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Transcending the cultural and socio-political conditions in Friends decision-making processes: case of Burundi

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

TRANSCENDING THE CULTURAL AND SOCIO-POLITICAL CONDITIONS IN
FRIENDS DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES:
CASE OF BURUNDI

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on March 14, 2013
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Global Perspectives.

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ABSTRACT

The basic concept is that the Friends are searching for ways to make decisions that are spiritual and culturally sound. This study aims to promote a Spirit-led decision-making process, to encourage the leaders to find Biblically based principles of decision making, and to help build the capacity of the participants to understand what their attitude should be during the decision-making processes. The study also looks at how cultural and socio-political conditions that might hinder the application of good decision-making processes can be transcended.

The study examines carefully the Friends origins and the structures through which Friends met to decide on a proper response to the needs of the time. Seeing that this study focuses on elements of how to transcend cultural and socio-political conditions in making decisions specifically among Burundi Friends, it also narrates about the history of Friends, from the sending of the first missionaries to their establishment in the country. An understanding on how scriptural evidence can inspire how unity is reached and how to attain agreement is discussed.

In order to fully grasp the situation in Burundi as it relates to decision making, a light is shed on other churches' experiences, and both protestant and Catholic denominations are briefly looked at. Drawing from some available Burundi material on the secular traditional way, the study explores the decision-making processes in the past and in the present. It looks into the present time and analyzes the patterns that the various government regimes have followed. The last part of the study presents to the reader the acquirements necessary to understand what decision making should be and convinces the

reader that there are indeed cultural and socio-political conditions that must be transcended in order to make effective decisions.

INTRODUCTION

Friends leaders in Burundi are searching for ways to make decisions in a way that is both spiritually and culturally sound, but there have been difficulties in this quest. This study aims to promote a Spirit-led decision-making process, to encourage the leaders to find Biblically based principles of decision making, and to help Christian groups build the capacity of their participants to understand what their attitude should be during the decision-making processes.

It might be argued that Friends have not had more conflicts than other Christian churches and groups, because Friends have always sought to distinguish themselves as a peace church. Yet they have had many internal conflicts. One of the reasons is probably due to the ways in which the decisions have been made. At its best, the decision-making process of Friends should strengthen the group's unity, not divide it, but there are particular challenges in that decision-making process. A much-needed change must take place through a better understanding of how a decision-making process is constructed within a hierarchical culture. Cultures in much of Africa feature strong leaders and this often carries over to the church. It is important to look at the cultural biases that might hinder the application of effective and Spirit-led decision-making processes.

This study points that Friends in Burundi would benefit greatly from a process that is: (1) Spirit-led and biblical, (2) faithful to the Quaker way, and (3) widely accepted by participants. What we mean by "Spirit-led and biblical" is a decision-making process that is being done with a worshipful heart and with the use of Biblical discernment. By "faithful to the Quaker way" we mean, the participants remain within the Quaker tradition of following a sense of the meeting that has historically characterized their

meetings for business. “Decisions that are widely accepted” are those that are made in a spirit of oneness and made after unity has been reached, even if it takes multiple sessions.

This study explores issues relating to transcending cultural and socio-political conditions in decision making among Burundi Friends. In this study, various processes are explored with the objective of determining if the cultural and socio-political conditions might indeed hinder the process of making decisions. The relationship between the Friends’ decision-making processes and the hierarchical decision-making in the Burundian cultural context will be explored. How best can leaders corporately discern God’s will within the context of the Friend's tradition and the Burundian hierarchical context? Our hope is that Friends’ insights into listening to and obeying the Holy Spirit will also benefit other Christian groups.

Chapter 1 discusses the historical background of Quaker beliefs and practices traditions in order to learn why Friends took the approach they did in conducting their meetings for business and on what philosophy they based these decision-making processes. It is interesting to realize that governance in the Friends Church gave greater importance to the authority of the group than the individual. That is why they carefully sought God’s guidance and waited upon the God’s leading toward a decision they could unite on as a group. The chapter examines the origins of Friends under the leadership of George Fox and the structures through which Friends made decisions.

Seeing that this study focuses on elements of how to transcend culture in making decisions specifically among Burundi Friends, it is necessary, in chapter 2, to define what is meant by culture and to narrate about the history of Friends, from the sending of the first missionaries to their establishment in the country. The study also looks at how they

proceeded in applying the Friends principles in the Burundi and looks at how their governance related to decision making. This also chapter gives a brief historical overview of how the local leaders after independence applied the lessons learned from the missionaries as they made their decisions.

Chapter 3 discusses how scriptural concepts influenced how unity is reached and how agreement is achieved. The study attempts to understand some Scriptures of both the New Testament and the Old Testament as they relate to decision-making processes and as practiced by Friends. These teachings are drawn particularly from the New Testament, where we learn how the Apostles handled complex issues that needed their attention. Scriptures are explored that indicate the right attitude of the participants in a decision-making process. The concept of allowing the guidance of the Holy Spirit is of central importance, since the theology of almost all Christians emphasizes the Holy Spirit as the presence of God within any body of believers.

In order to fully grasp the hierarchical culture in Burundi as it relates to decision making, chapter 4 sheds light on how other churches, both Protestant and Catholic, make decisions. The Protestant churches that are explored include the Pentecostal Evangelical Fellowship of Africa, the Union of the Baptist Churches of Burundi, the United Methodist Church, and the Anglican Church of Burundi. The information gathered from these churches came from personal conversations with the leaders of those denominations as well as examining available written documents. As far the Catholic Church is concerned, an extensive study has been done to explore its relationship with both the monarchy in Burundi and the colonial powers.

Drawing from information about Burundi's culture in general, chapter 5 explores the decision-making processes in the past and present. The chapter also looks into the patterns that the various governmental regimes have followed. The decision making at the royal court is studied along with decision making at the community level. Burundi's system of eldership had its own way of reaching unity as processes for mediating disputes and we will examine this. The chapter also includes a psychosocial analysis of the factors affecting the decision-making process in the recent past.

The concluding chapter brings all the information together to demonstrate that there are cultural biases that must be transcended in order to make effective church decisions. The chapter creatively offers an acronym of what a good Friends decision-making process looks like. It points out the shortcomings in other types of decision-making processes and introduces the practical concepts that, if followed, could make a great difference in decision-making processes in Christian groups. It summarizes all the issues discussed in the previous chapters and emphasizes lessons to be applied not only for Friends but to any another Christian organization or denomination.

It is the wish of the author of this study that the reader would find the methods presented in this dissertation to be practical and scripturally sound. It is also hoped that the concepts discussed would be applied by groups of Christian believers in general and Friends in particular and that this will improve the way decisions are made. The emphasis throughout the study has been on the work of the Holy Spirit to guide the decision-making process. The author's hope is that the Spirit-led and biblically sound decisions will not only be owned by those that make them but also be adhered to.

CHAPTER 1
HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE FRIENDS TRADITION IN THE
DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

In considering how Friends have made their decisions since their earliest establishment, one must first explore how it has been done since the beginning of the Friends Church in England. Shann Ray Ferch, in *Forgiveness and Power in the Age of Atrocity: Servant Leadership as a Way of Life*, says that “the influence of the Religious Society of Friends is notable in world history, perhaps especially because their way of life is just that: influential, or more precisely, dedicated to persuasion.”¹

George Fox, the founder of the Friends Church, was born in 1621. He felt a profound spiritual hunger and started searching for an answer to his condition while he was still young. In 1643, the earnest youth left home and traveled in search of spiritual fulfillment. After many painful experiences, he said he found One who spoke to his condition, and he came in 1646 to rely on the ‘Inner Light of the Living Christ.’² George Fox began his preaching ministry in 1647 and lived until 1691.³

The preaching of George Fox was not only limited to the spread of the Truth, but also provided some direction on how the early Quakers could sustain their movement. One of Fox’s concerns was how to put in place structures that could facilitate “reading

¹ Shann Ray Ferch, *Forgiveness and Power in the Age of Atrocity: Servant Leadership as a Way of Life* (New York: Lexington Books, 2012), 131.

² James D. Douglas, Philip W. Comfort, and Donald Mitchell. *Who's Who in Christian History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), 253.

³ Elbert Russell, *The History of Quakerism* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1943), xix.

the advices and for exhortations.”⁴ This led to arranging what came to be known as monthly meetings, quarterly meetings, and yearly meetings, the names coming from their frequency. This arrangement worked well enough that it is still practiced among most Friends today. George Fox’s favorite place for both worship and business was the monthly meeting, which he considered as the strongest structure as compared to the other two, namely the quarterly meeting and the yearly meeting. It was through this structure that Friends channeled their contributions to respond to the needs of those among Friends who were being persecuted and imprisoned. It was therefore necessary for them to make appropriate decisions about the welfare of their people. “At first, the Quaker meetings for worship had to give priority to caring for the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned.”⁵

Donald Thomas, in his little book, *Quaker Origins, Worship & Identity*, gives us a concise history about the period when Friends emerged as a significant religious movement. He says that during the civil war in England from 1642 to 1648, which opposed Oliver Cromwell’s army and that of King Charles I, Friends sought “to transform both individual lives and society.”⁶ Sometimes Friends’ convictions brought them into conflict with the laws and expectations of their government and society, for example, their refusal to perform military service and their desire to break down some of the society’s inequalities. Large numbers of Quakers were imprisoned for their faithfulness to their consciences. George Fox himself “was imprisoned on eight separate

⁴ Ibid., 217.

⁵ Jack L. Willcuts, *Why Friends are Friends* (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 1984), 78.

⁶ Thomas, B. Donald, *Quaker Origins, Worship and Identity* (Nairobi: Kaimosi Friends Press, 2010), 7.

occasions, and his wife Margaret Fell, the widow of Judge Fell, was imprisoned several times. At one point there were said to be about 4,000 Quakers in prison.”⁷

Friends were committed to caring for their own people and others in society who had great needs, so they had to determine how to go about that work. It was not clear at first who would take responsibility among the Friends to respond to the need. Women’s yearly meetings and youth yearly meetings were already in operation as early as 1683, “to consider the problems and character of the ministry and for mutual encouragement,”⁸ but it was not clear at first whether they were the ones who would be assigned to this work. For example, the large number of Quakers who were imprisoned drew their attention to the deplorable conditions there. Thomas says that “the conditions in prison were awful and the suffering was so great that Friends who were not imprisoned established regular meetings to share information about the needs of those who were in trouble and to find ways to support them.”⁹ They knew what needed to be done, but were not sure how to go about it. One of the Epistles from the Women Friends in London in 1674 reads as follows:

The services have been and are; -- to visit the sick and the prisoners that suffer for the testimony of Jesus; to see they are supplied with things needful; -- and relieving the poor, making provision for the needy, aged, and weak, that are incapable of work;-- a due consideration for the widows, and care taken of the fatherless children and the poor orphans, (according to their capacities) for their education and bringing up in good nurture and in the fear of the Lord; and putting them out to trades in the wholesome order of the creation...¹⁰

⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁸ Russell, 217.

⁹ Thomas, 11.

¹⁰ Ibid., 132.

As Friends began determining what needed to be done, it was the putting in place of what Friends called the “birthright membership” that seemed to determine who would take part in the decision-making processes. Having some kind of system for Quaker membership was important before they began to make decisions, since they needed to know the composition of the meetings in which decisions are made. Concerning those who would be permitted to participate in the decision-making process, it is stressed that “The beginning of the new era in Quaker history is marked by the establishment of birthright membership in 1737 and the first written book of discipline in England in 1738.”¹¹ By the phrase “book of discipline,” they meant a written document “largely based on the so-called ‘Canons and Institutions’ of George Fox with the addition of yearly meetings decisions, extracts from the epistles, rules, regulations, principles, queries and advices.”¹² This laid the foundation for the establishment of a movement that had tangible principles and guidelines agreed upon by its members.

According to Russell, the birthright membership was considered as very important during the business meetings even though there seemed to be an awareness that there were Friends who were neglected and not invited. Russell gives the following account: “Since the business meetings were ‘select,’ it was the custom to hold a ‘general monthly meeting’ every three months to which the whole membership was invited (including women and servants) for reading the advices and for exhortations.”¹³ This account implies that those who did not get invited had to wait for the general monthly

¹¹ Ibid., 215.

¹² Ibid., 223.

¹³ Ibid., 217.

meeting, once in three months, to be informed about what was going on. If this is the case, one can therefore conclude that some Friends meetings were specially organized to include specific participants. Here we cite again Russell giving us a picture of some specific Friends attending meetings in early days. He talks about the London Yearly Meeting being composed of “public Friends”¹⁴ at its beginning, and the nomination of “prudent solid Friends to sit with the ministers in these meetings.”¹⁵

In addition to select members in the early times, there were also selective meetings for business. These select meetings are helpful in understanding early Friends decision-making processes as well. It is crucial to analyze how these meetings gradually took shape and what characteristics they took. “In America the regular yearly meetings for business were more democratic in character so that separate meetings for those especially concerned with the public ministry seemed more necessary.”¹⁶ Through this information, one understands that the regular meetings for business were facilitated in a way that they were open to all, but also gave room to Friends to address some specific issues separately. It is implied that, for example, Friends who were concerned with the public ministry met to deal with their concern. So far, already, it is evident that Friends were accustomed to holding meetings. In this early period there were many issues to be dealt with and Friends found a number of settings in which they could deal with these issues.

¹⁴ Ibid., 217.

¹⁵ Ibid., 218.

¹⁶ Ibid., 217.

The Friends Capacity of Making Decisions

“George Fox believed that a seed existed in all humans, called the ‘inner light,’ that each person must follow to find God.”¹⁷ This concept is powerful to Friends traditions even though it was interpreted in a variety of ways later in the development of the Friends movement. Today, there are some Friends who would usually be described as theological liberals who have claimed the term “seed” as the driving force in decision-making processes. On the other hand, the evangelical Friends have understood the concept of “seed” to mean the inner presence and the leading of the Holy Spirit. In spite of these differences, both the liberals and the evangelicals share a trend to finding God’s truth in a particular situation and doing that in an effective and orderly way. Of course, for the evangelicals, the Scriptures are extremely important, especially when they relate to harmony and peace.

Harmony within oneself and within the community was the core indicator of the leading of the Spirit. For the evangelical Friends, “everything that happens in the life of the church springs out of worship, our interaction and the guidance of God through the Holy Spirit. Decisions, action, worship, business sessions, all ministries of whatever nature will be under the guidance of Christ and the empowering of His Spirit.”¹⁸ For the unprogrammed, just as George Fox looked for the “inner light” for inspiration, they also consider it as a personal capacity in everyone, which is neither “intellect nor natural reason nor morality, but a capacity to recognize and accept God.”¹⁹ They, too, agree with

¹⁷ James P. Eckman, *Exploring Church History* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 68.

¹⁸ Willcuts, 75.

¹⁹ Mark Galli and Ted Olsen, *131 Christians Everyone Should Know* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 176.

the evangelicals on the goal of achieving harmony and unity. George Fox was also concerned with the principle of harmony and therefore encouraged Friends to strive for it and bring it to the meetings they attended.²⁰ It was through this environment of harmony and oneness that their free will was most easily exercised. Speaking about free will, Augustine was “offended with those who deny free will; it is certain he elsewhere admits, that without the Spirit the will of man is not free, inasmuch as it is subject to lusts which chain and master it.”²¹ It is therefore through the “Spirit-filled life”²² that Friends could unchain themselves and free themselves to make appropriate decisions according to the free will that Augustine talks about.

Friends adopted the concept of the free will, as did other Christians in their time. For them, the free will meant a freedom to distinguish what was right for the body of Friends from what was not in compliance to their testimony. David Bebbington, in his *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, in describing the early Friends, says, “the central notion in the early nineteenth century remained ‘the light within’, the guiding principle, to be distinguished from reason or conscience, that is given to each human being.”²³ As a historian, David Bebbington emphasizes this core value among the Friends. It was this inner light that guided and made it possible for Friends to make decisions.

²⁰ Robert Halliday, *Mind the Oneness: The Foundation of Good Quaker Business Method* (Euston Road, London: Quaker House, 2010), 25.

²¹ John Calvin, “Augustine's Doctrine of ‘Free Will.’” Monergism.
<http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/deprived.html#eight.htm>

²² Halliday, 23.

²³ David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 155.

For Friends, exercising one's will in making decisions was not engaging in debate. Rather, issues were raised and decisions were made in the same expectant waiting upon the Spirit as in the meeting for worship.²⁴ Jack Willcuts, a prominent evangelical Friend of the twentieth century, says in *Why Friends are Friends*: "Dogmatic persons who speak with an air of finality or assume the tone of a debater determined to win may be a serious hindrance. Eloquence to appeal only to the emotion is out of place."²⁵ Debating and winning the argument at the decision-making process was not what early Friends wanted. Only the will of God was what they needed to see done.

Friends were also conscientious that care had to be taken that the enduring value of a spiritual community was not sacrificed to the immediate goal of action during a business meeting, recognizing that individual insights might bring to the meeting the will of God, and that the silence of some was often of greater significance than the speech of others.²⁶ "Those who come to meeting not so much to find the Lord's will as to win acceptance of their own opinions may find their views carry little weight."²⁷ Here again, it is clearly evident that even though Friends were to exercise their own will to make decisions, the ultimate goal was to find God's will.

In George Fox's *Book of Miracles*, he writes, "Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts, and then thou wilt feel the principle of God to turn thy mind to the Lord God, whereby thou wilt receive this strength and power from whence

²⁴ *Faith and Practice of New England Yearly Meeting of Friends* (West Chester, PA: Graphic Standard, Inc. 1986), 221.

²⁵ Willcuts, 82.

²⁶ *Faith and Practice*, 222.

²⁷ Willcuts, 82.

life comes to allay all tempests against blusterings and storms.”²⁸ In these admonitions, Fox draws the attention of the participants in the decision-making process to maintain the right attitude and be sensitive to God’s leading. His point is that this attitude is possible when Friends tune their mind to God and that even if the participants may be distracted in many ways, they will be empowered to overcome whatever might cause them not to understand and follow the will of God.

Because of this call to the conditioning of the mind that was set in the beginnings of Fox’s ministry, “Many Friends settle into silence by reflecting on the old Quaker saying, ‘Turn in thy mind to the Light, and wait upon God.’”²⁹ There is also, among Friends, “the common call to listening for the movement of the Spirit, for nurturing others’ attentiveness to God’s guidance, for holy obedience, and for prophetic ministry... and how we might be more faithful to the divine purpose.”³⁰

This is what Veli-Matti calls the unmediated access to God that the people sought during the reformation time. He asserts that according to Friends, “each person is capable of a personal, direct relationship with God.”³¹ Friends rejected the idea that someone seemed to have the right to go into God’s presence more than others and that he or she enjoyed the privilege of interceding on behalf of the rest. For Friends, access to God had to be unmediated, since all were invited to listen to and follow God’s voice. James

²⁸ Henry J. Cadbury, *George Fox’s ‘Book of Miracles’* (Philadelphia, PA: Quaker Uniting in Publication, 2000), 98-99.

²⁹ Brent J. Bill, *Holy Silence: The Gift of Quaker Spirituality* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2006), 95.

³⁰ Margaret P. Abbott and Peggy S. Parsons, eds. *Walk Worthy of Your Calling* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 2004), 269.

³¹ Veli-Matti Karkkainen. *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 63.

Eckman, writing about a period during which the Quaker movement developed, says that “The Protestantism of the seventeenth century had become cold, impersonal, and, for some, stifling,”³² and that is the reason why some movements such as the Friends were developed in response to the situation. Since, for Friends, the understanding of God’s will was unmediated, it was important to design good procedures to discern God’s will, and for them the best procedure was that which was found through the Spirit-led decision-making process.

Decision Making Among Early Friends Compared to Decision Making in the Broader Society

Until the middle of the twentieth century, the term “decision making,” was not generally used in the business context. According to Leigh Buchanan and Andrew O’Connell, the term was introduced by a retired telephone executive, Chester Barnard, and it “began to replace narrower descriptors such as ‘resource allocation’ and ‘policy making’.”³³ The concept was picked up by other theorists and they began to try to give meaning to it. One particular person, William Starbuck, professor in residence at the University of Oregon’s Charles H. Lundquist College of Business, explained that policy making is different from decision making in the sense that there are always public resources that people will need to allocate. He added that “‘decision’ implies the end of deliberation and the beginning of action.”³⁴ The concept of the term “decision making,” being somewhat new in the sense that it was used to replace the term “policy making”,

³² Eckman, 68.

³³ Leigh Buchanan and Andrew O’Connell, “A Brief History of Decision Making,” Harvard Business Review, January 2006. <http://hbr.org/2006/01/a-brief-history-of-decision-making/ar/1> (accessed September 11, 2012).

³⁴ Ibid.

seems to have gained more popularity. Even though the public administration and business world seem to be no different as far as deliberating on which course of action to follow, it is clear that the term “decision making” is much more user friendly in the sense that it suggests that everyone can be part of the process.

Before the concept of decision making or policy-making processes, Leigh Buchanan and Andrew O’Cibbell observed that “man, facing uncertainty, sought guidance from the stars.”³⁵ Now that people are probably no longer seeking guidance from the stars and other magical ways; insights about decision making processes have developed in the business world and have become available to apply to other societal organizations. Friends are among those who have developed decision-making processes and who are getting a reputation about a particular one. As said earlier, they have applied the Spirit-led decision-making process even though, paradoxically, some few Friends, when faced with an impasse, are taking a vote.

Those who think that taking a vote is the best process rationalize that it gives an opportunity for everyone to participate. According to the meaning of vote, it is expected that those who participate in meeting for business should be able to express their opinion, approve or disapprove. And this is probably why Albie Sachs argues that “The vote of each and every citizen is a badge of dignity and personhood. Quite literally, it says that everybody counts.”³⁶ The point this makes is that the participation of every member in the process is important and the process recognizes each one’s vote on an equal basis. One of the common obstacles that must be faced by those who are not so sure the Friends

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Albie Sachs, *The Strange Alchemy of Life and Law* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2009), 122.

discernment process should be adopted is the widespread belief that democracy is the most desirable decision-making process. On the other hand, Friends are not fundamentally opposed to democracy in the political setting. Rather, their process is based on the understanding that God's followers understand that they operate within a theocracy, not a democracy. The goal when Christians gather to make decisions is to listen to God's voice: not to find what the majority can support, but find what those present understand to be God's will.

Friends are aware that there are other types of decision-making processes in the broader society. For the purpose of this study, let us consider what the *Leadership Management Development Center, Inc.* has to say about the different types of decision making. In 1997, the Center put on their website what they identified as a concise definition and explanation of each type of decision making. The following is taken from the Center's website:

Democratic decision making is when the leader gives up ownership and control of a decision and allows the group to vote. Majority vote will decide the action. Advantages include a fairly fast decision, and a certain amount of group participation. The disadvantage of this style includes no responsibility. An individual is not responsible for the outcome. In fact, even the group feels no real responsibility because some members will say, "I didn't vote for that." Lack of group and personal responsibility seems to disqualify this style of decision making; however, the democratic style does have its place in business.

Autocratic decision making is when the leader maintains total control and ownership of the decision. The leader is also completely responsible for the good or bad outcome as a result of the decision. The leader does not ask for any suggestions or ideas from outside sources and decides from his or her own internal information and perception of the situation. Advantages include a very fast decision, and personal responsibility by the leader, for the outcome. If an emergency situation exists, the autocratic style is usually the best choice. The disadvantages are varied and sometimes include less than desired effort from the people that must carry out the decision. If the employee is personally affected by the decision but not included when the decision is made, morale and effort may or may not suffer. It is not always predictable. If the outcome for the decision is not

positive, members of the organization begin to feel they could have done a better job themselves and the leader may lose credibility.

Collective - Participative decision making is when the leader involves the members of the organization. Other perspectives of the situation are discovered because the leader deliberately asks and encourages others to participate by giving their ideas, perceptions, knowledge, and information concerning the decision. The leader maintains total control of the decision because, although outside information is considered, the leader alone decides. The leader is also completely responsible for the good or bad outcome as a result of the decision. The advantages include some group participation and involvement. This is especially valuable when a person is affected negatively by the decision. In most cases, the individual is informed before the decision is implemented (no surprises) and usually feels good about personal involvement. If the leader is a good communicator, and listens carefully to the information collected, he or she will usually have a more accurate understanding of the situation and make a better decision. The disadvantages of this style include a fairly slow, time consuming decision; less security, because so many people are involved in the decision.

Consensus decision making is when the leader gives up total control of the decision. The complete group is totally involved in the decision. The leader is not individually responsible for the outcome. The complete organization or group is now responsible for the outcome. This is not a democratic style because everyone must agree and “buy in” on the decision. If total commitment and agreement by everyone is not obtained the decision becomes democratic. The advantages include group commitment and responsibility for the outcome. Teamwork and good security is also created because everyone has a stake in the success of the decision. A more accurate decision is usually made, with a higher probability of success, because so many ideas, perspectives, skills and “brains” were involved in the creation. The disadvantages include a very slow and extremely time consuming decision. It is also a lot of work getting everyone in the organization involved. It takes skill and practice for a group to learn how to work together.³⁷

In summary, the four styles are an autocratic decision-making process in which the leader accepts responsibility for the outcome; a democratic process that involves voting; a collective participatory style where everyone is given the opportunity to provide input but the leader still makes the final decision; and finally a consensus process in

³⁷ Leadership Management Development Center, Inc. “Decision Making Styles.” Leadership Management. <http://www.leadershipmanagement.com/html-files/decision.htm> (accessed September 13, 2012).

which the leader understands that the group is responsible for the decision and everyone must agree.

Just as discussed above, it might appear as if “consensus” is the best description of Friends decision making. But because the typical consensus process does not focus on knowing God’s will together, we cannot recommend it for Friends decision making. But compared with the democratic, autocratic, and participative styles, consensus comes closest to the Friends practice. Friends still consider this process as not the best, not even when the clerk is doing what Emory Griffin suggests in *Getting Together: A Guide for Good Groups!* “You try to be impartial, giving everyone an equal chance to voice his or her opinion. After an agreed upon period of time, you call for a vote.”³⁸ The trouble with this concept, as seen by Friends, is that when a vote is about to be taken, there are those who will not be ready. The calling of the vote might be implying that there is nothing else to be added or to be explained. Another problem is an assumption or even a reality that there are those who might be ready to agree and those who might not be ready to agree. Griffin says that “One of the drawbacks of voting is that it splits the group into two opposing camps.”³⁹ Friends see this fact as true and therefore would not support a taking of vote as the best decision-making process especially because they always seek unity amongst themselves instead of condoning the ideal of two camps seeking to win against each other.

The consensus is also another process that is not supported by the Friends traditions. Griffin puts a strong emphasis on the leader, saying that “how the leader leads

³⁸ Emory A. Griffin, *Getting Together: A Guide for Good Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 68.

³⁹ Ibid.

is crucial for consensus to be reached.”⁴⁰ In an effort to suggest that the consensus is the best decision-making process, he gives four guidelines that he thinks would work if the leader is handling the process in the right way. The summary below shows what those guidelines are and what they mean, but still there is a missing element that is crucial to the Friends. The element that is missing is so important that, even if the Griffin’s guidelines are as good as one can imagine, the worship element cannot be replaced by the consensus process.

First, he says that as the clerk, you should “announce your intentions right from the start. Let folks know that you are prepared to hash things out until the group reaches a decision that everyone can support.”⁴¹ He stresses on the fact that the participants should be ready to support each other. While listening to each other is very important even to Friends, it lacks the spiritual environment in which the listening takes place and it ignores the important theological understanding of decision making, that a group of believers is not really seeking unanimity, but unity in their understanding of the Holy’s Spirit’s guidance.

The second guideline is for the leader or the clerk to “be a process person. As leader your concern is more on how the group decides as opposed to which of the six options they pick.”⁴² Here the important thing is how the agreement on the outcome is processed. In other words the agreement should assure that the participants are united. But even here, the uniting element is missing. For Friends, oneness is possible only through the Spirit, not just through careful listening to one another. This leaves one to

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

understand that in most cases participants will not be united unless they have a unifying factor, even if they have the same interests.

The third of Griffin's principles for achieving consensus is to "encourage open expression of disagreement. Conflict isn't necessarily bad. It can be healthy. It's quite probable that some members have come to the group with hidden agendas (pet ideas that they are privately committed to). If these thoughts stay beneath the surface, they'll keep people from honestly considering other possibilities. They'll shoot down everyone else's plan, and you'll never know why. Better to get all the ideas on the table."⁴³ This freedom to disagree will bring into the open any hidden agendas that the participants might have brought with them and which they are committed to support privately. It is those thoughts, he argues, which are deep in people's minds that might be a hindrance to unity, if they are not put on the table. If the clerk does not allow them, then people will not be honest and will not be able to listen to one another. While this may be true, one can also think of instances in which participants have expressed disagreements without understanding why they are disagreeing. Others may simply be afraid to express what is on their mind for fear they won't be heard or for fear of hurting other people's feelings. According to Friends, the Spirit will help the participants be able to express the truth in love and to be bold enough to say what is on their heart and mind.

Finally, Griffin advises the clerk in these terms:

Don't expect complete unanimity. That's not really your goal—which is indeed fortunate, because it's almost impossible to achieve this side of heaven. What you're shooting for is a solution that can gain everybody's approval. A lot of folks aren't sure what's best. But everybody has strong opinions about what's worst. I may not know what I'm for, but I sure know what I'm against. So your job is to

⁴³ Ibid.

help people discuss an alternative that all favor, even if it isn't first on everyone's list.⁴⁴

This could be interpreted that the leader should be aware that those keeping silent are not necessarily in agreement. Of course there will be those who will openly say that they are disagreeing, but the leader should be attentive for the disagreements that are not being expressed as well. Usually the number of those who will speak up will be smaller in comparison to those who will simply keep quiet when they are not in agreement. And again, for Friends, it is not a matter of numbers. Also, it is not a matter of hiding behind either those who speak or do not speak. It is a matter of who listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit to say what is on their heart and mind, regardless of whether it will be supported by the rest of the participants or not.

As mentioned above, even if Griffin's guidelines are helpful and in fact appropriate to a secular group, they still cannot be equated to a process that takes place in a worshipful manner with God's presence as the driving force. The problem is that in most cases, the participants attend meetings for business with only this stereotype that "Usually the collective wisdom of the group will be greater than the knowledge of any individual,"⁴⁵ without opening up for the source of that wisdom. And because they somewhat ignore the importance of waiting upon the Lord as the source of the wisdom they need, they end up becoming vulnerable. By being vulnerable they run the danger of being influenced by anyone who wants to reach his or her own interests.

In most cases, it is the leader who takes advantage of the participants' uncertainty as to what the will of God is, and tells them that God has spoken through him or her to do

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 69.

this and that. Father Emmanuel Katongole laments that the church thus becomes ineffective to address the social issues that she could deal with as the members come together to decide. In *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*, he states his argument as follows:

Even though the church appears to be one of the most viable and active institutions, especially in the rural areas, where nation-state influence seems minimal, the churches live with a posture of uncertainty, as if waiting for the real power to show up to provide the determinative frame of references for social and material realities.⁴⁶

The reason for this lack of action is the fact that the members are incapable of discerning what God would want them to do or what course He would want them to take. When people do not discern what God wants them to do, it is obvious that, as said, they do not engage in action or when they try, they respond to their own desire.

Having seen the above dynamics, both in decision making among Friends and decision making in the broader society, we can say, as a wrap-up, that both the facilitation and the participation must be well done in order to achieve success.

⁴⁶ Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 43.

CHAPTER 2

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FRIENDS IN BURUNDI AND THEIR DECISION- MAKING PROCESSES

Even though the precise meaning of culture remains under debate, and though so many authors and anthropologists have come up with diverse and sometimes differing definitions, for this dissertation I will use the following definition:

Culture is defined as the learned beliefs, values, rules, norms, symbols, and traditions that are common to a group of people. It is these shared qualities of a group that make them unique. Culture is dynamic and transmitted to others. In short, culture is the way of life, customs, and script of a group of people.¹

People are expected to behave in a certain way probably according to how their ancestors have behaved. C.S. Lewis said that “human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it.”²

As one thinks about what culture means, without going into deep anthropological analysis, he or she could simply say that people have learned how things have been done in the past and simply do them the same way. Or, they have learned how life has been lived and they simply live it that way. This learned manner of doing things and how life is lived becomes the norm that everyone agrees with and in return they are tied up by it. In other words, they get connected to each other by this learning as a common denominator. Also, John Seamands reminds us that “society is held together by culture, which is passed on from one generation to another and acts as a blueprint for the behavior and thinking of a people. Culture influences a people...it determines relationships and

¹ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (Washington, DC: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2010), 336.

² C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1977), 21.

responsibilities.”³ In view of this concept, it is obvious to say that culture is a very important societal value.

With this definition, one can choose the expression “learned” as a key term. In other words, according to Northouse, et al., whatever people “learn” may be thought of as their culture, so long as it becomes “common to a group of people.” The fact that culture is “dynamic and transmitted to other,” one can easily conclude that it can be changed. People need to simply “de-learn”⁴ what they have learned and shape a new culture, or at least part of it. Dan Story in *Christianity on the Offense*, he asserts that people are not prisoners of their culture. He quotes McCallum and says that “People are influenced by their culture, but examples abound of individuals who have turned against the views of their own culture.”⁵ On the other hand, Trevor Hart writes “Every human community has a story which it tells both to itself and to others concerning its distinctive origins and *raison d’être*, and about the sort of place this world in which it exists is.”⁶

When a person from outside enters into a new culture, it is plain that very quickly the difference is noticed. If that person has not adapted to the new culture or, simply, when he/she is trying to live out a culture with which he/she has entered that new one, often times that difference disturbs the status quo. This has been the case with

³ John T. Seamands, *Harvest of Humanity* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1988), 119.

⁴ Vineet Nayar, “When Was the Last Time You De-learned?” <http://www.vineetnayar.com/my-harvard-posts/when-was-the-last-time-you-de-learned/> (accessed November 10, 2012).

⁵ Dan Story, *Christianity on the Offense: Responding to the Beliefs and Assumptions of Spiritual Seekers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 165.

⁶ Trevor Hart, *Faith Thinking: The Dynamics of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 107.

missionaries entering into a culture and realizing, to their surprise, that people react negatively or positively upon getting in contact with the newcomers.

When the Friends arrived in Kenya, Africa, Arthur Chilson wrote in his journal on July 25, 1902, about the welcome. “The natives around here were very much disturbed about our coming, and held quite a palaver over it with their weapons in hand. They gathered far back from where we were working and stood silently watching. Their attitude was not friendly and it was plain to be seen that our presence was not welcomed.”⁷ Did these people, the Kalenjins, who lived “on the western Rift Valley slopes,”⁸ feel that their culture was threatened? Maybe they did not want their culture to be influenced by that of the Whites and therefore became disturbed.

The area where the Chilsons pitched their tent was a very highly controversial location because the Nandis who occupied it were a strong warring sub-tribe of the Kalenjins. These people had organized a resistance to the British colonizers who were building a railroad from the Coast of the Indian Ocean to Lake Victoria. It must be remembered that because of some of the resistance the British encountered from the local people, they brought in 30,000 workers from India, because none of the Africans would do this work.⁹ The Chilsons arrived just one year before the railroad’s completion in 1903.

Before going as missionaries to Burundi, Arthur Chilson served as Superintendent of Kansas Yearly Meeting of Friends. In its meeting at Lawrence, Kansas in 1932, the

⁷ Edna Chilson, *Arthur Chilson, Ambassador of the King* (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 1943), 25.

⁸ Judy Lumb, *Ending Cycles of Violence: Kenyan Quaker Peacemaking Response after the 2007 Election* (Washington, DC: Madera Press, 2012), 15.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Kansas Friends decided to send Arthur Chilson, his wife Edna and daughter Rachel for mission work. They arrived at Kibimba, Burundi, on April 20, 1934, according to Arthur Chilson's diary.¹⁰ One can wonder how the decision to send them was made. Was there unity in agreeing that these missionaries, who had ministered in Kenya's Western provinces, among the Luhyas with whom he established the very first Friends churches in Africa, should go? The decision making process for sending the Chilsons revealed the state of decision making practices among Kansas Friends.

Decision-Making Processes among Kansas Friends

Friends in Kansas Yearly Meetings had a long experience in missionary work, since they were part of what was known as the "American Friends Board of Missions." That mission board was in turn part of what was called Five Years Meeting of Friends, composed of the following yearly meetings: Baltimore, Canada, California, Indiana, Iowa, Nebraska, New England, New York, North Carolina, Western and Wilmington.¹¹ It was during the time when the Yearly Meeting withdrew from Five Years Meeting,¹² just as other Yearly Meetings did, such as the Northwest Yearly Meeting, because of the "Polarization developed between those who stressed evangelism and doctrinal essentials and those who stressed humanitarian concerns and doctrinal liberty,"¹³ that they decided to send Arthur B. Chilson, his wife Edna, and their daughter Rachel. It might have been a

¹⁰ Ralph Choate, *Dust of His Feet* (Mweya, Burundi: Grace Memorial Press, 1965), 7.

¹¹ Walter R. Williams, *The Rich Heritage of Quakerism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), 241.

¹² Allen C. Thomas, *A History of the Friends in America* (Philadelphia, PA: The John C. Winston Company, 1919), 217.

¹³ Arthur Roberts, "Society of Friends: A Movement of Christian Renewal," <http://nwfriends.org/what-friends-believe/brief-history/#Division> (accessed November 14, 2012).

great joy and relief to everyone who participated in the meeting for reaching such a decisive agreement. No doubt so much sharing and listening to each other was put into the meeting, probably for so many hours, especially because the Chilsons were changing the venue of their ministry and venturing into “a new field-to-be,”¹⁴ and funds to support their ministry was “a serious undertaking in the early depths of the Great Depression.”¹⁵

Concerning the way Kansas Yearly Meeting of Friends conducted their decision-making processes, the testimony narrated by Ferne Cook as she attended one of the Executive Board meetings is very much telling about the ambiance that seemed to prevail during the business meeting. In her *Remembering*, she shares about her own experience, which perhaps also characterized the spiritual awareness of other Friends during her time as they attended meetings in which decisions were made. She expresses herself in these terms, “I went to the place of meeting that morning with a very special consciousness of the nearness of the Lord. And I have never been in a business meeting of any kind where such sweet unity and tenderness were so keenly felt.”¹⁶ If this was true during her time, it is plain that the same atmosphere was true during the time the Kansas Yearly Meeting of Friends agreed to send the Chilsons to Burundi. The important thing about Ferne Cook’s tribute to the Spirit-led discernment of Kansas Friends was that she and her husband had applied for mission service in Africa at an earlier time and had not been approved.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ron Stansell *Missions By The Spirit: Learning from the Quaker Example* (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 2009), 65.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Ferne B. Cook, *Remembering* (Ozark, MO: Dogwood Printing, 1990), 27-28.

¹⁷ Cook, 7.

Ferne and Ellis later applied unsuccessfully for a missionary service in Burundi as shown in the following paragraph of part of the letter written to her on April 1, 1938:

Inasmuch as it was at our request that you filed your applications with us following Yearly Meeting last fall, we felt particularly responsible for giving you every consideration. But in the light of an application from Arthur and Faith Ford who are in Africa, and in view of his language preparation and then facing the fact of Ellis' inability to do a work of an industrial man such as is necessary for building, bricklaying, cabinet making and general instructor for the native boys, we were led to unanimous agreement that we could not consider your application further.

Please dear friends, don't let this hurt you beyond a sense of disappointment that you must necessarily feel, for your rating spiritually is par excellent and we have learned through every channel of investigation that you are the Lord's and are living beautifully and consistently Christian. This is so ordering our work in Africa as to make it balanced in all lines and to lay a broad foundation for the future. To that end we have to look for varieties of gifts and for diverse talents.¹⁸

In this letter, one can see the leading of the Spirit in two areas. First, the decision-making process was done in the Spirit of unity because the letter talks about a unanimous agreement even if it was against the applicants' wishes. Of course, the term "unanimous" does not imply an automatic leading of the Spirit, but in looking at the letter, it seems as though the Board allowed all to speak on the matter and had investigated as to what type of missionary services were needed in the field. It sounds like the Board was even able to get some necessary information or report about another candidate's application so as to analyze fully the best way to respond to the needs of the mission field.

Second, the letter addressed any possible hurts caused by the decision of the Board to not consider the Cook's application further. In the same clarification, the writer of the Board's letter expresses encouragement and appreciation for the Cook's godly living. The Board's response helped alleviate the kinds of speculations that often slip in when people are not approved for some type of Christian service. It has been observed in

¹⁸ Ibid., 33.

decision-making processes in which the will of God is not followed that people respond with anger simply because there is no effort made to affirm and honor the person not being approved, no provision for a spiritual empowerment and a soothing to those for whom things went negatively.

The Decision-Making Processes in the Early Days of the Burundi Friends Leadership

Usually, Friends in a given region unite to form a Yearly Meeting which is usually named after the geographic area. For example Friends in Burundi are referred to as being under the Burundi Yearly Meeting,¹⁹ meaning that they gather yearly to have a business meeting to deal with issues of its members as an organization. It is reasonable to assume that the Chilsons, the pioneer Friends missionaries in Burundi, brought with them the high appreciation for the kind of Spirit-led discernment that had resulted in their appointment as missionaries, even as other applicants were turned away. Seeing that the process was not new to the Chilsons, it was their turn to teach it to Friends leaders in their new field.

Those who joined the Friends churches in Burundi soon discovered that the business meeting was an integral part of the life of Friends as a denomination since it is part of their worship. They learned early on that “The goal is to be gathered by Christ into a common understanding of his will for the group, and when that happens, it truly is a

¹⁹ Burundi Friends have now formed two yearly meetings from the one, but for most of the period I am describing, they continued as one body.

‘spiritual gathered’ event”²⁰ and everything that happens in the life of the church springs out of worship, our interaction, and the guidance of God through the Holy Spirit.²¹

Friends believed that the same Holy Spirit who gathers us in worship also leads us in the decision-making process.²² Business meetings were supposed to be led by clerks, whose responsibility lies in ascertaining the will of God for the meeting. Proposals were to be considered in the Spirit of prayer and participation by members. Since Friends believed that the Holy Spirit could direct both the individual and the group to reach right policy decisions, actions were normally taken on approval rather than by voting.²³

In spite of the indications that Kansas Friends were fully in tune with the Spirit-led discernment process from the early days of Friends, for some reason these practices were not fully practiced among the Friends missionaries there and later in the actions of Burundi Yearly Meeting. Elizabeth Dawn Todd has extensively researched the history of Friends in Burundi as part of a graduate program and reported to me on her conclusions:

What I know about early days in Burundi was that the mission group voted when making decisions. This was the case even when the Missionaries were mostly one family. For instance, when deciding whether to open the Mutaho site, the missionaries voted. There are also records of Burundi Friends voting, such as “The Christians voted to require members to pay a tithe.” Before votes it was clear that there was a lot of discussion but it is also clear that votes were not unanimous and there were times when some missionaries (in the first 20 years) were unhappy at the result of a vote. For example, the missionaries were not unified in whether a missionary Helen should continue to work in Burundi or return to the U.S. The vote was for her to leave but there was regret (and some resentment) mentioned in a journal I read by one missionary.

²⁰ Paul Anderson, “The Meeting for Worship in which Business is Conducted,” *Quaker Religious Thought*, 107 (November 2006): 39.

²¹Willcutts, 75.

²²Anderson, 15.

²³Arthur Roberts, *The People Called Quakers* (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 2006), 9.

My research showed that there were strong personalities among the missionaries and they wanted to be “proper” about decision making; they thought they were operating like an organization not like a family and that was what they wanted to do. I never read any reference to discernment, consensus, waiting on the Lord... the expressions we use today for the leading of Christ among us. It was, however, very obvious that the missionaries prayed together, prayed individually, and had clear expectation that God would guide them in the right way forward.²⁴

This letter indicates that there may well have been both political and cultural factors that led Friends in Burundi away from the traditional Friends decision-making process. In the early days when local leaders got trained and were slowly being given leadership responsibilities, a group of them were asked to join the missionaries in making decisions for Burundi Friends. In 1962, the missionaries asked seven Burundian Friends pastors (“recorded” in 1956, the Friends word for ordination), to join the Burundi Friends leadership council. They further selected four of the seven to collegially serve as Legal Representatives along with Ralph Choate, the son-in-law of Arthur and Edna Chilson. The term “Legal Representative” was one the government used to identify the church official they would expect to deal with in matters involving the church and the government.

It may have been that having five persons on the mission council was so there could never be a tie vote among them, seeing that an uneven number determines the win. In a later chapter on the traditional Burundian decision-making process, we will discuss other factors that may have contributed to the moving away from Friends decision-making processes in Burundi. Research has not yet indicated why early Friends in Burundi found the process not worthy of retaining but one might be obliged to consider the socio-political context that the Burundi local leadership encountered during the early

²⁴ Elizabeth Dawn Todd, e-mail message to author, July 18, 2012.

years of the Burundi independence, when the missionaries handed over the church leadership to the locals.

After the first efforts to involve Burundians in the mission decisions, a different leadership model evolved in 1968, with a missionary and a Burundian as Co-Legal Representatives.²⁵ This means that neither was allowed to make a decision on their own. They had to always consult with each other before they moved towards a planned action. This consultation kept the focus on the needs of the group to act as a whole. It seems that during the period of shared leadership between the missionaries and Burundian leaders, there was a consciousness of the importance of being led by the Spirit and not assuming the leaders themselves were appointed to rule over the rest of the Burundi body of Friends.

What we can say of the basis of the governance of Friends in the early days of their work in Burundi was that it must be exercised in a way that eliminated the possibility of any individual authority. “Individual leadings were to be tested against the corporate discernment and were ultimately subordinate to the authority of the gathered meeting.”²⁶ Regardless of the fact that Friends in Burundi did not fully maintain the tradition of waiting upon the Lord and coming to agreement through discernment, they believed that only the authority of the group acting by the leading of God was valid, because they had time to pray together, according to Todd, and it had to be respected by all, whether or not they were part of the process.²⁷ To consider the authority of the group

²⁵ Samson Gahungu, *Ishimikiro ry'ishengero ry'abagenzi ryo mu Burundi* (Gitega, Burundi: Grace Memorial Press, 2003), 21.

²⁶ Halliday, 10.

²⁷ Howard Brinton, *Friends for 350 Years, Pendle Hill Pamphlet* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 2002), 123.

as essential was the most important element in the Burundi early Friends decision making and, therefore, to some it was equivalent to the “corporate discernment” that Halliday referred to as being important in the Friends tradition.

In support of Todd’s research asserting that the early missionaries voted to make decisions but that votes were not unanimous, one of the remaining leaders, Solomon Bahenda, confirmed it. Bahenda was one of the five-team leaders from 1961 to 1967 and served as a co-legal representative with a missionary from 1968 to 1984. In an informal talk, he nostalgically remembers that before a decision was made, there was a lot of discussion. He said that sometimes meetings in which decisions were made were organized for specific issues and were attended by several missionaries along with their spouses. He sought the company of Mark Bikomagu, a strong spiritual leader with an experience in mission outreach, to give input during the discussion but, “clearly, the missionaries did the deliberations, based on the majority rule, after hearing our opinion.”²⁸

In an effort to help smooth the process of making decisions within organizations, the government promulgated the Decree N° 1/11 of April 18, 1992,²⁹ reorganizing the process that all the Not-For-Profit Associations, including churches, should comply with. Amazingly, in all its articles, nowhere does it stipulate that all deliberations should be done on a simple majority rule, as it observed today among Friends and other Christian organizations. This, therefore, indicates that there are other factors that influenced the shift from the Quaker tradition of seeking the sense of the meeting to taking a vote on the

²⁸ Salomon Bahenda, “How Decisions Were Made during Missionary Times,” Interview. Kibimba, Burundi, November 14, 2012.

²⁹ Pierre Buyoya, Président de la République, *Décret-Loi N° 1/11 of April 18, 1992, Portant Cadre Organique des ASBL*, Bujumbura, Burundi.

basis of a majority rule. At the time when the government issued this law, it was helping Not-For-Profit Organizations to register officially and get legal status. This occurred when the country changed from military dictatorship to an era of democratic processes including multiparty systems and which led to general elections the following year, 1993.

Today, the Friends church in Burundi is still using the majority rule system of making decisions. The system has not proven effective at all in the sense that it has not arrived at decisions that are widely accepted. In fact, the system has not facilitated a healthy relationship of the Friends leaders among themselves due to how the processes of electing a new one have been handled. It has been observed that the replacements have not been done in a transparent way. Even though this statement sounds rather judgmental, the point is that there seems to be something missing in the current decision-making process among Burundi Friends today.

On numerous occasions, there have been instances of hurt feelings all caused by the process by which meetings in which decisions were made was prepared, handled, and concluded. Finally, as is evidenced today, there has been a split into two Burundi Yearly Meetings, simply because of the lack of agreement upon how leadership is decided. Most Friends lament the fact that there seems to be a blurred line between when Friends exercised the traditional decision-making process that allowed the listening of and the obedience to the Holy Spirit's guidance in making decisions, on one hand, and the use of the majority rule on the other hand. While it is probably not right to make a conclusion because of a lack of more evidence of reasons that the shift was exercised, it is perhaps not wrong to assert that an effective process is much needed among the Burundi Friends.

CHAPTER 3

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES ABOUT DECISION MAKING

It has been stated that when Friends come together they endeavor to participate meaningfully in the meeting for worship in which business is conducted. In so doing, they try to put into practice what the Bible, history, hearts, and minds tell about “Christ’s living Presence in the world.”¹ With this expression, Paul Anderson, in the helpful article he wrote in *Quaker Religious Thought*, in November 2006, indicates that what Friends do during a meeting for business has to take into consideration what the Bible says, along with what Friends believe Christ is also saying at the time.

Anderson focuses on three of the important Friends values: the Bible, history, and the human mind. He puts the Bible first, then Friends history, then our understandings or our mind. His thoughts remind us of what Jesus said when He was speaking to the Samaritan woman: that we are to worship God in Spirit and truth. “Quakers have from the beginning had a distinctly ‘other’ easiness with the paradoxical interplay of revelation, discernment and Scripture in the life of governance of the body of Christ on earth.”² These three, even though they are not ranged as Anderson puts them, show what Friends stand on as they manage their organization. Revelation could be interpreted as taking place in the heart while the discernment is part of the history and which was always processed through the leading of the Holy Spirit as guided by the Bible.

¹ Paul Anderson, “The Meeting for Worship in which Business is Conducted— Quaker Decision-Making Process as a Factor of Spiritual Discernment,” *Quaker Religious Thought* 107 (November 2006): 45.

² Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 154.

Talking about the place of the Bible in decision-making processes, “nearly all who share an evangelical persuasion are agreed that the Bible is the plumb line for all claims of truth.”³ With this statement, taken even from the psychology field, it is clear that the Bible cannot be overlooked when one is in search for the truth about things. Even though many people interpret the truth or talk about other truths, there is one question remaining, and this is, how truth is measured. One of the defining characteristics of evangelicals is that they use the Bible as a plumb line to check the claims of truth.

In this chapter, Old and New Testament passages are examined to consider claims of truth in decision-making processes. Just as anyone else on earth, people in Bible times had to make many decisions. I am reminded of a saying by the recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature on October 17, 1957, the French poet and philosopher, Albert Camus,⁴ “life is the sum of all your choices.”⁵ Wayne Dyer also said exactly the same thing, “Our lives are a sum total of the choices we have made.”⁶ If it is true that the Christian life involves making decisions and that the Bible is a plumb line for the truth, it is therefore important to consider how the Scriptures deal with issues related to the processes of searching for truth as Christians make decisions.

³ Peter C. Hill, ed, *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*; Christian Association for Psychological Studies (CAPS) 15, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 178.

⁴ Albert Camus, “Biographie Albert Camus” <http://www.evenc.fr/celebre/biographie/albert-camus-49.php> (accessed October 25, 2012).

⁵ Albert Camus, “Quotes” http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/957894.Albert_Camus?auto_login_attempted=true&format=html&page=5 (accessed November 10, 2012).

⁶ Wayne Dyer, “Quotes” <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/sum> (accessed on November 10, 2012).

The Old Testament Principles

Proverbs 15:22 (NIV) says, “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.” This Scripture is important in that it supports the concept of allowing as many people as possible to express themselves during a decision-making process. When “advisers” give their points of view, insights, and constructive opinions, the plans do not fail because they are owned by those involved in the decision. Their intellectual and spiritual participation leads them to be invested in and owning the outcome. On the one hand, this Scripture might sound as if it is pointing toward the democratic decision-making process because of mention of many advisers. But on the other hand, the reference to the many advisers simply suggests the opportunity to have a pool of ideas to draw from. Those alternatives become a tremendous opportunity to allow participants to freely make informed decisions, without being bound by a limited range of options.

Terry Muck, in *When to Take a Risk: A Guide to Pastoral Decision Making*, says that “The key to good timing is knowing when the people involved are prepared for the decision. On our survey, the second most frequently mentioned ingredient of good decision making was taking the time to prepare key people.”⁷ The advisers share ideas that prepare the participants before they make the decision. In fact it is through the counsel of advisors, as the author of Proverbs admonishes, that the way of the Spirit is discerned. In other words, apart from the formal preparation or coaching that key people might need to go through on important issues, participants must also be prepared, even during the sessions, to listen to God’s leading as the advisors make their points on a given issue.

⁷ Muck, 131-132.

Thomas Kelly, in *The Eternal Promise*, looks to another Old Testament passage, when Moses encountered God in the wilderness and saw the burning bush and heard that he was standing on holy ground (Exodus 3:5). According to Kelly, when Friends gather in worship and make decisions, “an objective, dynamic Presence enfolds us all, nourishes our souls, speaks glad, unutterable comfort within us, and quickens us in depths that had before been slumbering. The burning bush has been kindled in our midst, and we stand together on holy ground.”⁸ This is a vivid description of the intensely spiritual aspect of making decisions. The participants in such an atmosphere will not be bound by their various intellectual and cultural backgrounds, but by the Presence of the Holy Spirit which allows them to hear things on the same wave length. Moses’ experience with the burning bush created in him a sense of awe and reverence in presence of God. He experienced the fearfulness of being in God’s presence and was able to identify and abandon his own selfish reasons to refuse God’s mission. He had no choice but obey God’s leading. In the same way, as Friends allow themselves to encounter God’s presence, they will no longer be bound by limited agendas but will open up and respond to God’s call to do His will.

The Old Testament emphasizes that good decision making involves consideration for others, according to a number of Scripture verses.⁹ Genesis 4:9, particularly, shows how Cain missed the point by assuming that God was wrong in the way He designed how relationships within communities should be. When God asked him where his brother was, he replied: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Why did Cain not understand that caring about God is possible only when one cares about his brother? God designed human beings to be

⁸ Thomas Kelly, *The Eternal Promise* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1988), 86.

⁹ See Genesis 4:9, Micah 6:8, Job 31:16-2, Isaiah 1:17, Jeremiah 22:3, and Amos 5:14-15.

each other's keeper. This is why, even in decision-making processes, people should consider others, not only involving them in the process but also making sure that what is decided will be good for others and allowing them to actively participate in the implementation. Christians are their brothers' and sisters' keepers. With this in mind, decisions should be made while considering others' points of view as well as others' needs, hence the necessity to allow everyone to express his or her opinion during the process.

Another important principle we find in the Old Testament is the need for a deep desire to do God's will. David, in Psalm 25:4, expresses a great longing that should be the heart's longing for those who gather to make decisions. He prays in these terms: "Show me Your ways, O LORD; Teach me Your paths."¹⁰ As some decision-making processes get heated and argumentative, one would wonder if participants ever pray like David, asking God to show them His ways. In fact, in observing some difficult decision-making processes, one can easily suspect that there might be participants who, instead of asking to be shown God's ways, would want to show God their ways and convince others to adhere to them!

In many places in the Old Testament, for example in Isaiah and Jeremiah, the prophets express such a tremendous confidence in God's readiness to reveal his will. Start with Isaiah, who expressed words of encouragement to his people. "Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left" (Isaiah 30:21). Unfortunately, some debates can be so loud, sometimes with people banging on the tables or on the chairs at a business meeting, that participants hardly get to hear God's word behind them directing them

¹⁰ The Holy Bible, New King James Version (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1982).

which way they should take! In Jeremiah 9:23-24, we are reminded that it is not the wisdom expressed in a meeting or the might with which participants come to the sessions that God delights in. God does not delight even in those who come to the business meetings prepared to make financial contributions to the needs being addressed. He only delights in those who understand and know Him.

Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,
 Let not the mighty man glory in his might,
 Nor let the rich man glory in his riches;
 But let him who glories glory in this,
 That he understands and knows Me,
 That I am the LORD, exercising loving kindness,
 Judgment, and righteousness in the earth.
 For in these I delight.

In the book of Psalms, we read God's promises to direct and guide His people whenever they gather to make decisions. It reads as follows: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye" (Psalm 32:8). The promises of God are true not only in one's own heart but also in the corporate sense. This powerful statement from the Old Testament is an invitation that at the meetings in which decisions are made, Friends are invited to wait upon the Lord to get the instruction they need. The guiding eye of God is an indicator of His presence among His people just as discussed above; it actually connects the reality of the New Testament, where Jesus promised to be with His people always.

Another theme that is prominent in the Old Testament is the willingness to trust God, as we read in Isaiah 12:2, "Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid." Many times, there are difficult issues that are brought to the meeting for a decision. There may be even cases when participants learn about the meeting's agenda and decide not to participate because of fear. There may be fear that there might be no

way to reach unity, fear that all points of view might not be heard, fear that people might get hurt, etc. To these very people, God gives a word of encouragement that He will be with them and that they need not be afraid, that they should fully trust Him.

The Old Testament does not stop with factors that affect the decision-making process. It goes further to suggest what the believer should do and how his or her attitude should be before engaging in making a decision. Every believer is called to pray before making a decision. In Nehemiah 1:4 we read: “So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.” Nehemiah committed himself to praying and fasting in order to seek God’s direction of God regarding the news he had just received about the problems back home in Jerusalem. Nehemiah’s example shows us it is not enough to pray before the meeting. Nehemiah shows us that we are to pray before, during, and after the big decisions we face as a group.

There is a principle we find in Old Testament passages, from the life of Job, which is the importance of leaders and participants alike to do things that honor God (Job 1:8). “Then the LORD said to Satan, ‘Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?’” Job’s life was pleasing to God, including the decisions he made on an everyday basis.

Still another Old Testament principle is considering God’s Word as we make decisions. In Psalms 119:105 we read, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” The verse gives us a picture of issues that seem to be like darkness: unknown paths, information which needs verification, statements that must be clarified, confusing

topics, and even superfluous plans. The Scriptures tell us that all those unclear pathways ahead of us will suddenly become clear when looked at through the lenses of the Word of God. God's word illuminates dark tracks that His people struggle with during decision-making processes.

The Old Testament also directs us to get good advice before making decisions, for example the passage in Proverbs 18:15 (NIV), "The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge." The verse helps one to understand that those who participate in the decision-making process are considered as wiser, and maybe that is why they may represent others. The point is the emphasis on the seeking heart, a heart that does not boast to have achieved all the understanding that is necessary before one makes a decision. The point is that participants are reminded that before deciding, they should seek a deeper level of knowledge even when they think they know already.

All these Scripture passages have one thing in common, the renouncing of the self and seeking God's will. This is all done in the Spirit of worship. In worship, it is God who is exalted just as in the decision-making process where only God's will is sought. Worship was a very crucial thing in the Old Testament. "One thing worship costs us is our self-centeredness. You cannot exalt God and yourself at the same time. You don't worship to be seen by others or please yourself. You deliberately shift the focus off yourself."¹¹ This is so crucial if people truly want to agree on things without following their own personal interests. The shifting of the focus away from the participants ushers in an attitude of oneness that facilitates a mutual trust and respect for one another. When

¹¹ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids: MI, Zondervan, 2002), 120.

this happens the participants are able to focus on a common goal and together make decisions that they can adhere to and own.

The Old Testament Principles and the Friends' Concept of God's Presence in the Midst

We have seen in the Old Testament the importance of the role of leaders. Leaders, like the Friends clerks, were called to facilitate the unity of God's people as they sought God's will. It was through worship that God spoke to them and showed them His way. The prophets and godly kings were also expected to play an important role in promoting justice for everyone. In worship, there was no discrimination, as everyone was allowed to enter into God's presence with a pure heart, love, fear of God, and in obedience to His precepts. "Outstanding people promote unity and corporate worship. When leaders establish justice and nail things down in such a way that people feel secure, it results in unity and everybody thanks God for it."¹² Nehemiah wrote about the joy of those who corporately agreed on the project of re-building the walls of Jerusalem. The people not only agreed on the importance of the project, but joined together to carry it out and owned it as essential for protecting the life of God's people. "And all the assembly said, 'Amen!' and praised the LORD. Then the people did according to this promise" (Nehemiah 5:13). It is wonderful when Friends, in a decision-making process, can all shout an "Amen" to a decision.

Kelly says that "Again and again this community of life and guidance from the Presence in the midst is made clear by the way the spoken words uttered in the meeting

¹² Rudi Lack, *101 Leadership Principles* (Krattigen, Switzerland: GLIFA, 2004), 72.

join on to one another and to our inward thoughts.”¹³ And here again, it is not one individual’s spoken words that prevail and dominate but the words of the gathered body of Friends building on one another and springing from within as from one source. The joining of spoken words one to another is very important. It also shuns the possibility of a person trying to convince others that his or her ideas are superior to others. The contributions are put together as in a piece of puzzle to complete the picture. And the picture is God’s intention for His people, whatever might have been initially brought forward by Friends.

New Testament Principles

Jesus Christ declared in Matthew 18:20 (NIV) that “where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” While this verse may mean lots of things depending on each one’s interpretation, for Friends, this Scripture is foundational to the discernment and decision-making process. It means exactly what Anderson calls the “living presence of Christ.”¹⁴ According to Friends, all their meetings, whether for worship, teaching, fellowship or business, must to be centered on the real presence of Jesus. Thus, all the group’s actions have to be biblically supported and justified to glorify Jesus. This should not be a problem, seeing that those actions and decisions are reached with the help of Jesus and with Him being part of the process. Of course, it is the responsibility of Friends to invite and allow His presence to be explicitly acknowledged

¹³ Kelly, 89.

¹⁴ Anderson, 45.

during their business meeting. And they can do it through the spirit of worship with which they come to participate.

Jesus also said in John 14:16 (NIV): “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.” A lot could be said about how, during the decision-making processes, some issues become sticky and hard to resolve. At times, Friends have had to postpone a decision because of the lack of agreement on the issue. Sometimes Friends have had to “stand aside – acknowledging their own misgivings about the action but inviting the group to proceed in the direction they are being led.”¹⁵ In short, they have felt the group was making a mistake in what they were proposing to do, but have had the humility to realize they may not have been listening fully to the Spirit’s voice.

Acts 4:32 (NIV) says, “All the believers were one in heart and mind.” This oneness of heart is very interesting to our exploration. In *Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders*, Charles M. Olsen narrates several examples that are in accordance with the beliefs of Friends. Based on Acts 6:1-6 where “a complaint had been registered by the Greek-speaking Christians that their widows were being neglected in the food distribution,”¹⁶ he says that the issue was resolved by a decision-making process. In the same context and in the attempt to settle the issues that seemed to be disturbing to those first Christians, a letter was written by the Apostles after a meeting was convened at the request of the church in Antioch to decide on the right conduct of the non-Jewish believers. It was a conflict between Jews and Gentiles on whether or not

¹⁵ Lon Fendall, Jan Wood, and Bruce Bishop, *Practicing Discernment Together: Finding God’s Way Forward in Decision Making* (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 2007), 133.

¹⁶ Charles M. Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards Into Communities of Spiritual Leaders* (Alban Institute Publications, 1995), 29.

Christians should observe the Mosaic laws and rules in order to be accepted as true followers of Jesus Christ. After “centering down – concentrating on God and putting aside all other matters” and “holding silence – sitting in active, listening silence,”¹⁷ and probably long discussions in the manner of Friends, they reached a sense of the meeting.

Speaking about the act of listening, it must be added that this kind of listening must be done carefully and effectively. “Effective listening involves focusing on what is being said, above what we want to say, and refraining from interruptions which break the flow of thought.”¹⁸ Of the Apostles’ meeting, Richard J. Foster commented, “It was an issue that could have easily split the Christian fellowship right down the middle. Yet as they gathered, as they talked, as they listened, the power of God broke through in a Spirit-led unity of heart and mind.”¹⁹ It could have been disastrous if the Apostles could not agree on the way forward; but thanks to the counsel of the Holy Spirit, they proceeded with no apparent obstacle.

The New Testament Principles and the Friends’ Sense of the Meeting

Friends use the phrase *sense of the meeting*

in preference to consensus, indicating the understanding that emerges from waiting on God for leading. In its appropriate context, it recognizes that people have been meeting with God, not just with each other. A deeper level of spirituality is involved than the term consensus can indicate.²⁰

¹⁷ J. Brent Bill, *Holy Silence: The Gift of Quaker Spirituality* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2006), 140-141.

¹⁸ Betty Barnett, *Friend Raising: Building a Missionary Support Team That Lasts* (Seattle, WA: YWAM Publishing, 1991), 31.

¹⁹ Richard J. Foster, *The Challenge of the Disciplined Life: Christian Reflection on Money, Sex and Power* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985), 200.

²⁰Fendall, et al., 133.

The term “consensus” which means reaching an agreement without taking votes, is understood differently than the expression commonly known among Friends as the “sense of the meeting,” which has at its center the process of listening to God for guidance. It is to be noted that some terms used by non-Friends may convey a different meaning when used by Friends and one such word is consensus or even paradoxically the expression “sense of the meeting” referred to above, when used outside the religious circles.

For instance when Friends use “the sense of the meeting,” they mean an awareness of the place to which the Spirit has led the group. When it is a shared awareness, they say that they are in unity. Also, when such a sense of the meeting has led the participants to put on record or what Friends call a minute of the agreement, the decision itself is sometimes referred to as “the sense of the meeting.” “This procedure,” writes Howard Brinton, “takes more time and patience than the voting method, but the results are generally more satisfactory to all concerned.”²¹ It really does not matter to Friends how long it takes to reach this sense of the meeting, so long as they feel there is that presence of Christ. After all, on one hand, they are in worship and therefore will be free to reconvene if need be, on the other hand they are glad that the resolution is reached to be able to implement that which they wanted to put in action.

The sense of the meeting also suggests that people must agree, just as when they are praying together about a certain need. “People must be agreed,” writes Charles G. Finney, “in desiring a thing for good reasons. The best reason for desiring a thing would

²¹ Howard Brinton, *Friends for 350 Years*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 2002), 131.

be for the honor and glory of God.”²² But the act of agreeing is often very difficult among Christians, even when they know they desire the same thing.

There are always things that cause people not to agree and, as Jack Dennison observed, things such as characteristics and beliefs.²³ Take for instance decisions as to whether or not Christians should participate in war. There are differing opinions on the topic among Christians and no wonder C. S. Lewis lamented, “If ever the book which I am not going to write is written, it must be the full confession by Christendom to Christendom’s specific contribution to the sum of human cruelty.”²⁴ Much human cruelty has been committed with the pretention of defending the faith and unfortunately by Christians. On a topic like this, it would not be easy to gather unanimity of the participants during a decision-making process. This is still true today in Burundi, because the question on enrollment in the armed forces is still not solved. There are those who say that since Friends are members of the community as anyone else, they should take part in civil duties that they are called to do even if it means to enroll in the armed forces. But others still maintain a “conscientious objector’s,”²⁵ mentality when it comes to bearing arms even in police forces.

In the letter written by the council in Jerusalem, as recorded in Acts 15:25, 28-29 (New King James Version), we read:

²² Charles G. Finney, *How to experience Revival* (Nairobi, Kenya: Acme Press (K) Ltd, 1982), 102.

²³ Jack Dennison, *City Reaching: On the Road to Community Transformation* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 190.

²⁴ Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville: TN, Word Publishing, 1998), 109.

²⁵ Conscientious Objectors. http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/conscientious_objectors.htm (accessed November 10, 2012).

... It seemed good to us, *being assembled with one accord* [emphasis added], to send chosen men to you... For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.

This excellent summary of the decision-making process in Acts 15 hits the nail on the head in pointing out the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing about unity in a badly divided group of leaders. The expression “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us” is very much telling on the sensitivity of God’s leading in the matter being considered.

In another account in the book of Acts, we find that the Apostles used their discernment to solve a problem and make a decision that apparently threatened the unity among the congregation of people that they were ministering to. It appears as if this was a very diverse congregation because it was composed of a multiracial community that seemed not to get along with each other lovingly. The disciples decided they needed to make a decision about the situation in order to solve the problem. This is how the matter was resolved:

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” And what they said pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid hands upon them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith (Acts 6:1–7, RSV).²⁶

²⁶ Charles Tidwell. *Church Administration: Effective Leadership for Ministry* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1985), 103.

In the above narrative, one sees clearly that the Scriptures take the processes of decision making seriously. While one might not need to dwell on the outcome of that process and how useful it was to the people for whom it served, it is worthy to mention that this passage gives an example that leaders today could follow. They made a decision that furthered the growth of the Word of God, the multiplication of the disciples, and the obedience of the leaders to the faith. Those three things could be called the results of a decision made in a Spirit-led process.

Terry C. Muck, professor of World Religions at Asbury Theological Seminary, on the subject of decision-making, encourages leaders to always look for the potential issue that might cause a division or anything that might become a subject of contention among the communities one is leading. He says that “Identifying the nature of the issue involved, whether theological, institutional, interpersonal, or personal, is the essential first step”²⁷ toward solving the problem. In solving the problem or simply in guiding others, as servant leaders are called to do, the first step is to identify what the issue is. And this is not the work of the leader only. It is the responsibility of participants in the decision making as well, as they listen to one another in a prayerful manner. It is then expected that after they have identified the issue, they will discern God’s leading on what should be done.

All decision making must be subject to the will of God. James 4:13-15, Matthew 26:39 and 42, and Luke 12:16-21 are key verses on this awareness. In support of the view that decision making is an ability to arrive at a decision after due consideration of all the factors, one can remark that the Scriptures give guidance concerning how decisions are

²⁷ Terry C. Muck, *When to Take a Risk: A Guide to Pastoral Decision Making*. Vol. 9. The Leadership Library (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, Word Books, 1987), 117.

made in the Christian life, and that in them we can learn a lot from those who made right decisions as well as those who made wrong decisions. The decision making that the Christian life involves had been mentioned above, but here the point is the “how” decisions are made. For example, if a decision is made by one leader it may be implemented, but the likelihood is that the participants’ ownership of the decision will be minimal. If participants are involved throughout the process, there will be a mutual understanding even if there may be a variety of opinions. But if the participants in a meeting for business do not even understand the topic being discussed for lack of listening to each other, how can they listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

A careful look at the Scriptures shows that Christians are capable of discerning and following God’s plan for his people.²⁸ The best way to discern this plan is for God’s people, whether Friends or other believers, to come together in a Spirit of worship. It is then that they will feel joined together as one body. “Worship is where the vitality of the life of the Christian community is most clearly manifested and where the claims and purposes of the idolatrous powers are most clearly threatened.”²⁹ Once people join together as one body, then they will begin to build, through worship, a relationship that eventually facilitates an outcome that will be good for all, since “we benefit from belonging, from contributing to a bigger thing called community.”³⁰

When Christians come to an agreement through the Spirit of worship, it is not so hard for them to be held responsible for the course of action they have taken, according to

²⁸ See Romans 8:28-30, Ephesians 1:3-14, Philippians 2:12-13, and Hebrews 11:39-40.

²⁹ Jim Wallis, *Agenda for Biblical People* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976), 72.

³⁰ Jerry White, *I Will Not be Broken: Five Steps to Overcoming a Life Crisis* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008), 125.

Jeff VanVonderen in *Tired of Trying to Measure Up*. He assures us that “it is okay to hold people responsible or accountable for their actions,”³¹ and this is what is meant by owning the decisions made. In this way Friends also give up the striving that sometimes has characterized Friends decision-making process because of the refusal of some to be held accountable. And as Christians, “when we abandon argumentative and persuasive speech, listen to each other’s truths, speak carefully our own truths, and above all, listen to the voice of the divine participant, a third way will emerge that we can unite with.”³²

It is this third way that Friends at their best try to understand and follow as they seek to do the will of God. And through this “voice of the divine participant” decision makers are capable of experiencing the power to make the right choices. As Jean Paul Lederach observed, “we are not limited by having too few options but by our own inability to experience the wide range of potentials afforded by all the available choices.”³³ This statement suggests that God offers us a tremendous opportunity to freely explore options without being limited to one’s own point of view. God invites us to sample His riches from which we can choose a course of action to take as we implement His will for His glory.

³¹ Jeff VanVonderen, *Tired of Trying to Measure Up* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 48.

³² Jack Powelson, Gusten Lutter, and Jane Kashnig, *Seeking Truth Together: Enabling the Poor and Saving the Planet in the Manner of Friends* (Boulder, CO: Horizon Society Publications, 2000), 113.

³³ Jean Paul Lederach, *Conflict Transformation* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2003), 54.

CHAPTER 4

DECISION MAKING AMONG CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN BURUNDI

This study so far has considered some biblical principles of decision-making processes in both the New Testament and the Old Testament. This chapter will look into how the Christian churches in Burundi have understood and practiced the principles of decision making. It looks at these churches' experience in their governance as they seek to accomplish their mission. During their early establishment in the country, it has been observed that the shifts of leadership on the ecclesiastical political levels have impacted the communities' comprehension of decision making. This chapter will not attempt to interpret all the reasons why the churches decided to follow particular decision-making processes, but will tell the story of the experiences of these church bodies with governance and decision making. For the Protestant side of the story I have selected four denominations active in Burundi, the Baptists, the United Methodists, the Anglican Church and the Pentecostal Evangelical Fellowship of Africa, in order to compare and contrast with the Friends experience.

The Protestant Experience Relating to Decision Making

It is difficult to document the beginnings of the Protestant church in Burundi, and quite hard to narrate it due to the limited literature available. Bear in mind that this is a country and a continent where stories and experiences are most often conveyed and preserved orally. It is very hard to find written material from early Burundi church leaders, so that leaves the accounts of early missionaries. Most of their books are either out of print or simply not accessible, probably lying in the storage places of missionaries

long since retired and maybe deceased. Also, the missionaries moved from one place to another due to their changing assignments and because of their moving, sometimes hurriedly, some of their documents, including pictures, either got lost or misplaced. There were Friends missionaries who were given very short notice to leave the country and not return. Also, it must be added that the earliest Protestant materials were written in Danish and therefore not very accessible to researchers.

Ralph Choate, one of the early Friends missionaries, tells the story in his little book, *The Dust of His Feet*, about a young German missionary, probably from the sending missionary agency the Neukirchner Missionsgesellschaft in Germany,¹ who had established his little Lutheran mission on the Kibimba hills in the central part of the country. This missionary, who apparently was single, “fled before the conquering Belgian army in 1914.”² No name was left at the abandoned station but he was believed to have hastily taken a donkey and went southward toward the shore of Lake Tanganyika where he might have taken a lake and land transport in an effort to reach a ship on the Indian Ocean. Nobody knows if he made it to Germany to marry his fiancée or if he was captured in the central Tanzania fighting during the First World War. Nothing of him was known, except, according to Choate, the fruit trees and beautiful flowers he had planted that the subsequent Friends missionaries enjoyed upon arrival. They wondered if they had partially fulfilled the dream the young missionary had pursued. Not even his house or his utility building had survived by the time Arthur and Edna Chilson arrived at the site in 1934.

¹ According to Donald Hohensee, Protestant missionaries didn't enter Burundi until 1911. Missionaries came from the Neukirchner Missionsgesellschaft in Germany. They started several mission stations, but were forced to leave in 1916 when Germany was pushed out of Burundi, 37.

² Choate, 5.

The Union of the Baptist Church

The Union of the Baptist Church of Burundi is the first Protestant mission to Burundi after the German Lutheran missions had to leave during and after the First World War. It was established in Burundi thanks to Dr. H. Net who called Protestant missions to go and occupy the property or continue the work that was left by the Lutheran missionaries at the end of the World War I. As the Protestant Missions Secretary in Belgium, Dr. Net persuaded Danish Baptist Mission to send missionaries to Burundi in the 1920s. In a meeting in Odense in 1927, it was agreed that Niels Peter and Johanne Andersen be sent to Burundi. The couple agreed and traveled by ship to Dar-es-Salaam, Tanganyika and traveled until they reached Musema, Burundi on June 19, 1928. They settled at a site that the Germans donated to Protestants in 1911.³ Being the first Protestant mission, it was regarded as the mother of all Protestant missions, because it took possession of the five stations the Lutherans had abandoned. The Danish Baptists served as a source of information for any new Protestant mission groups seeking to enter Burundi and made the former Lutheran stations available after selecting three for their own use. They gave two sites away: Kibimba, to the Friends in 1934⁴ and Muyebe, to the Free Methodists in 1939.⁵

A lot of information concerning the early years of the Danish Baptist mission is written in missionaries' records and are not accessible to the researcher of this study.

³ Isaac Bimpenda and Knud Ronne Hansen, *Burundi: imyaka 75 y'abatistite mu Burundi* (Bujumbura: Burundi, UEEB et Forttveds Forlag, 2003), 23.

⁴ Donald Hohensee, *Church Growth in Burundi* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1977), 41.

⁵ Ibid.

However, the history does not differ from that of the other protestant missions. For example, it has been evidenced that during the time when Burundi was nearing its independence in 1962, Christian missions prepared the handing over of the mission's leadership to the local leaders. For the case of the Danish Baptist mission, two Danish representatives, Henry Gjerrild and Aage Baungaard Thomsen, returned to Danmark in 1960 to ask and inquire on what would be the relationship and cooperation between the mission and the local church,⁶ which was named the Union of the Baptist Church. For the purpose of our study, we will not dwell in any more chronological sequence of events seeing that our focus is on how decisions were made by their leaders.

The Union of the Baptist Church suffered greatly in the 1972 Burundi interethnic violence. The violence was a politically motivated conflict between the two major ethnic groups – Hutu and Tutsi. The violence eliminated virtually all the Hutu intellectual leaders of the church, both the laity and the clergy, to the extent that Bishop Samuel Sindamuka, who was then the secretary of the Alliance of the Protestant Churches and Anglican Bishop, offered to become the interim leader of the Union of Baptist Church until new leaders could be prepared and selected. Bimpenda and Hansen's account in the little book published on the occasion of the celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the Church, estimated that in a period of 22 years, between 1977 and 1999, there were 9 leaders and a total split—the Reformed Baptist Church. In our analysis, this is an indication that, since the change of leadership occurred during a decision-making process, one can assume that something about the process was wrong. The leaders did not get killed because the period under discussion is after the violence of 1972 that we

⁶ Bimpenda, et al., 88.

referred to, even though, obviously, during the time when Bishop Samuel Sindamuka of the Anglican Church facilitated the development of the local leadership, he had to make decisions for the whole denomination.

These leaders who served in the period being studied were removed and replaced during processes of decision making. For instance, the split that occurred in 1999 proved that some of the decisions made were not adhered to. The period of 22 years for 9 Legal Representatives gives an average of 2 years for each leader, even though Rev. Emmanuel Ndayiziga served 10 years alone in that same period.⁷ This rapid change of leadership for a short period would have necessitated numerous decision-making meetings. This was the reason for selecting the Union of the Baptist Church of Burundi for this study of decision making.

The researcher met with Juvenal Nzosaba, the current Union of the Baptist Church of Burundi Legal Representative, to inquire about leadership and decision-making processes in his denomination⁸. His analysis of decision making in his church is that it has three processes. One of these is the consensus process that is followed at what he calls the Leaders' Meeting. The Leaders' Meeting is currently composed of 4 people, the president of both the executive board and the annual assembly, the vice president, the legal representative, and his vice legal representative. These four meet when necessary, but particularly prior to the Executive Board meetings.

During their deliberation, the leaders seek consensus and if there is something they cannot agree upon, they go ahead and take it to the executive board for discussion.

⁷ Ibid., 115.

⁸ Juvenal Nzosaba, "Leadership and Decision Making Processes in the Union of the Baptist Church". (In an informal interview on October 8, 2012, Bujumbura, Burundi).

The discussion in the Leaders' Meeting is usually warm and cordial and even when they deal with a difficult issue. They do not let the debate become heated because they know they can seek a decision in the larger group, the executive board. And also because the leaders do not make final decisions, their meeting is something like a preparation or a kind of formulation of what will be presented to the Executive Board.

The Executive Board meets three times a year and deals with issues that cannot wait for the Assembly meetings. The deliberations at the Executive Board meeting are participative and the decisions are made in "a democratic way." By this, the Baptists mean that the will of the group is known when two-thirds of its members raise their hands in support of the motion.

The largest decision-making group for the Baptists is the Annual Assembly. It has wide representation, with delegates from all local churches. The participants meet to receive the reports of the leaders, the president of the denomination, and the legal representative. The decisions are also made with a vote by a show of hands, which is counted to make sure that two-thirds are in agreement.

In summary, Juvenal Nzosaba describes decision making in their denomination as being democratic, with the exception of the Leaders' Meetings, which don't actually make decisions. Responding to a question about whether this democratic way of making decisions was taught by the missionaries or if the process came from the Burundi culture, Nzosaba said that the process came from Baptist churches all over the world. He also said that he believes that the church has a lot they could teach to Burundi's political leaders concerning the democratic way of making decisions.

Given this strong commitment to democratic processes, the question remains as to why a democratic denomination would need so many meetings, since voting is supposed to be the quickest way to make decisions, and why the Baptists have had such rapid turnover in leadership? One might wonder if the democratic process is the most effective one for the Baptists or if it has just been brought in from elsewhere as the way Baptists do things.

Here again, the majority rules is brought under question even when the chairperson has followed the advice given by Charles A. Tidwell, in *Church Administration: Effective Leadership for Ministry* that the chairperson must make sure the agreement is reached when “two-thirds vote of church members present” are in agreement.⁹

The United Methodist Church, Formerly World Gospel Mission

The United Methodist Church work grew out of the World Gospel Mission, which began their work in Burundi in 1939. The World Gospel Mission had been invited by the Free Methodist Mission to assist with evangelism in the area to which they had been assigned, in the eastern part of the country. Rev and Mrs. Virgil Kirkpatrick carried the load of this new mission alone for five years before new recruits join them.¹⁰ The Free Methodist missionaries helped a lot with administrative procedures and legal matters, until World Gospel Mission got its own governmental legal status in 1951.

⁹ Charles A. Tidwell, *Church Administration: Effective Leadership for Ministry* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1985), 241.

¹⁰ Hohensee, 48.

One of the emphases of the early years in WGM work was the outreach to new areas with the Gospel, evangelizing, and planting churches. These churches were called “World Gospel Churches” in this early period. This study did not find information about decision-making processes within the early WGM work. It does not mean that no decisions were made. The point is that the leaders were more concerned with adjustments that were necessary when the missionaries handed over the administrative responsibility to Burundian leaders who were given the title “legal representative,” meaning in part that this person was responsible for interfacing with the government. One of the early WGM missionaries, Donald Hohensee, has looked back on this transition process and has concluded that it was a very difficult time. Burundian leaders in the World Gospel Church were so overwhelmed with managing their schools and health care programs as well as dealing with disciplinary problems that there was no time left to establish effective participative decision-making processes.

In the recent past, there has been even greater change for the World Gospel Church. Bishop Alfred Ndoricimpa started a process that eventually led to making the churches a part of the global United Methodist Church. The first step was in 1980, when the church became the Evangelical Episcopal Church, with Ndoricimpa as its first bishop. Then in 1982 he led the negotiations that, in 1984, led to the Evangelical Episcopal Church joining the United Methodist Church. The second step was in August 1984, when the Burundi Annual Conference became a part of the United Methodist Africa Central

Conference,¹¹ attaching the Burundi churches to Methodists in Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, and Sudan.

All of this change had a dramatic bearing on the decision making in what had been the World Gospel Church, for Methodists had a structure that centralized authority in its bishops and archbishops. It became obvious that church members and local leaders were not comfortable with the top leaders' delay in carrying out normal church processes. For example, between 1987 and 2006, there were no ordinations of pastors, regardless of the need for recognized leaders in the various churches. A group of members wrote a petition to the World Conference of the United Methodist Church requesting that Bishop Alfred Nduricimpa be directed to allow corporate decision-making processes to be restored to the church. World Conference Methodist leaders advised Nduricimpa, to negotiate with those opposing his style of leadership, a move that he agreed to, but changed his mind later and decided to try to excommunicate his critics.¹² He did not succeed in removing the group he called dissidents but confusion and disorder persisted until his death on July 29, 2005 after which ordination resumed, under the direction of a Methodist bishop from Uganda.

The United Methodist Church in Burundi is still going through leadership turmoil at the time of the writing of this study. Meetings to make decisions using majority rule, both on the local and international levels, have not helped resolve the problems.

According to the current Bishop Justin Nzoyisaba, there is a small group of Methodists

¹¹ Linda Bloom, "United Methodist Bishop J. Alfred Nduricimpa Dies in Kenya." Global Ministries News Archive. http://gbgm-umc.org/global_news/full_article.cfm?articleid=3384 (accessed October 30, 2012).

¹² Justin Nzoyisaba, "The Current Situation of the United Methodist Church in Burundi" (In an interview on October 22, 2012).

that does not accept the authority of the United Methodist Church in Burundi. In a nutshell, those who do not accept the current leadership believe that, since the Methodist Church in Burundi is annexed to a regional conference, they should not be led by a local Bishop. Methodist leaders have sought the help of political authorities in trying to resolve the dispute, so far without success.

The Episcopal Church or Anglican Church of Burundi

The Anglican Church in Burundi got its start in 1935 at the invitation of the Danish Baptists.¹³ The mission, led by the church's mission agency, the Church Missionary Society, is described as having "contributed much to the growth of Protestantism in Burundi,"¹⁴ especially through its role in the "East African Revival," a movement that was acknowledged as the great work of the Holy Spirit. It is remembered that in the middle of 1930's missionaries from Rwanda went to Uganda and shared their testimonies in a worship service followed by a downpour of the Holy Spirit to the whole congregation. After this amazing spiritual experience, those moved by the Spirit traveled in East African countries including Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Uganda, Eastern Congo, Tanzania, and invited people to accept Jesus Christ as Savior and change their lives. During those times, the first Anglican mission leader, Dr. Leonard Sharp, arrived in Burundi for his exploration trip in 1934.

The work of starting a mission in Burundi was not easy. Sharp was once heard to have said: "Attacks on the missionaries which come from outside at least drive us to our

¹³ Hohensee, 90.

¹⁴ Ibid., 89.

knees and bring us together if we are loyal hearted.”¹⁵ Along with the normal challenges of pioneer mission work, the Anglican missionaries encountered resistance from the Belgian colonial authorities for the fact that they did not bring with them the French language and culture that prevailed in a substantial part of Belgium. Nevertheless, with the help of the Baptist and Friends missionaries, the church took root and was firmly established. For the sake of this study, it will not be necessary to give the accounts about details of the early years of the mission, but we shall simply address the issue of decision-making processes practiced within the church.

According to the Archbishop of the Province of the Burundi Anglican Church and Bishop of Matana Diocese, there is a need for shifting from democratic processes to the consensus processes in decision making, taking into account the interesting blend of Episcopal structure and governance at the synod level.¹⁶ Anglican Bishop Bernard Ntahoturi noted that it is one thing to make a decision and another to own it and carry it out. His concern is that the church realizes that the bishop cannot decide on their behalf because he knows the decisions must be owned by the members.

One example that Bishop Ntahoturi gives is on land ownership. In a country where more than 50% of conflicts are related to land ownership, there are cases of church “neighbors” trying to cut pieces of land off the church properties. It is Ntahoturi’s conviction that once the members of the church decide the church land belongs to them corporately, they will not have to wait for the bishop to help advocate for their land’s return. Each one will be responsible to do all in his/her personal ability to reclaim the

¹⁵ Katharine Makower, *Not a Gap Year but a Lifetime* (East Sussex, UK: Apologia Publications, 2008), 163.

¹⁶ Bernard Ntahoturi, “Decision Making Process in the Anglican Church.” (In a talk with the Archbishop on October 26, 2012).

land. But the problem is the lack of full participation of the members in the decision-making processes on matters of their churches. According to Ntatohuri's experience in the Anglican Church, ownership is only possible when there is full participation.

On April 18, 1992 the government issued Decree N° 1/11 re-organizing the legal status of all the Not-For-Profit Associations, including churches to comply with new regulations prior to democratic elections. Archbishop Ntatohuri expressed contempt for the fact that the churches have to follow this law. His argument is that churches are not like any other not-for-profit organizations. The churches operate on the basis of heart convictions, not just the voting rights that participants get after they have made their required membership subscriptions. Bishop Ntatohuri's opinion is that the decision-making processes should spring from the participants' convictions and not from those dictated by the government. He is using the consensus type of decision making because it is through this process that members get empowered and transcend the vulnerability that blocks them from the ownership of the decision they make. It is such an exercise that will help the church members change their mentality, the mentality of waiting for somebody else to make decisions on their behalf.

The Pentecostal Evangelical Fellowship of Africa in Burundi

As a denomination, the Pentecostal Evangelical Fellowship of Africa in Burundi started on December 31, 1975.¹⁷ Today, the denomination has a membership of over 100,000 in 561 local congregations and Rev. Etienne Nahimana is the Legal Representative or the Overseer, as commonly known to their members.

¹⁷ Etienne Nahimana, "Pentecostal Evangelical Fellowship of Africa in Burundi" (In an Interview on September 18, 2012).

The Pentecostals have three major levels of administration, namely: (1) the administrative board, composed of the Legal Representative, Vice-Legal Representative, Treasurer, and General Secretary; (2) the Executive Council composed of District Leaders; and (3) the General Assembly, composed of 43 representatives, including 5 representing the youth, 5 representing the women, 5 representing the districts, 7 elders, and the rest being selected pastors.

In preparation for business meetings of the General Assembly, the administrative board meets to develop an agenda. Without debating the issues, administrative board members determine if the issues require the General Assembly's attention. Once they agree on the items on the agenda that are to be presented to the assembly, the agenda is sent out to districts one month ahead of time so that people might pray and prepare their hearts to seek the will of God about it. Once the Assembly is meeting for business, they usually take a vote. However, some questions such as the ordination of new pastors, the authorization of new pastors, disciplining a person, whether a pastor or not, are deliberated using the consensus process.

The leaders of the Pentecostal Evangelical Fellowship of Africa in Burundi consider that making a decision to suspend or punish a member who has done wrong or acted in conflict with the church's bylaws is something more serious than just deciding whether to allow a church plant in a certain location. In the case of approving the planting of a church in a certain location, it is much easier because the congregation usually comes with clear information about the need, whereas for punishing a person, there might be differences of opinion about why the person should be punished or it might be because of internal individual misunderstanding such as family conflicts that are necessarily against

their code of conduct. In this kind of case, they will want to examine all the information available.

The leaders of the Pentecostal Evangelical Fellowship of Africa in Burundi also consider ordination and the authorization – a probationary period a candidate passes through before he or she is ordained – as very serious because they involve a lifelong ministry in a spiritual sense and they would not want to make a mistake by ordaining or authorizing a wrong candidate. They seek as much information as possible and make sure that the participants are in agreement on the matter. They would rather postpone the decision than push it through and “lay hands” on those who might not be called by God for ministries.

According to Rev. Nahimana, who usually chairs or clerks the General Assembly, it takes very laborious discussions in a spirit of humility and discernment so that everyone is at peace about the decisions being made. He is determined that the process take place in an atmosphere of serenity because their bylaws are clear, known, and respected by all. For example, no one would be allowed to chair a meeting for which he/she is not authorized. Nahimana is well aware that some organizations, in the absence of the chairman, nominate somebody to chair it. The bylaws of this particular denomination stipulate clearly that in the absence of the Legal Representative, only the Vice Representative can chair the General Assembly.

Ordained pastors are those given full responsibility for a congregation, performing all the pastoral duties, ministries and responsibility, including wedding ceremonies and officiating at the Lord’s Table. The authorized pastors are those who are allowed to perform some pastoral duties such as baptisms and funeral ceremonies, but are

not given full responsibility for a parish. Before ordaining new pastors, there is extensive discussion among the participants of the General Assembly about each candidate to be ordained or authorized. If consensus is not reached, they postpone the matter and wait for more discussions until all are in harmony about those to be ordained. It might take more time, as they seek more information and clarify things such as the personal life conduct of every candidate. It is only on these decisions to ordain or authorize pastors that Pentecostal Evangelical Fellowship of Africa in Burundi do not vote.

On the question about the decision-making process, Rev. Nahimana says that they put forward a consensus. However, on matters of urgency, especially when consensus proves impossible to reach, they take a vote with a simple majority.

The Catholic Experience Relating to Decision Making

Seeing that the Catholic Church was the earliest Christian religion to be established in Burundi and that there are plenty of resources about it, I will look at a historical background before relating to the subject of our study. The reader should bear in mind that whilst the background sounds unrelated to the topic, there is important concepts that informs the mind as the decision-making process in the Catholic Church is discussed. Such issues like the loss of the political figures' power in relation to the Catholic Church clergy and the attempt of the government to regain it, as well as the elements relating to the socio-political conditions, are all somewhat introduced in the account about the early Catholic Church establishment. Also, knowing that Catholicism in Burundi is one of the most widely practiced religions, with 60 percent of the total

population following Catholicism,¹⁸ it is imperative that the study looks briefly at its beginnings even if they do not relate to the decision-making processes directly.

Since 1879, writes Albert Nibimenya in *Monseigneur Joachim Ruhuna: Le Pasteur Fidele*, White Fathers attempted without success to establish a mission at Rumonge¹⁹ but two years later, they chose to flee after a local chief assassinated three of their comrades, Denioud, Augier, and D’Hoop.²⁰ It was not until 1898 that they succeeded in establishing a permanent mission at a site called Muyaga in the eastern part of the country. Catholics in Burundi call the year 1898 the “baptism of Burundi” because their work began growing rapidly. By the following year, they established a new mission in Mugeru (central Burundi) and in 1903 in Buhonga (western Burundi).²¹

As the twentieth century continued, the Catholic Church continued to grow rapidly. Between the years 1920 and 1934, the church grew from 10,000 baptized members to 140,000. The new converts included chiefs and administrative leaders. Of course, one could argue whether these conversions to Catholicism were genuine or not. But Nibimenya says that the four years during which the candidates for baptism were on probation as they went through the process of learning the religious conduct and theology, was enough to discourage what he call “volunteerists.”²²

¹⁸ Roman Catholicism in Burundi. <http://www.mapsofworld.com/burundi/religions/roman-catholicism.html> (accessed November 14, 2012).

¹⁹ Albert Nibimenya, in *Monseigneur Joachim Ruhuna: Le pasteur fidele* (Colombelles: France, Ressource Editions, 2001), 9.

²⁰ Bimpenda and Hansen, 23.

²¹ Nibimenya, 9.

²² *Ibid.*, 14.

As Christianity became more established in Burundi, of course there were new values that took shape and that changed the social and cultural beliefs. One of these new values was the reduction of the king's sacerdotal dimensions. Before the coming of Catholicism, the king was the highest priest and mediator between God—*Imana*—and the population. He interceded on behalf of his people and sought the will of God, especially during the time he needed to make a decision about responding to an invasion. In the planting season, he annually blessed one type of seed that symbolically represented other plants. The chosen seed was sorghum and it was ceremonially and spiritually blessed during the month of December during the beating of the drum called *Karyenda*, a ritual that was commonly known as *Umuganuro*.

Catholics considered the ritual of *Umuganuro* a pagan ceremony with elements of divination, sex, and other things that demonstrated the king's might. When at Bukeye, Father Canonica was asked by the king's uncle to influence the king Mwambutsa IV, still young, to celebrate the ceremony, Canonica declined because he wanted to interdict what he called the "pagan practice that is not compatible with the new religion" and the priest's challenge to *Umuganuro* posed a threat "directly the royal power,"²³ according to a Burundi historian, Michel Bahenduzi.

As a result of this showdown between Catholic leaders and the traditional rulers, the king lost the respect for his mystical powers and his authority in an important part of the life of Burundians. Starting in 1929, it was the priests who blessed the crops. The ceremonial rite of sorghum blessing became the domain of the Catholic priests.²⁴ The

²³ Michel Bahenduzi, *Culture et société*, vol. 4, (Bujumbura, Burundi: Ministère de la Jeunesse, des Sports et de la Culture, 1981), 14.

²⁴ Nibimenya, 15.

Christian teachings replaced the traditional beliefs and cultural powers that the king held. In fact, it was said that Bishop J. Gorju charged Father Pio Canonica from Italy to rear the king Mwambutsa IV, who was enthroned at 3 years old on December 16, 1915, in a Christian way.²⁵ People no longer looked at the king as all powerful, when they learned that God was the omnipotent and the omniscient. In fact, even the young king Mwambutsa IV, though he did not get baptized himself, decided to marry a young Christian at the Gitega Catholic cathedral and decided to visit the oldest known traditional holy site dedicated to God—*Imana*—by the different dynasties that succeeded each other in the country. This site was targeted by the Catholic missionary and it is the very site where they had established the second mission in Burundi, Mugeru, in 1899. At the time the king dared to go there not to perform pagan rituals but to visit the parish, Father Henry Bonneau declared that it was a “triumph of the cross” and said: “This coming of the king on the sacred mountain of Mugeru, is the destruction of the hip of pagan prejudices.”²⁶

On one hand, it was important, for the Catholic clergy, that the pagan prejudices be destroyed with the change of the mentality of the king, but on the other hand, there was a shift from the trust in the king’s authority to the authority of the church. Perhaps the best summary of the concept concerning the power of the clergy is found in the letter by the late Bishop Bernard Bududira when he announced the death of the Archbishop Joachim Ruhuna, of Gitega Diocese, who had just been assassinated on September 9, 1996:

²⁵ Bimpenda et al., 19.

²⁶ Nibimenya, 15.

We have just lost a man of great value. A true “*Mushingantahe*”²⁷ who never turned back in front of a battle. You all know the mission of a shepherd in his diocese. It is him the father of the family who ensures respect and dignity. It is him who is responsible of persons and goods. It is to him that problems and difficulties are addressed. He is the rock upon which Christ builds his church, that it may remain solid (Matthew 16:18). It is Peter who feeds the sheep and the lambs (John 21:15). It is him with, the priests and other apostolic workers, who organizes the life of the diocese so that “the will of God maybe realized” and that God’s Kingdom may reach everyone in his heart. His Excellency Bishop Joachim Ruhuna forgot nothing among all of those.²⁸

Even though the excerpts of the letter mentioned above was written and addressed to the Catholic community on a very sad situation trying to tell the strange circumstances in which the highest ranking clergy was murdered, the content reminds everyone explicitly who the person was and how he was regarded in the Burundi community. Just as the colonial powers nullified the power of the kings by obliging them to obey the new politics in place, so it seemed that the Christianization of the country rendered the loyalty of the population to the king unnecessary. In fact, the Christianization was not only on the lower levels of the community but also on the administrative levels below the king’s authority. For example, by 1933, among 33 chiefs, 21 had become Christians, and of 649 sub-chiefs, more than a half, that is, 339, had been baptized.²⁹ Unfortunately, some of these chiefs who had converted to Christianity used their power to cause trouble to protestant Christians, as is the account of Dr. Leonard Sharps, first missionary of the Anglican Church, “Later will come attacks from the enemy with persecution of adherents

²⁷ *Mushingantahe* is a very old term in the Kirundi language, hard to translate, because it describes a man full of gifts of wisdom, honesty, love of justice, strength and courage, a man in whom all the neighbors recognize themselves because his life seems to sum up all the values that all the society would like to see lived.

²⁸ Nibimenya, 113.

²⁹ Joseph Gahama, *Le Burundi sous administration Belge*, (Paris: Karthala, 1983), 229.

and Christians by Roman Catholic chiefs. People will lose their land, cows, their positions and attempts at redress will be unsuccessful.”³⁰

It was also humiliating to find that the catechists held more powers than that of the king himself in the sense that they were the eyes of the priests, with a considerable authority, especially because they were trained at the mission to carry out pluridisciplinary responsibilities such as informing the clergy at the higher levels on social situations and the general political atmosphere in the country. They were also political monitors of rebellious tendencies, of the misconduct of the sub-chiefs and encouraged the population to resist insurrections, just as it was the wish of the colonial powers.³¹

Since this study is looking at how decision-making processes are carried out in the Catholic Church, it is from this concept of power and authority of the clergy that one could lodge an argument that the foundation of an autocratic decision-making process was laid. For example, the fact that the catechists could be allowed to make decisions on their own and give reports that were easily accepted even without checking it up with anyone was a strong indicator that at their meetings in which decisions are made they were influential and autocratic.

Vivine Mbarushimana is the president of the Catholic Charismatic Prayer Group at the main Bujumbura Cathedral, Regina Mundi. The Charismatic Group, one of the movements in the Catholic religion, began in 2002 at Regina Mundi as part of a new

³⁰ Makower, 163.

³¹ Gahama, 17.

initiative to encourage prayers among the Catholic parishes around the country.³² The Group does not only offer opportunities for private prayers and pilgrimages, it also cares for the vulnerable and needy people such as widows, orphans, imprisoned, sick, bereaved, and poor people in general.

Mbarushimana is one of the leaders who are called Ministers in the movement. The movement is structured hierarchically. It has a Priest at the top, then a Shepherd, a Minister, and a Responsible of a smaller unit in the movement called the Fraternity. The Charismatic Group may follow a certain direction, such as compassion, music, evangelization, etc., depending on the decision of the Priest. On a higher level, only the Priest makes decisions and on the next lower level, the Shepherd makes decisions according to the need. “When the Shepherd has decided on something, no one is allowed to change it,” she said, “even if the decision is hard or harsh to the members of the movement!” She implied that people have to wait for 4 years when a new one is nominated by the priest and get to be released of the heavy leadership weighing upon them. It is on the Ministerial level that meetings for business take place under the chairmanship or clerkship of the Minister. Knowing that it might not sound appropriate to draw a conclusion after looking at only this one part among so many movements within the Catholic Church, it is to be understood that here we are simply underlining the issue concerning the ownership of decisions made.

There are usually prayers and worship at the beginning of all the business meetings with an intention to seek God’s help and presence in the process. The Minister gives introductions and thanks the participants for attending. The agenda is given after

³² Vivine Mbarushimana, “Decision Making Process in the Catholic Charismatic Prayer Group” (In an informal talk on September 19, 2012).

the “get to know each other” time and comments are encouraged in case there is somebody who would want to have the agenda changed or modified. The agenda is prepared ahead of time by a group of 15 people. When the small group meets to prepare the agenda, they base their thoughts on the training that they have received from the Priest and the information they have on what other groups are doing elsewhere. On agreeing on the agenda, they follow the consensus process.

During the assembly at the ministerial level, at which about 50 people attend, the clerk presents the agenda and gives time to the participants to discuss it. Everyone is free to speak so long as they ask to be called upon. When there seems to be diverting ideas and participants seem to disagree, the clerks takes a vote by the raise of hands to find if those in favor are more than those who are not in favor. Sometimes the clerk can influence the voting, by introducing what she/he sees as necessary. For example, when Mbarushimana learned that on February 11, the Virgin Mary appeared to announce that she “had come to alleviate the suffering,” she pushed the participants to accept that day to do compassion in their movement and it should be on February 11th of each year.

Mbarushimana has dealt with cases of participants trying to influence and dominate the decision-making process. She identified three reasons why the process proved hard to facilitate and unity hard to achieve. One reason was the claim that somebody in the meeting for business had seen a vision from God about what should be done in the movement. The second reason is the claim that a member would be the one to contribute the necessary funds that were being sought to fulfill the mission, such as the purchase of the food stuff to be cooked and taken to the sick in the hospital. The third reason was the speculation by a member or some members of the group that they would

be chosen as the next ministers or even ascend to the position of becoming a Shepherd if they showed their eloquence and power in their inputs and insights during the proceedings and deliberations.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Mbarushimana laments that there was a time when 50 persons agreed to visit the prison but only 15 turned up. She was not sure if the poor participation in the event was caused by the fact that during the voting those who said no were not really supporting the decision and therefore did not respond. Obviously if only 15 people among 50 had said yes during the voting, the decision could not have been made, seeing that they use the majority rule in order to take the decision as an accepted one.

This chapter has provided an overview of the origins and decision-making processes of the various churches which have been established in Burundi. We have seen that the Protestant churches tend to have the same process in making their decisions, which is that of majority rule. Only the Catholic church uses the autocratic process, as confirmed by the Archbishop Andre Perraudin, in these terms, “Concerning the organization and the direction of the apostolate, the unique and true chief of the diocese is the Bishop, successor of the Apostles and representative of Jesus Christ. All priests, religious as well as seculars, owe obedience to him in this domain.”³³

The next chapter will broaden the discussion to consider the decision-making processes at the political level of government, the kings of the royal court and the institution of elders known as the *Bashingantahe* and will provide socio-political explanations for the decision making adopted in Burundi.

³³ André Perraudin, *Statut synodaux de l'archidiocèse de Kabgayi* (Kabgayi, Rwanda: Faculté Décennales, 1960), 19.

CHAPTER 5

DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES IN BURUNDI: PAST AND PRESENT

Burundi's pre-colonial history is similar to that of other countries elsewhere in the world and its monarchical political system was well established by the time Germany took control of it from Belgium from 1903 to 1914. Belgium succeeded Germany as the colonial power in Ruanda-Urundi, as part of the peace process after World War I. Belgium colonial control continued until independence in 1962. Even as early as 1868 and afterwards, when slavery was a major problem in the central and eastern parts of Africa, there seems to be no evidence that the country was ever seriously threatened by slaving activity.¹ This was probably due to the fact that the kingdom was well organized politically and that there was unity in the population.

Burundi is inhabited by three Bantu-speaking groups that call themselves ethnic groups or tribes. These groups do not comply with the characteristics of communities with a consciousness of being a people distinct from all others with such elements as a belief in a common ancestry and sharing common culture, such as language and religion.² The Hutus, Tutsi, and Twa of Burundi do not meet these characteristics. They all speak the same language, Kirundi. They claim the same ancestors, share the same history and culture, including worship of the same God, *Imana*, and having the same homeland. Having said this, foreigners who visit Burundi, with the stereotype in mind about these groups, do not hesitate to write like Penny Relph, "Although there were some differences

¹ Ralph Choate, *Dust of His Feet* (Mweya, Burundi: 1965), 3.

² Dewi Hughes, *Peace to the Nations (Zechariah 9:10): Ethnicity in the Mission of God* (Lausanne Global Conversation, 2010), 1.

between Hutus and Tutsis, they were not tribes in the traditional sense but social groups within the same culture, and the distinctions were not rigid”.³ Nigel Watts suggested that, in describing the differences among these people, “perhaps ‘categories’ is the best word.”⁴ Even Donald Hohensee, researching on the church growth in Burundi between 1879 and 1977 on both Catholic and Protestant missions, says, “In all my research I did not find one group that kept a record as to what number of their membership belonged to the Hutu tribe or what number of their membership belonged to the Tutsi tribe, either in the past or in these days.”⁵

Decision Making at the Royal Court

Jean Pierre Chretien proposes that the first Burundi kingdom was established by King Ntare Rushatsi I, more or less in 1680-1709.⁶ The authority of the king in early Burundi was apparent everywhere, but particularly during the daily court cases he handled. Of course, he was not alone. He not only welcomed people who were in conflicts or those who sought his advice but also those who wanted to get favors from him. His main aides were the elders, *abashingantahe*, who worked hand in hand with his Princes, called *Ganwa*. The king had also another group of people at his court called the

³ Penny Relph, *An African Apostle: The Story of David Ndaruhutse* (Kent,UK: African Revival Ministries International, 2000), 29.

⁴ Nigel Watt, *Burundi: Biography of a Small African Country*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 24.

⁵ Honensee, 39.

⁶ Emile Mworoha, *Histoire du Burundi: Des origines à la fin du XIX siècle* (Paris: Hattier, 1987), 134.

closer ones, *Abishikira*, who, according to Augustin Nsanze, “met with the king to get directives and to give propositions.”⁷

The decision-making process at the court thus had participative elements, but all decisions were made solely by the king. He decided what he wanted; he gave directives on anything he saw fit; he was free to accept and follow propositions or reject them. But in everything he did, he was somehow empowered by being surrounded by the elders. The saying in Kirundi was that the king’s capacity building is done by those around him – “*umwami agirwa n’abagabo*.” In brief, Burundi’s traditional political model was very autocratic; the king maintained total control and ownership of the decisions he made.

The authority of the king remained unchallenged until the arrival of the early colonizers. It was not until 1903, at the time of the defeat of King Mwezi IV, Gisabo, that the Germans made it clear that the king was no longer supreme in making decisions. He was forced to obey somebody else and follow his instructions. At the Kiganda’s famous treaty, on June 6, 1903, between the king Mwezi Gisabo and the German Captain Von Beringe, the king was forced to accept three obligations: (1) recognize the military base in Usumbura (current capital Bujumbura); (2) pay 424 heads of cows; and (3) make the road from Usumbura (west of the country) to Muyaga (east of the country). In these negotiations, Beringe only conceded that he would support the king as long as he would obey.⁸

Even when the Belgians came in after the Germanic rule, they maintained the power the Germans had seized and made sure only they made the decisions. For example,

⁷ Augustin Nsanze, *Un domaine royal au Burundi* (Cedex 01, Société Française d’Histoire d’Outre-Mer, 1980), 19.

⁸ Melchior Mukuri, *Dictionnaire chronologique au Burundi* (Bujumbura, Burundi: Université du Burundi, 2003), 21.

between 1939 and 1952, they established what they called the Council of the King; E. Jungers, the General Governor of Ruanda–Urundi, remembered to remind the Council’s members as to their roles and responsibilities. He wrote a long letter in 1945 summarized in these terms: “The Council of the King is not a deliberative assembly but a consultative one... It only gives the points of view on the questions that the king himself submits... As a result, never will the Council make definitive decisions.”⁹ This warning is a vivid indicator that a sound decision-making process, neither the former autocratic one in which the king was responsible and controlled the decision, nor the new one that allowed the participation of members of the Council, such as a Collective-Participative decision-making process, was permitted.

How powerful were the Belgian governors in Ruanda–Urundi? Records by early missionaries confirm that that these political figures were authoritarian and completely overlooked the leadership systems they found in place. They established visa entry requirements almost as the same as what is found in some of today’s governments. For example, in 2005, for a Burundian to visit the Czech Republic he/she was required to make a deposit of \$5000 in order to get a single entry visa. It was unimaginable that the missionaries in 1935 were required to make a deposit of \$500 in South Africa, in order to get a visa for Burundi. The governor had the authority to cancel or waive a visa for anyone without consulting the king, thus minimizing the decision-making capacity that the king had.

The Governor received us kindly, and I explained to him what I purposed to do. I presented a letter of introduction I had secured from Dr. Anet in Brussels, the liaison officer between the Belgian Government and Protestant missions, which put me in a favorable light. He wished me well, but before I left I told him that my

⁹ Joseph Gahama, *Le Burundi sous l’administration Belge*. 2nd ed. (Paris: Editions Karthala, 2001), 140.

wife and two daughters were in Durban wanting to come to me and that I very much wanted them to come, but that they were required to deposit \$500 each in order to get visas. He wrote a note in French and signing it handed it to me, instructing that it be sent to my people and by them to the Belgian Consulate General in South Africa, and that he would visa their passports without the deposits. »¹⁰

According to this account, recorded in 1935 by the Free Methodist missionary, John Wesley Haley, it was evident that an autocratic decision-making spirit had already been planted during the early missionary time and that the king could do nothing about it. Augustin Nsanze says in *Le Burundi Contemporain, l'Etat-Nation en question 1956-2002*, that the problem was for the sovereign to exercise his power as defined in the law that the colonized imposed, seeing that there was a regime in which the king reigned without governing.¹¹ Having said this, one should not assume that the king had lost total control of the population completely, even though evidently the king was limited in how far the decisions which he would make would go. Dominique Darbon and Philippe L'Hoiry argue that the allegiance of the population to the king remained at least until 1965.¹²

In view of these facts, the research therefore can conclude that, regardless of limited information because of the fact that most of the tradition is oral, there is nothing that can be appreciated at that royal court to support the decision-making process that is being advocated for in this study. The decision-making process at the king's court was simply blurred, weakened, and perhaps annihilated altogether by the foreign colonial and governing policies. One can also wonder if the early traditional leaders might not have

¹⁰ John Wesley Haley, *But Thy Right Hand* (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1949), 31-32.

¹¹ Augustin Nsanze, *Le Burundi contemporain, l'etat-nation en question 1956-2002* (Paris: Editions l'Harmattan, 2003), 28.

¹² Dominique Darbon and Philippe L'Hoiry, *Pouvoir et intégration politique: les cas du Burundi et du Malawi* (Bordeaux, France: Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Bordeaux, 1982), 48.

copied from the colonizers the method of making decisions. It was certainly tempting for the traditional elders to think that making decisions that no one could contest was a great idea.

The Role of the Elders

Before the role of the elders is analyzed, I will present the expected roles played by elders. Adrien Ntabona, in *Les Abashingantahe à l'heure de l'Interculturation*, gives a list of roles that were expected to be played by elders, and here are summarized only 4 that are relevant to the topic being researched: (1) to settle lawsuits through judicial means or through the conciliation processes; (2) to counsel and balance the political power at all levels; (3) to speak on behalf of the common good, of human rights and of socio-political responsibility whenever deemed necessary; and (4) to validate, in the name of the population, the new king, the new chief, and the new sub-chief.¹³ Most people would recognize an elder as a person who has been invested to administer judgment, hence, the name “elder” became synonymous with the term “judge.”

These men were very important in the community, especially in the pre-colonial times, and were called upon any time a decision needed to be made on anything. Since they were considered as the wise people of the society, their counsel was sought not only by the king himself but also the community, at the lowest level. To be invested in the system of the elders was considered as a privilege and therefore no one could get into it of his own accord. In Kirundi, the local language for Burundi, the elder is *Umushingantahe* and the plural is *Abashingantahe*. The “Bashingantahe – wise men, are

¹³ Adrien Ntabona, *Les Bashingantahe à l'heure de l'interculturalisation* (Bujumbura, Burundi: Editions CRID, 2010), 27.

appointed by local communities themselves, acting as local mediators and judges.”¹⁴ In investing an *Umushingantahe* into the system, there were criteria that were to be observed.

One of the strongest criteria was the fact that people testified about the man’s life. They looked at the behavior at home and in the neighborhood. This was to be observed with or without the candidate being interviewed or being aware that he is monitored. They also listened to him to discern if there was wisdom in what he said, that he was eloquent, that he know how to control himself, that he was not tempered, that he maintained his household in order, had a good relationship with his wife, that he does not steal, that he paid his debts and that he respected his superiors.¹⁵ But even if all was found favorable to being accepted in the system and be invested, one had to ask for it, even if his father was one. After the father of one to be invested died, the son would ask to replace his father, a request that was easily considered, given the good reputation of his late father. There was a great ceremony in which the invested man would be charged in the following terms:

You elder, now you have swallowed the stone of the men. If you were not reconciling stop it, if you lied, stop it. From now onwards, men, those in authority have invested you in the presence of the whole country. If you see people in conflict make reconcile them. If you are attacked to not retaliate, but ask for help from other men. Do not fight for fear to put a bad reputation on the system. And if you make a judgment you will not be doing it alone, you will be with others.¹⁶

The elder who was more eloquent and seemed to have insights as to what the judgment should be, was more powerful and was feared. He was rewarded and if they

¹⁴ Peter Uvin, *Life After Violence: A People’s Story of Burundi* (New York: Zed Books, 2009), 7.

¹⁵ Jean Baptiste Ntahokaja, *Ibanga ry’Abashingantahe mu Ntwaro Rusangi* (Bujumbura, Burundi: Presses Lavigerie, 2011), 22.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

offered drinks he drank first; also, those who administered judgment on the village level were not the same as those who did those at the king's court.¹⁷ This inequality is indicative of what indeed should be transcended. It is very unfortunate that a group of people should come together to deal with the same case only to realize that only one's voice is considered and heeded.

Seeing that the whole *Bashingantahe* concept is known as a system, one would wonder why one individual in the system would be singled out. "A system is composed of parts, but we cannot understand a system by looking only at its parts. We need to work with the whole system, even as we work with individual parts or isolated problems."¹⁸ According to this concept concerning a system, it seems as if one would understand that the elders were to be united in whatever decision they made about the case in a way that one individual's suggestions would be put in the pool where others are so that at the end the elders would pick up one that fits the situation, without naming the owner, necessarily.

Eloquence and having insights are good, but the concept that they are inborn to only a few or only one person in a group is simply not acceptable. One may have eloquence but another may have an in-depth analysis as to what is being said. Another person of the group might have a strong discernment that could work well with one who has insights and analysis of the situation. These qualities are complementary to each other and they go along each other well if they are well utilized and considered from all participants. Respecting one who speaks fluently versus one who speaks hesitantly or

¹⁷ Ibid., 25.

¹⁸ Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 1999), 139.

perhaps one who stammers like the Moses sounds like discrimination on the basis of one's mental capacity. And how about the invisible capacities that one might not necessarily show during a one-day court case?

Unfortunately in the Burundi culture there was a practice that a man who spoke more eloquently was the one who should be feared and rewarded, as if others were simply escorting the process without involving themselves. Another element observed was the location where the elder served as determinant of the level of power he held in those early days. In my research, I did not find a criterion upon which to base the choice as to who served at the royal court and who served at the village courts. The court at the king's palace seemed highly regarded, and yet those more eloquent ones still remained in the village. While the services rendered by the elders were important, it was unfortunate that the process by which they made decisions was dictated by one individual's eloquence. There was also fear that one's propositions or suggestions would not be accepted.

In Os Guinness' *Call*, there is a chapter in which he gives details on what he called the "Audience of One." He urges his readers that they should seek not to be people pleasers. He cites President Harry Truman, who once said that he wondered how far Moses would have gone if he had taken a poll in Egypt.¹⁹ In contrast with the eloquence that the elders hoped to demonstrate during the early court cases for others to appreciate and reward, the Christian attitude is just the opposite. Guinness says that it is that very reason "why Christ-centered heroism does not need to be noticed or publicized" and that

¹⁹ Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1998), 75.

by being in the presence of the Audience of One all our endeavors are transformed.²⁰ This study is therefore advocating for the transformation of the endeavors of those gathered to make decisions so that they may say, as Guinness suggests, “I have only one audience. Before you I have nothing to prove, nothing to gain, nothing to lose.”²¹

One who was offended was encouraged to find one elder and tell him his case. If the elder told him that he would win, the offended one proceeded. If the elder told him that he would lose, he did not proceed. When the two conflicting parties spoke their cases, the elders called the witnesses, and if the case was serious and they could not finish the same day, they deliberated on the case on their own. They announced to the conflicting parties that the judgments were being dreamed and that their god needed to drink before it pronounced judgment. The next day, they called the two to hear the decision. No one among them was allowed to say who proposed what to be said, and which judgment they agreed upon. No one would say who would win and the one who would lose. If one broke the secret, he was punished. People were free to take the case to the king with the king’s proceedings, but they had to take an oath and to promise what they would give if they did not say the truth. Usually it was a cow and a bull. There were cases in which a defendant gave a bribe to the elders.²² “Whenever there were problems in the villages related to land disputes, theft, or violence, these elders were called on to administer judgments and give advice.”²³ And they could claim that they were capable of

²⁰ Ibid., 74.

²¹ Ibid., 75.

²² Ntahokaja, 27.

²³ David Niyonzima and Lon Fendall. *Unlocking Horns: Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Burundi* (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 2001), 28.

helping the community. They were almost like what Patricia Raybon describes as having the knowledge of the ages at their right hand and the wisdom of the universe at their left hand,²⁴ even though some of them were not all that old.

The Socio-Political Factors Affecting the Decision-Making Process Today

We have seen how King Mwezi Gisabo IV was stripped of his governing role by the colonial powers – Germany and Belgium – and how the Christianization of the country also caused changes in the traditional concepts of the king’s authority. The account of those changes may suggest that the population was left with no sense of independence as far as deciding what they deem fit for themselves. Even the *Bashingantahe* had to adjust to the situation. As Dominik Kohlhagen observed, “Certain judiciary authority, traditional elders like *Bashingantahe* had to adapt themselves to the institutions introduced under the colonization.”²⁵ In other words, core cultural values were no longer held firmly and perhaps even got lost. This is something that Adrien Ntabona called “acculturation by substitution.”²⁶ By this he means that the elders developed some survival mechanisms by submitting to the new rulers, thus substituting their traditional ways of acting on behalf of the community with the obedience to and dependency on the authority of the colonial government.

The wave of independence in the early 1960s swept through some African countries and caused them to set about replacing the colonial governments with their own

²⁴ Patricia Raybon, *My First White Friend: Confessions on Race, Love and Forgiveness* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 215.

²⁵ Dominik Kohlhagen, *Burundi: la justice en milieu rural* (Bruxelles, Belgique: RCN Justice & Democracy, 2009), 22.

²⁶ Ntabona, 29.

independent governments. Almost in the same way, the wave of democracy challenged several African countries to move from military dictatorships and organize reasonably free and fair elected democracies in the 1990s. On the one hand, for Burundi, the difference between the struggle for independence and the movement to become a democratic country was that the first was motivated by nationalistic ambitions and a concerned patriotism, while the quest for democracy was motivated by the incentives offered by the developed countries such as those of North America and Europe. On the other hand, the wave of independence and democracy were the same in the sense that they all did not stem from the explicit support of the population but from the efforts of autocratic leaders such as of the heads of political party and a charismatic president.

Blind Obedience

Those changes, unfortunately, did not encourage the spirit of discernment and a logical analysis necessary when the people respond to the socio-political realities, but instead they provoked a blurring of minds and the tearing up of the conceptual, mental, and socio-political fabric that resulted in total deculturation,²⁷ as Adrien Ntabona observed. For instance, the habit of calling the population to work on different projects such as roads, planting of coffee, and terracing the mountains without payment assumed that people would simply obey without protesting when the orders come from a higher authority. This obeying without reasoning for fear of being punished became perhaps the root causes of a concept that, even when participants gather for a meeting for business, they expect that the leader will be the one to decide. This concept is supported by

²⁷ Ibid., 31.

Ntabona, who asserts that “People are robbed of their power to discern and the capacity of making autonomous decisions, to the benefit of the true deciders, situated at the zenith of totalitarianism.”²⁸

Hostile Political Leadership

Since during the colonial era colonial leaders often used the divide and rule principle, it was expected that the post-colonial era would be different. For example, it was assumed that the leaders would allow for consultation and restoration of the people’s voice, such as that which was heard in the days of the *Bashingantahe*. Instead, a succession of military dictators acted exactly like the colonial officials. For example, during the regime that was hostile to religions in Burundi in 1977-1987, the president dealt with the clergy just as the colonial leaders dealt with the traditional customary leadership. In an interview that President Colonel Jean Baptiste Bagaza had with the *Evangelische Kommentare* in Germany in 1983, he stated: “We have reduced the influence of the Catholic Church and we will reduce it even more, although the measures we have taken are rather not well understood, especially in Europe.”²⁹ With this statement, it is clear that the government attempted to regain the power that it assumed was in the hands of the clergy. This effort was maintained throughout the subsequent regime although the oppression and persecution of the church ended with a *coup d’état* that toppled Bagaza in 1987.

²⁸ Ibid., 45.

²⁹ Bernard Kouchner, *Burundi: La déviance d’un pouvoir solitaire* (Bruxelles, Belgique: Les Editions de la Longue Vue, 1997), 55.

Distorted Mentality

In view of the mentality that has developed in the population as far as making decisions was concerned, it became evident that one of the greatest assumptions was that a leader is the decision maker, even during business meetings. The trend has been observed concerning the shifts of authority from the king to the colonial powers – Germanic and Belgian rules. The same trend of authority shift has manifested itself when the power of the Catholic Mission in Burundi was weakened by a political regime hostile to religious activities, as if it was reclaiming its lost authority.

The unfortunate fact is that during a period known as a democratic era, the population still did not exercise their free will, but remained vulnerable, seeing that “they have been mishandled by the colonial and post-colonial regimes.”³⁰ This is probably the reason why Major Pierre Buyoya, the successor of Colonel Bagaza, promulgated a law allowing a multiparty system on April 18, 1992. He warned that only those who abstained from “ethnic propaganda and regionalism” would be permitted.³¹ It was clear that the population needed guidance and to be empowered as they prepared to make major decisions democratically on whom they wanted as political leaders.

This study has found that the empowerment to exercise free will independently, especially in making decisions, has not been firmly rooted in the population mentality. It has been reported that even during parliamentary sessions, some members of parliament still considered the political party leader’s leaning or opinion instead of their own understanding, before they raised their hands to approve or disapprove a motion. If this is

³⁰ Ntabona, 31.

³¹ Mark Manirakiza, *Burundi: quand le passé ne passe pas* (Bruxelles, Belgique: La longue Vue, 2002), 51.

true for the representatives of the population, how easy can it be for the rest of the population that has been manipulated or who can be easily influenced when orders come from on high? Unfortunately, some of the new democratically elected political leaders have maintained the old unfortunate divisive legacies. During their political campaigns, it has been apparent that they have used ethnically divisive slogans and have relied heavily on ethnic allegiances to win their votes.

Traumatic Events

When the population went to the ballot during the democratic elections, they did not respect the proclaimed law. Ethnocentrism became the basis on which they voted. Instead of voting according to the program presented by a political party, they only wanted a change of leadership. Two camps quickly developed, namely those wanting to maintain a status quo and those who wanted a new leadership at all costs. Tragically, the two camps confronted each other in bloody violence that left hundreds of thousands dead, orphaned, widowed, and miserable, while others became refugees in other parts of the world. In fact, following the 1993 assassination of President Melchior Ndadaye, a vicious cycle of violence has terrified the country. Though significant steps have been taken toward the creation of a lasting peace, with the help of the international community, there are an untold number of less-visible scars today. As communities have been torn apart, the psychological trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other severe problems related to the violence, have become epidemic. Is the population capable of a decision-making process that is sound, given the traumatic situation it has endured?

The American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition Text Revision*, states that a person that has been exposed to

trauma is one who “experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others and the person’s response involved intense fear, helplessness or horror.”³² Since this is the case for Burundi, one can argue that a great number of adults who saw the interethnic violence and killings are today traumatized people, including leaders who are supposed to facilitate the decision-making processes.

If one wants to study the decision-making processes facilitated by Burundi leaders, it seems that it is necessary to also look at the mental health of these leaders. As said above, traumatic events have now affected people and therefore no doubt interfere when they engage in making decisions during their various business meetings. Among the other things that hinder them from making good decisions, trauma alters these people’s concept of reality.

Refugee Situations

An example of how trauma alters a person’s concept of reality is visible in the case of refugees. In the 1972 interethnic war, over 300,000 Burundians crossed into Tanzania. As some of these returned back home, they brought with them years of unhealed trauma that became visible in their behavior. Many of these, especially those that have now taken leadership responsibilities, live in denial. Some of them do not want to talk about what they have gone through because it is too painful to remember. Others do not think about the events in their refugee situation as being traumatic. But on the

³² Michael B. First, ed. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th ed. (Washington: DC, American Psychiatric Association, 2000), 467.

other hand, anyone who has gone through a war situation cannot be indifferent to the effects of violence.

A study was done about the way Burundian refugees understood the issues about their identity. Liisa Malkki, in the *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*, says that you get a different answer depending on which group of Burundians you ask, where you ask, and to whom you pose the question of identity.³³ For example a Tutsi asking the location where Hutu lived indicated a false address. Also, René Lemarchand, in *Burundi: Ethnic Conflict and Genocide*, says that even in Burundi the response to the question changes depending on who is asking, interests, and why the question is asked.³⁴ Marc Sommers, in his *Fear in Bongoland: Burundi Refugees in Urban Tanzania*, also said almost the same thing in describing the Burundian community in Dar Es Salaam, that the answer one gets when asking a question depends on who is asking and why.³⁵ In view of these realities, one can easily conclude that healing processes must be sought out for traumatized leaders before a decision-making process can be facilitated.

Capacity to Engage in Decision-Making Processes

In talking about the capacity of people who are traumatized to engage in informed decision-making processes, it is to be remembered that it is not an easy thing. People

³³ Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 352.

³⁴ René Lemarchand, *Burundi: Ethnic Conflict and Genocide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 206.

³⁵ Marc Sommers, *Fear in Bongoland: Burundi Refugees in Urban Tanzania* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), 224.

involved must be mentally able to analyze the whole process and must have clear information. Members of a community whose behavior is affected by trauma cannot make good decisions. It is this community that is described as a system in trouble. The good news, according to Margaret Wheatley in her *Leadership and the New Science*, is that

... it can be restored to health by connecting it to more of itself. To make a system stronger, we need to create stronger relationships. ... The solutions the system needs are usually already present in it. If a system is suffering, this indicates that it lacks sufficient access to itself. It might be lacking information, it might have lost clarity about who it is, it might have troubled relationships, or it might be ignoring those who have valuable insights.³⁶

It is indisputable that having strong mental health is essential to facilitating decision-making processes. It has been said that repetitive tragic events can hinder good leadership. In this situation, the community becomes indifferent and does not exercise its capacity to make good decisions, especially during meetings. It has been demonstrated that when both the leaders and the community are affected by political pressure and effects of violence, they cannot make informed decisions independently. The interference of such things as trauma in people's minds and behavior is so profound that not everyone realizes what has happened until the time comes for making decisions. Leaders often try to find solutions through reinforcing laws and regulations, but people simply do not understand why they should even obey those laws. In decision-making processes, it is clear that no good decision is made by either the leaders who facilitate the process or the community who takes part in the process until all those involved have developed good mental health through a healing process that restores the heart and the mind.

³⁶ Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (San Francisco: CA, Berrett-Koehler, 1999), 145.

Even today when politicians talk about “returning the word” to the population through democratic processes of election and good governance, there are still evidences of “higher orders” influencing the population’s life conditions. In other words, the democratic process has not proven to be effective to help change people’s mentality in making their own decisions and feeling responsible about them. The herding mentality is as vivid presently as the time, during the colonial period, when the communities were asked to work without knowing why they should do it. Dr. Larry Raifman defines the herding mentality as a behavior that “involves decision making based upon external public information exclusively rather than doing independent (as in your own) thinking.”³⁷ It is exactly what the “higher orders” do. Once the external political or administrative information is given, usually in a form of a measure, it is expected that the concerned ones will comply without question, even if those receiving it are in a meeting for business! Regarding this herding mentality, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche 1844-1900, “advocated a ‘transvaluation of values’ from the herd morality of democratic equality ... to a strong-willed self-assertiveness.”³⁸ On this, there is accuracy of reality pertaining to the point of this discussion. While this study does not support Nietzsche’s concepts,³⁹ especially those attacking the Christian doctrines, it laments the fact that, unfortunately, even during the present political meetings, the participants are still expecting the “leaders” to decide and not exercise their self-assertiveness.

³⁷ Larry Raifman, “Money, Psychology and the Law” Cogito. <https://cogito.cty.jhu.edu/17671/cogito-conversation-dr-larry-raifman-money-psychology-and-the-law/> (accessed October 27, 2012).

³⁸ Arthur Holmes, “Friedrich Nietzsche,” in *Who's Who in Christian History*. James D. Douglas, Philip W. Comfort, Donald Mitchell, eds. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), 514.

³⁹ After Nietzsche was no longer teaching at the University of Basel, he wrote *The Antichrist* in 1895, a book that was an attack on Christian doctrine. He is accredited with the “death of God” theology that ran a lot of ink in the 1960s.

CHAPTER 6

THE CHARACTERISTICS RECOMMENDED FOR A FRIENDS DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

As discussed in this dissertation, a Friends decision-making process should have its own characteristics. In Chapter 1, several decision-making styles were briefly discussed and it was found that none of them could be recommended for Friends. For the sake of refreshing the reader's mind, we have talked about: the democratic, autocratic, collective-participative, and consensus decision making. The only style that was found as being closer to the Friends was the consensus process, but even this lacked the focus on listening to the Holy Spirit for direction. For the benefits of our study, on a decision-making process that transcends cultural biases, let us consider the acronym F.R.I.E.N.D.S. in an attempt to describe the Friends decision-making process. While the acronym and its application is my own idea, I realize that almost all the work we do as scholars is influenced by what we have learned from others. In order to encapsulate the findings in this research, I have developed the following model: **F**ellowship-bound for the wider body of Friends; **R**eincarnating the mind of Christ according to the Scriptures; **I**nvolving each participant present; **E**mpathetic to the views of the other; **N**on-discriminating on the basis of background; **D**isciplined on the Quaker values; **S**pirit-led from beginning to the end.

Fellowship-Bound for the Wider Body Of Friends

By Fellowship-bound, we mean the very act of coming together in a meeting in which decisions are made. It has been observed that during yearly meeting sessions, for

example, some Friends have not seen each other for at least a year (if they remained representatives for another term). In Burundi, newly nominated or elected representatives have not met at all. It is during the occasion of the yearly meeting sessions that these people, some of whom have traveled long distances, meet to celebrate their oneness as the Friends of Christ. They shake hands, share about their home ministry, and establish new relationships as in any social gathering. Even if this might be done informally in the yard of the meeting venue, over lunch or in the dormitory, the fellowship has started. It does not matter that they have not shared about the concern they have brought in their minds to put on the agenda.

Unfortunately, some leaders with questionable motives and methods take the opportunity before the meeting to brief their delegates on the points they intend to push forward in the meeting. They sometimes even do propaganda talks and campaign for who they want nominated. It has even been reported in the Burundi Yearly Meeting that some leaders have tried to buy the delegates' support through distributions of funds or promises of what they will get once they vote for the leaders they are being asked to support. Other organizers organize their camps and start to anticipate the votes they will get, for the sake of the meeting for business where voting is exercised.

A fellowship-based decision-making process is important because when Friends come together to fellowship about the concerns pertaining to their ministry and testimony, participants do not limit themselves to the here and now. They look beyond their present role as representatives and see the corporate fellowship of the whole body of Friends, locally, regionally, and even internationally. When the meeting starts, they bring with them that fellowship that started before the meeting among the delegates. That

fellowship also embraces those not present physically, but present invisibly. The process itself therefore does not only take into consideration the interests of those participating, but also cares about those who are not there. The awareness of the decision involving even those whom the participants are representing must be carefully analyzed and scrutinized so that they will not jeopardize the existing fellowship of Friends regardless of their differing opinions.

Reincarnating the Mind of Christ

What is meant by “reincarnating?” Reincarnating the mind of Christ means that if Christ would be physically present as a decision is made, He would express himself in a resounding “Amen” in agreement. “Reincarnation is an ancient religious belief found in many pagan religions. It teaches that through a series of deaths and rebirths, one can eventually purge oneself of all sins and ultimately reach oneness, or absorption, with the spiritual Absolute.”¹ This is not what we want to talk about, seeing that the belief in reincarnation, as held by pagan religions “contradicts divine revelation.”² Rather, I am suggesting here something else that conveys the meaning of the image of Christ as described in Philippians 2:6-7. In 1 Corinthians 12:27, Paul uses a metaphor of a church as a reincarnation of Christ. “This expression describes the Christian life as a kind of reincarnation of Christ in a believer’s life. This is in fact God’s ideal and purpose—for Christ to live His life in and then through each believer.”³ We also read in the Bible concerning the “mind of Christ.” Paul is a very strong advocate for Christians to seek the

¹ Dan Story. *Defending Your Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1997), 187.

² *Ibid.*, 179-180.

³ John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Ga 4:19–20)* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 603.

mind of Christ: “Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” Philippians 2:5-8. “The type of mind Paul urges us to form is prescribed clearly—the mind of true humility; the mind ‘which was also in Christ Jesus’ when He was on this earth, utterly self-effaced and self-emptied; not the mind of Christ when He was in glory. Humility is the exhibition of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and is the touchstone of saintliness.”⁴

In a meeting for business where participants seek to reincarnate the mind of Christ, personal interests and cultural biases are laid down. The first priority for members is to be able to discern what Jesus would have said if He were here. The driving force for them becomes the inspiration from within instead of how they will benefit when the resolution is passed. Their attitude becomes, “May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

How can the participants achieve this reincarnation? It is through their prayerful consideration of each utterance they make, each verbal contribution they make, and each explanation they give. Their suggestions concerning the way forward must proceed from a prayerful comprehension that what they are advocating is something that will give glory to God. And again they must consider themselves as vessels in which God’s grace and love are served, and channels through which a blessing from God flows to the community. The Apostle Paul talks about the renewing of people’s minds as they seek God’s will. “He instructs believers in Rome, Ephesus and Colossae to have their minds

⁴ Oswald Chambers. *The Moral Foundation of Life: A Series of Talks on the Ethical Principles of the Christian Life* (Hants UK: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1936).

renewed so that they will have knowledge and understanding of God's will for their daily lives and Christian witness (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:23; Colossians 1:9; 3:2)."⁵

Involving Each Participant Present

To involve is a term that means to engage as a participant. Everyone who has come to the meeting in which decisions are made is a participant and must be active. It is true that the level of involvement might differ from one person to another, given the eloquence of some more than others. Some may give lengthy verbal explanations, clarifications, and points of views, but others may choose to say little. Even those not speaking must tune their hearts, without being distracted by what is going on in the meeting. It has been said that there are representatives who come to the meeting with a spirit of indifference. Those who come to a meeting thinking "I don't care what decisions are made so long as things go fine" must begin to think more about finding the will of God than having a pleasant meeting. Some of these just take a nap during the intensive "heated" discussions. Others may be thinking more about the meal to come than about finding the Bread of Life.

The participation of each delegate is crucial. Their involvement is so important because they will have to report back to their constituencies. They should not think of this as a football match with players and spectators. Everyone in the meeting for business is a player. One cannot be a spectator in the meeting because whatever the outcome of the resolution could affect Friends in general and the representatives in particular, especially if they get to be nominated for a committee. In fact, they are even held accountable by the

⁵ Gregory L. Jones and Celestin Musekura. *Forgiving as We Have Been Forgiven: Community Practice for Making Peace* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010), 67.

ones who have nominated them and so they should not disappoint them by not bringing their voice.

It is so unfortunate that sometimes those who do not speak and express their views inside the meeting might choose to speak outside the meeting when the sessions are over. This is dangerous because it is prone to planting the seeds of doubt in the Friends' minds over what they have just decided. This is evidenced in the story of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, when he said, "Has God indeed said...?" (Genesis 3:1 NKJV). Sometimes spiritually weak and unstable Friends might even recant what they have just agreed upon. The talking outside the meeting and the questioning of the veracity or even the genuineness of those who have expressed themselves in the meeting has been a painful source of divisions among Friends. There are those who are well intentioned to dig more deeply into the issues discussed. But when this is done outside the business meeting without all the information in hand because he/she was not listening in the meeting, it can be very damaging. Why would one want to question the authenticity of the information with those who might have been sleeping or reading a book during the time the important points were being clarified?

Indeed, the meeting in which decisions are made should take place with complete transparency and in the light of Christ since Friends call themselves the Friends of the light. Friends may understand the concept of light better than any other religious denominations. In fact they call themselves "Friends of the Light." Does the prophecy about the darkness being dispelled by the light come true, that is, "The people living in darkness have seen light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawn" (Isaiah 9:2 NIV), in the meetings? Indeed, Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled with the

coming of Jesus Christ. Isaiah further prophesied that Jesus was to come in the world as the light bringing salvation to the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:6 NIV). Matthew realized that Jesus was the true Light that Isaiah had predicted about 400 years beforehand (Matthew 4:16 NIV) and he did not want to miss proclaiming this truth as he narrated the birth of Jesus.

Even though Jesus came as the light, darkness seems to creep into business meetings and sometimes people speak in the meetings as if they were in darkness. Sometimes they make decisions as if in darkness because they have not yet allowed the light of Christ to guide them. George Fox once said, “I also saw that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. In that I also saw the infinite love of God and I had great openings.”⁶ So many times participants in a process to make decisions miss the great openings simply because they do not allow the light to illuminate their minds and they also refuse to immerse themselves in the infinite love that comes from God as they share their opinions with others. And John, in describing the person of Jesus Christ as the Light of the World, gives an encouraging word when he says that “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.” (John 1:9 NIV)

At the meeting in which decisions are made, Friends need enlightenment in order to move from the “dark corners” where they are not sure what they can do. John says that “The man who walks in darkness does not know where he is going” (John 12:35, 46 NIV). And in Ephesians 5:14, Paul tells his audience that “it is light that makes everything visible.” Friends call it living in the light or simply the “testimony.” It is what

⁶ Thomas, 9.

Friends are and do. This light is action oriented just like a torch or flashlight. It must be oriented toward seeking the will of God.

Dean Freiday, the editor of *Barclay's Apology in Modern English* makes reference to George Fox's "Everlasting Gospel" as the limitless message concerning how Christ's words should be taken seriously regardless of one's generation. "Christ's sway extends to all of creation... as pertinent in the twentieth or twenty-first century as in the first, or the seventeenth..."⁷ This message encourages Friends to seek the Light together and be illuminated as they make decisions. There should be no excuse for any Friends group to suppose that the message concerned only those who lived during Jesus' time. The fact of being led by the Light is as necessary today in the twenty-first century where there seem to be intellectual or political things that people rely on as guides, as it was needed in the first century. Holding discussions outside the business meetings with or without the knowledge of the clerk is usually a perilous pathway toward splits and the breaking of relationships. As it is suggested in *Mastering Personal Growth*, "we need to be careful to build habits of involvement that give a good return."⁸

Empathetic to the Views of the Other

Empathetic to the views of the other means being sensitive to the situation of another person and trying to experience another person's feelings and thoughts. It may not be an easy thing to do, especially because the person trying to empathize might have no idea what the other person has gone through or is going through at the moment.

⁷ Dean Freiday, "The Everlasting Gospel and John 15," *Quaker Religious Thought*, 18, no. 3. (1980): 35.

⁸ Maxie Dunnam, Gordon MacDonald, and Donald W. McCullough, *Mastering Personal Growth* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 1992), 153.

Whether the person understands the situation fully or not, the important factor in empathy is expressed through the kind of attitude the person portrays toward the other one explicitly. It might be through verbal or non-verbal communication. In other words, the attitude of the person will tell the other one that there is empathy. It is an inward action and attitude that permits the person to somehow experience what the other one is experiencing.

In the meeting for business, it means that during the time when a participant is expressing him/herself, the others seek to create a spiritual environment in which they try to understand the speaker in the same terms as he/she is expressing. “Empathy is the compassionate gift of seeing life through the eyes of another, and in seeing clearly, to extend tenderness... The empathic listener sees the heart of the other and values the heart of the other.”⁹ Being empathetic to the view of the other does not mean that one will agree necessarily with the point of view of the other. Carolyn Crippen, in Fitch’s *Forgiveness and Power in the Age of Atrocity*, said it eloquently as she described one of the fundamental beliefs that are interwoven in the Friends tradition, “Mind is a social activity; meaning is something we do together and share jointly. We may say many different things, and yet somehow speak with the one voice.”¹⁰ This simply means that one will try to humbly put him/herself in the stance of the interlocutor. As one speaks, the other one will listen with a non-judgmental ear or without a condemning heart. The listener should not have pre-conceived ideas on what the speaker is about to say.

It has happened that some clerks, notoriously, listen to a few words, sometimes only the introduction of a participant and then thunder from the chair at front in these

⁹ Ferch, 140.

¹⁰ Ibid, 132.

terms, “Enough, I heard it, now sit down, I know what you are saying, and I understand it all.” This has taken place again and again, to the dismay of the other participants and to the total broken-heartedness of the contributor. Such behavior must be avoided because it portrays a lack of empathy. As people seek to be empathetic with one another, the Spirit of unity reigns and converging ideas are brought forth with no one feeling frustrated for not being heard, even if he/she says what is totally not in accordance with what is being considered. It is also noted that there are Friends who do not want to speak for fear that they will not be understood. It is the responsibility of not only the clerk but also the whole audience to listen to this person. All participants must listen to each other actively.

Not all things mentioned in the meeting are to be acted upon. Some Friends will want to speak for the mere reason of letting everyone know they are in the meeting. Other Friends will speak to express some hurts incurred in the course of their lives as Friends and for which they embark on a healing process when they are listened to with empathy. And for them, empathy means a willingness to be heard compassionately even if one might not necessarily agree or act upon the views put into the light. For some Friends, interrupting them before they finish saying what they are sharing hurts a lot. For others, when they hear some laughs and murmurs in the hall, it is an indication of the lack of empathy and therefore causes them to be hurt to the point that they decide not to speak anymore and refuse to attend any further sessions.

Listening is a skill, and must be a key feature in Friends processes of decision making. In a worshipful attitude, Friends are encouraged to listen inwardly to the promptings of love and truth in one’s heart as stirred by the Holy Spirit, and outwardly, for the truth other people’s words may contain. This point reminds us that listening is

both inward and outward, “Take heed...to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Receive the vocal ministry of others in a tender and creative spirit. Reach for the meaning deep within it...”¹¹

The spirituality of the first Friends was focused on the ‘inward light’ – which was to be trusted as revealing the will of God. This was discovered as Friends listened to one another in a worshipful way. Unfortunately, Friends congregations have been shaken by a number of incidents in which they made decisions or spoke out in ways that clearly showed that the listening that characterized their discipline for generations was not applied. A way must be found to reconcile conflicts in the promptings that that “inward light” has offered to Friends. As a result, a system was established by a group of ministers and elders whereby individual leadings must be tested in a gathered meeting.¹² “The design and effect of the ‘inward light’ are the communication of new truth, or of truth not objectively revealed, as well as the spiritual discernment of the truths of Scripture. The design and effect of spiritual illumination are the proper apprehension of truth already speculatively known.”¹³

With the above statement, one understands that it is crucial to be attentive to the inward light because that is where the illumination comes from. For Christians, the Holy Spirit speaks through the person expressing him/herself and this is why it is very important for people to listen. Bruce Bishop, in *Practicing Discernment Together*,

¹¹ Patricia Loring, *Listening Spirituality, Vol. 2: Corporate Spiritual Practice Among Friends* (Washington Grove, MD: Openings Press, 1999).

¹² Michael Sheeran, *Beyond Majority Rule: Voteless Decisions in the Religious Society of Friends* (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1996).

¹³ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc. 1997), 93.

stresses that “learning to listen to the Spirit is one of the fundamental disciplines of the followers of Christ, and it precedes the ability to discern.”¹⁴ Listening is one of the key elements during the traditional meeting in which business is conducted. Friends are expected to listen to each other in order to value each other’s contributions. Friends greatly value the gift of listening because they know that “the problem is never that God does not want to speak but that we are not listening carefully enough”¹⁵ to hear what He is saying through ourselves when we gather for a business meeting.

Friends even use the expression to “Listen Under,” which “refers to seeking to discern what is under the words, emotions, and conflicts that others are expressing. The assumption is that under these things is to be found God’s voice, ready to be uncovered and understood. It also means that one can listen to the heart and intent of the other person rather than be limited by the language used.”¹⁶ In other words, Friends, in listening, go beyond what is being verbally expressed and seek to discover the Spirit’s leading of the person speaking in the presence of Christ.

Non-Discriminating on the Basis of Differences

The Friends decision-making process is open to everyone who has been invited to participate. If it is on a monthly meeting level, all Friends who hold a membership status are encouraged to participate. In other words, Friends are equal from the “membership” points of view. They may be new members or old members, young or adult, educated or

¹⁴Ibid., 27.

¹⁵ Selwyn Hughes, *Every Day with Jesus*, Revised and updated by Mick Brooks. (Farnam: CWR, 2010).

¹⁶ Lon Fendall, Jan Wood, and Bruce Bishop, *Practicing Discernment Together: Finding God’s Way Forward in Decision Making* (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 2007), 132.

unlearned, and all are equal irrespective of their ethnicity, tribe, and nationality. There may be limitations and regulations as to who takes part in making the decision, but the liberty of expression is given to all present in the meeting, even if they are visitors, so long as they have identified themselves through their testimony or their traveling minutes.

It has been said that some missionaries from the West have mirrored the attitude of the colonials in the way they dealt with the locals. Just as the colonials expected the indigenous people to always say “Ndio Bwana,” a Kiswahili phrase meaning “Yes Sir,” to every request or every order, so those missionaries also expected to never be challenged by the people with whom they were working. The concept was that missionaries knew better than the locals. The very unfortunate point is that this perspective was also carried into the business meetings – to the point that what missionaries said during the decision-making process was accepted as the truth and taken as the sense of the meeting. The difference between those who know better and those who do not should not be a barrier in a non-discriminating decision-making process. In fact, Bryant Myers, Vice President for International Program Strategy at World Vision International, warns Western workers on this concept in his book *Walking with the Poor*, saying that “local knowledge may add to Western knowledge, providing we have the humility to believe that our knowledge system is not complete.”¹⁷ The concept of knowing and not knowing does not only relate to missionaries and locals but also to educated and uneducated, illiterates and literates, etc. Once these find themselves in the same meeting in which decisions are to be made, they all expect to treat each other as

¹⁷ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 145.

equals as far as discerning the will of God, seeing that the Holy Spirit who will guide them is not limited by any social, economic, and intellectual status.

In the case of what Friends call Quarterly Meetings and Yearly Meetings in which a limited number of delegates are nominated by their respective constituencies, the clerk conducts a roll call to find out if all constituencies are represented and participants recognized. And again there is a kind of “get to know each other” that reinforces the fellowship that we have mentioned in the beginning of our discussion. Once this is done, all participants start to enjoy the same privileges, the same shared responsibility, and the same advantages under the leadership of the clerk. Even if one is already a leader, a director or a superintendent in some capacity, he/she will “lay down” those titles and obey the leadership of the clerk without exerting his/her power over the process during the meeting.

While this element of non-discrimination is not meant to explain how meetings are conducted and how they are constructed, the point here is that it does not recognize the power and positions of influence of certain members over the others, but goes deep into the respect of “that of God” and the “guiding light” in all the participants on an equal basis. The core point here is that everyone is worthy to be listened to and also that he/she has the right to contribute collaboratively. The common denominator here is the Spirit of God within, which leads to all truth regardless of differences within the body of Friends.

This is more easily said than done. There have been reports of people in meetings who enjoy the freedom to speak as much as they want, more than the others. Especially if they are already leaders or they are rich, reinforcing the old Kirundi saying *umukene ntagira ijambo*, meaning “the poor have no say.” This happens often when the item on

the agenda being discussed has the potential of needing a leader's power or a financial contribution. Those of a business background, for example, are more likely to speak a lot when an issue comes up concerning monetary intervention. They tend to feel obliged to say something that pertains to finance because their predisposition is that they are likely the ones being targeted to be the primary contributors. Likewise, those of leadership positions feel very vulnerable when they sense that their positions are threatened and they tend to jump in to defend themselves and protect their positions, sometimes even illogically. Whilst it may not be always wrong to make clarifications and defend one's livelihood when their interests or their reputation are at stake, Friends are called to exercise extreme caution to do it in a way it does not undermine others' capacity to speak. It would be so unfortunate to find a small number of people in any gathering trying to dominate a whole meeting in which decisions are made, as in the case of the story below.

From 2003 to 2006, the General Superintendent lived at the mission station in a remote location far from the city. When missionaries came to the country, they did not start mission work in the towns and cities. They concentrated their mission initiatives in rural areas where, so it seemed, the villagers received the Gospel more easily. In an effort to reach out to the "intellectuals," one missionary succeeded in planting a church in the city, within a compound that was purchased thanks to a memorial fund donated by the family of the pioneer missionary to the country. The General Superintendent found himself commuting to the city for administrative activities, including many official government meetings that he was invited to. He was accompanied by the city pastor, who also had a large family. Unfortunately, the General Superintendent sometimes failed to

get reservations in a guest house or hotel and there were not many Friends members in the capital city who might offer him hospitality.

During the Yearly Meeting sessions, an item was put on the agenda by the General Superintendent that the church needed to build a guest house next to the church building in the city compound so that the General Superintendent might have an accommodation. The Clerk facilitated the discussion in a way that it was clear that he called upon participants whom he knew were employed and thus had money to contribute. These people asked questions relating to the fact that it was cheaper to pay for the hotel than to build a guest house. Others said that the church secretary should do the booking well in advance as the General Superintendent's meetings were scheduled ahead of time.

The General Superintendent spoke as often as he wanted, pushing the meeting to accept that the guest house be constructed as soon as possible. Some participants were not given an opportunity to speak. One older Friend suggested that every member of the Yearly Meeting should contribute money to build. Assuming the group was in support of the position of this older Friend, the Clerk asked the meeting how much money each family was going to give. The participants, with lots of unanswered questions and frustrations on both the way the meeting was facilitated and the issue being discussed, started to go home one by one. Some of those who remained were speechless and were convinced that the decision to give money to the building project simply did not concern them. This story unfortunately highlights the unequal power the General Superintendent had which resulted in a poor decision.

A non-discriminatory decision-making process will transcend all the cultural, economic, gender, and education barriers. Gender-based discrimination, sexual orientation and racial differences being some of the major challenges among Friends have no room here and are to be overcome as well during the process, especially when the items on the agenda have nothing to do with those elements. Friends must feel that they are in “a place of gathering where anyone should be able to come and involve themselves with a community of believers who are joined by a common faith in the Lord Almighty,”¹⁸ said Andrew Marin, in *Love Is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community*.

In Burundi, for instance, men tend to dominate in almost every social position. Even in Christian spheres, men tend to occupy an important role, as observed by Donald Honensee in *Church Growth In Burundi*. “The evidence indicates that in many of the Protestant Churches in the early years, the emphasis was put on winning the men in the community.”¹⁹ Because of this emphasis, obviously men are in the majority in meetings for business. Women might attend, but simply sit idle with a feeling that, given their small numbers as compared to men, they will not be heard. Seeing that the society is patriarchal, it might seem as if nothing can be done to reverse the situation, but the decision-making process that is being proposed as non-discriminatory must be inclusive of the women’s points of view regardless of their slim number. They are also equal “heirs of the kingdom” (James. 2:5), even though they have been the object of discrimination. And yet, in *Every Woman Has a Story*, Tsitsi Mhlanga of Zimbabwe says: “There are

¹⁸ Andrew Marin *Love Is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009).

¹⁹ Honensee, 124.

many great women who have conquered politically, economically and socially. These are women who challenged the status quo, who, risking their own security, have helped those in trouble.”²⁰ Seeing that the women have a right to speak as freely as men in the Friends decision-making processes, they must, therefore, feel welcomed into the decision-making processes on an equal basis with men.

Peter Westen, in his work *Speaking of Equality: An Analysis of the Rhetorical Force of ‘Equality’ in Moral and Legal Discourse*, gives us some guidelines that shed light when one is considering the meaning of equality – especially that between men and women. I find this helpful in understanding the roles of men and women during meetings in which decisions are made. “Descriptive equality is the relationship that obtains among two or more distinct things that have been jointly measured by a common standard and found to be indistinguishable, or identical, as measured by that standard.”²¹ This description says that using the standard of the oneness in the body of Friends, with the same membership statuses, men and women are equally considered during expression of ideas at meetings.

Another difficult hurdle in a non-discriminatory process is the cultural stereotype that “old” means “wise.” As found in the story above, there are those among Friends who might not want to speak after the old man or the elder at the “facing bench” has spoken; as if they were waiting for the final hit-on-the-nail word. It is to be remembered that it is not about the heeding of the wisdom of the old man, but the heeding of the God’s Spirit

²⁰ Shelley Anderson, Euphemia Akos Dzathor, Crystal Kwanda Tettey, and Densua Mumford, *Every Woman has a Story* (Accra, Ghana: Afram Publications Limited, 2010), 128.

²¹ Wayne A. Grudem, ed. *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, Foundations for the Family Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 129.

leading Friends. Whether the leading is made manifest through an old person or a young person, the important thing is for Friends to discern it, appropriate it, and obey it.

During the traditional court system in which justice was rendered to the victims of various wrongdoings, the system of the *abashingantahe* did not include women. Younger generations were not welcomed either. In *The Bashingantahe Institution in Burundi*, edited by Philip Ntahombaye, Joseph Gahama, Adrien Ntabona and Liboire Kagabo, all Catholic priests, there is a record of a lament and an accusation of the influences of modernity to be one of the major causes of the vicissitude of the *Bashingantahe* institution. According to them, no younger persons were to be allowed in the institution. They attribute this vicissitude with the colonial period when the investiture immediately compromised with moral values. “As a matter of fact, young people began to be invested for the only reason that they were educated, even at primary school level.”²²

Friends must transcend this bias. There should be no age barrier in a decision-making process. Everyone can be used by God if he/she can discern what God is telling the gathered Friends. The Burundi eldership system of *Bashingantahe* is today finally being renewed, the women are being considered for admission, and some have already gone through the ceremonies of investiture. There should be no discrimination, and the leadership must ensure that the process “is open to all, even as the NT churches observed no racial barriers (Eph. 2:11–22; Gal. 3:26–29).”²³

²² Philip Ntahombaye, Joseph Gahama, Adrien Ntabona, and Liboire Kagabo, *The Bashingantahe Institution in Burundi* (Bujumbura, Burundi: Life and Peace Institute, 1999), 51.

²³ Robert J. Utley, *How it All Began: Genesis 1–11*. Vol. 1a. (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2001) 114.

Disciplined on the Friends Values

It has been said that “successful people establish disciplines that become routine.”²⁴ Every society or community has its own guiding principles and values that it is disciplined on. Those values are very crucial in that they determine the life, the growth and the death of the society or the community. One of the forgotten things, especially in the denominational communities, is that knowing the values is not enough until they are acted upon and applied. Friends have values that define and facilitate the decision-making process. Let us consider a few of these values that seem to be most applicable to this study. It must be noted that there may be several others that can be taken under other subjects related to Friends and their business meetings.

The Value of the Process: How can one describe a process? A process is something that is done on a regular basis and that it must be characterized by certain rules and principles. This makes one understand that it is a skill that is learned and that it is learned as it is practiced or exercised. In our context, let us talk about the processes of Friends decision making as practiced during a meeting for business and then say something about the central feature of the Friends process, which is listening. In another chapter we talked about a process called discernment as the quality of being able to grasp and comprehend what is obscure,²⁵ according the Merriam-Webster dictionary. Now before speaking about listening let us describe very briefly three other perspectives that one could even call practices of decision making. Let us look at: (a) worship sharing;

²⁴ Bruce Larson, Paul Anderson, and Doug Self. *Mastering Pastoral Care* (Portland, OR; Carol Stream, IL: Multnomah Press, 1990), 122.

²⁵ Ibid.

(b) threshing meetings; and (c) clearness groups. These three are so crucial in Friends cycles that a student of Friends' ways of making decisions would not want to miss them.

A worship sharing session as is observed is essentially a meeting focused on a question of a particular interest. If the group is small enough, all members may speak and the session may even be organized as a go-round. There is no discussion following contributions. Worship sharing is particularly useful for opening up an issue, enabling feelings and thoughts to be shared without the expectation of a particular outcome or decision. We have used this type of process to ease tensions among elders, especially when we felt that an issue has arisen that has the potential to divide the local church leadership.

Threshing is an expression that is used in the perspectives of Friends decision-making processes. It is a term that is well understood by agriculturalists, especially when they are harvesting their dry crops. They thresh their crop by removing the coverings of cereals such as wheat or rice. The concept is that issues have layers and that not all the layers are necessary. Just as it is understood that the threshing of the grain separates the edible part from the stalks, so is the process helps the participants to analyze what can be taken and accepted or what cannot be good for them. This practice is used especially when a controversial decision has to be made. A threshing meeting may include a session in which worship sharing is done and an opportunity for participants to discuss a topic of a controversial nature is provided. It can simply be facilitated in a way it takes a question and answer format. However, as surprising as it can be, this threshing session, according to the Friends tradition, does not have the capacity to make decisions. The point is to enable participants to hear each other's point of view on issues, explore arguments as put

forward, test out their own thinking on each other to find out how they are taken, whether negatively or positively, and deepen their understanding of the issues. Threshing would normally precede a formal business meeting where a decision is to be taken so that it may give a picture of what the actual business meeting would look like.

In large meetings, threshing may take place in small groups to enable everyone to get his/her voice heard and questions answered, and to explore thoughts and feelings in dialogue. Sometimes, when an item before a business meeting turns out to be controversial, a threshing session may be arranged to allow for detailed discussion and exploration in small groups where everyone may have an opportunity to express him/herself at ease. The item is then brought back to a later business meeting and the decision is often much easier because the tension might have cooled down during the smaller threshing groups.

Clearness groups are another practice that is used among Friends. Normally, these groups are used to support an individual rather than to practice corporate discernment. A small group of Friends meets with a person seeking to make a decision to support him/her in reaching a certain clearness. The intention is not for the group to make the decision for the individual. In fact, the participants are discouraged from giving any advice. The process usually starts with a person explaining the decision being considered. In *Practicing Discernment Together*, Lon Fendall, Jan Wood and Bruce Bishop say:

Early Quakers had “meetings for clearness”; some still follow this practice today. On one level, the meaning of the clearness is the same as clarity, but there is a richer meaning that indicates the absence of any hindrance to discernment, inwardly or outwardly. Individually and in the groups, we come to clearness by the patient process of discernment of the Holy Spirit’s leading.²⁶

²⁶ Fendall, et al., 131.

The idea is that participants in the group get involved mainly by asking questions of the person who is considering a particular decision or course in his/her life, and to encourage him/her to look at different dimensions before the decision is taken. The questions do not necessarily need to be answered right then in the session, and the person may not make the decision until later at his/her convenience. Sometimes a clearness group meets several times, depending on when the question is or is not explored or analyzed to the satisfaction of the one who has requested for it.

The Value of the Facilitation: On a bigger scale and on a much more serious level of decision-making processes, Quakers have a common method that they use. This process is known as the Quaker business method. This process includes aspects that are becoming commonly used in the consensus approach. The uniqueness of the Friends' method is that it involves a special inner discipline. The Friends understanding of this method is that it facilitates a discovery of God's will or simply allows the participants to discern God's direction, which they call the leading of the Spirit, the "sense of the meeting."²⁷ Other religious groups or religious denominations call it "a sense of God's presence at any time in the meeting."²⁸

Decision making among Friends during the business meeting is facilitated by a person known as a "clerk,"²⁹ similar to what an executive officer who chairs a Presbyterian General Assembly or synod. But in the Friends circles, as well defined in *Practicing Discernment Together*, "We have taken the term *clerk* from the traditional

²⁷ Jack L. Willcuts, *The Sense of the Meeting* (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 1992), 75.

²⁸ Dan Williams, *Starting (and Ending) a Small Group*. Lifeguide Bible Studies (Downers Grove: IL, InterVarsity Press, 1997), 58.

²⁹ Fendall, et al., 131.

Quaker word for the presiding officer. As expressed in this book, the leadership of the clerk is a spiritual exercise, a very different process from serving as chairman.”³⁰ Among Friends, this person is assisted by a co-clerk. Along with the spiritual exercise in the process, the responsibilities of the clerk include the preparation of the meeting for business. This preparation entails a careful planning of the items to be considered in the business meeting and the projected time the meeting will take. He/she prepares the draft agenda and makes sure that the participants receive it well ahead of the meeting, sometimes two weeks or even a month in advance.

The next phase of the business meeting is more challenging because the clerk has to introduce the draft agenda and make any changes as he/she introduces items for consideration or asks others to do so. He/she then proceeds to invite contributions and call for the participants to speak during the consideration of each item. He/she is careful and encourages participants to maintain their focus on the item in hand and ensures that time is kept according to what was set in the beginning. The much harder part of the clerking is when it comes to putting together ideas of the participants in order to make a decision. The clerk must draft the conclusions or what Friends call “minutes.”³¹ The minutes are carefully drafted in a way they reflect what everyone seems to be agreeing on. Once they are announced, the participants are invited to make comments on them.

It is the responsibility of the clerk to listen to what the participants are saying and draft a minute that captures the “leading of the Spirit” or “the sense of the meeting.”³²

³⁰ Ibid., 131.

³¹ “The singular word *minute* is not normally used, but some Quakers speak of a minute as the individual statement capturing the discussion and the action that follows in the discernment process.” Fendall, et al, 132.

³² Fendall, et al., 133.

This “leading” therefore becomes a position or a point of view around which the participants can unite. It might occur that such a position is given by one participant, but most commonly, the minute is drafted based on many contributions/points of view presented at the meeting. As the clerk is in the process of drafting the minute, he/she can find a creative way to sum up what he/she has heard the participants say. The minute is usually agreed upon by the participants at the time of drafting, but sometimes the clerk may work on it during a break in the meeting and bring it back for consideration and approval. Once it is agreed upon, it is not changed and therefore becomes a resolution of the participants to which they all adhere. Traditionally, there is no voting in the process, although in the course of history and for reasons that we have not yet known, some Friends, like those in Burundi vote during all the decision-making processes. Further research might be necessary and is yet to be done to find out when, why, and how the Burundi Friends started using the vote in their business meeting as an exception to other Friends.

Seeing that the decision-making facilitation is the ability to arrive at a decision after due consideration of all the factors involved and that people need guidance from God about how they should make up their minds on difficult issues, the clerk skillfully facilitates the process in such a way that participants do not attach themselves to personal positions but accept the sense of the meeting. This is usually the harder thing on the part of the participants. It has happened in the past that a leader might want to introduce his/her personal “leading” or a point to be implemented, and sought the meeting to “bless” it as if it is a resolution of the whole group. This has often led to disagreements and participants feeling that they are being used or forced to support a personal bias of

the leader. It has not been easy, especially among those who use voting as a way to settle on minutes.

In such a situation, the difficulty is to know whether those who vote for the resolution have really taken time to listen worshipfully and discern the leading of the Spirit or the sense of the meeting. Those voting against the resolution are often viewed as unsupportive and considered as the opposers of the leadership in place. This is perhaps why Jack Willcuts believed that voting was an invitation to division, in the sense that the secret ballot only allowed anonymity instead of unity.³³ It is the duty of the clerk to work on the minutes until they are accepted by the participants. If an individual has a serious doubt about the minutes, there is usually an opportunity to express it.

The minutes may record that one or more Friends were uncomfortable with the decision, if they have indicated that they do respect the sense of the Meeting and stand aside. If even one Friend indicates that he or she cannot possibly agree to the minutes, the decision should not normally be taken, and the Meeting should minute that it has been unable to reach a decision. In such a case, an alternative such as this suggested by Merrill and Shelley, is considered. “Sometimes, if we still don’t have oneness of opinion, we’ll table the matter for another meeting. This gives time for emotions to cool, facts to be assembled, and more prayer to be offered.”³⁴ It is better to table the matter than to take a hasty decision that will not be owned by the participants.

The sad thing occurs when, during the facilitation, the views of those against the minutes are marginalized; their views are simply ignored and rejected instead of being

³³ Willcuts, 77.

³⁴ Dean Merrill and Marshall Shelley, *Fresh Ideas for Administration and Finance* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 1984), 39.

recorded. This often leads to painful breaking of the relationships or sometimes even splits among the participants. The clerk is considered as a servant leader of God and of the participants during the whole process. He/she must not be attached to whatever outcome and is careful not to introduce personal interests in the consideration. He/she must obey what God is saying through the people and facilitate unity about it. As Smith describes in *Learning to Lead: Bringing Out the Best in People*, “You are a servant of God, given to absolute obedience to what he says.”³⁵ This is a heavy responsibility to those who lead the meetings.

The Value of the Role of Participants: Much has been said about the responsibilities of the clerk, as if there is nothing to be said about the participants. Participants have also a number of qualities that are expected of them and here we only mention four among others. Just as the clerk comes to the meeting for business prepared, also the participants are expected to come to the meeting with a certain discipline. This discipline entails the following qualities:

(a) Come well prepared, that is, having reflected and given consideration to the items on the agenda and perhaps having spent time to discuss them with others. It must be remembered that the agenda for the meeting has been sent to them well in advance. The hope is that they have had an opportunity to pray about, reflect, and explore items to be discussed before they come to the meeting. Usually, when the participants are not prepared, the process takes longer than necessary.

(b) Come to the meeting with an open mind and heart, with a readiness and willingness to change their own point of view and to listen and adhere to the “leading of

³⁵ Fred Smith, *Learning to Lead: Bringing Out the Best in People*. The Leadership Library (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, Inc. 1986), 24.

the Spirit.” The prayer that is done before the participants meet in the session and the careful spiritual discernment that happens during the process should really facilitate open-mindedness to what God is saying. The open heart of the participants is of great significance because it prevents the participants from coming to the meeting with a hidden agenda, a position to defend and a leader’s idea to support, as sometimes it has been observed, regrettably.

(c) Be careful not to interrupt or respond to others’ contributions. This means that, just like it is done in the normal worship, the understanding is that contributions that people bring forth are from the leading of the Holy Spirit. This is where respect of each other is exercised, seeing that Friends hold that “there is that of God in every human being.” In respecting each other, Friends who feel shy or who are reluctant to contribute will be encouraged to say what is on their hearts and minds. But when they are interrupted, they will be prompted to stop what they are saying and assume that their contributions are not as important as those who are interrupting them.

(d) Seeing that the spoken contributions come from the Holy Spirit, participants try their best not to speak from prepared contributions. “Everything that happens in the life of the church springs out of worship, our interaction and the guidance of God through the Holy Spirit.”³⁶ This is where the discipline of listening is exercised, and here the discernment as a practice is applied. Prepared contributions usually come from hidden agendas, especially when participants have come with a plan to push forward. When this happens, the leading of the Holy Spirit is blocked and people end up following their own minds and selfish interests.

³⁶ Willcuts, 75.

(e) Stand to speak only if they have a substantive addition to make to what has gone before. As far as possible, contributions should be constructive, seeking to build on previous contributions or offer a different view rather debate the points others have made or to justify one's own points. "Dogmatic persons who speak with an air of finality or assume the tone of a debater determined to win may be a serious hindrance. Eloquence to appeal only to the emotion is out of place."³⁷ This discipline is rather hard for those who think they should be heard on any point that is brought forward. These persons sometimes do not even care for what others have said previously and never give any credit or acknowledgement to prior discussants.

Much of the discipline of Quaker business meetings is quite subtle and it is best conveyed through experience rather than in writing. Barry Morley comments that the business method cannot be taught but it can be learned.³⁸ For example, contributions are normally considered and offered without strong emotion, making space for alternative points of view. The Wiltshire Quarterly Meeting in 1678 set down advice on the conduct of Quaker business meetings and gives ideas that could guide participants' attitude during a meeting in which decisions are made:

For the preservation of love, concord and a good decorum in this meeting, 'tis earnestly desired that all business that comes before it be managed with gravity and moderation, in much love and Amity, without reflections or retorting, which is but reasonable as well as comely, since we have no other obligation upon each other but love, which is the very bond of our society: and therein to serve the Truth and one another; having an eye single to it, ready to sacrifice every private interest to that of Truth, and the good of the whole community.

³⁷ Ibid., 82.

³⁸ Barry Morley, *Beyond Consensus: Salvaging the Sense of the Meeting*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1993), 307.

Wherefore let whatsoever is offered, be mildly proposed, and so left with some pause, that the meeting may have opportunity to weigh the matter, and have a right sense of it, that there may be a unanimity and joint concurrence of the whole. And if anything be controverted that it be in coolness of Spirit calmly debated, each offering their reasons and sense, their assent, or dissent, and so leave it without striving. And also that but one speak at once, and the rest hear. And that private debates and discourses be avoided, and all attend the present business of the Meeting. So will things be carried on sweetly as becomes us, to our comfort: and love and unity be increased: and we better serve Truth and our Society.³⁹

The Value of Spiritual Discernment: Another element to consider as one of the important values of the Friends' decision-making processes is spiritual discernment.

Charles Conniry Jr., in his paper *Discernment – Corporate and Individual*

Considerations, defines the spiritual discernment as “a distinguishable assortment of processes by which Christians attempt to perceive and understand ‘God’s way’ in the light of a particular set of circumstances.”⁴⁰ Also, Elizabeth Liebert writes in *The Way of Discernment: Spiritual Practices of Decision Making* that “Discernment means making a discriminating choice between two or more good options, seeking the best of this moment.”⁴¹ This means that discernment is a channel or a vehicle that brings God’s directions to the seeking hearts of Friends so that at the end they might say that God has led them to make such and such decision.

To this definition, Lon Fendall, in *Practicing Discernment Together*, adds: “A group discernment process is essentially a process of listening carefully to God... As we listen for God’s voice, we do not at the same time compose our next words, as though we

³⁹ Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, *Quaker Faith and Practice* (London: Britain Yearly Meeting, 1995), 19, 57.

⁴⁰ Charles J. Conniry, Jr., “Discernment – Corporate and Individual Considerations”, *Quaker Religious Thought* (November 2006), 7.

⁴¹ Elizabeth Liebert, *The Way of Discernment: Spiritual Practices of Decision Making* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2008), Kindle edition.

needed to rebut our opponent's statements in a debate. We don't need to argue with others involved in the discernment process, for discernment is not the same as debate."⁴²

This is very true. As it has been discussed, this is part of the discipline that is expected of the participants in the decision-making process. Also, from Paul Anderson's paper on *Corporate Decision Making Aspects of Spiritual Discernment*,⁴³ there are very significant elements concerning discernment that could be summarized as follows: (a) The matters that concern the direction of the entire community deserves the searching of all; (b) Because business is for worship, the question should be "what is the leading of Christ in our midst?"; (c) Because no individual possesses all of God's truth, the contribution of each who has something to say is essential; (d) Where there is a conflict of perspective, the issue must be sorted until the genuine issue(s) of disagreement is (are) clarified; (e) Friends must agree to wait until there is clarity of leading and then support the decisions made in unity; (f) Not all concerns and understandings are of equal weight, but the important thing is for people to feel that their views are attended and understood by others; (g) The goal is not to make a particular decision, but to come together in unity in aspiring to follow Christ's leading above all else.

For the risk of diluting these self-explanatory elements, this study refrains from making further elaboration on them. While these principles do not guarantee a successful decision-making process always, they are at least a tool through which the Spirit ushers God's will among His people. They must be known by both the clerk and participants and they together must allow the Holy Spirit to use them as the "*garde fou*" to help them not err and end up in hurting each other as they struggle to come to an agreement.

⁴²Fendall et al, 43-44.

⁴³Anderson, 39-45.

Seeing that the Friends values that we have explored above are clear, we will neither attempt to interpret them nor elaborate them more. But the point to be underlined is that any decision-making process must have that discipline and live by it. Those values will not only facilitate the smoothness of the meeting, but also will help the participants have a healthier mental awareness as they depend on God's direction to make their personal and individual decisions.

Spirit-Led from the Beginning to the End

The point is not about praying in the beginning and at the end of the meetings. The question is whether each participant is aware and prayerfully conscientious of the leading of the Spirit throughout the meeting as previously discussed. This is where prayer is strongly emphasized. Paul admonishes his audience that they should be praying without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Prayer and the Spirit of worship have always characterized the Friends meeting for business. It is not an act Friends did but it is their attitude, their whole being and character. The discernment of God's initiatives and His will are not possible without the Spirit of God. This is so because God's things are seen and discovered spiritually. "For we walk by faith not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7), and again Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:1, "When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom."

Whilst this study did not focus on how Friends elsewhere are making decisions, it was interesting to realize that a larger portion of decision-making processes among Friends, evangelical and liberal traditions together, are using the sense-of-the-meeting process. During the 6th World Friends Conference, in Kenya, an interview question was asked to facilitate a combination of descriptive and explanatory responses from a few

participants. It was through this interview process that patterns and trends among Friends from different parts of the world were gathered to show the picture of how Friends are reaching unity. The collection of qualitative insights was done through an open-ended question. The question was formulated like this: “How do you reach agreement or unity during your meeting-for-business?” The answers given are summarized in the chart at the appendix on page 142 and gave an understanding that a majority of Friends, that is, 68% use the “the sense of the Meeting” (SoM) as compared to the “majority rule” (MR), 25%, in decision-making processes.⁴⁴ This does not necessarily mean that the larger use of this process equals success in decision making, seeing that we are putting an emphasis on the role of the Spirit in the process. It is rather a picture of the trend that is most preferred and which is, of course, linked to the early Friends tradition.

When, during the meeting, a complex issue comes up that needs God’s help, what seems impossible to human beings, it is through prayer that people should wait patiently upon God to lead them to the course of action to take. The Spirit must be allowed to be active during and through the sessions; after all, it is His business. Jesus said “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...” (John 16:13). “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law” (Galatians 5:18). “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God” (Romans 8:14). Charles Hodge, in his *Systematic Theology*, has something to say about the issue pertaining to being led by the Spirit. Even though he is not attempting to interpret the above scriptures, he says that “Evangelical Christians admit that the children of God are led by the Spirit of God; that their convictions as to truth and duty, their inward character and outward conduct, are moulded

⁴⁴ Interviews at the 6th World Conference of Friends, April 17 - 25, 2012, Kabarak University, Nakuru, Kenya.

by his influence.”⁴⁵ For Hodge, being led by the Spirit should not be confused with mysticism, which can be found among some Friends, especially those of the conservative persuasion. In his effort to explain about what he calls “spiritual illumination,” as compared to mysticism, which might creep in a business meeting to interfere with the leading of the Spirit, he stresses that the inward understanding that comes from the Spirit is sought by prayer, whereas that of mystics is “not intended to enable us to appreciate what we already know, but to communicate new knowledge.”⁴⁶

By the fact that Friends gather to listen to each other, share their hearts and read minutes and reports, they are not waiting for a new understanding as mystics would claim, but seeking God’s guidance on what they already know or what they are hearing. In a limited understanding of mysticism, let me say in passing that “The Mystics...are those who claim an immediate communication of divine knowledge and of divine life from God to the soul, independently of the Scriptures...”⁴⁷ The trouble with this mystical concept is that one can claim to have received that communication directly from God and therefore can dictate what others should do. Of course if he/she has got it, why would others be here, and for what purpose if the receiver of the communication has authority of implementing the orders from God? Contrary to the mystical concept, it is obvious that at the Spirit-led decision-making process, the participants depend on each other as they listen to each other empathetically, they depend on the Scriptures that might be shared in

⁴⁵ Charles Hodge, *Systematic theology*, vol.1, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc. 1997), 68.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

a worshipful atmosphere, and then they discern what God might be telling them collectively as one body, the body of Christ.

When we talk about being led by the Spirit from the beginning, we are not only referring to those spiritual moments when the clerk invites the participants into a “centering down in a spirit of communion,”⁴⁸ before he/she presents the agenda. It is not that prayer that precedes the whole activity, and it is not even that song that the participants sing as they settle their thoughts on the occasion or as they wait for the latecomers to arrive. It is the predisposition of their hearts with which they come to the meeting.

As the participants think and prepare to attend, they engage in a conscious and deliberate desire to do God’s will even before they know what the course the agenda will take. They already come to the meeting with a spiritual hunger and thirst for the will of God to be fulfilled in their individual hearts. They come with a prayer of longing to be in the presence of God as they deliberate on God’s business. They come as if they are called by God Himself to be used as He continues His involvement in His creation and mission of “reconciling the world to himself” (2 Corinthians 5:16), in Christ. Willcuts wrote, “To follow the call of God is therefore to live before the heart of God”⁴⁹ and this is possible when people lead a prayerful life, as it is being suggested in a Spirit-led decision-making process. That predisposition of doing God’s will remains with each individual participant and will become the determination in the application of the resolutions and it also calls for each one’s personal responsibility. One cannot imagine a person living before the heart of God and becoming indifferent in applying God’s resolution. One cannot claim to

⁴⁸ Willcuts, 80.

⁴⁹ Guinness, 73.

follow God's call and refuse to act according to His call. It is God's will for His people not only to respond to His call but also to live by it.

CONCLUSION

The claim of this dissertation is that a decision-making process that is Spirit-led, Biblical, and faithful to the Quaker way will give glory to God and not be bound by any hierarchical cultural context. The study has demonstrated that cultural biases in the decision-making process have been proven inadequate and have been swayed here and there according to socio-political contexts. Also it has been illustrated that a process of making decisions in which people do not attempt to reach unity always lacks wide acceptance and ownership by the participants. This has been evidenced by the fact that participants do not take responsibility for the outcome of the decision, and illustrated by how participants are often afraid to challenge the ideas of their traditional leader because of their vulnerability. Or sometimes, one could assume that if the participants are not voicing their concern, the issue might be considered as not important to them. Griffin says that “Group members will usually go along with a decision made by someone else as long as they don’t see it as central to who they are or what they are about.”¹

According to what we have also seen above, a reluctance to say what they think on the grounds that it might not make any difference and the fact that decisions are in most cases supported by those close to the leader are truly evidence that the decision-making process that transcends the cultural biases needs to be rediscovered. “Every member needs to listen to what other members say. If the members are not talking about what they sense God is doing, the whole body is in trouble,”² wrote Blackaby and King in *Experiencing God*. Tsukahira wrote, “Our God is not a disinterested, distant ‘cosmic

¹ Griffin, 74.

² Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), 207.

force' somewhere out there in the universe."³ He is concerned and He cares about even little details of His people's lives, let alone His ministries. God is the one who empowers the people and removes them from the state of vulnerability. Dandelion explained, "In a faith which claims God speaks to us directly, knowing what is of God is crucial and we require reliable access to that experience for guidance in daily life."⁴ God cares when Friends meet to deliberate on issues pertaining to His ministry. He is involved and is interested to work through His people when they are willing to listen. The practice of being guided by God should not happen only during the meeting for business but should be a daily life experience.

Once again, a decision-making process that is Spirit-led, Biblical, and faithful to the Quaker tradition will be widely owned by participants. It imperatively must transcend the cultural and socio-political conditions and allow everyone's point of view to be considered. This is acknowledged by the fact that the decisions made in a participatory manner, in unity and with one accord, will not break relationships but empower the body of Christ to corporately respond to His call and accomplish His purposes for His own glory.

³ Peter Tsukahira, *God's Tsunami: Understanding Israel and End-Time Revival*, (2003), 23.

⁴ Ben Pink Dandelion, *Celebrating the Quaker Way*, 2nd ed. (London: Quaker Books, 2010), 20.

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APPENDIX

Friends Interviewed at the 6th World Conference of Friends, April 17 - 25, 2012, Kabarak University, Nakuru, Kenya

Assan, Edwina: Ghana (SoM)

Ayusawa, Noriko: Japan (SoM)

Bishop, Jessica: South Africa (SoM)

Constantino, Patricia: Mexico (SoM)

Corbett, Michael: Australia (SoM)

Dubois, Sita: Congo Brazzaville (MR)

Fick, Steve: Canada (SoM)

Frei, Tony: Hungary (MR)

Garcia, Milton: El Salvador (SoM)

Guidon, Benito: Costa Rica (SoM)

Hilare, Ruben: Bolivia, Evangelical
(SoM)

Hinde, Chrissie: UK (SoM)

Hubbard, Marvin: New Zealand (SoM)

Kalala, Tschibuabua: Democratic
Republic of Congo (MR)

Kinaro, Malesi: Kenya (SoM)

Kohring, Esther: Germany (SoM)

Kwak, Yi Boon: Korea (SoM)

Lamichhane, Pradip: Nepal (No Pr)

Lewis, Deborah: USA (SoM)

Mamani, Condori, Bolivia (MR)

Massey, Gabriel: India (MR)

Moise, Bigirimana: Burundi (MR)

Moutongo, Olivier: Cameroon. (No Pr)

Muana, Lal: Myanmar (MR)

Patou, Rudy: Indonesia (SoM)

Rand, Roland: Estonia (SoM)

Rodriguez, C. Luis: Guatemala (MR)

Sales, C. Kenya: Cuba (SoM)

Sizeli, Marcelin: Rwanda (SoM)

Songoro, Mapendo: Tanzania (SoM)

Spalding, Jacklyn: Jamaica (SoM)

Tabingo, Lydia: Philippines (SoM)

Towen, Martin: Netherlands (SoM)

Vesane, Aino: Finland (SoM)

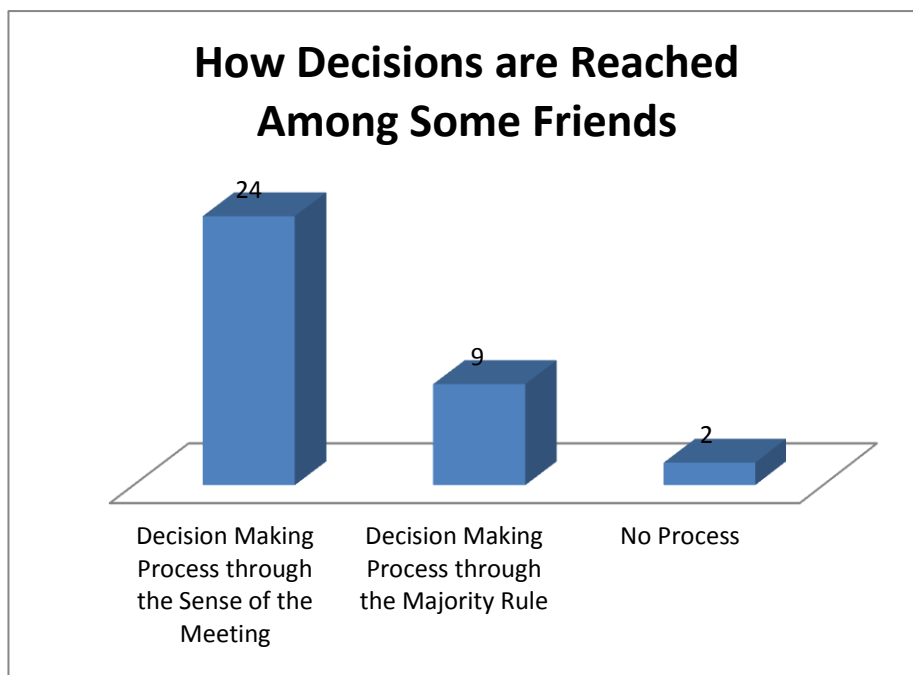
Wananga, Charles: Uganda (SoM)

Explanation:

SoM: Sense-of-the-meeting

MR: Majority Rule

No Pr: No Process as yet (for new groups)



Other Interviewed People

Reverend Ethienne Nahimana: Pentecostal Evangelical Fellowship in Africa, Bujumbura, Burundi, September 18, 2012.

Reverend Juvenal Nzosaba: Union of Baptists Churches, Bujumbura, Burundi, October 8, 2012.

Bishop Justin Nzoyisaba: United Methodist Church, Bujumbura, Burundi, October 22, 2012.

Archbishop Bernard Ntahoturi: Anglican Church, Bujumbura, Burundi, October 26, 2012.

Mrs. Vivine Mbarushimana, Catholic Charismatic Prayer Group at the main Bujumbura Cathedral, Regina Mundi, September 19, 2012.

Reverend Salomon Bahenda, Kibimba, Burundi, October 14, 2012.