

Marriage and Discipline: The Place of Women in Early Quaker Controversies

For it is one thing to have authority, and another thing to usurp authority; now they that come to hear the power of God, and thereby be moved to speak, the *power* gives her authority, but she that is not in the *power* neither doth feele the motion of the Spirit, such a one usurps authority and is unlearned, and such, and they only were prohibited by Paul and no other. (Francis Howgill, *One of Antichrists Voluntiers Defeated*, 1660¹)

If they would contend, that Women ought not speak in the Church, all that they can pretend with any shew, or colour of Reason, at most is, *That Women are not to speak in the Church by permission*: if they speak, they are not to do it by permission, but by commandment, whereas it is permitted unto men, at times to speak in the church by permission, when not by commandment: an unlearned man may be permitted to ask a Question in the Church, which is not permitted unto a Woman, nor is it needful, for she may ask her Husband at home.

But if the Spirit of the Lord Command or move a godly and Spiritually Learned Woman to speak, in this case she is the Lords more than her Husbands, and she is to speak, yea, though [sic] the Husband should forbid her, *for she ought rather to obey God than Man. And in Christ Jesus there is neither Male nor Femal but all are one in him*. (George Keith, *The Woman-Preacher of Samaria*, 1674²)

In their defences of women's preaching, the Quakers Frances Howgill and George Keith reinterpret the well-known and much-debated Pauline command for women to be silent in church to justify occasions when women can lawfully speak. Howgill and Keith distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate speech not according to gender but according to spiritual condition. Women moved by the spirit of God are 'spiritually learned' and possess the authority to speak and thus to teach. Howgill and Keith insist that such women are not those meant by Paul. The Quaker reinterpretation of Paul accords men and women spiritual equality. Furthermore, the distinction Keith makes between 'permission' versus 'commandment' to speak,

essentially a distinction between human desire and divine will, emphasises not only the legitimacy of women's speech but more crucially the compulsion and obligation that the woman has to speak when she is impelled by the divine. To keep silent in this case would be to deny God.

Given this sort of understanding of men's and women's place in the Quaker church, it is not surprising to find the Quaker historian William C. Braithwaite praising the Society of Friends for the 'equality of men and women in spiritual privilege and responsibility'.³ More recently, Phyllis Mack examines the ways in which early Quakers appear to transcend gender in the language they use to describe their spiritual state. She argues that the 'importance of the [Quaker] doctrine of perfection was not only, or even primarily, in granting authority to individual women but in what we might call its liquifying aspect, its potential for decomposing the individual, gendered personality and encouraging women and men to speak and act with the traditional attributes of both sexes'.⁴ Gender becomes disconnected from biological sex such that Quaker women can claim spiritual manhood: 'One *Williamsons* wife, a Disciple of [James] *Milners* [a follower of George Fox], when she came to see him at *Appleby*, said in the hearing of divers there . . . that she was the Eternall Son of God; And when the men that heard her, told her that she was a woman, and therefore could not be the Son of God; She said, no, you are women, but I am a man'.⁵ The belief in a levelling of gender hierarchy is a common Quaker one. In my epigraph from *The Woman-Preacher of Samaria*, George Keith similarly reiterates the conviction that in Christ 'there is neither Male nor Femal'. The woman disciple of James Milner is perhaps more confrontational. She does more than simply assert that there is no difference in gender; she in fact reverses both her gender and the gender of the scoffing men. Refusing to be confined by her sex, she boldly claims a spiritual state that makes her not just a man, but Christ himself. By calling them women, she chastises her male detractors for their spiritual lack in the very terms they use to rebuke her.

The Quaker use of gender to describe spiritual condition allows women the liberating possibility of crossing gender lines, to think of themselves as men, at least spiritually, rather than always as reviled women. The Quakers do not do away with all gender distinctions, as the passage from George Keith's tract indicates: Keith allows the 'unlearned' man to ask questions in church but not the 'unlearned' woman. The man can speak, as he calls it, 'by permission'; in other words, the man can be led by his own will to ask questions. The woman needs to be impelled by the will of God. Nonetheless, the Quakers seem to offer more scope for women's spiritual equality and participation in public preaching than other churches. But the symbolic use of gender also reemphasises the traditional negative associations with the female sex. The androgynous ideal is hard to maintain in practice. The early Quaker defences of women's speaking, including the famous ones by George Fox and Margaret Fell that I shall discuss, testify to the difficulty of contesting old

prejudices and to the new fears of unruly women, as the various sects proliferated in the seventeenth century, many with numerous women members. As Patricia Crawford points out, those hostile to the separatist churches and to 'enthusiastic' religion associated sects with women, who were thought to be especially prone to heresy. Sectarian women were accused of seeking to usurp authority and to overturn the gender hierarchy: 'sexuality, female insubordination and separatism were associated' in the minds of their critics.⁶ Quaker spiritual equality opens the sect to such criticisms. It is, after all, difficult to discern a person's spiritual condition, difficult to tell when one is prompted by the spirit of God and when one might be driven by the devil. How does one distinguish between a woman who feels the 'motion of the Spirit' and an unruly woman in need of correction? Given their notions of spiritual equality, which encourage women such as the disciple of Milner to resist men who try to put them in their place, it is not surprising that gender would become a crucial issue as Quaker women test the boundaries of social convention.

Moreover, as the sect struggled for survival in the period of Restoration repression, the 'enthusiastic' character of the movement became far more of a liability. The movement had to change or expire. Quaker quietism was thus a later development. In its beginnings in the 1650s the sect was as enthusiastic and as aggressive as other radical religions of the English Revolution. The earliest Quakers engaged in flamboyant public proselytising – including going into trances, prophesying, interrupting sermons, and 'going naked as a sign' – in the first revolutionary decades.⁷ Christopher Hill suggests that 'the whole early Quaker movement was far closer to the Ranters in spirit than its leaders later liked to recall, after they had spent many weary hours differentiating themselves from Ranters and ex-Ranters'.⁸ It was following several decades of persecution after the Stuart restoration that the sect retreated into conservatism and attempted to integrate into the social and political mainstream, a process largely completed by the end of the seventeenth century.⁹

There has been a renewed interest in the early millenarian and apocalyptic period of Quakerism,¹⁰ but the early period of Quakerism is not simply the story of the hostility experienced in the encounter with unsympathetic outsiders. The early period is also marked by a series of internal dissensions threatening to fracture the sect. While in part the Quakers' gender troubles may stem from the outsider's perception that Quakerism encouraged unruly women, Quakers do not necessarily agree among themselves how far to take their principle of spiritual equality. Gender issues were expressed differently in the 1650s and after the Restoration. As the sect changed its character, the roles available for women within the sect also changed. Post-Restoration gender conflicts were over how much authority women had in the organisation of the church and thus were internal affairs. In contrast, the most prominent episode of the 1650s that led to fracture in the sect involved a charismatic reenactment of the messianic entry that shocked contemporary observers, with reverberations that spread out to the larger society.

The infamous episode of James Nayler, who was arrested in 1656 for riding into Bristol with a group of women, including Martha Simmonds, singing and hailing him as Christ, greatly damaged the reputation of Quakers nationally.¹¹ While Nayler and Fox had had disputes prior to this occasion, Nayler's entry into Bristol was especially significant because of the notoriety it gave the Quakers.¹² Nayler was vehemently denounced in parliament – his case was debated for six weeks – with some members calling for Nayler's death. Nayler was eventually punished savagely: he stood in the pillory for two hours, was whipped 310 times, had his tongue bored through with a hot iron and had his forehead branded with a B for blasphemer. Christopher Hill suggests that the exaggerated reaction was due to fears by conservative elements of the government that religious toleration would get out of hand, fears that were fuelled by the terrifying rapidity with which the Quaker movement was spreading.¹³

Within the sect, the issue was not theological because the Quakers believed in the 'indwelling' spirit of God in man; Nayler was simply performing that belief. Rather, what was at issue was the unity of the sect. Christine Trevett argues that 'It was *schism* rather than heresy . . . which Quakers were most fearful of at the time. Loyalty to George Fox seemed to be in jeopardy'.¹⁴ Trevett has pointed out how modern historians have placed the blame for James Nayler's fall on his women supporters, despite evidence that men were also associated with Nayler's actions. One of her examples is Isabel Ross, who writes, 'sometimes Nayler had a return of his old humility and spiritual sanity, but always his loyalty to Fox and his teaching was destroyed by the extravagance and adulation of Martha [Simmonds]'.¹⁵ Against this sort of reading, Trevett suggests that women were challenging male leaders in the mid-1650s, culminating in the controversy over Nayler. The women can be viewed as promoting an alternate leader, Nayler in this case, against other male leaders, notably Fox, with whom they may have become disaffected. In her study of Mary Westwood, Maureen Bell similarly finds disaffectation among the female ranks.¹⁶ And Patricia Crawford speculates that Martha Simmonds was an early Quaker leader whose role in the sect has been elided by later historiography: 'Certainly it was a crisis, but what has been insufficiently recognized – because it seemed even more radical than later commentators expected – was that Martha Simmonds was, for a brief period, one of the leaders of the Quaker movement'.¹⁷

A few years after the embarrassment occasioned by Nayler, John Perrot and other enthusiasts were censured by George Fox and his party as Fox tried to institute order that would allow the sect to survive as a church that might be tolerated by the state.¹⁸ Trevett suggests that in this conflict too women were actively involved.¹⁹ But the largest schism was the one led by John Wilkinson and John Story in the 1670s, as the 'two Johns' rebelled against what they saw as Fox's imposition of form and order, a kind of church government, in contradiction to the earliest Quaker belief that the individual

must listen to the inner promptings of the spirit. In this schism, one major bone of contention was the women's meetings, and closely allied to it, the practice of requiring young couples who wish to marry to declare themselves to both the men's and the women's meetings.

I would like to suggest that women again challenged gender hierarchy in the Wilkinson-Story schism of the 1670s.²⁰ This time, however, it is Fox's group that was perceived to be upholding practices that undermine men's authority. Although the controversy raised by Wilkinson and Story was, as they framed it, a debate on imposed form in worship and church governance, interestingly, this issue became inflected by gender. Moreover, Quaker women writing in support of Fox in fact perceived the opposition to be against their wielding of authority in the church. While in the 1650s women attempted to seize leadership through public preaching, given the charismatic character of the Quaker sect at the time, after the Restoration other women tried to take control of church government. Patricia Crawford has argued that 'In the earliest years, before a hierarchy of male leaders was established, women's role was more prominent than later. While many of the leaders did believe that men and women both had responsibilities in the movement, there were limits to male acceptance of female participation'.²¹ Although her argument that there was a process of containment of women within the sect is largely true, it overlooks the opportunities women had to gain influence. Even though some female challenges failed, others succeeded. Reading the history of the Quaker reorganisation in the Restoration, we find that women made some gains from the organisation of the sect. The Wilkinson-Story controversy, I argue, was not just a struggle for power between George Fox and the 'two Johns', it was also very importantly a controversy about what roles women may or may not play in the sectarian church and the difficulty of reconceptualising relations between men and women when old notions about hierarchy sit uncomfortably beside new ones about God manifested in Friends, no matter what gender or social class.

The idea of a spiritual levelling was not new to Quakers or to seventeenth-century sectarians. It was an idea that emerged with Protestantism itself. In his *The Obedience of a Christian Man* (1527–28), William Tyndale begins by arguing for obedience to established authority but later asserts the unity of believers in Christ, an assertion which seems to dismantle the hierarchy that the first part of the work supports: 'In Christ there is neither French nor English; but the Frenchman is the Englishman's own self, and the English the Frenchman's own self. In Christ there is neither father nor son, neither master nor servant, neither husband nor wife, neither king nor subject'.²² This contradiction became an acute problem in the mid-seventeenth century, especially for the Quakers.

Fox and Fell on Women Speaking

The question of women's authority arose within Quakerism even before the schism of the 1670s. Like other enthusiastic sects the Quakers supported prophecy, including that by women. Not surprisingly, like other sects, they too struggled to define the place of women in their church.²³ The struggle began as early as two decades before the Wilkinson-Story separation. It is useful to examine two important early tracts by George Fox and Margaret Fell on women's role – Fox's *The Woman Learning in Silence* (1656) and Fell's *Womens Speaking Justified* (1667) – before we consider the controversy in the 1670s and beyond, because these tracts outline the (ideal) possibilities for women in the Quaker community. Furthermore, they also indicate the activities by women that need defending and describe the Fox-Fell position attacked by the Wilkinson-Story faction.

In *The Woman Learning in Silence, or the Mystery of the Woman's Subjection to Her Husband*, Fox explicates the Pauline injunction that women be silent in the epistles to the Corinthians and to Timothy: 'Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church' (I Corinthians 14: 34–35) and 'Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence' (I Timothy 2: 11–12). These verses have long served to justify patriarchalism, and defences of women and women's speech inevitably have to contend with them.

Despite his title, Fox accepts Paul's proscription against women speaking as a condition true only under the law: 'That which usurps authority, the law takes hold of, but if you be led by the spirit, then you are not under the law'.²⁴ Believing in Christ, we find ourselves released from the former constraints. The old rules no longer apply, so that Fox goes on to point out that there are two kinds of learning – learning in the law and letter and learning in Christ:

Peter, who was unlearned in the letter, yet learned of Christ, says, such as were unlearned wrest the scriptures, and the epistles, being unlearned. The Scribes, Pharisees, great Rabbies, and doctors knew not the scriptures, being not learned of Christ, he who was the life of the prophets, and the end of the law, whom Peter was learned in, knew and preached, whom they knew not: so here the unlearned, who were in the life, confounded all the learned out of the life and learned of him by whom the world was made, who comprehended all the learning that was in the world; so the unlearned wrest, they are to learn in silence, and not to speak, as saith the law, but learn of Christ their husband who makes free from the law, Christ in the male, and Christ in the female.²⁵

I quote this passage at length in order to give an example of the way in which Fox proceeds through his argument. The repetition of 'learned' and 'unlearned' is a good example of the Quaker incantatory style. Jackson I.

Cope has noted that when Quakers address outsiders their style changes from the incantatory to the 'short, limpid sentences without resort to metaphor' of, for instance, Margaret Fell's *Womens Speaking Justified*.²⁶ While I am largely in agreement with Cope and find his arguments convincing, I have reservations about the intended audience of Fell's tract. I suggest that the tract was written just as much for fellow Quakers as it is for outsiders, given especially the historical context of internal disagreements throughout the seventeenth century, so that it is not easy to generalise about Quaker style on the basis of intended audience. I also suggest that at least in doctrinal and polemical works such as *The Woman Learning in Silence*, there is a logical progression that depends, paradoxically, on the incantatory style.

In the passage I quoted from Fox, the repetition hinges on the opposition of 'learned' and 'unlearned'. This opposition is not always structured in strict parallelism in Fox's sentences. Rather, he may emphasise one or the other side of the opposition depending on the point to be made. In the first sentence I quote above, the emphasis is on 'unlearned', which is repeated three times compared to the one instance of 'learned'. Peter's learning in Christ is literally surrounded by three references to his status as 'unlearned in the letter'. The structure of the sentence mimics the 'inward' and 'outward' distinction that the Quakers make.²⁷ The one word, 'learned', is enclosed by the word 'unlearned' repeated thrice to suggest that Peter is outwardly unlearned but learned inwardly. The repetition is not static in that unlearning in the letter must be transformed into learning in Christ before the unlearned may 'wrest the scriptures'. The syntactical progression of the sentence reveals its logical progression. This progression is not linear: it turns back on itself; it is not a circular either, however, in the sense that its turning back does not simply return to its beginning. The last 'unlearned', which is also the last word of the sentence, is a turn backward, but its effect is not static because its function is to emphasise the mysterious contradiction of the outwardly unlearned understanding the true sense of scripture. We have moved from a simple condition of being unlearned to a paradoxical one of outward lack of learning conflated with inward learning.

The iterative nature of the next long sentence performs a similar effect, except that the 'learned' and 'unlearned' are reversed. Now the learned in the letter are the unlearned in Christ, while Peter is learned because he knows Christ. This reversal then elucidates the rather mystifying phrase, 'wrest the scriptures'. In the second part of the sentence following the colon, we find that Fox is unable to maintain the logical reversal of the first part. Instead, the distinction between learned and unlearned blurs as the 'unlearned' is simultaneously described as 'learned by him [Christ]'. This blurring nicely illustrates Fox's point about how the 'unlearned', who are yet learned in Christ, 'confounded all the learned out of the life'. The semantic ambiguity again reveals the confusion of those learned in the letter and those who would judge according to worldly standards. The 'unlearned's possession of

scripture is not a simple process, for they must 'wrest' it. Fox's use of the verb suggests a process of mastery, but paradoxically this wresting is accomplished by adopting a passive posture: 'so the unlearned wrest, they are to learn in silence, and not to speak'.²⁸ Thus in this passage, we move from the opposition between learning and its lack, to the paradox of inward versus outward learning, to a productive confusion of learning and its lack, and to the paradox of becoming learned by keeping silence. But Fox overturns even this last paradox by redirecting our attention to the limitations of the law, so that finally, learning of Christ we, male and female, are made free from the law. This freedom from the law justifies the prophesying of both men and women in the rest of the tract. This distinction between learning and 'unlearning' would be repeated by later Quaker defenders of women's speaking, such as George Keith.

One last point needs to be made about Fox's prose style in *The Woman Learning in Silence*. The characteristics of Fox's hermeneutics – the iterative nature of his sentences and the slow but definite logical progression of his prose – have a pedagogical function as well. Fox begins from a place of common agreement and slowly brings his reader to the Quaker perspective. The best illustration of the slow acclimatisation of the reader is in how *The Woman Learning in Silence* begins. Its very title, as I have mentioned, may mislead the unwary reader into thinking that the tract is a traditional interpretation of the Pauline verses. Fox appropriates Paul's words, speaking them in his own voice. The tract begins, 'Let your women learn in silence, with all subjection; here is a silent learning, a learning in silence; I suffer not a woman to teach'.²⁹ But by the end of the paragraph, Fox writes that 'Christ in the male, and in the female is one, which makes free from the law' though he then immediately returns to the Pauline voice, admonishing women who speak, 'for it is a shame for a woman to speak in church'.³⁰ The first paragraph ends, somewhat confusingly, by rejecting what has preceded it, 'What? came the word of God out from you, or came it unto you only'.³¹ The confusion of the opposing views spoken in the same voice both illustrates the paradoxical nature of God's truth and effectively leads the reader into embracing the Quaker view, when a bald statement would be too unfamiliar and threatening to be accepted.

Fox goes on to argue that the injunctions against women prophesying are not meant to forbid prophesying entirely but merely to ensure order in the church: 'for you may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted, and the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets, for God is not the author of confusion but of peace'.³² The converse of prophesying is learning in silence: the Quakers believe that silence is necessary to receive the influence of the Spirit, and so there must be a balance between speaking and silence.³³ Indeed, Fox insists on the right of women to prophesy: 'and if Christ be in the female as well as in the male, is not he the same? And may not the spirit of Christ speak in the female as well as in the male?

Is he there to be limited?'.³⁴ The levelling or dissolution of gender difference in spiritual terms has practical and social consequences, of which the right to prophesy is only one. While other puritans may subscribe to women prophesying, those so gifted are thought to be few. For the Quakers, because Christ is in all true believers, male and female, this rare gift of prophecy has become common, democratised if you will.

The Quaker democratisation of prophecy leads easily to the act of speaking because the other implication of commonness is the rejection of rare moments of possession by the divine spirit in favour of God's taking up continuous residence within the individual believer. Ten years after Fox published his tract, Margaret Fell wrote *Womens Speaking Justified* (1666, second edition 1667).³⁵ We have moved from prophesying to speaking by divine inspiration: the full title of Fell's tract is *Womens Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed of by the Scriptures, All such as speak by the Spirit and Power of the Lord Jesus*. Speaking is more liberating than prophesying because it allows women to participate in the present everyday organisation of the church and does not limit them to pronouncing about the future. In this essay, I am interested not in preaching as an activity in itself but in how vindications of women preaching lead to vindications of other activities that Quaker women engage in, such as social work, church administration, and most importantly, social control of the group in the institution of marriage discipline so intensely contested in the Wilkinson-Story schism.³⁶

Margaret Fell, like Fox, reinterprets 1 Corinthians 14 to argue that 'the Apostle is their [sic] exhorting the *Corinthians* unto charity, and to desire Spiritual gifts, and not to speak in an unknown tongue, and not to be Children in understanding, but to be Children in malice, but in understanding to be men; and that the Spirits of the Prophets should be subject to the Prophets, for God is not the Author of Confusion, but of Peace'.³⁷ Not surprisingly, we hear echoes of Fox's words in Fell's tract, not just because they share a common Quaker vocabulary but also because they worked closely together. After reminding the reader to read the chapter in context, Fell argues that the women that Paul ordered to be silent were particular women: 'Where it doth plainly appear that the women, as well as others, that were among them, were in confusion . . . Here was no edifying, but all was in confusion speaking together: . . . Here the Man is commanded to keep silence as well as the woman, when they are in confusion and out of order'.³⁸ Fell argues that men too are forbidden to speak if their speaking creates confusion.

It is not gender that is the important consideration but rather one's spiritual condition. Paul, Fell argues, is referring to women who are under the old dispensation and have not received grace: 'he speaks of women that were under the Law, and in that Transgression as *Eve* was, and such as were to learn, and not to speak publicly, but they must first ask their Husbands at home, . . . And it appears clearly, that such women were speaking among the *Corinthians*, by the Apostles exhorting them from malice and strife, and

confusion, and he precheth the Law unto them'.³⁹ Like Fox, Fell focuses on the reference to law to reinterpret the context of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Her argument does tend to be circular. For Fell, the content of Paul's admonition indicates the nature of the women. Her argument works backwards so that by the consequence we trace the cause. Fell insists that women who are imbued with the spirit of God are allowed to speak, indeed must speak: 'And what is all this to Womens Speaking? that have the Everlasting Gospel to preach, and upon whom the Promise of the Lord is fulfilled, and his Spirit poured upon them according to his word'.⁴⁰

Fell reinterprets scripture by reading the verses contextually. In another instance, she argues that women's subjection must be viewed relationally: 'Here the Apostle speaks particularly to a Woman in Relation to her Husband, to be in subjection to him, and not to teach, nor usurp authority over him, and therefore he mentions *Adam* and *Eve*'.⁴¹ The injunction does not apply to women in relation to men who are not their husbands. Fell then provides another objection and suggests that even if women's subjection is not just in relation to their husbands, we must read the passage in the context of Paul teaching the women about proper dress: 'But let it be strained to the utmost, as the opposers of Womens Speaking would have it, that is, That they should not preach nor speak in the Church, of which there is nothing here: Yet the Apostle is speaking to such as he is teaching to wear their apparel'.⁴² Fell argues that such rules do not apply to godly women: 'And what is all this to such as have the Power and Spirit of the Lord Jesus poured upon them, and have the Message of the Lord Jesus given unto them? must not they speak the Word of the Lord because of these undecent and unreverent Women that the Apostle speaks of, and to, in these two Scriptures?'.⁴³ By particularising, Fell circumvents these Pauline verses to champion a more active role for women. She often uses the word 'here' to circumscribe and to limit the applicability of the particular scriptural verse. Again and again, Fell opposes the traditional tendency to generalise any gender reference to apply to all women.

But Fell herself engages in another kind of generalisation. She recapitulates scripture to highlight the active role of women and their godliness, showing how Christ included women in his ministry and treated them as equal to men: 'Thus we see that Jesus owned the Love and Grace that appeared in Women, and did not dispise it, and by what is recorded in the Scriptures, he received as much love, kindness, compassion, and tender dealing towards him from Women, as he did from any others'.⁴⁴ By piling on example after example of good women, Fell comes close to asserting another generalisation about women's spiritual fitness: she admits that not all women are thus fit but that neither are all men.

Finally, in the section added in the second edition of 1667, Fell says that Paul's words would not apply to all women because not all women are married and thus subject to husbands: 'If you tie this to all outward Women, then

there where many Women that were Widows which had no Husbands to learn of, and many were Virgins which had no Husbands . . . such would be despised, which the Apostles did not forbid'.⁴⁵ By pointing to the particular circumstances of individual women, Fell is able to make the case for women speaking. While on the one hand, she refuses to erase the differences among women, on the other hand, her argument, like Fox's, erases the spiritual distinction between men and women: 'where Women are led by the Spirit of God, they are not under the Law, for Christ in the Male and in the Female is one; and where he is made manifest in Male and Female, he may speak'.⁴⁶ Moreover, that spiritual distinction is also erased in that men also take the role of wives to Christ the husband: 'For Christ in the Male and in the Female is one, and he is the Husband, and his Wife is the Church'.⁴⁷ By feminising men in their relation to God, Fell points out that to oppose women's speaking is also to gag the church: 'Thus much may prove that the Church of Christ is a woman, and those that speak against the womans speaking, speak against the Church of Christ, and the Seed of the woman, which Seed is Christ'.⁴⁸ Ultimately, to gag the church is also to silence Christ and to give free rein to the evil speech of the 'Seed of the Serpent'.⁴⁹

Other than gendering the church female, Fell also reminds her readers that the church consists of both genders and argues for a place for women in the church: 'so is not the Bride the Church? and doth the Church only consist of Men? you that deny womens speaking answer: Doth it not consist of Women as well as men? Is not the Bride compared to the whole Church? And doth not the Bride say, Come? Doth not the Woman speak then?'.⁵⁰ The Church, then, is made up of male and female, but its role vis-à-vis Christ is female. Because in this female guise the Church speaks, women in the Church too may speak.

Such defences of women's speaking, I would argue, lead to defences of women's active role in church administration, so that the *Epistle From the Womens-Yearly Meeting at York, 1688* begins thus: 'We, being met together in the fear of the Lord, to wait upon him for his ancient power, to order, and, in his wisdom and counsel to guide us in our exercise relating to church affairs'.⁵¹ The result of God's spirit manifesting itself in women and authorising their speech is not spontaneous and enthusiastic prophesying but rather deliberative policy-making suggested by the terms 'exercise' and 'church affairs'. One issue that the women's meetings deliberated upon was whether to grant permission to young Quaker couples wishing to marry.⁵² This was one of the major issues of the Wilkinson-Story controversy of the 1670s.

Wilkinson and Story against Fox

The opposition that John Wilkinson and John Story formed against George Fox was to Fox's institutionalising authority and setting up church hierarchy through formalising the weekly and yearly meetings, both men's and

women's, what Richard Bauman, borrowing from Max Weber, aptly calls the 'routinization of charisma'.⁵³ Although from the modern perspective, the regularisation of women's meetings may seem to entail a loss of the independence that enthusiastic female prophets and preachers had, the women's meetings were viewed as threatening male authority because through them women had juridical power over young male Quakers wishing to marry, as some of the polemical tracts of the period reveal. Furthermore, these meetings gave women a powerful corporate identity.

The earliest published tract detailing the Wilkinson-Story controversy is William Mucklow's *The Spirit of the Hat: Or, the Government of the Quakers Among Themselves* (London, 1673), ostensibly published by a hostile outsider who managed to lay hands on a work written by an anonymous Quaker. The publisher apparently intended to expose what he saw as corruption within the Quaker community: the work is subtitled, 'As it hath been Exercised of late years by *George Fox*, and other Leading-Men, in their *Monday*, or *Second-dayes* Meeting at *Devonshire-House*, brought to Light. In a *Bemoaning* Letter of a certain ingenious *Quaker* to another his Friends; Wherein their Tyrannical and Persecuting Practises are detected and redargued [sic]'.⁵⁴ From the subtitle, it is clear that the meetings played a large part in the exercise of authority. It was the concentration of authority in few hands in these meetings that caused many of the problems. In this tract, the issue of gender does not play as central a role as it appears to do in the women's responses, which I treat later. In *The Spirit of the Hat*, the conflict is among men and revolves around the problem of age and authority.

From the examples given of the high-handedness of the Quaker leaders at the meetings, the problem for those opposed to Fox appears to be about what authority leaders have over other Quakers: 'So that in their Selected Assemblies, these keep the Inferiors at so great a distance, and their Spirits are so over-awed, that they dare not (but seldom) contradict the sayings of the most eminent Elders'.⁵⁵ The problem of having power concentrated in few hands is also posed as a conflict between young and old. In the case of James Claypoole, who the author says disagreed 'with much moderation' with John Bolton, and who eventually apologised, the apology was made not because Claypoole genuinely changed his mind but because of the unequal positions of Claypoole and his critics: 'This poor man, for this presumption, was first to acknowledge his Error: Yet he in private confest it to be no Error; But being a man of peace, would rather bear his burthen, then to stand against, or contend with so great an Elder. How is it possible the Young ones can speak their minds freely, when they are thus curbed and overawed? by this means a few will sway a Meeting which way they please, unless the *Peers* are in Competition, then they meet as two great waters, ready to overwhelm one another, with their asserting both *in the name of the Lord*'.⁵⁶ Imposition of hierarchical authority contradicts one of the central tenets of Quakerism, which is that one acts according to the dictates of the 'indwelling spirit' of

God. Here, what we see is an account of the suppression of individual expression by the group, which is led by the few and powerful, who themselves claim divine guidance, as the author says mockingly, 'in the name of the Lord'. And the conflict is expressed in terms of the old suppressing the young: the author warns, 'Despise not to take counsel of a Fool, nor disdain the advice of the young and weak Ones, for 'tis possible, deep knowledge and yet little esteem may be found together', and pleads 'that the little Ones may serve the Lord without fear'.⁵⁷

Because the internal conflict is generational, the marriage discipline – which is a process of gaining approval at the meetings by declaring one's intentions in order to be questioned to the other members' satisfaction – becomes an effective means of social control and punishment for insubordination, since it is the young who are marrying. John Osgood, wishing to marry Rebecca Travers, the younger, had gone so far as to obtain permission at the women's meeting: 'first he went to the Womans-Meeting, according to Custome, to acquaint them with his Intentions, and there they past it with so great an Acceptation, that a very considerable part of them went along with him to the Mens-Meeting, to justifie and stand to their procedure towards him, if occasion offered, whereas others have seldom above two'.⁵⁸ However, despite the overwhelmingly positive response from the women, Osgood encountered opposition at the men's meeting. The author attributes it to Osgood's earlier disagreement with some of the men on a theological point about whether to keep one's hat on during prayer: 'The Zealots for that practice, did use their utmost endeavour to tcrew [threw?] him out of that power and authority which he had in the Meeting, as the Paper signed by *eleven* Ministers doth clearly demonstrate'.⁵⁹ Again, John Bolton insists that Osgood testify against the keeping on of one's hat before they would agree to the marriage. The marriage discipline could be used to ensure doctrinal conformity, which the author rails against: 'That the greatest part of the Meeting signifie no more than Cyphers, that a few Rule by Will and Pleasure, a certain ready way it is to make Hypocrites; for what greater temptation can a man meet withal to reduce him to a conformity against his Conscience, than to deprive him of a Person whom he most dearly loves?'.⁶⁰ This discipline is a crime against individual conscience, and it is enforced by pitting the Quaker's loyalty to church and community against love of (would-be) spouse and family.

Partly, the conflict among the Quakers arises out of a drive toward corporatisation that insists on wholly encompassing the lives of the members of the group. Perhaps the most extreme example of how the individual is subsumed in the group is the use to which Fox puts his marriage to Margaret Fell. The author of *The Spirit of the Hat* rebukes Fox's overweening pride that would equate his private, earthly marriage to the spiritual one between Christ and his church:

Such is the swelling pride of this *Luciferian*, that he gave forth a Paper, That *his Marriage with Margaret Fell, was a figure of the Marriage between Christ and the*

Church. I may more justly believe it to be a figure of the great Apostacy from the Truth, and barrenness in the Truth.

He likewise declared, That *his Marriage was above the state of Adam in his Innocency, in the state of the second Adam, who never fell*. This Paper was so ill resented, and so much dislik'd, that it was call'd in again; and a rare thing it was to get a sight thereof, albeit through an accident, I had a [sic] view of it.⁶¹

Although Fox's living metaphor is intended to shore up the Quakers' communal identity, the overemphasis on the group over the individual can be divisive. In part, the problem arises from what is perceived as Fox's (individual) pride and the way in which Fox elevates himself above the community. The author resents the analogy that Fox makes between his marriage and the marriage of Christ with the church, sneering at a marriage likely to be barren since Fox was 45 and Fell 55 when they married. This example clearly reveals the problems in conflating individual and group identities, for those who are relatively powerless may find that group identity is dictated by the more powerful in terms that not everyone can agree with.

In 1680, William Rogers published what he calls a 'historical account' of the conflict from the perspective of the Wilkinson-Story faction. *The Christian-Quaker, Distinguished from the Apostate & Innovator* (London, 1680) is a huge, repetitive work in five parts, ranging from 92 to 139 pages, not including a 42-page preface with a 32-page postscript and a 26-page index. Rogers apologises for its length, explaining that the parts were originally intended to be published separately. This work made the split between the main group led by Fox and Fell and the faction led by Wilkinson and Story inevitable, and in fact Rogers tries to answer the charge that he is destroying group unity by arguing that he is not revealing names, except for a few of the major players such as Fox, whom he denounces, and, of course, Wilkinson and Story. The other argument that he makes is that the division is already known to the outside world, and he claims that the other side started the publicising of the schism with the publication of *An Epistle for True Love, Unity and Order in the Church of Christ* (London, 1680), one of the defences by women.

These arguments are interesting for a consideration of how Quakers develop group identity through publication as well as how publication can also worsen schisms within the group.⁶² Rogers's claim that his account preserves the privacy of the church is not entirely convincing since he is in fact airing dirty linen in public. The need for privacy in a public medium puts him also in the difficult position of having to tell a history without names, a fact that he acknowledges: '*That it seemed unlikely, to bring forth a Credible History, touching Religious Differences, without naming the Authors of Books, Papers, and Names of Persons reflected on; evidencing the Reality of such Principles, Doctrines, and Practices, which occasioned Disunion and Separation, amongst some of the aforesaid People*'.⁶³ His settling for a partial disclosure is a compromise that tells us much about the reliance of the Quakers

on the print medium. Indeed, numerous references to written documents in *The Christian-Quaker* and other tracts on the Quakers' procedures reveal their dependence on writing. Arnold Lloyd argues that 'Quaker books exercised a deep consolidating influence on the Society during our period [1669–1738]'.⁶⁴ While writing could and did help develop an emerging group identity, such as with their use of epistles, the permanence of writing could also hasten the course of divisions.

The rambling nature of Rogers's work means that its points are not argued with any semblance of method, but there are repeated themes that are similar to those raised in *The Spirit of the Hat*. A large part of the work is concerned with form, such as marriage discipline, which Rogers argues is a curtailment of the liberty of conscience and a practice not unlike persecution by the state church. In his analysis of the situation, Rogers also brings up the conflict between youth and authority: 'In the Church of Christ, there are *Babes, Young Men, and Fathers*; there are the *Weak, and the Strong*: Suppose a Weak Brothers Faith Differs from his Brethren, must he be accounted a *Fool*, or an *Hypocrite*? Nay; Nay, Charity measures not so'.⁶⁵ Rogers argues from spiritual equality for a levelling of the social disparity among the Quakers. In his use of familial metaphors, Rogers in fact attempts to reconstitute the family of Friends as a family free from the usual generational roles: 'I now appeal to the impartial understanding Reader, whether according to this form of Government, one that is in the place of *Paul* a Father (who according to the aforesaid Author [Robert Blaykling, who supports Fox], hath right to rule over and command) may not have the testimony which he hath through the motion of Gods Spirit to publish unto the World for God, be *over-ruled* by *Timothy* a Son (when, according to the aforesaid Author, he ought to be *ruled* by *Paul* the Father) nay, perhaps by one that is of much lesser rank in the Body; if so be he hath a word of Exhortation on the behalf of Gods Truth, & is usually exercised therein in publick'.⁶⁶ While Rogers clearly finds that Fox's faction uses familial metaphors to impose their authority, he does not reject these metaphors but invests them with new meaning and imagines different, more equitable, roles for sons and fathers.

The argument for equality among men, young and old, however, does not automatically lead to an argument for equality between men and women. Rogers does not insist that women should not speak in church, for he quotes Paul to the Corinthians only to argue that despite the positive proof of a command by Paul that women keep silent, each must act as he or she is moved by God, though he does exclude 'unrule, disorderly Women' from speaking or prophesying.⁶⁷ Why then does Rogers oppose women's meetings? Rogers argues that the submission of proposed marriages to the women's meetings for approval is an innovation, pointing out that Fox himself did not submit his proposal of marriage to the women's meetings: 'As divers Friends of *Bristol* have testified G. F. proposed not his Marraiges [sic] to the *Womens Distinct Meeting in Bristol* (where his Marriage was accomplished) though

such a Meeting was held there many years before'.⁶⁸ Rogers believes that the women's meetings are wielding excessive authority in their exercise of the marriage discipline; he finds the imposition of the practice, which he calls 'a Submission [sic]', the reenactment of Isaiah 3:12: '*As for my People, Children are their Oppressors, and Women rule over them. Oh, my Poep[le] [sic]! they which lead thee, cause thee to Err*'.⁶⁹ While elsewhere Rogers bemoans the oppression of fathers, here he uses Isaiah to depict a world turned upside-down where traditional hierarchies are overturned so that children exert authority over parents and women rule men. Rogers's emphasis, however, is most decidedly on the unnaturalness of women ruling men, given the context in which he quotes Isaiah.

The unnatural exercise of authority by women seems to be what Rogers alludes to when he complains that while the other side justifies women's meetings by pointing to their work in relieving the poor, that service is not spoken of in Fox's defence of women's meetings. He hints darkly that 'under pretence of *serv[ing], and reliev[ing] the Poor* in some cases, more effectual then before, and yet Publish a Book under pretence of *incourag[ing]* the said *Meetings*, whence it is thereby apparent, that some other *End* is now at least, if not from the Beginning, aimed at, than was manifested plainly in the Beginning'.⁷⁰ The 'other End' is presumably the marriage discipline.

In his criticism of Fox, Rogers employs anti-feminist rhetoric, depicting Fox to be under the influence of women, saying that 'tis a Shame for a Man to become an Instrument that *Womens Meetings* should be held'.⁷¹ The shame is in becoming a tool made use of by women. Calling him 'a mis-led, fallible Man',⁷² Rogers insinuates that Fox is controlled by women, in particular Margaret Fell. Rogers goes so far as to accuse Fox of uxoriousness, using the analogy of Adam and Eve: '*As the Serpent beguiled Eve, so Eve beguiled Adam, in prevailing upon him to eat of the Forbidden Fruit which she had eaten; and the Argument used by the Serpent to tempt Eve was this, Ye shall be as Gods. Even so are we persuaded, that there hath not been wanting unto him [Fox] (to speak comparitively [sic]) a tempting Eve, which hath been too aspiring after such a State*'.⁷³ While Fox would depict his marriage to Fell as that of Christ, the second Adam, to the church, as *The Spirit of the Hat* mentions, his opponents turn that analogy against him to suggest that the more appropriate analogy is to the first fallen Adam and the sinful Eve.

Rogers draws further parallels between Fox and the disgraced James Nayler by citing evidence of the influence of women: '*And if James Naylor's Opposition consisted in Not Reproving his company, when they bowed to him, and cryed Hosanna, let it be a Warning to thee, and Reprove thy Company when they give thee the Titles and Honour due to the Highest*'.⁷⁴ According to Rogers, Fox is coming dangerously close to repeating Nayler's error, which is pride fuelled by the blasphemous adulation of women. Rogers reminds Fox that he himself had condemned Nayler's actions: '*Hast thou forgotten, how Thou hast Testified against James Naylor's Spirit,*

whose great fall was *his owning*, or at least *not Reproving the Women*, when they Cryed with a Carnal Tongue *Hosanna* to him?'.⁷⁵ The reference to the women's 'Carnal Tongue' alludes to the danger of allowing women complete freedom to speak; women's inherent carnal natures might be corrupting, especially to men.

One underlying issue in this quarrel is economics, but it appears only obliquely. As dissenters, the Quakers suffered persecution from the law which resulted in economic loss when they were fined for not swearing allegiance or paying tithes. The Wilkinson-Story faction was accused of valuing their property above their principles as Quakers. Rogers in turn accuses Fox of helping Mary Pennington secure her property while condemning Rogers for doing so, when he is only preserving the well-being of his family: 'neither was G. F. ever so friendly to me, as to take so much care of me and my family'.⁷⁶ Rogers asks, 'If G. F. had so great a Care for *others, not outwardly related to him*, I know no Reason why I may not take the same Care for my *Wife and Children*, which are many'.⁷⁷ Rogers here assumes the priority of the immediate family over the Quaker community, revealing that the familial metaphor for the community, so often employed in Quaker rhetoric, can break down where money is involved and when one group seems to be favoured over others.

Given that the Quakers are dissenting outsiders to the nation, support from within the group, include trading with other Quakers, assumes a greater importance. Rogers complains that the accusations that Fox levelled against him has caused other Quakers to cease trading with him: 'That one of my Correspondents, highly affected with G. F. and who for many Years past, hath been Partner with me in a Merchandizing-Trade, to several parts beyond the Seas, is of late come so far, as (on the Score of my Concern in Religious Differences amongst the afore-said People) to break off all manner of Dealing with me in Parnership . . . Let now the Ingenious and Impartial Reader consider, whether this is not at least next Door to a *Discouragement, to Buy and Sell with me*; For if all should so serve me, I should be obstructed to proceed in that Method of Trade, by which I have been enabled, not only to provide for my Family, but to administer to the Relief of others also'.⁷⁸ Again, Rogers uses his family to justify his worldly concerns. But he also argues that Fox's faction goes too far when they try to administer and control the worldly affairs of fellow-Quakers: 'But neither the Scriptures without us, nor the Light within us, do evidence, that under the Spiritual Government of Christ, there is any need to *Establish Orders or Laws* touching worldly Property, or for the Members of Christ to assume Jurisdiction therein, without *assent* of the Parties differing. For, *since his Kingdom is not of this World*, Is it not against the nature of his Government, to exercise by Constraint, a Jurisdiction in Matters relating to this World?'.⁷⁹ Rogers wants to separate worldly from spiritual life, believing that Fox and others are overstepping the bounds of their authority. For Rogers, the sin of engrossing

authority beyond one's rightful share is not just a sin committed by the women but also one committed by male leaders like Fox.

Near the end of the century, twenty years after the publication of *The Spirit of the Hat*, ex-Quaker William Mather's tract, *A Novelty: Or, a Government of Women* (London, 1694), expresses the conflict much more explicitly as one about gender and authority. The title page criticises the stubbornness of 'such Women as has a secret Command of their Husbands Purses; together with those Preachers that reap Profit by such a Female Government'.⁸⁰ Mather inveighs against submitting to 'a *Female Authority* in Marriage, [as] *Not to be of God*, [but] then of the Devil' and compares the women's meetings to the 'Government of the *Amazons*, who were not so Censorious upon the account of Marriage'.⁸¹ He sees the women's meetings and their exercise of authority as monstrous.⁸² While age is an issue for Mather, the opposition that he emphasises is between young men and presumably older women: 'I do greatly desire to hear how they do to bear it, that a Young Man should refuse to submit to their Authority'.⁸³ To be sure, Mather criticises both male and female leaders for holding meetings 'in private Rooms (where sometimes there are not above four persons that take upon themselves to Rule) and there dispose of such Monies as they collect at the end of Religious Meetings (where the most Givers are) where they ought also give a publick Account how they disposed of the Money unto the general givers; but this I never see them do'.⁸⁴ The focus of his tract, however, is on misgovernment by women.

While the conflict is not strictly one over gender hierarchy and is more of a conflict over authority, it is curious and revealing that Mather puts such emphasis on the newness of the women's meetings, which he calls 'unscriptural Female Government'.⁸⁵ Again, he also finds marriage discipline to be burdensome, but it appears that couples find submission to the women's meetings more irksome: 'How often have you troubled a Couple, for refusing to submit to a *Female Government* in Marriage, and enjoying some, scarce of Ability to travel many Miles, and often (at their own charge) to your private *Women's Meetings*, and *Men's Meetings*, which have been so wearied with Journeys, and needless Delays (tho' Relations were satisfied) who to rid themselves of the trouble of waiting upon you any longer, have gone to a Priest upon the account of Marriage'.⁸⁶ 'Female Government' is repeatedly invoked in this short tract. Mather prefers that marriage discipline be exercised in a meeting as public as possible rather than in 'a Meeting of a few Women, (who may be Strangers to you [the couple])'.⁸⁷ Mather fears having to submit to the authority of women, who are not controlled by men, in their separate meetings.

The conflict over women's roles is not divided by gender. A number of men wrote tracts in defence of women's meetings, including John Pearson's *Anti-Christian Treachery Discovered and Its Way Blocked Up* (London, 1686?) and William Loddington's *The Good Order of Truth Justified* (London, 1685). But the most important one is George Fox's *This Is An*

Encouragement To All the Women's Meetings In the World (London, 1676), which comes under special attack in *The Christian-Quaker*. This repeatedly points out that Fox erred in holding up Micah's mother as a virtuous woman when the context in Judges 17 of the Old Testament plainly show that she was idolatrous. Fox's longish work – 96 quarto pages – is modelled after Fell's *Womens Speaking Justified*. Like Fell, Fox compiles biblical examples of virtuous women, one of whom is that unfortunate inclusion of Micah's mother, in order to make the case that it is proper and godly for women to assemble in meetings. Fox argues that women have the domestic knowledge necessary to exercise authority over the young: 'So the Women in the time of the Light, Grace and Gospel, are to look into their own selves and Families, & to look to the training up of their Children; for they are oft-times more amongst them then the Men, and may prevent many things that may fall out, and many times they may make or marr their Children in their Education. So now they come to be exercised in the Grace of God, and to admonish and exhort, reprove and rebuke'.⁸⁸ The metaphor of the 'Nursing Mother'⁸⁹ makes women not just nurturers but also judges and teachers of the young. The verbs that Fox uses – 'admonish and exhort, reprove and rebuke' – describe a strong and demanding authority figure.

Fox sees women exercising this authority beyond their immediate families through the way in which he conceptualises the Quaker community as a kind of family, so that '*the Elder Women should be as Mothers; and a Mother is a Nurse, and Teacher, and Instructor of her Children, and the Younger Women as Sisters, with all Purity*'.⁹⁰ He envisions the community of Quakers as a family, but familial relations are hierarchical. This vision of community may lead to a conflict between two authority figures; mothers (or mother figures) are set up in opposition to husbands, even if Fox paints a utopian picture of harmonious relations: '*And that these aged Women teach the younger Women, first To be Sober; secondly, To love their Husbands; thirdly, To love their Children; fourthly, To be Discreet; fifthly, To be Chast and Keepers at Home, and Good, Obedient to their own Husbands, that the Word of God be not blasphemed*'.⁹¹ Notice that loving one's husband comes second after sobriety and that obedience is last. It is the translation of spiritual equality of men and women to a practical equality in managing church affairs that some find highly threatening: 'so in the Church here were women Instructors women prophets and Daughters Prophets in the Church . . . Virgins Prophets, Women Disciples in the Church, women elders in the church as well as men: so women are to keep in the Government of Christ, Obeys of Christ, and women to keep the comely Order of the Gospel as well as men, and to see that all that have received Christ Jesus that they walk in Christ Jesus, and to see that all that have received the Gospel do walk in the Gospel'.⁹² Essentially, Fox argues that women too should be given authority, including authority over men, in maintaining order in the church.

In their pamphlets defending their meetings, the women in turn accuse their opponents of being disorderly and of spreading discord and confusion, while emphasising the necessity of maintaining order, peace and unity. In *An Epistle for True Love, Unity and Order* (1685), Mary Elson asserts 'That that Spirit which hath opposed the blessed Unity and Order of Truth, in these our Men and Womans Meetings, shall never prosper'.⁹³ Although defending order may appear reactionary, the women appear to gain from this conservatism, a conservatism that we see also in their envisioning of church as family. Following Fox, they invoke the familial analogy to justify their authority. *A Living Testimony* (1685), signed by five women, argues that women ought to be respected as mothers and sisters: 'such Elderly Women in the Truth, are to be intreated as Mothers, and so not to be Railed upon; and the Younger, as Sisters, with all Purity, and Widows, that are Widows indeed, are to be honoured'.⁹⁴ The authors of *A Living Testimony* also argue for women's special domestic knowledge to justify their part in marriage discipline: 'And concerning *Marriages*, it being God's joyning, and his Ordinance, we Women in the Spirit and Grave of God, being living Members of the Church of Christ, do see with the Spirit of God, our Service concerning Marriage, that both Young and Old that profess Gods Truth, may go together orderly, first having their Relations consent; for many times we having seen, and do see more in the Young People and Widdows State and Condition, than some of the Men, because we are more amongst them'.⁹⁵ As it turns out, the exercise of discipline is not only over young women but also over widows who wish to remarry. Since widows can be quite rich, marriage discipline gives the women's meetings much more power than it first appears.

The Wilkinson-Story schism of the 1670s shows how the problem of maintaining group cohesion can quite easily be inflected by gender. Opposition to George Fox's leadership was framed in terms of opposition to the rule of women. Sometimes the women were viewed as Fox's pawns in his attempt to consolidate his power and influence. Other times the women were perceived as a corrupting influence, leading good men astray. Often too the women are criticised in conventionally misogynistic terms. William Mather, for instance, derisively depicts the women as vain and pretentious, whose frivolous love of fine clothes shows them incapable of serious judgement: 'And whether such *Women-Judges* ever did any Good, who come into the Seat of *Counsel*, ruffling in gaudy flower'd Stuffs, or Silks, from Top to Toe, mincing with their Feet, &c. except their Gifts to the Poor'.⁹⁶ While Mather's denunciation of 'Lordly Spirits' are not confined to women but also encompass the men, his use of the word 'woman' tends to be pejorative, as when he laments that those who rule in the meetings are 'most of them Ignorant ones, not knowing who gave them their usurped Power, yet will be as angry as a Woman, if you obey not their Wills, when you come before them'.⁹⁷ It is ironic that the attack on Fox's establishment of the women's meetings should focus on women since Fox himself similarly accused Nayler and his women supporters.

Clearly, despite their notions of spiritual equality, Quaker men were not unlike their peers in the established church or in the nation at large. They found powerful women threatening and tried to contain these women. While Quaker ideas of spiritual equality allowed women an active, speaking role in the community, when women took on such roles they did not do so without challenge. Defences of women's preaching, such as Fox's and Fell's, or even that of George Keith and Frances Howgill, from whose tracts I quoted in the beginning of this essay, had to insist on the distinction between an unlearned man and a spiritually learned woman. While the tracts defend the Quaker practice of public preaching by men and women, women's public preaching was less threatening to the sect when women directed their preaching against outsiders, urging non-Quakers to become converted. Often too such public preaching was far less threatening to the Quaker sect even when these women preachers were highly confrontational and did not respect the authority of male priests. It became far more controversial for women to assert equality within the sect and Quaker women's leadership became a divisive issue.

The distinction Quakers make regarding the spiritual state of women means that the struggle over women's authority would be fiercer in the arena of social organisation because the meaning of women's voice there would be even more troubling. A spiritually learned woman who is imbued with the 'indwelling' spirit of God can, in that moment, become spiritually a man. This spiritual change in gender authorises her speaking. It is more difficult to make this claim – and more difficult to maintain the notion of a woman who is spiritually gendered male – when women handle the daily business of church government. It is easier to revert to old habits and old prejudices about women's inferiority.

In response, Quaker women argue first from spiritual equality. But they also argue that their participation in church government is an extension of women's traditional roles in the family. Quaker women argued for an expansion of their authority into church administration based on the authority they already possessed in the household. In their tracts, they portray themselves as good administrators of households: 'For you know, that we are much in our families among our children maids, and servants, and may see more into their inclinations; and so see that none indulge any to looseness and evill, but restraints it'.⁹⁸ Women's daily management of the household and their intimate knowledge of those they govern – children and servants – mean that they are best placed to act as moral guides. Quaker women also maintain that their economic productivity gives them a voice in church affairs: '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 tithes, and that those testimonies be recorded'.⁹⁹ Even married

women, though only engaged in small-scale cottage business, have a tenth of the income they produce claimed by the state church, a claim that they have a part in resisting. It seems appropriate that women's meetings take the responsibility of recording testimonies of women opposing tithes and standing to their Quaker principles. Because the practice of recording the testimonies of Quaker suffering would serve to unify the sect, the women are insisting on their central place in the sect. They refuse to let the men relegate them to a peripheral role.

In part, women's claim that their greater expertise in the household justifies their authority in the church derives from the analogy that Quakerism makes between church and family. Quakers conceive their relations with other Quakers in familial terms and their language is one of love and affection. Salutations such as 'dear beloved Brethren and sisters' are common, for example, in the letters of Margaret Fell published in her collected works of 1710.¹⁰⁰ More famously, Quakers address Fox and Fell as 'nursing father' and 'nursing mother', a metaphor common among them. In the first letters of the Fell family to Fox, after their early convincement, they address him as 'our dear nursing father' and speak of him as their begetters: 'Our dear father in the Lord, for though we have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have we not many fathers, for in Christ Jesus thou hast begotten us through the Gospel, eternal praise be to our father'.¹⁰¹ In 1654, Thomas Holme, a Quaker who was visited by Margaret Fell, Jr. in gaol in Chester, wrote to Margaret Fell, Sr. praising her and her daughter and calling Fell, 'A nursing Mother thou art who feeds the hungry with good things, but the fat with judgment, who kills and stays the living and raises the dead'.¹⁰² Phyllis Mack points out that the archetypal female Quaker, who combines ecstatic prayer and public evangelising with the mundane work of everyday life and Quaker committee work, is called 'mother in Israel'.¹⁰³ Since Quakers address each other as brother and sister, it is consonant with their sense of their community as family to view the elders of the sect, the more established members, as fathers and mothers.

Such language implies a hierarchy of age and status based on the traditional family. Although such a hierarchy may ultimately be patriarchal in nature, it is nonetheless a hierarchy that can be appropriated by women, as is evident in the tract above where women extend their authority from the household outward to the community of Quakers. Moreover, family hierarchy allows women a place of respect and authority, unlike the binary nature of the gender hierarchy. It may also be that terms such as 'nursing father' and 'nursing mother' take advantage of the hierarchy of age. Indeed, critics of Fox such as William Mucklow complain that younger Quakers are oppressed by church elders wielding a hierarchy of status conflated with age.

In response to challenges to their authority, Quaker women (and their supporters) resorted to several lines of defence. They insisted on their spiritual equality, a fundamental tenet in Quaker theology. They eloquently argued for women's right to speak, creatively interpreting the Pauline injunction for

women's silence in church so as to limit applicability. And they claimed roles of leadership within the sect based on their own experience as governors of households. Quaker women had no compunction about insisting on the prerogatives of seniority in order to argue for gender equality. They could straightforwardly claim authority over servants and children. But their language of nursing mothers also allowed them maternal authority over other Quakers, authority with overtones of age and status. Paradoxically, then, Quaker women employed the rhetoric of hierarchy to claim their authority. In their case, the authority of age is effectively used to counter gender authority claimed by men. Quaker women, and those who defended their leadership in the Quaker community, supported one hierarchy in order to contest another.

Such support for the authority of age and a hierarchy that maintains distinctions of status is fundamentally conservative. It is a far cry from the enthusiastic practice of the Quakers of the 1650s. The mystical and ecstatic character of early Quakerism offered women an outlet to express freely their spirituality that by nature could not be controlled by patriarchal norms. It may at first appear that the increasing conservatism of the Quakers meant once again a loss for women. Certainly the Restoration crackdown on the radical sects was in part fuelled by fears of unruly women. But women's participation in public life need not only take the form of aggressive preaching in the streets. Women can also gain authority from their participation in the organisation of a quietist sect. Conservatism offers a different set of opportunities to women, and it can, as in the case of the Quakers, be liberating for women.

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Notes

- 1 Francis Howgill, *One of Antichrist's Voluntiers Defeated, and the True Light Vindicated* (London, 1660), p. 20.
- 2 George Keith, *The Woman-Preacher of Samaria a Better Preacher, and More Sufficiently Qualified to Preach than Any of the Men-Preachers of the Man-Made-Ministry in These Three Nations* (London, 1674), pp. 23–4.
- 3 William C. Braithwaite, *The Second Period of Quakerism*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 270.
- 4 Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1992), p. 155.
- 5 Francis Higginson, *A Brief Relation of the Irreligion of the Northern Quakers* (London, 1653), pp. 3–4. Cited in Mack, *Visionary Women*, p. 157.
- 6 Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England, 1500–1720* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 123.
- 7 On the practice of 'going naked as a sign', see Kenneth L. Carroll, 'Early Quakers and "Going Naked As A Sign"', *Quaker History*, 67 (1978), 69–87.

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- 8 Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1991; originally published by Maurice Temple Smith, 1972), p. 232.
- 9 See Barry Reay, *The Quakers and the English Revolution* (London: Temple Smith, 1985); Richard T. Vann, *The Social Development of English Quakerism, 1655–1755* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969); and Mack, *Visionary Women*. All trace a similar trajectory though Mack focuses on Quaker women.
- 10 Margaret J. M. Ezell, chapter 5, 'Breaking the Seventh Seal: Writings by Early Quaker Women', *Writing Women's Literary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), argues for a recovery of early Quaker women's writings which have been occluded by both feminist history and Quaker history. See, generally, the special issue of *Prose Studies*, 17.3 (December 1994) focusing on 'The Emergence of Quaker Writing: Dissenting Literature in Seventeenth-Century England', ed. Thomas N. Corns and David Loewenstein. For George Fox's apocalyptic writings, see David Loewenstein, 'The War of the Lamb: George Fox and the Apocalyptic Discourse of Revolutionary Quakerism', *Prose Studies*, 17.3 (1994), 25–41; for women's prophecy, see Elaine Hobby, 'Handmaids of the Lord and Mothers in Israel: Early Vindications of Quaker Women's Prophecy', *Prose Studies*, 17.3 (1994), 88–98.
- 11 A recent biography of Nayler is by Leo Damrosch, *The Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus: James Nayler and the Puritan Crackdown on the Free Spirit* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1996).
- 12 For a reading of the early conflict between Fox and Nayler, when Nayler's popularity overshadowed Fox in the city of London, see H. Larry Ingle, *First Among Friends: George Fox and the Creation of Quakerism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 128–33, 141–50. Ingle suggests that out of the struggle for leadership with Nayler, Fox created the monthly meetings to counter internal dissidents: 'Fox had adduced no standards, no criteria, to determine when or if Nayler and his followers stepped over the invisible line that divided authentic promptings from fraudulent illusions: the "filth and "deceit" Fox and others discerned they recognized by some process they never described. Now Fox had to fix a system that allowed others to see as clearly as he had in Nayler's case, to judge real leadings and detect false ones' (p. 150).
- 13 Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, pp. 249–51.
- 14 Christine Trevett, *Women and Quakerism in the Seventeenth Century* (York: The Ebor Press, 1991), p. 39. In this assessment, Trevett follows Ronald Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950). See also Maryann S. Feola: "'Warring with ye world": Fox's Relationship with Nayler', in *New Light on George Fox, 1624–1691: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Michael Mullett (York: The Ebor Press, 1993), pp. 101–109.
- 15 Isabel Ross, *Margaret Fell: Mother of Quakerism* (London: Longmans, 1949).
- 16 Maureen Bell, 'Mary Westwood Quaker Publisher', *Publishing History*, 23 (1988), 5–66.
- 17 Crawford, *Women and Religion*, p. 176.
- 18 On John Perrot, see Nigel Smith, 'Hidden Things Brought to Light: Enthusiasm and Quaker Discourse', *Prose Studies*, 17.3 (1994), 57–69, and 'Exporting Enthusiasm: John Perrot and the Quaker Epic', in *Literature and the English Civil War*,

- ed. Thomas Healy and Jonathan Sawday (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 248–64.
- 19 Trevett, *Women and Quakerism*, p. 40.
 - 20 See the historical account by Braithwaite, *The Second Period of Quakerism*, especially chapter 9. Recent work on the Quakers have tended to neglect this schism in favour of the more scandalous one involving Naylor.
 - 21 Crawford, *Women and Religion*, p. 162.
 - 22 Henry Walter, ed., *Works*, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1848–50), I, 296.
 - 23 Patricia Crawford argues that male sectarian leaders generally were caught between the criticism of outsiders for the disorderly women in their congregations and opposition from women within, and that women themselves were caught between conscience and duty to men, especially their husbands ('Historians, Women and the Civil War Sects, 1640–1660', in *Rulers, Religion and Rhetoric in Early Modern England: A Festschrift for Geoffrey Elton from his Australasian Friends* (Sydney: Paragon, 1988), pp. 19–32). See also, Keith V. Thomas, 'Women and the Civil War Sects', *Past and Present*, 13 (1958), 42–62, who argues for radicalism's impact on state and family; Claire Cross, "He-goats before the flocks": A Note on the Part Played by Women in the Founding of Some Civil War Churches', *Studies in Church History*, 8 (1972), 195–202; and Rachel Trubowitz, 'Female Preachers and Male Wives: Gender and Authority in Civil War England', in *Pamphlet Wars: Prose in the English Revolution*, ed. James Holstun (London: Frank Cass, 1992), pp. 112–33, who argues for the fluidity of gender boundaries in the period though such perceptions of gender operate only within a very narrow sphere.
 - 24 George Fox, *The Works of George Fox*, 8 vols (Philadelphia and New York: New Foundation Publication, 1990; reprinted from Philadelphia: M. T. C. Gould, 1831; first published 1706), IV, 104.
 - 25 Fox, *Works*, IV, 105.
 - 26 Jackson I. Cope, 'Seventeenth-Century Quaker Style', *PMLA*, 71 (1956), 738.
 - 27 See Maurice A. Creasey, "Inward" and "Outward": A Study of Early Quaker Language', *Journal of the Friends' Historical Society*, Supplement 30 (1962), 3–24.
 - 28 This use of 'wrest' is peculiar; for other separatists it is usually a term of abuse suggesting a forced interpretation.
 - 29 Fox, *Works*, IV, 104.
 - 30 Fox, *Works*, IV, 104.
 - 31 Fox, *Works*, IV, 104.
 - 32 Fox, *Works*, IV, 106–7.
 - 33 For a study of the Quaker view of silence as a necessary condition for receiving the truth of the Spirit, as suggested in Fox's passage, see Richard Bauman, *Let Your Words Be Few: Symbolism of Speaking and Silence among Seventeenth-Century Quakers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
 - 34 Fox, *Works*, IV, 109.
 - 35 Margaret Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified* (1667), introduction by David J. Latt, The Augustan Reprint Society number 194 (Los Angeles: Williams Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1979).
 - 36 For studies on Fell and Quaker defences of women preaching, see Susan Mosher Stuard, 'Women's Witnessing: A New Departure', in *Witnesses for Change*:

- Quaker Women Over Three Centuries*, ed. Elizabeth Potts Brown and Susan Mosher Stuard (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1989), pp. 3–25; Mary Ann Schofield, “‘Womens Speaking Justified’: The Feminine Quaker Voice, 1662–1797”, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 6 (1987), 61–77; and Judith Kegan Gardiner, ‘Re-Gendering Individualism: Margaret Fell Fox and Quaker Rhetoric’, in *Privileging Gender in Early Modern England*, ed. Jean R. Brink (Kirksville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1993), pp. 205–24.
- 37 Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, p. 8.
- 38 Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, p. 8.
- 39 Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, p. 8.
- 40 Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, p. 9.
- 41 Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, p. 9.
- 42 Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, p. 9.
- 43 Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, pp. 9–10.
- 44 Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, p. 6.
- 45 Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, p. 13.
- 46 Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, p. 13.
- 47 Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, p. 13.
- 48 Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, p. 5.
- 49 Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, p. 5.
- 50 Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, p. 17.
- 51 *Epistle From the Womens Yearly Meeting at York, 1688*, introduction by David J. Latt, The Augustan Reprint Society number 194 (Los Angeles: Williams Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1979), B2.
- 52 For the process of Quaker marriage discipline, see R. S. Mortimer, ‘Marriage Discipline in Early Friends: A Study in Church Administration illustrated from Bristol Records’, *The Journal of the Friends’ Historical Society*, 48 (1957), 175–95. For Quaker views on marriage, see Jacques Tual, ‘Sexual Equality and Conjugal Harmony: The Way to Celestial Bliss: A View of Early Quaker Matrimony’, *The Journal of the Friends’ Historical Society*, 55.6 (1988), 161–74.
- 53 Bauman, chapter 9, ‘Where Is The Power That Was At First? The Prophetic Ministry and the Routinization of Charisma’, *Let Your Words Be Few*, pp. 137–53. Max Weber argues that charisma ‘is undiminished, consistent and effective only in statu nascendi . . . When the tide that lifted a charismatically led group out of everyday life flows back into the channels of workaday routines, at least the “pure” form of charismatic domination will wane and turn into an “institution”’ (*Economy and Society*, 2 vols, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), p. 1121). See also chapter 2 of Arnold Lloyd, *Quaker Social History, 1669–1738* (London: Longmans, 1950), chapters 8–10 of Mack, *Visionary Women*, and chapter 3 of Trevett, *Women and Quakerism*.
- 54 Richard Mucklow, *The Spirit of the Hat* (London, 1673), sig. A1.
- 55 Mucklow, *Spirit of the Hat*, p. 29.
- 56 Mucklow, *Spirit of the Hat*, pp. 29–30.
- 57 Mucklow, *Spirit of the Hat*, p. 35.
- 58 Mucklow, *Spirit of the Hat*, p. 30.
- 59 Mucklow, *Spirit of the Hat*, p. 30.
- 60 Mucklow, *Spirit of the Hat*, p. 32.

- 61 Mucklow, *Spirit of the Hat*, p. 42.
- 62 In his study of Quaker publication, Thomas O'Malley points out that criticisms of the separatists that Fox was seeking to gain control of Quaker printing in order to disseminate his views were accurate: 'Fox was using the system of church government that he had established to impose his notions of uniformity on the movement through publications passed by the Second Day Meeting and the Meeting for Sufferings' ("Defying the Powers and Tempering the Spirit". A Review of Quaker Control over their Publications 1672–1689', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 33 (1982), 85–86).
- 63 William Rogers, *The Christian-Quaker* (London, 1680), Preface, sig. C3v.
- 64 Lloyd, *Quaker Social History*, p. 154. See, generally, Lloyd, chapter 11, 'The Quaker Press', *ibid.*, pp. 147–56, and Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History*, pp. 141–5.
- 65 Rogers, *Christian-Quaker*, Part 1, p. 26.
- 66 Rogers, *Christian-Quaker*, Part 3, p. 30.
- 67 Rogers, *Christian-Quaker*, Part 3, p. 52.
- 68 Rogers, *Christian-Quaker*, Part 1, p. 64.
- 69 Rogers, *Christian-Quaker*, Part 1, p. 64.
- 70 Rogers, *Christian-Quaker*, Part 1, p. 66.
- 71 Rogers, *Christian-Quaker*, Part 1, p. 66.
- 72 Rogers, *Christian-Quaker*, Part 4, sig. A1.
- 73 Rogers, *Christian-Quaker*, Part 1, pp. 92–93.
- 74 Rogers, *Christian-Quaker*, Part 4, p. 43.
- 75 Rogers, *Christian-Quaker*, Part 4, p. 96.
- 76 Rogers, *Christian-Quaker*, Part 5, p. 44.
- 77 Rogers, *Christian-Quaker*, Part 5, p. 46.
- 78 Rogers, *Christian-Quaker*, Preface, sig. B3.
- 79 Rogers, *Christian-Quaker*, Part 3, p. 38.
- 80 William Mather, *A Novelty: Or, a Government of Women, Distinct from Men, Erected amongst some of the People, call'd Quakers* (London, 1694), sig. A1.
- 81 Mather, *Novelty*, p. 4.
- 82 For seventeenth-century sexual satires on women for taking on male roles, see Sharon Achinstein, 'Women on Top in the Pamphlet Literature of the English Revolution', *Women's Studies*, 24 (1994), 131–63; and Susan Wiseman, "Adam, the Father of all Flesh", Porno-Political Rhetoric and Political Theory in and After the English Civil War', in *Pamphlet Wars: Prose in the English Revolution*, ed. James Holstun (London: Frank Cass, 1992), pp.112–33.
- 83 Mather, *Novelty*, p. 4.
- 84 Mather, *Novelty*, p. 7.
- 85 Mather, *Novelty*, p. 10.
- 86 Mather, *Novelty*, p. 11.
- 87 Mather, *Novelty*, p. 12.
- 88 Fox, *An Encouragement*, p. 20.
- 89 Fox, *An Encouragement*, p. 44.
- 90 Fox, *An Encouragement*, p. 76.
- 91 Fox, *An Encouragement*, p. 77.
- 92 Fox, *An Encouragement*, p. 90.
- 93 Anne Whitehead and Mary Elson, *An Epistle for True Love, Unity and Order in*

- the Church of Christ, Against the Spirit of Discord, Disorder and Confusion, &c.* (London, 1680), p. 14.
- 94 Mary Foster, Mary Elson, Anne Travice, Ruth Crowch, Susannah Dew, Mary Plumfield, *A Living Testimony From the Power and Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ in our Faithful Womens Meeting and Christian Society* [sic] (London, 1685).
- 95 Foster et al., *Living Testimony*, p. 4.
- 96 Mather, *Novelty*, p. 5.
- 97 Mathr, *Novelty*, p. 7.
- 98 Milton D. Speizman and Jane C. Kronick, ed., 'A Seventeenth-Century Quaker Women's Declaration', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1 (1975), 242.
- 99 Speizman and Kronick, ed., 'Seventeenth-Century Quaker Women's Declaration', p. 243.
- 100 Margaret Askew Fell Fox, *A Brief Collection of Remarkable Passages and Occurrences relating to the Birth, Education, Life, Conversion, Travels, Services, and Deep Sufferings of that Ancient, Eminent, and Faithful Servant of the Lord, Margaret Fell; but by her second marriage, Margaret Fox* (London, 1710).
- 101 Spence MS III, 24–26; quoted in Ros, *Margaret Fell*, p. 36.
- 102 Swarthmore MSS. I, 197; quoted in Ros, *Margaret Fell*, p. 25.
- 103 Mack, *Visionary Women*, p. 215.

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