</sup>

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59 W.Rogers, *The Christian Quaker...*, (preface)

60 B.Y.Kunze in her biography of Fell (p.101-128) investigates a 17 year long bitter feud between Fell and the steward of her Iron Forge - Thomas Rawlinson (a Quaker). Each accused the other of business malpractices. The Lancashire monthly and quarterly meetings were involved as arbitrators, but Fell remained absolutely uncompromising and finally resorted to civil litigations in an attempt to win her case.

61 J.Pearson, *Antichristian...*, p.57-8.

While Fell had found (through the WMMs), by accident or design, an avenue to maximize her influence in the Movement, on the other side of the Atlantic another founding *Mother in Israel*<sup>62</sup> of Quakerism completed her life's work.

In Jamaica, November 1671, while accompanying Fox and his associates on the preaching mission to the New World, the old and seasoned preacher Elizabeth Hooton died, at the age of 71. Fox records: *she departed in peace, like a lamb*.<sup>63</sup> She certainly had not lived like one, and she is significant in this chronology of events because in many ways she was a paradigm of the power and diversity that existed in some Quaker women.

One of Fox's earliest converts<sup>64</sup>, throughout her long widowhood Hooton had travelled tirelessly, enduring incarcerations and public whippings well into her old age. She badgered Parliament incessantly and on several occasions had been forcibly removed from the court for haranguing the king. When Quakerism was outlawed by the death sentence in New England, she had immediately set sail to defy the order. Earning her respected place in the unofficial hagiography of the Movement for her more outrageous and unpredictable exploits, she was in 1670 appointed by the London Meeting to the responsible position of prison overseer, a position she did not live to take up.<sup>65</sup> Although not the last of the great women ministers to die, her death nevertheless represents the passing of an era, not only an unprecedented age of heroic itinerant preaching by women, but also a time in which often the same women were social and political activists.<sup>66</sup>

But Hooton's success in the Quaker ministry depended upon there being no gender role differentiation and upon total acceptance of the integrity of the individual Quaker conscience. From the sketchy details we have of her life, she appears to have remained a free spirit all her life and operated entirely on the impulse of "divine guidance". Margaret Fell lived on into the next phase when gender roles were being defined at the agenda level, but not developed at a philosophical level.

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62 H.Barbour, *Quaker Prophetesses...*, p.41.

63 G.Fox, *Journal...*, vol.2, p.154 (Leeds Edition).

64 *ibid*, p.9 (Cambridge ed.).

65 M.R. Brailsford, *Quaker Women...*, p.36. Hooton died before she was able to take up the appointment.

66 Hooton is only one example. There are many others. Ann Downer Whitehead was another preacher turned prison overseer, as was Ann Travers who also ran a small business, and later administered a small Quaker boarding school.

This next generation of Quaker women grew up in a more circumscribed environment. As persecution waned, there were fewer opportunities for heroics. They were no longer exposed to the same possibilities. Their behaviour was monitored by meetings. Preaching opportunities faded. Unauthorized itinerating was not only discouraged within the Quaker church<sup>67</sup> but had long been prohibited by law through the 1662 Act of Settlement.<sup>68</sup> Quakers contained their own preachers by requiring them to be registered within a locality and women ministers were effectively monitored by the men. Lloyd records that the first official recording of ministers in London began in 1675, the list being kept by the clerk of the all-male Morning Meeting.<sup>69</sup> Permission to travel beyond the jurisdiction of their Quarterly Meeting was required for which certificates or letters of introduction were issued.

After 1672 Quaker publications were censored internally by the Second Day's Morning Meeting - the all-male committee responsible for oversight of all publishing work.<sup>70</sup> The level of female publications dropped and actually compares unfavourably with the general level of women's publications in England.<sup>71</sup>

It is clear that Margaret Fell and her daughters envisaged a broadening of women's roles through the WMM, and did all they could to facilitate this. The controversies in which Fell was involved may well have reduced her influence. In London, such seasoned Quaker women as Rebecca Travers, Ann Downer Whitehead and Ann Camm maintained a high profile for the WMM. But overall the picture of Quaker women in the closing quarter of the 17th century reveals a mood of introspective modesty and cautious efficiency.

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67 A.Lloyd, *Quaker Social History*, p.113, refers to a pre-1686 letter from the London Women's Meeting, advising women that the Yearly Men's Meeting were clamping down on their public preaching and travelling, particularly amongst the younger women.

68 The Toleration Act of 1689 again released a flood of itinerating Quaker ministers, but the number of women was much smaller. Lloyd (in *Quaker Social History*, p.125-6) notes, for example, that in the 1706-7 minutes of the Bristol meeting, 44 travelling ministers were entertained. This included only 7 women.

69 *ibid*, p.124-5.

70 W.C.Braithwaite, *Second Period...*, p.280.

71 See P.Crawford's essay "The Challenges to Patriarchalism: How did the Revolution affect Women?" in J. Morrill (ed), *Revolution and Restoration: England in the 1650s*, (U.K. 1992). Crawford demonstrates in a frequency distribution table of women's writings 1600-1700 (p.125) that generally women sustained the dramatic increase in their publications that occurred during the 40s and 50s. Quaker women, however, either did not attempt to publish much after 1670, or had their writings rejected by the Morning Meeting. Of Fell's 16 major books/pamphlets, for example, only one was published after 1668.

## Chapter 4

### RECIPROCAL INFLUENCES

In a final assessment of the changing profile of Quaker women in the last decades of the 17th century, this chapter is concerned with summarizing reciprocal influences. I shall consider the pressures exerted on the WMMs both by the men, and from other external forces; also the effects that the WMMs had on the women themselves, the Movement as a whole, and society in general.

It must be remembered that the revision of Quaker philosophy and practice of the late 1660s was not specifically aimed at either releasing or containing women, but was part of a larger metamorphosis, concerned with authority and control, and centred around George Fox himself.

It is also important to acknowledge that there were no traditions, precedents or role models apart from the Men's Meetings, to which the women could refer in seeking to establish their corporate identity. Other Separatist churches had scotched the notion of Women's Meetings altogether. John Bunyan's alarm at such a request in his own Baptist congregation at Bedford prompted his writing of a substantial thesis declaiming the idea<sup>1</sup>. Just as the first generation of Quaker women prophets modelled themselves on the male prophets of the Old Testament, so the second generation of women adopted the men's business methods. In this way it can be argued that they perpetuated patriarchy in their church. Restoration of essentially feminine expressions of spirituality are perhaps only just being explored in the late 20th century. The measuring of the Quaker women's autonomy by identifying the parallels between male and female roles is not, according to Mabel Dunn, ultimately an appropriate conceptual framework.<sup>2</sup> Dunn draws us back into philosophical epicentre of the Quaker belief system. Regardless of what forms and traditions are adopted at particular times in history (and these have been remarkably consistent), the pivotal theological tenet provides spiritual liberation and equality untainted by interpretations of the Fall less flattering to women, so frequently perpetrated by other Protestant Churches.

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<sup>1</sup> See above, p.8 and fn.10 and 11.

<sup>2</sup> E.P.Brown and S.M.Stuard, *Witnesses...*, p.77-9.

One of the external forces operating on the Quakers was the changing attitude of society towards religion. Because it was one of the few sects to survive the heady, experimental years of the Interregnum, Quakerism becomes an interesting study of the interaction between socio-political conditions and religious expression. Although Fox undoubtedly believed that his new organizational framework in the late 60s was divinely ordained, we can see it as a reflection of the changing mood of society. Although the religious charismatic fire of the Quakers outlived the political charismatic fire of the Interregnum from which it had been generated, ultimately it could not be sustained. It was not extinguished by socio-political opposition but by infiltration of new societal values and pre-occupations. Although the Quakers saw themselves unaffected by, even opposed to, these changes, the Age of Reason, with its growth of religious toleration and secularism was not in fact a favourable climate for women.

The intellectualization of religion through such philosophers as John Locke (1632-1704) is just one aspect of the growth of the secular state, and it had the effect of marginalizing and privatizing the devotional quietism so strongly espoused by religious women. Equally despised were public displays of spiritual fervour, which seem to come more naturally to women than men.

The 1689 Edict of Toleration placed within reach of the Separatist Churches a degree of respectability that had long been denied them. Referring generally to these churches Stuard writes, *It is not at all surprising that such congregations saw the elimination of women from positions as preachers as a small price to pay for a degree of tolerance and respectability and the right to survive.*<sup>3</sup>

Even if the Quakers themselves continued to sanction a high public profile for the women - and in theory they did - the political freedoms of the Interregnum backing up this novelty had long disappeared, and legal prohibitions were in force that curtailed some of these freedoms. But more than this, the energy that had sustained fanaticism was spent. Both men and women became concerned about public approval and embarrassed by any anti-social behaviour. As the adrenalin drained away, Quaker men began to reappraise their own situation. Still cut off by law from entering university and the professions, or from civic and political careers, they turned increasingly to trade and commerce and the accumulation of wealth.

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*..., p.11.

As a result their middle class homes, now serviced by domestic staff, left wives with more time but fewer avenues for activities. Working women, however, did not have these commercial opportunities and remained largely in the service industries.<sup>4</sup> With the gradual decrease in persecution, and increase in material wealth and security, the men's reliance on the emotional and practical support of their women diminished.

Yet the establishment of the WMMs did vouchsafe for them a significant place in Quaker society. In spite of criticism, restraints, even ostracism, they had something substantial to hold on to. All religious movements lose their initial spontaneity and momentum, and come to terms with society. The prominence of women during these initial stages and their exclusion in the formalization stage is also a pattern repeated throughout religious history. Yet the Quakers achieved what the New Testament Church (and many other revivalist religious movements) failed to bequeath to the next generation - a continuing public profile for their women adherents. As the Pentecostal fire dimmed in the primitive church of the Acts of the Apostles, women deacons and prophets faded away, and the ensuing church order excluded women in leadership, missionary and public roles altogether. For the Quaker women 1700 years later, their separate meeting was a unique religious legacy.

That a more solid foundation for a women's public platform lay through improved education became obvious probably only to the Quaker middle classes. Perhaps it was recognized first in the domestic sphere, where a well-educated mother could be seen to be advantageous to the children's future prospects. Puritans also acknowledged this. But by the mid-eighteenth century it became clear to the women that education was also the key to political influence which was in turn the key to their reform programmes.<sup>5</sup> Writing over a century later Clarkson comments on the Quaker women's reputation for high educational standards, pointing out that the girls were not taken from their books to learn a trade as boys were.<sup>6</sup> Education was also a tool for establishing a new social identity. In order to evolve a new and appropriate curriculum, which would include freeing up areas of learning previously forbidden or considered inappropriate, there needed to be a gradual transition from men teaching women, to women teaching women.

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4 M.R.Brailsford, *Quaker Women...*, pp.324-9.

5 E.P.Brown and S.M.Stuard, *Witnesses...*, p.17.

6 T.Clarkson, *A Portraiture...*, p.285.

The Act of Uniformity in 1662 did not prevent the founding of at least 15 Quaker boarding schools by 1671. These came under the care of the Quarterly Meetings and a policy of co-education was implemented where possible.<sup>7</sup> In the absence of statistical analysis of the percentage of females from Quaker families attending Quaker Schools at a secondary level, the effect of their educational principles on the female profile can only be surmised.<sup>8</sup> But what we do know about the early educational philosophy and curriculum serves to further illustrate the process of uniformity and conformity overtaking their ranks.

Braithwaite describes the system as a *guarded education* in which the Quaker child was *given a fixed mental and moral environment, to which he was to accommodate himself; he was not taught to make his own life.*<sup>9</sup> This stereotyping must be seen as one of the causes of the drab uniformity that weighed down the Meetings in the 18th century. For the girls, perhaps even more than the boys, the absence of fine arts and crafts, music, drama and dance in the curriculum, robbed them of their most creative and spiritual energies. In the 40s and 50s the unfettered pursuit of the knowledge of God, had celebrated revelation and mysticism above formal education.

Although it was usually women who ran small cottage schools for the poor, surviving records suggest that the boarding schools were initially staffed by men, although QWMs had input into staff appointments. Curriculum differentiation between the sexes seems to have occurred only at the level of the practical vocational skills taught. The growing importance of formal education for an 18th century upwardly mobile woman was only gradually recognized. Quaker women themselves seemed reluctant to move out of the mindset of being the weak and despised servants that God chooses to confound the wise. Initially their right to be heard had been derived from the mystical idea of an individual - male or female - being an uncluttered, unambiguous channel for God's Word to the world. Such an idealistic stance was not sustainable. Appealing only to a small minority, it brought women's ministry into further disrepute, since the radical sects that had originally embraced this idea were now - a generation or so later - considered heretical, anarchistic, and anti-social.

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<sup>7</sup> A.Lloyd, *Quaker Social...*, p.168. Also H.H.Brinton, *Quaker Education in Theory and Practice*, Pennsylvania 1940, p.33-5.

<sup>8</sup> Statistics may exist but I have not been able to locate any.

<sup>9</sup> W.C.Braithwaite, *Second Period...*, p.537.

It has already been noted in chapter 2 and in the Wilkinson and Story controversy that men responded variously to the women's involvement at any level - with enthusiasm, prevarication, indifference, reluctance, hostility. Apart from Fox and Penn, almost all the leading men had some reservations. Almost as soon as they were given a clear mandate for official separate meetings, the women were criticized and their agendas restricted. Given the novelty in religious circles of the arrangement, and the societal gender norms of the day, it is hardly surprising that the women proceeded with a mixture of caution and rashness, prudence and audacity.<sup>10</sup> The threat of controversy may have put women on their guard. Under pressure of this kind a disadvantaged group or person may either go overboard, barefaced, deliberately causing reaction and offence, or - as the Quaker women seemed to do - advance with a sense of having to prove themselves by an exemplary lifestyle, as if they had to earn what Fox had insisted was theirs by right - an equal share of authority.

The establishment of the WMM can be seen as a bolder yet more subtle challenge than the women's preaching ministry to the accepted residue of patriarchal order within the Quaker society. Although less demonstrative, the WMM struck at the heart of the decision-making processes. Rogers, writing on behalf of the Wilkinson and Story faction in 1680, saw it as a power grab by the women - *they are entered into the possession of the power of God, because they take upon them to be Members of a Womens' Meeting, distinct from the Men.*<sup>11</sup> The preaching and prophesying women had largely directed their invective outwardly against the world. However distasteful or embarrassing their activities appeared to their contemporaries, they could be seen virtually as performances and, as such, regarded with a certain amount of detachment. In contrast Fell's ministry took a different direction from the other early women preachers who had been consumed with evangelical vision. Sewell described hearing her *preach an hour altogether, delivering her matter compactly and orderly*,<sup>12</sup> but both she and her daughters were primarily administrators, concerned with the interior workings of the organization.

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10 For example, at this time Bunyan was advising the women in his own Separatist congregation to wear *the badge of inferiority* with contentment, and that women *are not the image and glory of God as men are. They are placed beneath.* (C.Hill, *A Tinker...*, p.299).

11 W.Rogers, *The Christian Quaker...*, part 1, p.66.

12 W.Sewell, *The History...*, vol.1, p.184.

Men brought business acumen to their meetings which women had difficulty matching through lack of experience and education.<sup>13</sup> It is clear that considerable effort and encouragement was required from both the Fell women and their associates, and George Fox to maintain the vision of WMMs. In his strongest letter on the topic, Fox begins - *Keep your Womens Meetings in the Power of God*, and goes on to urge them into the roles of exhorters, expounders, instructors, disciples, prophets, and elders, insisting that *Women are to keep in the Government of Christ... and to keep the Comely Order of the Gospel as well as Men*.<sup>14</sup> The whole tone of the letter illustrates his compelling belief that Friends had inherited the whole authority of the Gospel as a body of men and women, and were to exercise that privilege and responsibility. In the same way Sarah Fell's letter lists precise practical guidelines against an impressive pageant of biblical *curricula vitae*. Braithwaite interprets it as a movement designed to liberate the entire Quaker community for service.<sup>15</sup>

Where they were required to take the offensive to become established, the women sometimes felt threatened or were reluctant to assume formal responsibility. The Buckinghamshire WMM, after an abortive start, failed to get underway for four years.<sup>16</sup> Lack of business was the explanation offered. Given the wide agenda offered by Fox and Fell, clearly either the Society was dysfunctional in that county or the men were executing all the business. Perhaps there were not enough capable women to form an active body. In Oxford in 1674, the MMM appointed one of their number to instruct one Sarah Dean in the skills and procedures of organizing meetings.<sup>17</sup>

Besides the scarcity of business skills, women faced other difficulties. The vagaries of child-rearing made it difficult for them to timetable regular attendance. In country districts travelling was time consuming and difficult. And unless single or widowed, the husband's attitude could either facilitate or complicate arrangements.<sup>18</sup>

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13 W.C.Braithwaite, *Second Period...*, p.286-9.

14 (See Appendix 2). G.Fox, *A Collection...*, ep.291, p.323.

15 W.C.Braithwaite, *Second Period...*, p.273.

16 *ibid*, p.274.

17 A.Lloyd, *Quaker Social...*, p.115.

18 Quaker family life may have assumed a more regular pattern since the 50s when Fox was able to summon 60 mature and faithful women to an emergency meeting within a few hours. See M.R.Brailsford, *Quaker Women...*, p.271.

Fox's theory of separate meetings inadvertently led to a polarization of power. Consensus within a meeting was difficult enough to achieve, but consensus between separate meetings would require - in practice - the two meetings to come together. Bacon contends that in principle the men's meeting could overrule the women's, for example in matters of discipline or marriage clearance.<sup>19</sup> The *ad hoc* business meetings of the 50s seemed to have been run largely by the men, but the idea of men and women also meeting together for business was not opposed even by the Wilkinson and Story faction. Fox was also in favour of joint bodies. The establishment of the Six Weeks Meeting in London during the momentous year of 1671 is evidence. This joint Meeting ran parallel with the Meeting for Sufferings for a number of years, and considering the breadth of its agenda, might well have become the executive committee for the Yearly Meeting.<sup>20</sup> Had this happened, female participation in the central administration would almost certainly have been stronger. The London women chosen by Fox for membership of this body were seasoned and mature. But it was the Meeting for Sufferings, a body of men primarily involved in providing legal protection against persecution, and having the advantage of meeting weekly, that gradually assumed importance as the central executive body for the Society.

It might have been an easier path for Fox to have simply stipulated equal or balanced representation of men and women at the Monthly and Quarterly Meetings. But he had a clear sense of there being matters that were appropriate for women only to discuss, a discretion that was obviously not shared by many of the men. Or perhaps he understood that unless women were given a separate mandate and clear areas of responsibility, they would be reluctant to assert themselves and be swamped by the weight of men's opinions and decisions. William Penn described it as the *bashfulness* of women to speak in front of men.<sup>21</sup> Maybe Fox felt that the imposition of the corporate discipline of WMMs would both harness and control women's energies.

So far we have considered the external influences operating on the WMM. Can it also be demonstrated that, either on their own initiative or as a result of these influences, the women were forging their own patterns, and in turn affecting Quaker philosophy?

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19 M.H.Bacon, *Mothers...*, p.44.

20 A.Lloyd, *Quaker Social...*, p.112.

21 M.H.Bacon, *Mothers...*, p.50.

Elizabeth Hooton is a prime example of dynamic interaction between a Quaker woman and her environment. As hostile and negative forces operated upon her life in the form of persecution and imprisonment, she reciprocated by impacting on society with petitions and programmes of prison reform, not to mention her outspoken preaching. But as variety and diversity of ministry faded for women, opportunities for initiatives diminished.<sup>22</sup> Second generation women allowed both society and their church to mould them. Nowhere is this more evident than in the area of standards of behaviour. How far their moral watchdog duties were self-imposed, and how far they were an expectation placed on them can only be surmised. Perhaps they were over anxious to prove their worth, perhaps over-sensitive consciences led to greater precautions and restraints. But their former liveliness of spirit was certainly debilitated by zealous policing of marriage, behaviour and appearance. The practice of requiring moral offenders to write a paper of self-condemnation is listed in the letter from the Lancashire QWM<sup>23</sup> and its cumulative effect of repressed shame can only be imagined. Aged 88, in one of Fell's last letters, she complains of the drab uniformity of dress being imposed on the female members of the Society and this was a significant comment on the general direction of the Movement.<sup>24</sup>

Again, it was the women who fiercely endorsed the Movement's endogamic policy, and through it erected a self-imposed exclusion zone which caused loss of mobility, flexibility and new ideas. Marriage opportunities became particularly limited for women, because of a surplus of females in Movement and of their restricted mobility.<sup>25</sup> Their plain, strict and exclusive lifestyle made the women socially dependent on other Quakers, and cut them off from the common neighbourliness of their local communities, traditionally a support system in sickness and child rearing.

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22 For example, 12 out of 22 missionaries to Massachusetts from England before 1660 were women, but only 14 out of 68 in the next 40 years. (H.Barbour, "Quaker Prophetesses...", p.46).

23 M.D.Speizman and J.C.Kronick, "...Declaration", p.241.

24 N.Morgan, *Lancashire Quakers and the Establishment*, (Ryburn, 1993), Appendix 6, p.292-4 quotes the full text of this letter.

25 From observations made around the 1800s, T.Clarkson, *A Portraiture...*, vol.2, p.23-6, believes that Quaker women were much sought after by men outside the Movement, because of their modesty, diligence and intelligence, and that this accounted for the number of females being disowned by their meeting for marrying outsiders.

Poverty was exacerbated, especially in rural areas, by the women's rigorous strictness in policing non-payment of tithes which still resulted in fines and imprisonment. Self-imposed restrictions on women's paid work, such as the ban on fancy sewing, significantly reduced income opportunities and increased poverty problems.

In England another century was to pass before the influence of the Quaker WMMs was to expand demonstrably beyond the internal local level. To understand the potential of the separate Women's Meeting in the process of female emancipation, and to acknowledge its most significant legacy to 18th century English speaking society, one must turn to their Quaker partners in the New World.

Whereas in England Quakers remained a disadvantaged minority throughout the 18th century, shackled by religious and cultural traditions, there were less restrictions in some of the American Colonies. In Pennsylvania and West Jersey Quakers held the political power and provided a wider arena for their adherents to initiate social change and reform.<sup>26</sup> Here the women were not confined to local internal questions but could lobby over much wider issues. Yearly meetings for women were underway in the 1670s as a direct follow on from Fox's visit of 1671/3, opening WMMs to much broader horizons for action.

Dunn also observes that the value and worth accorded women's meetings is evident even in the changing architecture of American Meeting Houses. Sliding panels were included to divide the room into two equal sections. In England, where Friends often continued meeting in private homes, the Women's Meetings were sometimes relegated to sheds or lofts.<sup>27</sup>

Yet in spite of this rather forbidding picture, Women's Meetings in England continued to function, and in the more progressive urban centres such as London, Bristol and Norwich, operated with an efficiency and vigour that only the Fell females and their associates could have instigated. It could be argued that what was lost through a lack of heterogeneity in ministry, they gained in solidarity by channelling their energies into this one vehicle of active christian expression - the separate meeting.

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26 M.M.Dunn, 'Latest Light on Women of Light', in E.P.Brown and S.M.Stuard, *Witnesses...*, p.74-5.

27 M.H.Bacon, *Mothers...*, p.46.

In the 18th century when religious faith underwent a process of feminization, and was correspondingly marginalized, Quaker women maintained a corporate identity that undergirded, and to an extent saved them from a privatized piety divorced from the male world of politics and intellectual pursuits.

Through prolific correspondence with each other, the WMMs maintained and developed organizational patterns for Quaker women internationally, affirming a common philosophy, consistent relief programmes, and a network of interlocking ties. Female leaders were funded to travel the Atlantic exchanging ideas and initiatives. The right to speak in joint meetings, though subdued and restrained, was never denied them. No other religious body at the end of the 17th century could match these facilities for its female adherents.

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## APPENDIX 1

### SIGNIFICANT EVENTS BETWEEN 1669 and 1673

- 1669 (Oct)*      **Marriage of George Fox and Margaret Fell.**
- 1669 (Dec)*      **Fell imprisoned, Lancaster. Her son, George, attempts to claim Swarthmoor Estate.**
- 1670 (May)*      **2nd Conventicle Act leads to renewed persecution.**
- 1670 (Sept.)*    **Fox suffers severe illness/breakdown.**
- 1670 (Oct.)*      **George Fell dies.**
- 1671 (spring)*    **Fox recovers.**
- 1671 (April)*    **Fell released, joins Fox in London. London Yearly Meeting convenes. Decision made to form central body.**
- 1671 (June)*      **Circular letter from Fox urging establishment of Women's Monthly and Quarterly Meetings.**
- 1671 (Aug.)*      **Fox leaves with associates for America. Fell returns to Swarthmoor.**
- 1671 (Oct.)*      **First meeting of Swarthmoor Women's Monthly Meeting.**
- 1671 (Oct.)*      **The London Six Weeks Meeting set up (joint body - 34 men/34 women handpicked by Fox).**
- 1671 (Nov.)*      **Elizabeth Hooton (travelling with Fox) dies in Jamaica.**
- 1672*              **Wilkinson and Story already active in Westmoreland - opposing Fox and Fell and Women's Meetings.**
- 1672 (spring)*    **Kendal Women's Meeting established. Fell travels with daughter Rachel through Yorkshire, encouraging WMMs.**
- 1672*              **Fox travels through the New World establishing both men's and women's separate business meetings.**
- 1673 (June)*      **Fox returns to England, encounters opposition within Quaker groups.**
- 1673 (Dec.)*      **Fox imprisoned at Worcester until Feb. 1675. Wilkinson/Story faction active during this period.**

## APPENDIX 2

A letter from George Fox to all Women's Meetings (1672), taken from *Epistles of George Fox*, ed. S.Tuke, London: Edward Marsh, 1848, epistle no.291, p.217-221.

*To all Women's Meetings.**Friends,*

1672.

Keep your women's meetings in the power of God, and take your possession of that which you are heirs of, and keep the Gospel order. For man and woman were helps meet in the image of God, and in righteousness and holiness, in the dominion before they fell; but after the fall, in the transgression, the man ~~was to rule over his wife; but in the restoration~~ by Christ, into the image of God, and his righteousness and holiness again; in that they are helps meet, man and woman, as they were before the fall. Sarah obeyed Abraham, and called him lord. Abraham did also obey the voice of his wife Sarah, in casting out the bondswoman and her son. Dorcas, a woman, was a disciple. So there was a woman disciple, as well as men disciples; and mind the women that accompanied her. And women are to take up the cross daily, and follow Christ daily, as well as the men; and so to be taught of Him their Prophet, and fed of Him their Shepherd, and counselled of Him their Counsellor, and sanctified by Him who offered Himself once for all. And there were elder women in the Truth as well as elder men in the Truth; so they have an office as well as the men, for they have a stewardship, and must give an account of their stewardship to the Lord, as well as the men.

Deborah was a judge; Miriam and Huldah were prophetesses; old Anna was a prophetess, and a preacher of Christ; to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. Mary Magdalen, and the other Mary, were the first preachers of Christ's resurrection to the disciples; and the Disciples could not believe their message and testimony that they had from Jesus, as some now a days cannot; but they received the command, and being sent preached it. So is every woman and man to do, that sees Him risen, and has the command and message; daughters shall prophesy as well as sons. So they are to be obedient that have the Spirit poured upon them. Women are to prophesy; and prophecy is not to be quenched. They that have the testimony of Jesus are commanded to keep it,

whether men or women. Priscilla and Aquila were both exhorters and expounders, or instructors to Apollos. So in the church there were women instructors, and prophetesses, and daughters prophetesses in the church; for Philip had four virgins that were prophetesses; and there were women disciples in the church, and women elders in the church, as well as men. So women are to keep in the government of Christ, and to be obeyers of Christ; and women are to keep the comely order of the Gospel, as well as men; and to see that all that have received Christ Jesus, do walk in Christ Jesus; and to see that all that have received the Gospel, do walk in the Gospel, the power of God which they are heirs of. I say, they are heirs of the comely order of the Gospel; and therefore, I say, take your possessions of it, and walk as becomes the Gospel; and keep the comely order of it, and in it keep your meetings. And here is the ground and foundation of our women's meetings.

Now mothers of families, that have the ordering of children, maids, and servants, may do a great deal of good or harm in their families, to the making or spoiling of children, maids, and servants; and many things women may do and speak of amongst women, which are not men's business. So men and women become helps meet in the image of God.

And the elder women in the Truth were not only called elders, but mothers. Now a mother in the church of Christ, and a mother in Israel, is one that nourishes, and feeds, and washes, and rules, and is a teacher in the Church, and in the Israel of God, and an admonisher, an instructor, an exhorter. So the elder women and mothers are to be teachers of good things, and to be teachers of the younger and trainers up of them in virtue, in holiness, in godliness and righteousness, in wisdom, and in the fear of the Lord, in the church of Christ. And if the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife, then who is the speaker, and who is the hearer? Surely such a woman is permitted to speak, and to work the works of God, and to make a member in the church; and then as an elder, to oversee that they walk according to the order of the Gospel.

G. F.

### APPENDIX 3

An extract from a general letter to all Women's Meetings from the Lancashire Quarterly Women's Meeting, dated between 1675-1680, and probably written by Sarah Fell. This extract is taken from M.D.Speizman and J.C. Kronick, "A Seventeenth Century Quaker Women's Declaration", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1:1, 1975, p.231-245.

And let us meet together, and keep our womens meetings, in the name and power, and fear of the lord Jesus, whose servants and hand-maids we are, and in the good order of the Gospel meet.

1<sup>st</sup>

And first, for the women of every of every [*sic*] monthly meeting, where the mens monthly meetings is established, let the women likewise of every monthly meeting, meet together to wait upon the lord, and to hearken what the lord will say unto them, and to know his mind, and will, and be ready to obey, and answer him in every motion of his eternal spirit and power.

2<sup>ly</sup>

And also, to make inquiry into all your severall particular meetings, that belongs to your monthly meetings, If there be any that walks disorderly, as doth not become the Gospell, or lightly, or wantonly, or that is not of a good reporte: Then send to them, as you are ordered by the power of God in the meeting, (which is the authority of it) to Admonish, and exhort them, and to bring them to Judge, and Condemn, what hath been by them done or acted contrary to the truth.

3<sup>ly</sup>

And if any transgression or Action that hath been done amongst women or maids, that hath been more publick, and that hath gott into the world, or that hath been a publick offence among friends; then let them bring in a paper of condemnation, to be published as far, as the offence hath gone, and then to be recorded in a booke.

4<sup>ly</sup>

And if there be any that goes out to Marry, with priests, or joineth in Marriage with the world, and does not obey the order of the Gospell as it is established amongst friends. then for the womens monthly meeting to send to them, to reprove them, and to bear their testimony against their acting Contrary to the truth, and if they come to repentance, and sorrow for their offence, and have a desire to come amongst friends again: before they can be received, they must bring in a paper of Condemnation, and repentance, and Judgment of their Action; which must be recorded in Friends Booke: And also to carry that paper to the priest, that married them, and Judge, and Condemn, and deny that Action, before him or any of the world before whome it shall come.

And dear sisters it is duely Incumbent upon us to look into our families, and to prevent our Children of running into the world for husbands, or for wives, and so to the priests: for you know before the womens meetings were set up, Many have done so, which brought dishonour, both to God, and upon his truth and people.

Therefore it is our duty and care, to prevent such things in the power, and wisdom of God: and to see that our Children are trained up in the feare of God, in the new Covenant, for the Jews were to train their Children up in the old. For you know, that we are much in our families amongst our children maids, and servants, and may see more into their inclinations; and so see that none indulge any to looseness and evill, but restraine it, for you see what became of Eli, and his familie, for not restraining his Children.

5<sup>ly</sup>

And also all friends that keeps in the power of God, and in faithfull obedience to the truth, that according to the order of the Gospell that is established, that they bring their Marriages twice to the womens meetings, and twice to the mens: the first time they are to come to the womens meetings that the women of the meeting, do examin both the man and the woman, that they be cleare and free from all other persons, and that they have their parents, and friends and Relations, Consent: And that enquiry be made of their cleanness in each particular meeting to which they do belong, before their next appearance in the womens meeting.

And if nothing be found, but that they come in clearness to the next monthly meeting, then they may proceed according to the order of the Gospell, and perfect their marriage in the meeting of friends, as friends which they belong to sees it Convenient: But if any thing be found that they are not clear, but that others lay Challenge, or Charge to them, either by promise or otherwise that then they do not proceed, till they have given satisfaction both to the parties, and friends, concerning that matter, according to the order of the Gospell; and that if any thing be amiss concerning the woman, examin it, and look into it, which may not be proper for the men.

6<sup>iv</sup>

And likewise, that the women of the monthly meetings, take care, and oversight of all the women that belongs to their several particular meetings, that they bring in their testimonies for the lord, and his truth, against tithes, and hireling priests once every yeare, Since the priests claimes, and challenges a tithe, which belongs to women to pay, as well as the men, not only for widdows, but them that have husbands, as piggs, and geese, henns and eggs, hemp and flax, wooll and lamb: all which women may have a hand in: Soe it concerns the womens meetings, to looke strictly to every particular meeting, that every woman bring in their testimony against tiths, and that those testimonies be recorded in the quarterly, or halfe yeares meeting book, once every year.

7<sup>iv</sup>

And at every monthly meeting, that they give timely notice, to every particular meeting, that they make ready their testimonies against tithes, be brought in at other Quarterly meetings, or half year as aforesaid: that so all hearts and consciences may be kept cleare, clean and sweet, to our precious high priest of our profession, who is the Author of our faith that becomes us, who is holy and harmless, and undefiled, and seperate from sinners, who is made higher than the heavens, Christ Jesus who is the minister of the Sanctuary, of the true tabernacle, which God hath pitched, and not man: he is our everlasting high-priest, for ever: and so we deny all other priests, both in the time of the law, and since that takes tithes.

8<sup>iv</sup>

And also all friends, in their womens monthly, and particular Meetings, that they take special care for the poore, and for those that stands in need: that there be no want, nor suffering, for outward things, amongst the people of God, for the earth is the lords, and the fullness of it, and his people is his portion and the lot of his Inheritance, and he gives freely, and liberally, unto all, and upbraids none.

So it concerns all that feares the lord, that he hath endued with an outward Substance, that they be free, and liberall in their hearts, to any that stands in need, but especially, as the Apostle saith to the household of faith.

And so let Care be taken for the poore, and widdows, that hath young Children, that they be relieved, and helped, till they be able and fitt, to be put out to apprentices or servants.

And that all the sick, and weak, and Infirme, or Aged, and widdows, and fatherless, that they be looked after, and helped, and relieved, in every particular meeting, either with clothes, or maintainance, or what they stand in need off. So that in all things the Lord may be glorified, and honoured, so that there be no want, nor suffering in the house of God, who loves a Chearfull giver.

Also let Care be taken that every particular womens monthly meeting, have a booke to set down, and record their bussinesses and passages in, that is done or agreed upon, in every monnethly meeting, or any service that any is to go upon, let the book be read, the next monthly meeting, and see that the business be performed, according to what was ordered.

And also that the collections be set downe, in the booke; and that the Receipts, and disbursments of every particular meeting, be set down in their booke, and read at their womens monthly meeting, that every particular meeting may see and know, how their collections is disbursed.

And that some faithfull honest woman, or women friends, that can Read, and write, keep the Book, and receive the Collections, and give a just and a true account, of the disbursments of them in the book, according as the meeting shall order, which must be Read every monthly meeting; And so give notice what is in stock; and when it is near out, to give notice that it may be supplied.

10,

And likewise that there be a general Book in every County, for their Quarterly, or half-years womens meetings: And there come, and appear at the Quarterly meeting, some (or as many as can conveniently) of every monthly, and particular meeting, of their whole County, that inquiry be made, at the Quarterly meeting, or half-yeares meeting, whether there be some there of every particular monthly meeting, and one or more of every particular meeting: and that the Quarterly meeting set down the name, of every particular meeting in the book, that is within, or pertains to the whole County.

And that every Quarterly meeting, they call over every monthly, and particular meeting, to see if there be some of every meeting: and that they bring every particular womans testimony against tithes, from every particular meeting, and of the clearness of their meetings, from all these things before mentioned, and they they do all walk and Act, as becomes the Gospell. And that every particular meetings testimonies, be recorded as the meeting stands severally in the book.

And that all other businesses as is there presented, or that is done that day, may be recorded in that quarterly booke.

And so here in the power and spirit, of the Lord God, women comes to be coheires, and fellow labourers, in the Gospell, as it was in the Apostles dayes who entreated his true yoakfellow, to help those women that laboured with him in the Gospell, phill: 4.3. and also in his epistle to Timothy .5.3. he exhorted the elder women, that they should be as mothers, and the younger as sisters with all purity.

And in Titus: 2.3: the Aged women likewise that they be as becometh holiness, and teachers of good things; and that they teach the younger women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, Chast, keepers at home, Good, Obedient to their own husbands; that the word of God be not Blasphemed.

So here was womens meetings, and womens teachings, of one another, so that this is no new thing, as some raw unseasoned spirits would seem to make it: So dear Sisters, in the everlasting truth, we conclude in the Apostles words, to his Brethren, in phill: 4.8.9. whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any vertue, if there be any praise: think on these things, which yee have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, and do them; and the God of peace shall be with you Amen.

And though wee be looked upon as the weaker vessels, yet strong and powerfull is God, whose strength is made perfect in weakness, he can make us good and bold, and valliant Souldiers of Jesus Christ, if he arm us with his Armour of Light, and give unto us the sword of his Eternal Spirit which is the word of the Eternal God, and cover our hearts with the breast-plate of righteousness, and crown us with the helmet of Salvation, and give unto us the Shield of Faith, with which we can quench all the firey darts of Sathan; and if he shoe our feet, with the preparation of the Gospel of peace, and set our feet upon the Mountaines, so that we stand there, and publish glad tidings of great Joy, and say unto Sion, thy God reigneth: and if he bring us unto his banquetting house, and spread his banner over us, which is love: there we can stand our ground, and fight our lords battel, boldly and valliantly, under our lords banner, and in our lords Armour. he who respect no persons, but chuseth the weak things of this world, and foolish things to confound the wise: our sufficiency is of him, and our Armour, and strength is in him: and all the great strength that is in men, if they want this Armour, they can do nothing for God, nor he will have none of their service in that State, who will have no flesh, to glory in his presence: Our glorying is in him, who doth not, nor will not despise, nor contemn the weak: And so to him be all glory, and power, and Dominion, forever, and ever. Amen.

This is given forth for Information, Instruction, and Direction, that in the blessed unity of the spirit of grace, all friends may bee, and live in the practice of the holy order of the Gospell; if you know these things, happy are you if ye do them so.

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