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## A Discernment-Based Model of Church Decision-Making

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GEORGE FOX SEMINARY

A DISCERNMENT-BASED MODEL OF CHURCH DECISION-MAKING

A DOCTORAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GEORGE FOX SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
CHARLES M. ORWILER

MAY 2003  
NEWBERG, OREGON

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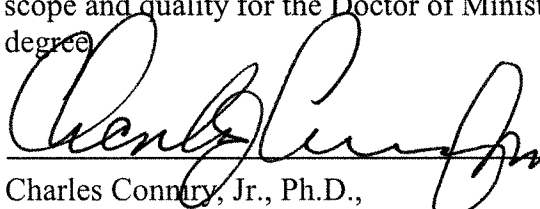
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**Title: A DISCERNMENT-BASED MODEL OF CHURCH DECISION-MAKING**

**Presented by: Charles M. Orwiler**


**April 15, 2003**

We, the undersigned, certify that we have read this thesis and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation degree



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Charles Connry, Jr., Ph.D.,  
Doctor of Ministry Program Director



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All Scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible unless noted otherwise.

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Charles Orwiler

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## ABSTRACT

The problem addressed in this paper is: How can the decision-making process for business meetings in First Denver Friends Church be a process dependent upon paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction, and following in holy obedience? This problem will be addressed by proposing a model for decision-making in which the corporate discernment of God's direction and the corporate affirmation of obedience to that discerned direction take place in an environment of worship. Decision-making in the local church requires paying attention to Christ, our Head, then following His direction. Worship is the means by which a congregation attends to Christ. Therefore, a model for congregational decision-making in which the principle activity is paying attention to Christ will be an exercise in worship. The biblical norm for discerning the will of God for the Church is the corporate affirmation of that direction. Therefore, a model of decision-making in the local church founded upon paying attention to Christ and following His direction will include the corporate affirmation of God's direction discerned within the context of worship.

Making decisions by corporate discernment within the context of worship has a biblical antecedent, a historical precedent, and has been endorsed by contemporary research. Chapter Two lays the biblical and theological foundation that paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction, and responding in holy obedience are normative practices in biblical church leadership. The Quaker decision-making method is explored in Chapter Three as a historical, practical application of the biblical and theological principles of the preceding chapter. The Quaker decision-making model functioned within a culture of listening. This culture of listening is defined in Chapter Four,

especially in terms of its relevance to leadership. Finally, a viable model for a discernment-based decision-making process in an evangelical Friends church is described in Chapter Five.



# **Chapter 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **NARRATIVE**

The Friends Church (Quaker) has an intriguing tradition regarding business. They consider meetings for business to be meetings for worship. I became aware of this perspective soon after becoming a Friend as a young man. It was a notion full of hope and the promise of bringing life to lethargic, cumbersome, and sometimes contentious, meetings for business. Unfortunately, there was the contradiction. There was a disparity between our proud expectations for what a meeting for business ought to be, and what was actually practiced.

This same dynamic is present in the Friends church where I serve as pastor. The people participating in this discrepancy are sincere followers of Christ. I would be very reluctant to describe us as hypocrites. Over the years I have become convinced that we have a general principle we hope to apply, but we lack the practical methods for applying that principle. We think we know what we want to do, but we do not really know how to do it. So, we do something else and hope for the best. Our aspirations for business meetings being meetings for worship are rarely realized.

We do know how to worship. Our worship services are well attended with sincere participants whose worship is heart-felt. We believe that Christ is present in our services for worship, and we expect Christ to speak to our hearts during that time. However, the expectations and atmosphere change when business is at hand. It is often as if whatever inspirational ways and means are stirring our hearts in worship are for a different realm than the world of decision-making. However, if Christ is the Head of His church,

including our local congregation, ought not our decision-making process, *perhaps above all else*, reflect the power and presence of our risen Lord who reigns as Head of our faith community?

By definition we understand the church to be the body of Christ. When the Apostle Paul described the church in that manner, he clearly had an incarnational expectation for the church. To discover Christ Himself functioning as the Head of a typical church – our church – is a remarkable and inspiring prospect. I observe many followers of Christ in our congregation who are inspired by the hope that the Kingdom of God is at hand. In particular, they participate in their local church believing in its promise to be a redemptive community: a real life alternative to the dysfunctional society that we observe is so desperately in need of Christ's redemption. We have this abiding hope for the community of the church to be qualitatively different because the Gospel is true and the risen Christ is really the Head of His church.

Frequently, when I have explained the possibility of pursuing business as worship to prospective members they become excited at the notion. Then they may venture to attend a business meeting to experience this hopeful phenomenon. With our inspiring tradition in hand, they are often disappointed when their experience of our business meeting does not meet their expectations. Of course, the “elephant in the living room” is that we are disappointed too. Again, we think we know what we want to do, but we apparently do not know how to do it.

However, we remain hopeful because, often enough, even our faltering attempts at pursuing business after the manner of Friends yield promising results. We know seeking the sense of the meeting compels us to listen and pray with more fervor than if

we were seeking a simple majority. We know what it is to be stumped on a difficult decision, wait for a season, and return to the dilemma and discover that Christ has quietly and effectively brought us somewhat unwittingly, but convincingly, to a place of concord. We know from experience that there is a place in decision-making where we can conclude, “It seemed good to us, and to the Holy Spirit.” We like making decisions like that. Such decisions worked out together strengthen our faith community, and strengthen our faith with a sense that we are in the will and way of God.

Nevertheless, these successes are somewhat haphazard and infrequent. Our decision-making process is cluttered with inappropriate concerns, diminished by poorly prepared reports, and confused by ambiguous responsibilities and expectations. There is a better way than the one we practice. This obfuscation of our intent to follow Christ’s lead causes me to ask these questions about our process:

- We reserve a prominent place for Christ in our worship. Do we not need to do the same in our business? What would it look like, and what would we need to do, to attempt to seat Christ at the head of our meetings for business, and follow His lead?
- We are not simply seeking consensus, but seeking the mind of Christ. That is a remarkable pursuit. What is the means of preparing a group for such a quest?
- When we face big decisions we often realize how unpracticed we are at seeking discernment together. Are there business practices and spiritual disciplines that we can incorporate into our routine decision-making so we are ready to seek God’s face together when special needs arise?
- What would it look like to maintain a group of key leaders who understand their role is to be integrating discernment of Christ’s leadership into their own leadership responsibilities?

These are the practical kinds of questions that will need to be answered in the course of this paper. Business is important because it sets the direction, and often the tone

for the ministry of the church. Organization and democratic or representative processes are valuable tools. However, they can never be substitutes for the corporate acknowledgment of God's direction for the congregation. We frequently allude to God's direction, but we rarely depend upon it. From time to time we lay aside the routine management of details, and are surprised to discover that Christ is at hand in our business. *Christ is at hand*. Can we pursue the business of our church with the sincere intention of depending on the present leadership of Christ, the true Head of our church?

### CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

#### *Demographics*

We are an Evangelical Friends church with about three hundred attenders, and most of them do not have a Friends background. Consequently, most of our members lack a deep understanding of the faith and practice of Friends. Furthermore, those in our membership who grew up in the Friends' tradition were raised in somewhat different Friends' traditions.

We are urban. Consequently, we are a fairly diverse population. We live in a variety of neighborhoods. A dramatic range of incomes is represented. We are mostly white, with some Hispanic, Asian, and African-American attenders. Our congregation is composed of an even mix of ages. We are transitional: there is a constant trickle of folks moving out and folks moving in.

The church has been around for one hundred ten years. We have a wonderful "old guard" that have a pretty good idea of how things should be done, yet they remain remarkably open to change. The pastor has been on staff for twenty-four years, seventeen

of which has been in the role of senior pastor. Stability and trust with an openness to change characterize this congregation.

Our volunteer leadership is primarily composed of younger adults (ages 30 - 50) with a significant minority who have been in the church for less than ten years. Most of our leaders have been in a leadership position for less than six years, and do not have a predisposed idea of how business must take place in a Friends' church. Of course, they bring with them their predispositions of how business is conducted in their places of business.

The congregation is at peace. We often see God working in our ministry endeavors. Worship is inspiring. It is a good church in which people participate happily. This is a positive environment in which to implement a significant change. Because of the diverse population of this church with relatively shallow roots in the Friends' tradition, a means of continuous explanation and training will need to be a component of the proposed model.

### *Structural Analysis*

Our tradition is egalitarian. It is conceptually important that a single person or an exclusive group *not* have the responsibility of running the church. Business meetings are often viewed as "democratic." This term is valid in the sense that it means that all members are welcome to participate, and do, indeed, have a voice. The term is not intended to imply a process of majority rule or a form of adversarial decision-making that is often a part of a democracy. An annual church-planning day has been held for three of

the past five years in which we encourage participation in setting the course of the church.

Operationally, committees and staff handle the overwhelming majority of the business. Although staff are the most influential people by virtue of their position and involvement, they are accountable to committees, and not the reverse. Committees are empowered. We try to grant authority to whomever responsibility is given. The congregational business meeting is the ultimate authority, although the Executive Council often functions in that capacity.

The Executive Council is a key group of leaders. This Council of approximately a dozen people is composed of the committee chairpersons, the pastoral staff, the officers of the church, and the chairperson of our yearly meeting representatives. The influence of these key leaders is multiplied by their leadership in their individual committees. Furthermore, these are influential participants in the congregational business meeting. They are respected leaders, and by virtue of numbers alone, often compose half of the attenders at a congregational business meeting. Any model of decision-making for our church will only be effective when it is adopted by the Executive Council.

### *Historic Timelines*

There is a significant gap of understanding between the first generation of Quakers whose primary doctrine was “Christ has come to teach His people Himself” and our congregation of Quakers who are strongly influenced by contemporary evangelicalism. Our tradition of origin is strong in discernment, i.e., following Christ’s experiential lead. From that tradition comes the practice of consensus, which we retain. It

is important to find consensus in our meetings for business rather than vote. However, the notion of democracy has largely replaced the notion of discernment. That is “to participate” is perceived to be the critical issue, rather than “to discern.” “Discernment” is not a term commonly used among us. I sense a level of discomfort with the term. We value the democratic tradition that springs from the doctrine of the present Christ, but we are less sure how to respond to the presence of the present Christ.

The emerging leadership in the church is open to exploring a model of leadership based on discernment. This is unfamiliar territory for them. Furthermore, those who have been faithful in the business of our church for a long time have been deeply concerned about current changes in the decision-making process of our denominational organization (yearly meeting). Some perceive those changes as threats to democracy. In particular, many long-time participants feel more decisions are being made by an exclusive group rather than by the general population of the yearly meeting. Furthermore, there is an important sense of confidence in familiar ways and means. A change in our business procedure, even a change rooted in our historic tradition, will need to be implemented in a manner that inspires confidence and participation. This principle is indispensable for a successful implementation of a new model.

### *Symbols*

Despite the relative absence of ritual and symbols within our tradition, First Denver Friends Church maintains four outward markers, or symbols, that are critically important in addressing the ministry problem presented in this paper. The first is the business meeting as our symbol of egalitarianism and democracy. We intentionally

preserve this institution, not because it works especially well, but because it is especially important that the people of the congregation are ultimately responsible for the local church. This value could easily be distorted to the exclusion of Christ's leadership of the church. However, the naming of this symbol is not intended to be a negative criticism in that regard. On the contrary, the business meeting is an important symbol preserving the value that Christ works through ordinary citizens of the Kingdom to achieve His purposes.

The second symbol is the pulpit. The pulpit is the unintended symbol that the pastor is in charge of the church. The physical pulpit at First Denver Friends Church is an unpretentious piece of furniture. Our understanding is that the pastor is not a member of an elite class that is to be distinguished from the rest of the congregation. Consequently, we do not use the title "Reverend" for our pastor, though we certainly count on our pastor being reverent. Nevertheless, we are influenced by other traditions that have more authoritarian or priestly understandings of the role of pastor. Furthermore, when the same respected individual steps up on a platform and delivers a carefully prepared message nearly every Sunday from the pulpit, that person will be given authority by the congregation regardless of any organizational design. In my ministry setting the unintentional assumption that I am in charge derails the process of corporate discernment upon which our decision-making system is dependant.

The presiding clerk is our enduring symbol that the pastor is not in charge. The business meeting is our symbol of egalitarianism and democracy, and the clerk is the most influential individual in the meeting for business. It is imperative in everyone's mind that the clerk not be the pastor. The pastor will likely know more about the



workings of the church than any other individual participating in a decision, but the task of the business meeting is not to depend on the knowledge and experience of the pastor. Rather, the task of the business meeting is to discern God's direction for the congregation. Frankly, it may seem easier to let one influential person make a decision than to pursue corporate discernment. However, if we are to discern God's direction, we believe we do that together, consequently, it is vital that an "ordinary citizen" of the congregation clerk the meeting for business.

Communion without the elements is our enduring corporate symbol that Christ is present. We do believe in the experiential presence of the living Christ. We emphasize that reality by practicing communion in the manner of Friends in our worship services. This is a valued time for the membership of our church, including those who also practice communion with the elements elsewhere. We are quite intentional during this portion of our worship services to remind the participants that the purpose of this unprogrammed time is to commune with Christ Himself. Our worshippers frequently remark at the significance of this time in their worship experience.

A model for decision-making will need to take into account these four symbols. It must preserve the value of egalitarian participation and dependence on the "ordinary citizens" of the congregation. It must take into account the influential role of the pastor, and define that influence in ways other than authoritarian. The clerk's role must not only be preserved, but also clearly defined with a means of training the clerk for this critical role. Finally, there is great hope that the congregation can come to routinely depend on Christ's presence in meetings for business because they cherish that experience in their meetings for worship.

## PROBLEM AND CLAIM

The problem that is the focal point of this paper is: **How can the decision-making process for business meetings in First Denver Friends Church be a process dependent upon paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction, and following in holy obedience?** This problem will be addressed by proposing a model for decision-making in which the corporate discernment of God's direction and the corporate affirmation of obedience to that discerned direction take place in an environment of worship.

Because Christ is the Head of His church, decision-making in the local church requires turning our attention to Christ, our Head, and then following His direction as we seek to discern that direction together. Worship is the means by which a congregation attends to Christ. Therefore, a model for congregational decision-making in which the principal activity is paying attention to Christ will be an exercise in worship. Following Christ's direction requires a commonly held understanding of God's direction by the deciding group. The biblical norm for discerning the will of God for the church is the corporate affirmation of that direction. Therefore, a model of decision-making in the local church founded upon paying attention to Christ and following His direction will include the corporate affirmation of God's direction discerned within the context of worship.

The notion of making decisions by corporate discernment within the context of worship has a biblical antecedent, a historical precedent, and has been endorsed by contemporary research. A continuous theme throughout Scripture is God's intent to lead God's people. In the New Testament record Jesus literally incarnates that principle: Christ is the Head of the church. The remarkable decision of the Council of Jerusalem is

a biblical example of corporate discernment made within the context of worship. In the seventeenth century the Religious Society of Friends came into being in England, and was founded on the theological principle of the rule of Christ. That is, the fundamental expectation of the first generation of Quakers was that Christ had come to teach His people Himself. Consequently, a pervasive attentiveness to Christ became a lifestyle of these Quakers, and is described by this author as a culture of listening. In this culture of listening both meetings for worship and meetings for business were exercises in paying attention to Christ. Hence, the Quaker meeting for business was understood to be a meeting for worship. The meetings for business, however, extended beyond worship by seeking corporate discernment of Christ's direction for the congregation, as well as a commitment to act accordingly to that commonly discerned will of God. In the early 1990's Charles Olsen conducted a three-year research project under a Lily Endowment grant. The purpose of the project was to develop and test strategies for integrating spirituality and administration in church board meetings. The result was a model for decision-making that can be implemented following the liturgical worship practices of a given congregation. Olsen's research affirms several distinctive traits of the Friends decision-making process from an objective perspective, and offers helpful parameters for the development of the model proposed in this paper.

There are other approaches to decision-making evident in the history of the church that offer different means of resolving the problem addressed in this paper. For instance, the Roman Catholic tradition maintains a hierarchal authority structure that delivers authoritative mandates to its constituency. In this system select leaders hold the responsibility of responding to Christ's direction as they exercise an intermediary role on

behalf of the church. The Reformed tradition emphasizes the authority of the Bible. In terms of decision-making, the desire is to do what the Bible commands. Because of the emphasis in the Reformed tradition for the responsibility of the individual to interpret the Bible, a democratic approach to decision-making is encouraged.

This model proposed in this paper is an experiential approach to decision-making that follows in the Friends tradition of experiential religion. That is, inherent in the Friends tradition is the notion that Christ is present in all His offices to personally bring His comprehensive salvation to His people. This has led to a democratic approach to decision-making that, at its core, is dependent upon the response of individual participants to the present Christ. A belief shared among all Christians is that Christ leads His church. The Friends tradition preserves the hope that a congregation or a group of leaders can discern the immediate guidance of Christ through the Holy Spirit in the present moment for a particular circumstance.

The following is an outline of how this problem will be addressed by the primary claims and warrants of each chapter.

## Chapter 2: Biblical and Theological Foundation

*Claim:* Paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction, and responding in holy obedience are normative practices in biblical church leadership.

*Warrants:*

- The biblical record indicates that God intends to lead God's people as they listen and obey.
- Christ demonstrated what it means to follow God's lead by listening and obeying.
- Christ is leading the church (Christocracy).
  - Leadership in Christocracy means listening to and obeying Christ as Christ listened to and obeyed the Father.
  - Leadership in Christocracy is inspired by Christ and directed to His purposes (Christopraxis).
  - Leadership in Christocracy includes discerning Christ's direction in particular situations.
  - Leadership in Christocracy includes responding in holy obedience to the direction of Christ.
- Listening and obeying are normative practices of decision-making within the context of a *community* of faith.
- The church must identify the authoritative interpretation of Christ's leadership.
  - The church has always intended to follow Christ's leadership.
  - Historically, the authorities of persons, Scripture, creeds, and councils have been bases of authority in the church.
  - Human weakness will corrupt structures of authority.
  - The authority of the inward and unmediated guidance of the Spirit, understood within the boundaries of Scripture and confirmed by the unified affirmation of the congregation, is the authoritative interpretation of Christ's leadership among Friends.

## Chapter 3: Quaker Decision-Making: An Experiment in Christocracy

*Claim:* A model for church leadership founded upon paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction, and responding in holy obedience has a historical precedent.

*Warrants:*

- Quakerism was founded upon a theology of the rule of Christ (Christocracy).
- Quakers defined a lifestyle of gospel order (Christopraxis) based upon the presence of Christ in their communities of faith.
- A decision-making process based on paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction and responding in holy obedience emerged as a manifestation of their Christocracy and Christopraxis.

## Chapter 4: Developing a Culture of Listening

*Claim #1:* A decision-making model based on paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction and responding in holy obedience is practiced within a culture of listening.

*Warrants:*

- Attentiveness is contrary to contemporary culture.
- The central theme of early Quakers was attentiveness to Christ.
- A basis for understanding and practicing a culture of listening in a contemporary environment must be established.

*Claim #2:* Leadership in a culture of listening is defined in terms of the apocalyptic Word, the narrative of the apocalyptic Word, and the community of the apocalyptic Word.

*Warrants:*

- In a culture of listening leaders are attentive to the apocalyptic Word.
  - Leaders pay attention to, understand, and obey the written word of God.
  - Leaders choose fruitfulness over productivity.
  - They know the urgency and joy of a divine mission.
- In a culture of listening leaders are attentive to the narrative of the apocalyptic Word: they listen to the stories of how Christ is building His church.
- In a culture of listening leaders are attentive to the community of the apocalyptic Word: they depend on the corporate discernment of God's will.

## Chapter 5: A Model For a Decision-Making Process in an Evangelical Friends Church.

*Claim:* There is a viable model for a decision-making process in an Evangelical Friends church dependent upon paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction, and following in holy obedience.

*Warrants:*

- Charles Olsen has developed a research-based model for decision-making intended to integrate spirituality and administration in a contemporary church board setting.
- Olsen's model can be implemented by following the liturgical worship practices of a given congregation.
- The Friends' tradition of decision-making takes place within the context of worship.
- Paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction, and responding in holy obedience are normative practices in biblical church leadership.

- A decision-making model based on paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction is practiced within a culture of listening.
- Leadership in a culture of listening is defined in terms of the Apocalyptic Word, the Narrative of the Apocalyptic Word, and the Community of the Apocalyptic Word.

The proposed model draws from the biblical understanding of God's leadership of the church, the Friends' tradition of business, and the research of Charles Olsen. The model is one in which the participants in decision-making can embrace a process of business as worship in which they actually do depend upon Christ, understand His direction, and follow that direction in holy obedience.

## **Chapter 2**

### **A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION**

The thesis of this chapter that serves as the biblical and theological foundation of this paper is: *paying attention to Christ, discerning His direction, and responding in holy obedience are normative practices in biblical church leadership*. This will be established on the following principles:

- The biblical record indicates that God intends to lead God's people as they listen and obey.
- Christ demonstrated what it means to follow God's lead by listening and obeying.
- Christ is leading the church (Christocracy).
- Listening and obeying are normative practices of decision-making within the context of a *community* of faith.

#### **GOD'S INTENT TO LEAD THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

God's intent has always been to personally lead the people of God. Genesis 3:8 suggests that it was usual that God would have a personal encounter with the man and the woman in the garden. That is, despite the fall from the idyllic state in Eden, God continued to seek out humankind. For example, God called Abram to leave his homeland and journey to the Promised Land; God wrestled with Jacob; God spoke to Joseph in his dreams. These examples demonstrate that from the beginning of the biblical narrative God is characterized as leading people to accomplish God's purposes. In the book of Genesis, from Noah to Joseph, God is characteristically leading individuals rather than the people of God as a nation or a community of faith.

In the second book of the Old Testament, as the nation of Israel is being taught what it means to be the people of God, God is characterized as leading the people of God as well as continuing to lead individuals. As Moses led the nation to the Promised Land a



dramatic theophany took place. God spoke directly to Moses on Mt. Sinai. In part, the message Moses brought down from the mountain *from God* and *to God's people* was, "Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples" (Ex. 19:5). The people were inspired and responded, "Everything the Lord has spoken we will do" (Ex. 19:8). Moses subsequently took the people's response back to God. This is theocracy: God's people listening to God's direction and obeying it.

There is, however, more to this narrative. Later, when God appeared on the mountain to deliver the commandments, the people were frightened by the smoke and lightning and the sound of trumpets. *They insisted on not hearing from God themselves.* They said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die" (Ex. 20:19). The complication to God's leadership of the people of God was the people of God themselves. The intent of God to lead, and the reluctance of people to accept that theocratic leadership is a recurring theme in the Old Testament. An order of theocracy less direct than God's people listening to God's direction and obeying it was established through the Judges. Then during the judgeship of Samuel, the people raised their voices, demanding a king, "such as all the other nations have" (1Sam. 8:5). The tragedy of this turn of events was that the people were distancing themselves farther from the Lord Almighty by rejecting even the limited theocracy that remained.<sup>1</sup>

Although God's leadership continued indirectly through prophets and kings, God's intent remained to lead directly. By the time the following words of Jeremiah were written an involved cultic tradition had developed in Judaism. As hallowed as those

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<sup>1</sup> Paul N. Anderson, "Theocracy: God's Leadership in the OT," in *DMN 521 Leadership in Biblical and Theological Perspective*, Class notes (George Fox Seminary, June 18-20 2001).

practices were (at times), they were distanced from the simple model of listening to and obeying the Lord introduced at Mt. Sinai. The actual governance of Israel in the days of Jeremiah retained no sense at all of theocracy. Nevertheless, the obstinate refusal of God's leadership did not change God's design:

For in the day that I brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this command I gave them, "Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you" (Jer. 7:22-23).

In fact, the prophet declared the will of God to begin again at a future date with a new covenant with God's people in which God's law will be written on their hearts:

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people (Jer. 31:31-33).

The Old Testament record declares clearly God's intent to lead God's people. It also records in many different narratives the reluctance of God's people to accept God's leadership. It is sobering to be reminded that human nature has not changed. It is hopeful to be reminded that God persists in steadfast love for people who can be reluctant to function according to God's design.

A new chapter in the history of God and God's people opened in the book of Exodus. Moses is the key figure because the Lord spoke to Moses "face to face, as one speaks to a friend" (Ex. 33:11). Israel followed God's lead by following Moses. Moses followed God's lead by listening to and obeying God. In this process God unmistakably demonstrated the intent to lead the people of God. However, how would God lead the

people after Moses? Moses would eventually die, and there would not be another to replace him who heard so frequently and directly from God. This led to the rule of judges, kings, and prophets as alluded to earlier. Moses, however, prophesied that God would eventually raise up another prophet reminiscent of himself who will speak directly from the Lord. The people are to listen and obey him:

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. This is what you requested of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: "If I hear the voice of the LORD my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die." Then the LORD replied to me: "They are right in what they have said. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command (Deut. 18:15-18).

These words established the hope that at some point in history God would lead His people again through an extraordinary intermediary like Moses. In the meantime, the Old Testament record is a testimony to God's intent to lead God's people. When the time was right Jesus the Christ entered the stream of human history and was the consummate fulfillment of Moses' prophecy.

### **JESUS LISTENED AND OBEYED**

In speeches to Jewish crowds, both Peter and Stephen refer to Jesus as the prophet like Moses (Acts 3:22, 7:37). The Gospel of John leans heavily upon this prophesy, as well. The fulfillment of the Prophet-like-Moses typology "becomes the backbone of the Johannine presentation of Jesus' words and works."<sup>2</sup> Repeatedly in this gospel God is

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<sup>2</sup> Paul N. Anderson, "The Having-Sent-Me Father: Aspects of Agency, Encounter, and Irony in the Johannine Father-Son Relationship," *Semeia* 85 (1999): 33.

described as the One who has sent the Son, and the Son is described as the One who has been sent by the Father.<sup>3</sup>

The overarching conclusion...is that primary association of God as “the Father” in John pertains centrally to divine commissioning of Jesus as the Prophet like Moses, who acts and speaks not on his own behalf, but only as he – the Son – has seen and heard from God – the Father – in heaven. Therefore, the Father-Son relationship in John is couched within this Mosaic agency typology, and considering the impact of Deut. 18:15-22 on the Johannine tradition is an essential key to understanding this relationship properly.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus is this prophet like Moses sent from God. True, to Moses’ prophecy he speaks only what He has heard from God. Moses promised a prophet to come in the future who would speak directly for God. The people were to listen and obey him. Christ was the fulfillment of that prophecy.

Jesus Himself was reluctant to describe Himself as a prophet, although He did imply a connection between Himself and the prophets who had preceded him. For example, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Mt. 23:37), strongly suggests that Jesus is in the long line of prophets who have been rejected by the leaders of their own people.<sup>5</sup> As was mentioned earlier, the apostles clearly held the view that Jesus was a prophet like Moses. Consequently, theologians have listed “Prophet” as one of Christ’s three offices, along with “Priest” and “King.”<sup>6</sup>

Stanley Grenz speculates that the reason Jesus may have been reluctant to describe Himself as a prophet is because the prophets who preceded Him were only a

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>5</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 329.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

shadow of the prophet Christ was to be. Jesus did not just proclaim the message of God's salvation; He *was* the salvation message. "... He embodied God's complete, eschatological salvation.... As the embodiment of the eschatological action of God, Jesus came as the great fulfillment of the Old Testament hope, the climax of the renewal of the prophetic office."<sup>7</sup>

The understanding of Jesus as one who acts and speaks only as He has heard from God (a prophet like Moses) is reinforced and expanded in the following three sayings from John's Gospel:

My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work (Jn. 4:34).

Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise (Jn. 5:19).

But so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me (Jn. 14:31, NASB).

Jesus makes it clear that the Son's leadership is a manifestation of simply following the Father. The Son follows the Father's lead by listening and obeying. Theocracy is enfleshed in Christ. We can only understand Jesus properly if we understand how much he was *not* operating independently. To use the vernacular, he absolutely was not doing "his own thing." Moses led Israel by listening and obeying as God spoke to him. Christ is, indeed, a prophet like Moses, and surpasses Moses in this regard. What is more, when the Son of God came in the flesh He *demonstrated* God's desire to lead His people through a person who listens and obeys. Therefore, in light of the repeated call to God's people in the Old Testament to listen and obey, and the consummate example of Jesus' listening and obedience, this author concludes that listening and obeying are the means by which God intends to lead God's people.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

In Jesus, theocracy becomes a practical reality for the people of God. Seeing theocracy enfleshed in Christ is wonderful in its own right. However, that revelation was for our benefit. That is, just as the prophet Jeremiah had declared, something very much like what Jesus demonstrated is precisely what God has in mind for God's people. "Jesus did not come into the world clinging to this intimacy with his Father as if it were his private domain. He came to include us in his divine obedience. He wanted to lead us to the Father so that we could enjoy the same intimacy he did."<sup>8</sup> In this chapter we have seen that God's intent is to lead God's people as they listen and obey. We have seen both the difficulty the people of God have had in being faithful to task, and we have seen the consummate example of listening and obedience in Christ. Christ, however, is more than an example. He is the agent in Whom the people of God listen and obey.

### CHRIST LEADING THE CHURCH: CHRISTOCRACY

In response to the great confession of Peter in Matthew 16, Jesus responds that, as the Son of the living God, He Himself will build His church. This building of the church by the resurrected Christ happens through the Spirit-occupied followers of Jesus:

Having completed his ministry to the Father on behalf of the world and having prepared in his own body a dwelling place for the Spirit of God, Jesus, following his resurrection, promised the gift of the Spirit to his followers as a continuation of his ministry on earth. With the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the believers were constituted as the gathered body and empowered to become the serving and ministering body. Called out of the world in conformity to Christ, the early church was sent into the world in his behalf empowered by the Holy Spirit.<sup>9</sup>

Just as in the responsive relationship of the Son to the Father, the church can only be properly understood as *not* operating independently of Christ. "The body of Christ was

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<sup>8</sup> Donald P. McNeill, Douglas A. Morrison, and Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1982), 40.

<sup>9</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 43.

for Paul a *charismatic community*. . . . One cannot be a member of the body without being a vehicle of the Spirit's ministry to the believer."<sup>10</sup> Being a "vehicle of the Spirit's ministry" is so much more than an intriguing aspect of Christian life. It is an expression of utter dependence upon Christ. Christ building His church through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in lives of the members of His church is quite literally how the church works.

George Fox, the founder of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in the seventeenth century, made a point of emphasizing the active role of Christ in leading and building His church. In his writing and speaking he often referred to the offices of Christ, which take the reader or listener a step closer to appreciating the active role of the present Christ:

So now Christ is come, and you that are called christians will confess him; but how does he exercise his offices in you, or amongst you?

His office, as he is a counsellor; do you hear his voice from heaven, concerning your heavenly state. . . .

Now consider, doth Christ exercise this office of a shepherd amongst you? Do you follow him? Do ye know his voice? . . .

And likewise, how doth Christ exercise his office, as he is a bishop to oversee you, who is the heavenly and spiritual man with his heavenly spirit, light, and grace, and the head of his church. . . .

And how does Christ exercise his office, as he is a priest amongst you, who has died for you? Do ye feel his blood sprinkling your hearts, and his pure water washing you, and he sanctifying of you, that he may present you holy, without spot or wrinkle, and without blemish to God. . . .

And how do ye feel Christ exercising his office as a prophet amongst you? Do you hear him in all things? Doth he reveal the Father to you? . . .

And how doth he exercise his kingly office amongst you, or in you? Doth he rule in your hearts by faith? As he did in the church in the primitive times: so is Christ the heavenly and spiritual man your ruler, by his power, and faith, and spirit, and grace in your hearts.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1990), 110.

<sup>11</sup> George Fox, *The Works of George Fox*, vol. V, *The Doctrinals Volume II* (State College, PA: New Foundation Publication, 1990), 319.

### *Leadership in Christocracy*

In defining a model of leadership in the church, the issue then is how leadership is exercised in the context of the leadership of the resurrected Christ. The flow of biblical revelation indicates that God's intent has been to lead God's people as those people listen to God and obey. Jesus was the prophet for whom God's people had been waiting. This climactic prophet Who embodied the salvation message of God, demonstrated a consummate responsive relationship with the Father: a lifestyle of listening and obeying. Jesus' life and words call His church to imitate that life of responsiveness to Him, as he demonstrated the life of responsiveness to the Father. This is Christocracy. Consequently, the primary task of leadership in Christocracy is to be learning to listen and obey Christ as the Son listened to and obeyed the Father. Many volumes on leadership have been written describing how a leader can motivate people to achieve organizational objectives. If Jesus is our model leader and our ultimate leader, one may question the value of that approach to leadership. Or, at the very least, one must weigh very carefully the organizational objective of a church. In Jesus' leadership model there was only one objective: to do the will of the Father. "As the inner life of Jesus in his relation to the Father is constitutive of Christology, so the inner life of the church in its experience of Jesus Christ is constitutive of ecclesiology."<sup>12</sup>

Practically speaking, leadership in Christocracy is defined by who is actually in charge of the church. As Anderson observed above, this is an issue of ecclesiology. Christocratic leadership is founded upon the understanding that Christ himself leads the church. This is an easier doctrine to affirm than it is to practice. It is likely that more traditions than Quakers would find their consciences pierced and their praxes challenged

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<sup>12</sup> Anderson, *Shape*, 113.



by this poignant observation by Douglas Steere, “The Society of Friends needs nothing as much today as a fresh baptism of inward realization of who it is that truly sits at the head of the Meeting.”<sup>13</sup> Organizational methodologies generally presume an important role of leadership to be initiating change within the organization. That approach makes sense in a humanistic model. However, the participation of Christ alters our understanding, especially at the point of who initiates change. “The living Christ within us is the initiator and we are the responders... And all our apparent initiative is already a response, a testimonial to His secret presence and working within us.”<sup>14</sup> An understanding of leadership is needed that incorporates the primary leadership of Christ.

The practical tasks of leading in Christocracy are listening and obeying. That is, the leader or leadership team attempts to discern Christ’s direction and then follow it. The assumption, then, in Christian leadership is that the immediate will of Christ can be known and followed. Christ himself intends to guide leadership in particular situations beyond, but never contradicting, the revelation of the will of God in the Bible.

“Discernment is the recognition of the congruence between the Christ of Scripture and the Christ in ministry.”<sup>15</sup> Are there necessary vagaries, or even dangers, in such a pursuit? Of course, just as there are vagaries and dangers in interpreting the written word of God. More on the misuse of discernment is included in the section on discernment later in this chapter. The question we must not avoid, however, is: Can Christian leaders depend upon the particular leadership of Christ in their particular situations? The answer must be, “Yes,” if Christ is truly the Head of the church:

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<sup>13</sup> Douglas V. Steere, Author, *Where Words Come from*, Swarthmore Lecture Pamphlet (London: Friends House, No date), 44.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas R. Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1941), 30.

<sup>15</sup> Anderson, *Shape*, 56.

And to those who protest that the reality of the living Lord cannot be objectively discerned and known in the context of our own subjective experience, we must in turn protest that this is a denial of the sheer objective reality of the being of the risen Lord who presents himself to us both as an object of knowledge and as experience through the Holy Spirit's encounter of us.<sup>16</sup>

In the latter quotation Ray Anderson argued that we can expect to experience and know Christ through the Holy Spirit because of the objective reality of the risen Lord. Dallas Willard extends that argument to include the principle that God's rule in the church includes communication between Christ and His church:

Knowing the voice of God, the *practical understanding* of that voice in our minds and hearts, is *not* a luxury to the people of God... First of all, without this direct communication with Christ who is the Head of the Church, the rule of God will not be promoted through our lives as it should and could be. The understanding of the voice of God as here described gives *substance* to the relationship between Christ and His Church. *He talks to it*, and that is what it means for His word to live in the Church.<sup>17</sup>

According to the reasoning of these two theologians Christian leaders can depend on the particular leadership of Christ in particular situations because He is truly the risen Lord, and communication between Christ and the church is an important means by which the rule of God is promoted. Leaders follow the living Christ: "Theological reflection does not ask the question "What would Jesus do in this situation?" because this question would imply his absence. Rather, it asks the question 'Where is Jesus in this situation and what am I to do as a minister?'"<sup>18</sup>

Given that leaders follow the living Christ, what does following Christ include?

The most practical answer to the question is the subject of the final chapter. At this point

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>17</sup> Dallas Willard, *In Search of Guidance: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984), 213.

<sup>18</sup> Anderson, *Shape*, 56.

we can establish some further biblical and theological principles upon which that model will be built:

- Leadership in Christocracy is human activity inspired by Christ and directed to His purposes (Christopraxis).
- Leadership in Christocracy includes discerning Christ's direction in particular situations.
- Leadership in Christocracy includes responding in holy obedience to the direction of Christ.

These three principles will be examined within the narrative of the Council of Jerusalem from Acts 15.

### *Christopraxis*

Especially as it is described in the Gospel of John, Christocracy is, “an abiding immersion in the present leadership of the resurrected Lord.”<sup>19</sup> Paul Anderson’s concept of Christocracy as an immersion in the presence of Christ blends nicely with Ray Anderson’s notion of Christopraxis as actions that are filled with Christ. Anderson’s explanation of Christopraxis begins with Aristotle’s comparison of *poiesis* and *praxis*. *Poiesis* refers to a completed action where the end product of that action is independent of its future use.<sup>20</sup> For instance, a carpenter could make a cabinet, and that cabinet could be designed for a specific purpose. The carpenter will exercise skill and technique in the work of his craft. The carpenter may know the intended purpose of the cabinet, but could be indifferent to that purpose, as long as the cabinet is made to the proper specifications. Regardless of how the cabinet is used in the future, the carpenter’s work is done upon completion of the cabinet.

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<sup>19</sup> Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 135.

<sup>20</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *The Soul of Ministry: Forming Leaders for God's People* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 26.

*Praxis* is commonly understood to simply mean, “practice.” However, by Aristotle’s comparison, praxis is an action saturated with significance. It is an action fully informed by its *telos*, i.e., its ultimate purpose and value.<sup>21</sup> Praxis is not merely the application of skill and technique. Rather, it is an action filled with purpose, and, in fact, some of that ultimate purpose is realized in the process of the action. Discernment, then, is an integral component to praxis because one must understand the objective of the action, and grow in that understanding through that action.<sup>22</sup> Christian ministry is the consummate example of praxis. That is, in Christian ministry Christ is our *telos*: our ultimate objective. However, that *telos* is not a static goal, but a living Person, who is building His church. Christocracy has been used to describe the leadership of Christ. This can be understood in terms of ultimate objectives that have been revealed in Scripture, and through the immediate work of Christ to build His church in the present age. Christopraxis, then, is human activity inspired by Christ and directed to His purposes.

The present work of Christ is manifested in the practices, or praxis, of Jesus’ present disciples. The praxis is intended to be full of Christ, as Christ’s ministry was full of the Father. Our ultimate objective (*telos*) is Christ, and Christ leads and empowers our actions (praxis) through the Spirit. This is Christopraxis. “Christopraxis is the continuing ministry of Christ through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>23</sup> The purpose of this chapter is to establish that paying attention to Christ, discerning His direction, and responding in holy obedience are normative practices in biblical church leadership. Up to this point it has been biblically demonstrated that God intends to lead God’s people and, in particular, Christ is leading His church. Christian ministry and in particular, the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 29.

ministry of leadership, are not merely exercises of technique, but are human activities inspired by Christ and directed to His purposes. This ministry not only looks to the eschatological realization of Christ's kingdom, but also is directed and empowered through the Spirit by Christ Himself as Christian ministers discern Christ's direction and respond accordingly.

We are fortunate to have a biblical example of Christocracy and Christopraxis to examine. Acts 15 contains not a prescriptive formula, but a paradigmatic narrative of the church in action demonstrating Christocracy and Christopraxis.<sup>24</sup> The book of Acts is introduced by this key passage, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses..." (Acts 1:8). In this text the main character is introduced: the Holy Spirit, and the main activity of the disciples of Jesus is described: being witnesses.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, the Book of Acts is frequently characterized as the acts of the Holy Spirit. For example,

- The Holy Spirit released Peter and other apostles from jail (Acts 5 and 12).
- The Spirit orchestrated several details of the encounter of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8).
- The Spirit set apart Paul and Barnabas for their missionary work (Acts 13).
- The Spirit intervened to direct Paul in his missionary journey (Acts 16).

In the Council of Jerusalem the apostles' *witness* of the *acts* of the Holy Spirit is the determinative factor in that pivotal gathering for discernment.

The Council of Jerusalem was convened to determine if one had to follow Jewish practices to be a follower of Christ. We can imagine how enormously significant this inevitable question was. Richard Foster has identified it as the watershed issue in the

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<sup>24</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Decision Making in the Church: A Biblical Model* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1983), 56.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Foster, *The Book of Apostolic Acts*, lecture (George Fox College, Fall 1976), 4.

Book of Acts.<sup>26</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson identifies the Council of Jerusalem as the climax of a six chapter narrative beginning with Peter's revelation at the house of Cornelius that the door is open for the entrance of Gentiles into the Kingdom.<sup>27</sup> After centuries of Judaism based on the written, immutable Law, God is changing the religious culture and theology beyond what anyone would have anticipated. In a religious culture that valued tradition and Law so highly, the only convincing evidence to substantiate a paradigm shift of this magnitude is the common experience of the Holy Spirit witnessed by the apostles, and many others. In other words, Christ was building His church, and the church was compelled to redefine its *praxis* (including their theology and interpretation of Scripture) to the *telos* of the living Christ in its midst. "At stake is the church's identity as witness to the work of God. Will the church decide to recognize and acknowledge actions of God that go beyond its present understanding, or will it demand that God work within its categories?"<sup>28</sup> Just as Anderson described *praxis* as growing in the understanding of the ultimate purpose while pursuing that purpose, so the church redefined its *praxis* in the Council of Jerusalem through the *praxis* of following Christ in ministry.

In the Council those who argued for God's working within designated categories did so on the basis of the Law (Acts 15:5). It was a solid, biblical argument that had stood for centuries. Peter, Barnabas and Paul argued for a new paradigm. They substantiated their argument with stories of what they had seen the Spirit do, and the pertinent details of Peter's presentation are included in the text (Acts 15:7-12). God is the subject of every verb in this representation of Peter's speech:<sup>29</sup> God chose; God accepted; God purified.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>27</sup> Johnson, *Decision Making*, 68.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 81.

God was doing something, and God's activity demanded a response from the church.

"The church, in short, is able to discern what God is doing because it is silent and listens to the story of what God is doing in others. Without these narratives, the church cannot discern, and therefore it cannot decide in a theologically responsible way."<sup>30</sup> The stories of the work of God in the ministries of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas convinced the gathered church that Christ was doing something they could hardly have anticipated. A new paradigm for understanding the purposes of God was emerging, but corporate discernment was needed to affirm that new direction for the church.

### *Discernment*

The thesis of this section on discernment is that leadership in Christocracy includes discerning Christ's direction in particular situations. Because leadership in Christocracy is intended to be Christopraxis, and the primary task of the leader is to be learning to listen and obey, ultimately leadership must include being able to discern Christ's direction in the particular circumstances in which Christ *is* present and leadership *is* being exercised. As imperative as discernment is, it remains an often-subjective endeavor. However, it is not a purely subjective pursuit. Discernment takes place in the context of the known will of God, specifically, the corporately affirmed will of God as revealed in the Bible. This is a vital parameter for discernment with integrity. The exercise of discernment is the transitional bridge between the static record of God's completed work and the decisions required by the dynamics of God's emerging activity in the present moment. Consequently, a view of Scripture is needed that both guards

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 86.

against error and invites us to follow the living Christ. Such a view of Scripture is described in the paper as an eschatological perspective.

For the purpose of this paper discernment will be defined as attending to and understanding Christ's direction for the church. Earlier in this chapter a definition of discernment by Ray Anderson was cited, "Discernment is the recognition of the congruence between the Christ of Scripture and the Christ in ministry." This author's choice of a different definition certainly includes the sense of Anderson's definition, but is worded in such a way to be more compatible with the subject of decision-making. Repeatedly in this chapter biblical examples have been given of God's call for the church to listen and obey. In this paper "listening" and "discerning" are synonymous. They both include *paying attention* to Christ's direction, which could be acts of the Spirit or commands in Scripture, and *understanding* what that direction means. For instance, in the Council of Jerusalem a situation had developed for which the accepted interpretation of Scripture was inadequate. These people were *paying attention* to Christ's direction by acknowledging the acts of the Spirit and heeding the commands of Scripture. They were paying attention, but they did not yet understand. They needed to find *understanding* to adequately discern Christ's direction. To this author discernment (or listening) is more clearly understood when the component parts, paying attention to Christ's direction and understanding that direction, are both named.

The activities of listening and obeying have been repeated so often in the course of this chapter that we may need to be reminded that they are only the means to an end. The ultimate objective is doing the will of God. Discernment is important because the church aspires for God's kingdom to come and God's will to be done on earth as it is in



heaven. Discernment, then, is an exercise in humility desiring that God's will, not our own be done. We have available considerable help to point us in the direction of God's intended will. We have the scriptural record of the life of Christ, and the works of God that led to Christ. We also have in the record some descriptions of God's ultimate purposes in human history. We find ourselves on the timeline between the record of God's will manifest in Christ and the glimpses we have of God's ultimate purposes. Consequently, in the process of seeking to discern God's direction we can adopt an eschatological perspective in light of our position on that timeline and the revelation of God available to us in the objective content of the Bible.

In the account of the Council of Jerusalem we witness the emergence of an eschatological perspective as the church is faced with resolving a contradiction between their understanding of the record of God's completed work and the dynamic activity of Christ building His church in the present moment. After listening carefully to the doctrine represented by the Pharisees and the subsequent stories of Peter, Paul and Barnabas, James introduced a new level of understanding: salvation by grace alone. He substantiated his proposal with a new interpretation of an old passage from the book of Amos that says that even Gentiles can bear the name of the Lord (Acts 15:16-18; Amos 9:11-12). In this praxis of discernment recounted in Acts 15 we witness the development and influence of an eschatological perspective. Their eyes are being opened to the possibility that when David's fallen tent is rebuilt (Acts 15:16), it will be a different tent than the one old one. That is, they develop an eschatological perspective that God's work is developing in a way that may look significantly different than it did in the past, yet is congruent with the purposes of God.

It is unlikely that we are more apt to adopt an eschatological perspective than our predecessors in Acts 15. Ray Anderson asks the provocative question, “Which century is normative for our theology?”<sup>31</sup> Those who cite biblical texts as authoritative (as this author does) might be strongly inclined to think that the *first* century is normative for theology. Anderson contends that, in fact, it is the *last* century (i.e., the century in which Christ returns) that is the normative century for theology.<sup>32</sup> We want to believe the “praxis of the ministry of the Holy Spirit can be understood in light of that which God desires to become a reality at the end, not merely to replicate that form of ministry during the first century.”<sup>33</sup> However, our default mode of practical theology seems to be expecting the past to be replicated in the present. Such a view is inadequate to fully account for the present work of the living Christ.

In this illustration (Fig. 1) of an eschatological perspective one can follow a historical perspective from left to right.<sup>34</sup> Jesus ministered on earth in the flesh until His crucifixion and resurrection. Although, His ministry in the flesh ceased, His active role on earth continues on earth in the church through the Holy Spirit. The arched arrow connecting the resurrection to Pentecost indicates the continuity of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus’ ministry, however, is neither merely an extrapolation of the past, nor is it a response to current activity on earth. Rather, Jesus’ ministry is, and always has been, an anticipation of His realized Kingdom. Because Christ defines the church, it can also be said that the church’s ministry is to be an anticipation of Christ’s realized Kingdom.

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<sup>31</sup> Anderson, *Soul*, 120.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 120.

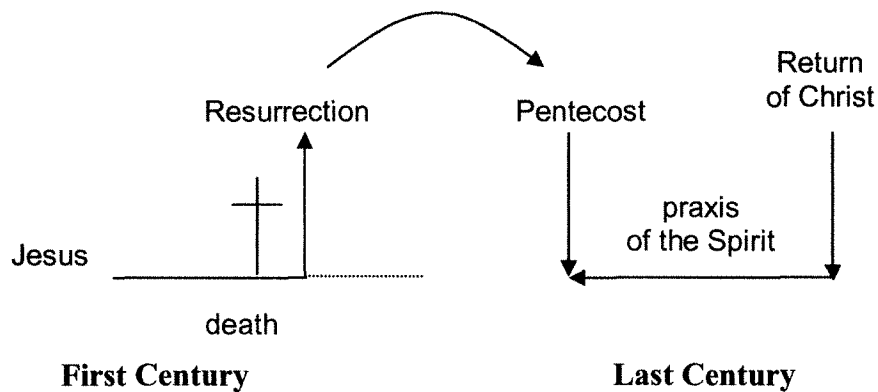


Fig. 1. Illustration of An Eschatological Perspective

The church exists on the time line between Pentecost and the Return of Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1:13-14). Here Paul encourages believers that the Spirit is a deposit on a future reality. It is curious that Christians who hold the Bible authoritative tend to refer back to the first century as normative, while that very first century church looked beyond us to the last century for much of their inspiration.

The issue at hand is an expectant awareness of the present activity of the Christ because Christ is neither dormant nor irrelevant. On the contrary, Christ is actively and purposefully working in His church to fulfill God’s ultimate objectives. An eschatological perspective is not intended to diminish the authority of the Bible at all. However, because Christ’s ministry continues, if we are only looking backwards we are likely to miss or misinterpret what Christ is doing now. “The Spirit that comes to the church comes out of the future, not the past. The presence of the Spirit is the anticipation

of the return of Christ.”<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, this view to the return of Christ is not a denial of present responsibilities while waiting for Christ’s return against which the Apostle Paul warned the church in Thessalonica. Neither is this eschatological perspective one that is preoccupied with the interpretation of world events in light of prophetic passages of Scripture. The issue is more immediate: in our church at this moment in time Christ is actively and purposefully building His church among us.

In the NT the Spirit is not regarded as an extra beyond the final revelation of God in Christ, but is consistently related to the risen Lord.... The Holy Spirit in the NT thus relates naturally to the resurrection and to the end time. In addition, the Spirit is experientially related to the Christian community and to the life of the Christians. This life is, of course, not an achievement of the end, but it is lived in hope and with a foretaste of the end.<sup>36</sup>

It is a humble perspective that starts with the Gospel record of Christ, makes note of our present circumstances and experiences, while looking to the future hope of God’s completed kingdom. It is one in which the pressures of the moment are reduced to a more realistic proportion, and we are more open to possibilities from God that far exceed our necessarily finite understanding.

One should be concerned that an emphasis upon discerning Christ’s leadership of the church based on an interpretation of Christ’s present activity could lead to false and arbitrary accreditation to the Spirit of things imprudent or ungodly. The concept of discernment itself is not necessarily a comfortable one to us. The fact is, we have witnessed spurious claims prefaced by, “The Lord told me,” and we do not want to join the company of those who slander Christ in the name of discernment. Nor in leadership, do we want to manipulate people to achieve our desires under an authoritative claim of

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Wesley Carr, "Towards a Contemporary Theology of the Holy Spirit," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28, no. 7 (1975): 506.

discernment. Church history abounds with such examples. Those examples begin in the New Testament epistles. Furthermore, we have a reasonable apprehension that even with the best of intentions, our discernment could be erroneous.

Nevertheless, discernment is a responsibility of the church.

The community as a whole, however, is expected to exercise discernment in matters which affect it as a whole. All discern the words of prophecy spoken in the assembly (1 Cor. 14:29), expel the rebellious deviant (1 Cor. 5:3-5; Matt. 18:15-20), decide matters of leadership (Acts 6:1-6) and fellowship (Acts 10:1 – 15:35).<sup>37</sup>

That is, although there are potential liabilities and abuses, discernment is a biblical responsibility of church leadership. It is, as has been established earlier, a primary means by which Christ leads the church. Our fears for the unfortunate possibilities that certainly abide within human effort “should not make the church abandon this most precious spiritual gift.”<sup>38</sup> The life of faith is not one of certainty in our own performance. So it is with this exercise of faith called discernment. Specifically in response to the possibility of erring in the practice of discernment, Jan Wood writes, “If God’s transforming grace were enough to cover my sinfulness when I was rebellious, how much more there must be provision when my heart is eagerly leaping into His Presence and Heart.”<sup>39</sup> There are good reasons for caution in the endeavor of discerning God’s direction. In faith we move ahead, not paralyzed by our apprehension. However, our cautions are prudent reminders that when we move into discernment, we do so carefully.

Two safeguards against misguided discernment practices are the witness of the community of the faith, and the testimony of the Bible. The significance of the

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<sup>37</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, “The New Testament and the Examined Life: Thoughts on Teaching,” *Christian Century* 112, no. 4 (1-8 February 1995): 89.

<sup>38</sup> Johnson, “Examined Life,” 89.

<sup>39</sup> Jan Wood, “Spiritual Discernment: The Personal Dimension,” in *Friends Consultation on Discernment* (Richmond, IN: Quaker Hill, 1985), 13.

community of the faith will be examined in the section of this chapter entitled, “The Church: A Community of Faith.” In a faith community that practices discernment (paying attention to Christ and understanding His direction), the Bible is indispensable. First, it is indispensable because it is our commonly acknowledged record of the character and behavior of God: “The possibility of our identifying the work of God in the circumstances of the moment depends upon our knowledge and understanding of God’s activity in the past.”<sup>40</sup> The Jesus we claim to follow today is the Jesus of history, not one of our imaginations. We, therefore, have a baseline of knowledge of the living Christ.

How we use that baseline of knowledge is important. In the example from Acts 15 James discovers something in an old passage of Scripture because his eyes have been opened by the current work of the Spirit. Anderson describes this as, “looking back into historical revelation for antecedents rather than precedence.”<sup>41</sup> In this same example the Pharisees used the Bible (The Law and the Prophets) as precedent, and interpreted the work of the Spirit through that lens. After centuries of separatist tradition it was unlikely that a first century Jew would identify the inclusion of Gentiles as a scriptural precedent. Indeed, in this case they did not. They were, however, convinced by the revolutionary acts of the Spirit paired with an antecedent reference to the Scriptures. It is a subtle and important mental shift to invite the Spirit to speak to our hearts through the authority of Scripture to see an antecedent of a new work of God in the present time. That is what happened to James. The Bible retained its indispensable authoritative role, the faith community confirmed its witness to both the Scripture and the current work of the Holy Spirit, and the direction of Christ was discerned.

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<sup>40</sup> Johnson, *Decision Making*, 30.

<sup>41</sup> Anderson, *Soul*, 125.

The second indispensable quality of the Bible is that it is our acknowledged record of the divinely revealed eschatological objectives. For instance, we understand, according to the Scriptures, that God's Kingdom includes a new community for the people of God: "God's eschatological desire is a reconciled humanity (Eph. 2:14-19), living in a renewed creation and enjoying God's presence (Rev. 21-22)."<sup>42</sup> This can be stated eloquently, such as, "God's aim in history is the creation of an all-inclusive Community of loving persons, with Himself included in that community as its prime sustainer and most glorious inhabitant."<sup>43</sup> The convincing quality of such a statement is not, however, the beauty of the arrangement of the words. Rather, this is a memorable restatement of God's intent that is reiterated a number of times in the biblical record. The biblical record then becomes the foundation for humility in discernment to which an allusion was made earlier. That is, the task at hand is always to do the will of God. Without the perspective of Who Christ is, and what His ultimate purpose is, we easily lose sight of the priority of the will of God. Anderson says, "The ministry of Jesus to the Father on behalf of the world is the inner logic of all ministry."<sup>44</sup> That is what we see in Jesus' life. It is a difficult place for us to maintain. A key manner in which we maintain that position of humility is in being rooted in the knowledge of the historical record of Christ while looking through our present circumstances to the completed work of Christ.

Ultimately, however, something more than discernment is needed. Jesus said, "The world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me" (Jn. 14:31), and then He said, "You are my friends if you do what I

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<sup>42</sup> John E. Anderson, "Developing Two Quality Characteristics of Natural Church Development Through Spiritual Formation Groups," (Project thesis, Denver Seminary, 2001), 51.

<sup>43</sup> Foster, *Apostolic Acts*, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Anderson, *Shape*, 42.

command” (Jn. 15:14). The community of faith is to pay attention to Christ’s direction, understand it, and then respond in holy obedience.

### *Holy Obedience*

Leadership in Christocracy includes responding in holy obedience to the direction of Christ. Listening (discernment) is not an end in itself. We listen in order to know what to do in order to participate in the work of Christ: “Discernment’s task is not completed with simply knowing; it needs to bridge to the reality of God’s will being done on earth as it is in heaven.”<sup>45</sup> The obedience to which we are called is to that which is set apart: holy, as is seen in this passage from Jeremiah: “Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you” (Jer. 7:23), a singular path is described. It is a way that is God’s way, as opposed to other options. Therefore, it is holy. The passage declares that it is in our own interest to obey God and walk in God’s way. However, it is not our interest from our perspective, but God’s interest from God’s perspective that defines the direction. It is the holy way. “Holy obedience,” says T. Canby Jones, “is doing God’s will before our own.”<sup>46</sup>

Doing God’s will before His own was precisely the action and attitude modeled by Christ, which is the basis of the fundamental thesis of this paper. Listening and obeying are clearly the Scriptural norm for the Christian life. “Holy and listening and alert obedience remains, as the core and kernel of a God-intoxicated life, as the abiding

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<sup>45</sup> Wood, “Spiritual Discernment,” 11.

<sup>46</sup> T. Canby Jones, *Triumph Through Obedience*, Quaker lecture given at Indiana Yearly Meeting of Friends August 16, 1964 (Indianapolis, IN: John Woolman Press, 1964), 6.



pattern of sober, workaday living.”<sup>47</sup> Kelly’s words nicely marry two notions that can easily be assumed to be mutually exclusive. Holy obedience is a radical venture of faith practiced by ordinary people in their ordinary lives. The scriptural texts cited in this paper have given no indication that the call to listen and obey is only for the exceptional person. Rather, the clear intent is that this is the means by which God ordinarily works among ordinary people.

Kelly suggests four steps by which one enters into this holy, listening and alert obedience.

1. An enticing vision of holy living inspired by Christ Himself within the individual.
2. Once inspired by the promise of holy living, begin obedience immediately. Now is always the time for holy obedience.
3. When one fails in holy obedience, waste little time in regrets and self-accusations. Simply begin again.
4. Holy obedience does not come by trying harder, but by learning to live in the passive voice. “‘I will’ spells not obedience.”<sup>48</sup>

These steps of obedience are Christopraxis. That is, they are inspired by Christ and directed towards the purpose of Christ. Furthermore, they are intended to be achieved by ordinary people. Consequently, it is surely a reasonable expectation that leaders in a church can have a God-given aspiration for holy living. They can begin immediately to attend to the Spirit’s lead, and respond in holy obedience. They will fail, or perceive themselves to fail, from time to time. They simply begin again, learning that obedience is Christopraxis – a work of Christ within them – not just a product of their own fallible efforts. It is by holy obedience that God’s kingdom comes, and God’s will is done. A doctoral classmate offered a solid definition of leadership within the context of holy

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<sup>47</sup> Kelly, *Testament*, 58.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-61.

obedience when she mused, “I’m wondering if leadership isn’t bringing people into a place where they can pray the Lord’s Prayer.”<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, “obedience” even without the modifier “holy” is a heavy word. It often suggests obligation or inconsiderate authoritarian power.<sup>50</sup> However, Jesus describes obedience as an easy yoke. It is the essence of abiding in the love of God, and love is not a heavy burden: “They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them” (Jn. 14:21). As Christ describes them, listening to Him and obeying Him are the very threads of our love woven into the fabric of His love. Those who choose to obey realize the true meaning of fullness of life.<sup>51</sup> Delight, therefore, rather than obligation, characterizes holy obedience in Christocracy: “Obedience is giving full attention to what the Father says to us in this very moment and responding lovingly to what we perceive, because God is our loving Father in whom nothing that is not love can be found.”<sup>52</sup>

The words above seem to capture what is implicitly described in the example of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. It has already been established that the Council gave their full attention to God, and responded to the Spirit’s leading. They then made an extraordinarily difficult decision. The difficulty of this decision is disguised because the tone of the chapter is not one of contention or hardship. Rather, a letter was penned that seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to the church (Acts 15:28); the letter was received as an encouraging message (Acts 15:31); and after Judas and Silas spoke prophetically over

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<sup>49</sup> Carol Hutchinson, Remark in class (George Fox Seminary, June 2001).

<sup>50</sup> McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen, *Compassion*, 36.

<sup>51</sup> Keith Esch, “Christian Obedience,” *Quaker Religious Thought* 16, #1-2, no. 39-40 (Winter 1974-75): 48.

<sup>52</sup> McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen, *Compassion*, 43.

a period of time they were sent home in peace (Acts 15:32-33). Again, the narrative of the Council of Jerusalem illustrates the concepts of Christocracy and Christopraxis. Christ was taking His church in a new direction. As the church discerned Christ's leadership and responded in holy obedience, not only did the eschatological view of the church grow clearer, but they also took a step nearer to that reality themselves as they responded in holy obedience. A remarkably challenging decision is couched in words of peace and encouragement. Holy obedience is not a heavy burden.

The focus of this chapter is on certain biblical norms for leadership in the church. The normative practices of listening and obeying have been examined. Before the topic is closed, however, a closer look is in order at the environment in which listening and obeying takes places: the community of faith.

### **THE CHURCH: A COMMUNITY OF FAITH**

The modern world challenges our claim that we have come to know the only God. We must meet this challenge on many fronts. Our answer must include the intellectual demonstration that the postulate of God best illumines our experience of our world and our own lies. But our response cannot end with an intellectual apologetic for faith. We must also embody our acknowledgment of the reality of God in the manner in which we live and in the way that we view ourselves. This embodiment entails participation in community – living in fellowship with God, others, and creation. In the end, only Christian living on this plane can confirm our testimony that we know God and therefore, that God is.<sup>53</sup>

When the Jerusalem Council made their pivotal decision in Acts 15 these remarkable words summarized the process by which they reached that decision, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...” (Acts 15:28). These words indicate a cooperative partnership that was evident in the entire narrative. In deliberating an issue that easily could have been a divisive split between hypothetical Pharisaic and

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<sup>53</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community*, 52.

progressive parties, the overriding desire to make this decision together is implicit in the Acts 15 narrative. The ensuing epistle was written to preserve the unity of all Christians, including the apostles, the Jerusalem church and the church in Antioch.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, their partnership with the Holy Spirit is given prominence. It appears to be a participation in the Divine Community. This is clearly a communal exercise of faith in which the Spirit inspires and participates.

The Christopraxis of the Council of Jerusalem narrative is Christ-inspired human activity directed toward His purposes, and realized within the community of faith. Listening and obeying are normative practices of decision-making within the context of a *community* of faith. This is true because:

- The Trinity is an interactive Divine Community.
- The church is a faith *community* because it is an expression of the nature of God.
- The church community exists to fulfill the purposes of God because it is an expression of the nature of God.

### *The Divine Community*

A theological presupposition of this paper is the central doctrine of the Christian faith that, “the one God is Father, Son, and Spirit.”<sup>55</sup> This Trinitarian theological statement refers to an interactive Divine Community. The terms “Father” and “Son” are integral to our theological language because it was the language of our Lord.<sup>56</sup> It was clear in Jesus’ use of this language that these words represented a person-to-person relationship. Consequently, the confessions of the early church affirmed both that Jesus is

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<sup>54</sup> F.F. Bruce, “Commentary on the Book of Acts,” *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. F.F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 315.

<sup>55</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community*, 53.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

Lord and God is one.<sup>57</sup> However, a fuller understanding of God was being realized through the presence of the Holy Spirit. God was now understood to be present among His people by the Spirit. The Spirit was closely associated with the resurrected Christ (e.g., “Now the Lord is the Spirit...” 2 Cor. 3:17), yet clearly differentiated between both the Father and Son.<sup>58</sup> An example of this differentiation closes the second letter to the Corinthians, “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

Our understanding of the one God must include this well-differentiated unity within a triune God. “In their mutual giving and receiving, the Trinitarian persons are not only interdependent, but also *mutually internal*.”<sup>59</sup> This is a repeated theme in the Gospel of John. For instance, “that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father” (10:38), indicates that Jesus wants His disciples to understand that something more than mutual cooperation exists between the Son and the Father. A word that has been used to describe this “mutually internal abiding and interpenetration of the Trinitarian persons” is “perichoresis.”

Perichoresis refers to the reciprocal *interiority* of the Trinitarian persons. In every divine person as a subject, the other persons also indwell; all mutually permeate one another, though in so doing they do not cease to be distinct persons. In fact, the distinctions between them are precisely the presupposition of that interiority, since persons who have dissolved into one another cannot exist in one another.<sup>60</sup>

This perichoretic quality of being distinct, yet in one another explains the sense of Jesus’ words in John 17:21 that Father and Son are in one another, and Christians are in

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>59</sup> Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 208.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 209.

*them* (plural, not singular).<sup>61</sup> Because of the simultaneity of being distinct-yet-one, each divine person can act as subject, and at the same time another divine person can act as subject within it.<sup>62</sup> This brings us full circle to the beginning of this chapter where Jesus describes Himself as doing nothing on His own, but only what He sees the Father doing. Similarly in John 7:16 the perichoretic relationship is evident in Jesus' paradoxical claim that His teaching was not His own.<sup>63</sup> Within the Trinity the profound oneness of the Trinity is defined and deepened by the multiple persons in the Trinity. Thus, the Trinity is very much an interactive social entity. It is not surprising then, that something parallel can be said of those created in the image of God.

*The Community of Faith in Responsive Partnership With the Divine Community*

God said, "Let us make man in *our* image..." (Gen. 1:26, emphasis added). In the creation narratives of Genesis it is apparent that humans are created in the image of One who exists in community, and are, therefore, created to enjoy community with each other.<sup>64</sup> Woman and man share life, and deliver mankind from isolation. Procreation expands the notion of community to a society and multiple societies. God's intent is that people dwell in harmony with each other, with God, and with all of creation.<sup>65</sup> The point is evident in all of the biblical record that the nature of humanity and the redemption of humanity is couched in terms of relationship rather than discrete units of isolated individuals:

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community*, 179.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

It is not surprising that ultimately the image of God should focus on community. As the doctrine of the Trinity asserts, throughout all eternity God is community, namely, the fellowship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who comprise the triune God. The creation of humankind in the divine image, therefore, can mean nothing less than that humans express the relational dynamic of the God whose representation we are called to be. Consequently, each person can be related to the image of God only within the context of life in community with others. Only in fellowship with others can we show forth what God is like, for God is the community of love – the eternal relationship enjoyed by the Father and the Son, which is the Holy Spirit.<sup>66</sup>

Grenz makes clear that the church is a faith *community* because it is an expression of the nature of God. Consequently, we can also conclude that because the church community is an expression of the nature of God it exists to fulfill God's purposes.

Since the church community is an expression of the nature of God it exists to fulfill God's purposes. To perceive the church community as the expression of the nature of God that exists to fulfill the purposes of God one must have an eschatological perspective. The purpose of this paper is not to detail how the church falls short of its design. The fact of our failings, however, is not to be denied. However, this author presumes that a solution to those shortfalls and failings is not found in a preoccupation with them, but rather, in the pursuit of God's design. God has chosen to populate His church with redeemed citizens of the Kingdom who can sin and fall short of the glory of God. There is a difference between heaven and earth. The church exists on earth, yet is drawn by a vision of the perfected community of God:

The future of the church in God's new creation is the mutual personal indwelling of the triune God and of his glorified people, as becomes clear from the description of the new Jerusalem in the Apocalypse of John (Rev. 21:2-22:5).... In a canonical reading of the New Testament one can understand this reciprocal personal indwelling of God, the lamb, and the glorified people as the eschatological fulfillment of Jesus' high-priestly prayer, which portrays the unity of believers as communion within the communion of the triune God: 'I ask...that

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us' (Jn. 17:21).<sup>67</sup>

This future church is not here, altogether, but we have stepped into the stream of God's history that leads to the consummation of God's eternal purposes. As the Apostle Paul reminded us, we have the deposit guaranteeing a future inheritance. Consequently, we look to the eschatological hope, and act upon the experiential deposit of the Spirit who secures that hope:

Such participation in the communion of the triune God, however, is not only an object of hope for the church, but also its present experience. 'We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ' (1 John 1:3)... Present participation in the Trinitarian *communio* through faith in Jesus Christ anticipates in history the eschatological communion of the church with the triune God.<sup>68</sup>

This partnership of the faith community with responsive partnership with the Divine Community is evident in the Acts 15 narrative, and in particular, by their profound declaration, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us." The Holy Spirit was creating a church to achieve God's purposes in the world. The deposit of the Holy Spirit then, is not just a remarkable event, but the active participation of Christ, the telos of history, in the present moment of the church.<sup>69</sup> Because the community of the Trinity is accomplishing God's purposes through the faith community of the church, we should not be surprised that according the New Testament writers, it was *to the community* that the Holy Spirit is primarily given.<sup>70</sup> The church is simply not an independent agency, again reminiscent of Jesus' repeated emphasis of the same. "The church does not *drive* the

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<sup>67</sup> Volf, *After*, 128.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>69</sup> Anderson, *Soul*, 113.

<sup>70</sup> Carr, "Towards," 511.



kingdom into the world through its own institutional and pragmatic strategies. Rather, it is *drawn* into the world as it follows the mission of the Spirit.”<sup>71</sup>

The perichoretic parallel is evident. God’s intent is a responsive partnership with God in which the church’s actions are God’s actions. It is surely true that humans indwell God and the Spirit indwells humans in a different manner than the divine persons indwell each other. For instance, human beings are never the subject (as opposed to object) of the Spirit, as the Son or Father can be subject of the Spirit.<sup>72</sup> However, our hope is that the Spirit will be subject in the life of the church. “This personal interiority is one-sided. The Spirit indwells human persons, whereas human beings by contrast indwell *the life-giving ambience of the Spirit*, not the person of the Spirit.”<sup>73</sup> The point here is that the church is to pursue God’s mission in a parallel manner to which the Son pursued the Father’s will. That is, in a real sense the church must dwell in a place where we understand that our mission is not our mission.

One of the means by which our mission is not our mission is that the mission is accomplished through the gifts of the Spirit (*charismata*). Miroslav Volf creates a picture of the community of faith through the following flow of reason.

- The universal distribution of the *charismata* suggests a common responsibility for the life of the church.
- This common responsibility requires a mutual submission as described in Ephesians 5:21.
- Since all members have *charismata*, but not every member has all *charismata*, a necessary interdependence is implied.
- Since the church is interdependent, there must be a life characterized by mutuality.
- A church characterized by mutuality, would, in fact, be a community.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Anderson, *Soul*, 161.

<sup>72</sup> Volf, *After*, 210.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 229.

Here again is a picture of individuality and mutuality. Within this community are diversely, and uniquely gifted individuals. Yet, their function is effective only as God works through them corporately. This manner of the Spirit's work is paradigmatic of the working of the Trinity. Each member finds his or her own identity while participating in the mutuality of the community.<sup>75</sup> "God's kingdom (eschatological) goal is the 'mutual personal indwelling' of the three personed God with God's glorified people. Revelation 21:3 makes clear God's desire: 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God and they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them.'"<sup>76</sup>

In the discussion on discernment in the preceding section, the community of faith was named as a guard against misguided discernment. The value of the community in matters of discernment is evident in the phrase from Acts 15:28, "It seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us." Respected individuals sincerely disagreed at the beginning of the process. If discernment had been an individual matter, at least two conflicting directions would have been identified, and both would have been defended as God's will. Although the phrase of verse 28 was not mentioned until the concluding epistle was written, the narrative flows as if settling on a corporate acknowledgement of the Spirit's lead was a presupposition for the deliberating body from the beginning of the process. For instance,

- A *council* was called rather than a mandate delivered.
- The leaders of the Jerusalem Council *welcomed* the controversial missionaries at the outset.
- After lengthy debate, the community of faith *quietly listened* carefully to the stories of Paul and Barnabas.
- James, the apparent leader of the Council, discerned a direction that was a radical departure from traditional Judaism, but still indicated he valued the interests of the conservative voices.

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<sup>75</sup> Carr, "Towards," 507.

<sup>76</sup> Anderson, "Developing," 59.

- A unanimous decision was made.
- Judas and Silas, presumably from the Jerusalem group, were sent along with Paul and Barnabas to provide a report representative of the whole fellowship.
- When the church in Antioch read the decision they rejoiced.

A unifying decision on a controversial subject suggests that their commitment to discerning God's direction together was the proper procedure. The church appears to have been strengthened by the process rather than divided into contending parties as listening and obedience were pursued within the context of a community of faith.

### **DISCERNMENT AND AUTHORITY**

The repeated charge throughout this paper is that Christ leads a congregation. In particular, this means attending to Christ and understanding His direction. The church has always intended to follow Christ's leadership, and at the heart of the Christian religion is the notion that there is an immediate and discernable communication between people and God. However, discerning Christ's immediate direction is not like reading instructions and asking questions of the author, with everyone hearing the same words from the same recognized authority. Therefore, the church must have an answer to who or what offers the authoritative interpretation of Christ's leadership.

A good deal of church history is formed pursuing the question of authority. In the example from the Council of Jerusalem, we see evidence of emerging authority. First, there was the authority of the council itself. Furthermore, influential individuals within the council, such as Paul, Peter, and James, exercised at least informal authority. Scripture was also referred to as authoritative. Finally, authoritative proclamations were written and distributed to the larger church. Three centuries later the emerging Catholic Church defined episcopate succession, the New Testament, and the Apostles' Creed to be

authoritative.<sup>77</sup> This three-fold base of authority is identified by this author as the authority of position, the authority of Scripture, and the authority of creed, to which can be added the authority of the council. These make a good deal of sense because in human endeavors authority is normally granted to individuals, recognized writings, and group decisions. The early evidence of these inclinations was noted above.

The authority of position began to be established by the Apostle Paul as he appointed elders (presbyters: from which the word “priest” is derived). This elder-led structure was a reflection of current practices in Jewish synagogues.<sup>78</sup> Bishops soon became recognized as having authoritative responsibility over a region. Early in the second century Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, was making authoritative proclamations, and before the end of that century, the bishop of Rome was recognized as having final authority in the affairs of the entire church.<sup>79</sup> The apostolic succession of the bishop was acknowledged no later than the end of the second century. At that time Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, constructed such a succession to justify the ultimate authority of the bishop of Rome. Consequently, we see that in an era of a rapidly expanding church, without a constant, universal distribution of authoritative writings, positions of authority were established to rule the church, and those positions were defined as being the means of Christ’s leadership.

The Old Testament scriptures were authoritative and widely distributed, considering the state of literature before the printing press. The New Testament was being collected by the church, and the present twenty-seven books were acknowledged by the fourth century. The lack of availability of these texts to the general population

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<sup>77</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *Christianity Through the Ages* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1965), 45.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

reinforced the authority of those had more immediate access to the hallowed texts. One means of getting the gist of the texts to the general population of the church was through the formulation of creeds. The earliest form of the Apostles' Creed also dates back to the fourth century.<sup>80</sup> The creeds captured the sense of Scripture on critical doctrines of the faith as interpreted by those in positions of authority. From this author's perspective the authority of the creeds is a product of the authority of position, the authority of Scripture, and the authority of councils. The authority of councils dates back to the Council of Jerusalem. Just as in the first council, these gatherings of leaders who occupied positions of authority established agreement on basic doctrines and procedures of the church.

Ideally, all of these forms of authority are functions of the immediate and discernable communication between God and people. That is, the Spirit could, and presumably did, work through bishops as they ruled their diocese, or served on a church council, or interpreted Scripture. Unquestionably, the essential doctrines of the church were inspirationally preserved in the recitation of the Apostles' Creed for many centuries when there was little or no access to the Bible. Nevertheless, a recitation of a creed or a bishop's mandate seems to this author to be a step back from immediate communication with God. Furthermore, because these authoritative functions are human endeavors, they are subject to corruption. What happens when the source of authoritative interpretation of Christ's leadership is corrupt?

In the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries views on authority were challenged and changed in response to corruptions of the existing structures. John Wyclif (c. 1320-1384) openly criticized the Pope as a heretic, and called for his removal. He claimed that popes were not inerrant, and they were unnecessary. He translated the Latin

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

Vulgate into English, and initiated a distribution of Scripture in England through itinerant preachers. John Hus (c. 1373-1415) furthered Wyclif's cause for a season. The Council of Constance condemned both.<sup>81</sup> The foundation was laid for the Protestant Reformation that challenged what was considered to be corrupted functions of authority. The church was mandating certain things, such as the inerrancy of the Pope, and men like Wyclif questioned whether that was the authoritative word from Christ. When Wyclif made his claims, a church council questioned his authority to challenge the church. The pertinent question remained: Who or what offers the authoritative interpretation of Christ's leadership?

The Protestant Reformation offered refreshed answers to the question of the authoritative interpretation of the leadership of Christ. The Reformation emphasized the priesthood of all believers, the authority of God's word in the Bible, and the right and duty of Christians to read and interpret God's word in the Bible.<sup>82</sup> These doctrines brought the authority of Christ's leadership into the realm of the general population of Christianity. The authority of Scripture was applied in a democratic manner that was very unlikely prior to the printing press. As accessibility to the Bible increased, noteworthy revival in Christianity resulted from a significantly more personal level of interpreting Christ's leadership.

Meanwhile, an interesting reform took place within Catholicism that signaled a shift toward personal responsibility of interpreting Christ's leadership by the Holy Spirit. The Council of Basel was convened to address the schism between the eastern and western church. Although sizable majorities were making decisions, Nicholas of Cusa

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 171.

was troubled by the manner in which the decisions were being made. The Pope was not present at this council, and the majority of the members in attendance were rivals of the Pope. Consequently, political maneuvering rather than prayerful attention on God characterized the decision-making process. Nicholas withdrew from the council, claiming the Holy Spirit could not be at work in such circumstances. Thereafter, an atmosphere of peace and prayer was required at the councils. Furthermore, it became commonplace for infallibility to be spoken of in relation to the councils rather than the Pope.<sup>83</sup> This action of Nicholas called the Catholic Church back towards something that looked more like immediate and discernable communication between God and people.

These examples of reform within the church illustrate the tension between institutional forms established by the church to guard its integrity and the purported leadership of Christ contradicting the institutional authority. Guarding the integrity of the church is imperative since it is always susceptible to human error and sin. On the other hand, no human institution can be a substitute for the immediate guidance from God. Again we return to the question of who or what offers the authoritative interpretation of Christ's leadership.

The Quaker tradition attempts to preserve the irreplaceable treasure of God's immediate guidance that necessarily must be contained in an earthen vessel of ecclesiology. The authority of the inward and unmediated guidance of the Spirit, understood within the boundaries of Scripture and confirmed by the unified affirmation of the congregation, is the authoritative interpretation of Christ's leadership among Friends. Robert Barclay defended "inward and unmediated revelation" by writing, "...

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<sup>83</sup> Michael J. Sheeran, "Presentation to Mennonite Group on Quaker Decision Making," 7/March Kitchener, Ontario, 1989, 5.

since the revelation of the Son is in and by the Spirit, therefore, it is only through the testimony of the Spirit that the true knowledge of God has been, is, and can be revealed.”<sup>84</sup> This true knowledge of God that is only known by a personal revelation from God is what this author perceives to be what Thomas Kelly identifies as the “heart of religion.”<sup>85</sup> Kelly acknowledges the rich Catholic literary tradition that, ironically, was often buried by its own weighty ecclesiastical authority structure. On the other hand, as Kelly notes, Protestants emphasize salvation and Scripture while virtually ignoring the interior life.<sup>86</sup> In both cases the “heart of religion” has been lost in the effort to preserve religion. This author seeks to describe in the course of this paper, a model of decision-making in which the “heart of religion” is preserved, rather than lost, in the earthen vessel of a corporately affirmed, authoritative interpretation of Christ’s leadership.

The Jesuit order was founded on principles of discernment about a century prior to the beginnings of Quakerism. They had a method of group discernment integral to their function, and within that method, their corporately affirmed discernment was passed on to a superior for his confirmation of the leading. This practice was a reflection of a tradition of authority of position that went back to the Desert Fathers who depended similarly on their abbot.<sup>87</sup> In the Friends tradition there is a relative absence of authority by position. Among Friends, the discernment of the meeting is the last word, which means the participants in the meeting must own the responsibility of inward attentiveness to the immediate guidance from God. Friends under pastoral leadership must be especially careful of abdicating the personal responsibility of each member to participate

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<sup>84</sup> Robert Barclay, *Barclay's Apology in Modern English*, ed. Dean Freiday (Elberton, NJ: by the editor, 1967), 16.

<sup>85</sup> Kelly, *Testament*, 32.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 32, 33.

<sup>87</sup> Sheeran, "Presentation to Mennonite," 8.



in discerning Christ's direction by informally or formally granting the pastor the authority of position.

So, in a highly localized sense, Friends practice an authority of the council by seeking the sense of the meeting. The authority, however, is not in the council itself, but in an understanding that Christ's direction is discerned corporately. Sheeran observes that despite the effectiveness of corporate discernment that was being widely practiced among the Jesuits, other Catholics, and Quakers, the practice of community spiritual discernment began to disappear in the Western world at the close of the seventeenth century.<sup>88</sup> He attributes this to a cultural shift toward individuality. Consequently, a dependence upon corporate discernment as the means of authoritatively affirming Christ's direction for a congregation is not an easy assignment because it is a counter-cultural pursuit.

Furthermore, corporate discernment in the Friends' tradition is certainly susceptible to corruption by human error and sin. The boundaries of the truth of the Bible affirmed by the historical community of the church are imperative to guard discernment from error. Friends are not creedal, therefore, their written authority is Scripture alone. However, the authority of the written word is derived from the Spirit to which the written word testifies.<sup>89</sup> That is, the Bible itself is not the authority, but is the inspired and reliable guide that points to its own source: the ultimate Authority. In an evangelical context Friends are responsible to be familiar with this source of shared truth as an indispensable foundation for discernment. However, knowing the Bible is not a substitute for knowing God. Evangelical Friends must learn to still the mind and listen with the heart. They must practice attentiveness to the living Christ described by Kelly as the

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>89</sup> Barclay, *Barclay's Apology in Modern English*, 46.

“heart of religion” if this method of corporate discernment is to have the authority of the Spirit.

In claiming to hear, understand, and obey God’s direction there must be an authoritative assurance that the discerned direction is of Christ. The authoritative interpretation of Christ’s leadership among Friends is the authority of the inward and unmediated guidance of the Spirit, understood within the boundaries of Scripture and confirmed by the unified affirmation of the congregation. This author does not intend to suggest this to be either an automatic or infallible process. On the contrary, Friends have repeatedly demonstrated the difficulty and human fallibility in trying to discern Christ’s direction for His people. Furthermore, this author respects the attempts of other Christian traditions to establish reliable and Spirit-sensitive means of discerning and guarding an authoritative account of Christ’s leadership of the church. We truly need each other in this endeavor. May God help us.

### SUMMARY

In this chapter the primary claim is: Paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction, and responding in holy obedience are normative practices in biblical church leadership. This claim has been substantiated first by establishing the biblical basis for the thesis that God intends to lead His people as they listen and obey. Moses prophesied that a prophet would come who would embody this principle, and to whom the people would listen and obey. Christ, as the New Testament record indicates, is the prophet like Moses. Christ was the consummate example of listening and obeying the Father, and in Christ’s listening and obedience God’s will was done.

Listening and obedience are still the responsibility of God's people. This role is now understood as listening to and obeying Christ Who is the Head of the church. Leadership modeled after Christ means learning to listen and obey Christ as Christ listened to and obeyed the Father. The living Christ is present and active in His church. The human activity of ministry is Christopraxis: inspired by Christ Himself and directed to His purposes. Consequently, leadership is inspired by Christ and directed to His purposes. Because Christ is active and directing His church, leadership includes discerning (which includes paying attention to and understanding Christ's direction) and responding in holy obedience. Again, this is precisely what Christ demonstrated in His life in the flesh.

This process of listening and obeying being described for decision-making in the church is not an exercise of individual discernment, but rather takes place within the context of a community of faith. The church is designed to function as a community of faith because it is a manifestation of the Divine Community of the Trinity. In community discernment, the church body in partnership with the Divine Community can say, "It seemed good to us and to the Holy Spirit." Consequently, we can conclude that paying attention to Christ, discerning His direction, and responding in holy obedience are normative practices in biblical church leadership.

Whereas, discerning Christ's direction for the church can be said to be a normative practice in church leadership, there must be an authoritative assurance that the discerned direction is of Christ. This issue has been addressed continuously through church history, and finds expression in the various traditions within Christianity. The authoritative interpretation of Christ's leadership among Friends is the authority of the

inward and unmediated guidance of the Spirit, understood within the boundaries of Scripture and confirmed by the unified affirmation of the congregation. The nature of the church requires us to seek God's direction. The nature of discerning that direction requires we do so humbly.

In this chapter a theoretical basis has been established from biblical and theological sources for a discernment-based model of decision-making exercised within a community of faith. The author has not suggested, however, that biblical sources either describe or mandate a particular model of decision-making to be replicated in the contemporary church. So, the practical question remains, "What does a discernment-based model of decision-making look like in a congregation?" In the next chapter the author will begin to answer that question by investigating a model of decision-making begun in the seventeenth century by the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

### **Chapter 3**

## **QUAKER DECISION-MAKING: AN EXPERIMENT IN CHRISTOCRACY**

The thesis of this chapter is that a model of church leadership in which paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction, and responding in holy obedience has a historical precedent: the Religious Society of Friends. While Friends are not the only movement to embrace this approach, the distinctive theological foundation of the Friends (Quakers) will, nonetheless, be described. Then the subsequent practical implications of that theology will be examined, especially as it pertains to decision-making by the faith community. The Quaker experiment was based on aspiring to attain a pure and unmediated form of Christocracy and Christopraxis as outlined in the previous chapter. The distinction of their theology was the emphasis on Christ as Prophet whose immediate voice could be discerned and followed. This theology led directly to the formation of a discernment-based decision-making process founded on the corporate affirmation of God's guidance.

The Quaker experience is an instructive one because their emphasis upon the leadership of Christ yielded a sensible manifestation called gospel order. Gospel order was the term given to how Quakers perceived life to be ordered as a result of the real presence of Christ. That portion of gospel order of significance to this project is the order of decision-making. Quakers developed a form of decision-making that took seriously the immediate guidance of Christ. In this chapter it will be demonstrated how the Quaker model embodies the biblical and theological principles of the previous chapter. That is, the author intends to establish the hope that a discernment-based model of decision-making in the church is possible because it has been done. At the same time, the author

will reveal that such a model is not without significant difficulties. In other words, the Quaker experience also suggests that a practical model for a contemporary church will require that certain difficulties be addressed for it to be effective.

### **DISTINCTIVE THEOLOGY: *CHRISTOCRACY***

#### *George Fox*

In the middle of the seventeenth century a young man, George Fox, had a personal confrontation with the living Christ. This encounter included hearing a voice that said, “There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition.”<sup>1</sup> These words touched the very core of his being, and as he reported, “When I heard it, my heart did leap for joy.”<sup>2</sup> This deceptively simple, though inspiring, event contained the essence of what was to become a powerful movement of Christian renewal in England that quickly expanded well beyond its country of origin. Those involved in this movement became known as Quakers. Fox’s life-changing encounter with Christ stood in sharp contrast to his disappointing experience of emptiness and superficiality in the organized church. He began a prophetic ministry: calling people back to the true church that God had intended since the days of the apostles:

Which the christians since the apostles’ days have lost, both the spirit and nature of this primitive church, and therefore, they must not bear the titles, for they are gone astray from Christ; but they who are returned to Christ the shepherd and bishop of their souls, are his sheep, and he is the head of them, and have the same titles, and the same spirit and nature, as they had in the primitive times; for the head is the same, and the body is the same, glory to God forever.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George Fox, *The Journal of George Fox*, ed. John L. Nickalls (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> George Fox, *The Works of George Fox*, vol. V, *The Doctrinals Volume II* (State College, PA: New Foundation Publication, 1990), 301.

Fox was inexhaustibly preoccupied with calling people back to the discovery that Christ *Himself* was to lead His church. Fox became a leading figure in his day. He was widely published, interacted with the highest offices of government, led a religious movement which quickly enlarged to tens of thousands of participants, and stood firm to his convictions against considerable resistance. He was an extraordinary human being. However, he is not remembered primarily for his moral strength or diplomacy or organizational ability. Instead he is remembered as a loving pastor and spiritual guide.<sup>4</sup> The enduring quality of his message proclaimed three and one half centuries ago is a testament to his spiritual inspiration and leadership.

The church was in disarray in England during the seventeenth century. Christians witnessed

A Church that fell far short of what they felt it should be. They saw disunity and a persecuting spirit, a clergy which often displayed worldly ambition rather than religious achievement, and a prevailing theology that confirmed and worsened the sense of sin and inadequacy from which they desperately sought relief.... The joyous freedom of which the Bible spoke was denied them.... The Christ they were offered was too small. He was in the Book and not in the world.<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, there were a number of movements to reform the church. Among some of those reformers it was commonly understood that since the days of Constantine, the church had been an agency of the state rather than an ambassador of the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>6</sup> An apocalyptic mood flourished, and various reforming groups understood themselves to have been chosen by God to once again establish the true church.<sup>7</sup> This was fertile ground for the seeds of Fox's message to sprout and take root.

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<sup>4</sup> John Punshon, *Portrait in Grey: A Short History of the Quakers* (London: Quaker Home Service, 1984), 41.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

Fox agreed that this moment in history was God's chosen time to restore His church. His revelation was that God Himself would lead that restoration through Christ. Fox called people to attend to the living Christ among them, and let Him teach, lead, and care for them.<sup>8</sup> Fox preached Christ. Christ was not merely the dominant figure in Fox's message; He was the only figure in his preaching. Consequently, Fox cannot be understood apart from his Christology.

### *Fox's Christology*

John Punshon describes Fox as "a born-again Christian and a mystic."<sup>9</sup> Fox uses evangelical language to describe his life-changing encounter with Christ alluded to earlier:

Then the Lord did let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give him all the glory; for all are concluded under sin, and shut up in unbelief as I had been, that Jesus Christ might have the pre-eminence, who enlightens, and gives grace, and faith, and power.... And this I knew experimentally.<sup>10</sup>

He gives a clue to his mysticism in the final phrase above, "And this I knew experimentally." Fox's faith had a strong experiential component. His Christology was not a theology contained only in books, even only in the Bible. Rather, his understanding of Christ was substantiated by his *experience* of the living Christ.

For Fox the basic human dilemma was how one can know and do the will of God.<sup>11</sup> His answer to that was Christ had come to teach His people Himself. This was the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>10</sup> Fox, *Journal*, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Lewis Benson, "George Fox's Teaching About Christ," *Quaker Religious Thought* 16, #1-2, no. 39-40 (Winter 1974-75): 28.



essence of the gospel preached by Fox.<sup>12</sup> To those who only preached Christ as Savior whose salvation would be relevant only in eternity, Fox reminded them that Christ died for us so that we can live to Him, and respond to Him as our teacher, prophet, shepherd, bishop and priest.<sup>13</sup>

It was typical for Fox to name offices of Christ in describing Christ's present function. However, the predominant offices of Christ alluded to by Fox were Prophet, Priest and King. These offices were not a designation original to Fox. The church had recognized these threefold offices for centuries, and Calvin included them in his theology.<sup>14</sup> The common gospel of salvation that was preached focused upon Christ's priestly role of sacrifice on the Cross.<sup>15</sup> Fox's message was not a denial of Christ's priestly role, but rather to emphasize that Christ was present in *all* His offices.<sup>16</sup> In particular, Fox emphasized Christ's office of Prophet. This differed from Calvin in that Calvin's concept of Christ's office of Prophet could be removed, and his theology would remain intact. Although Fox used other scriptural typologies, he frequently emphasized Christ's office of Prophet by referring to Him as the Prophet-like-Moses:

The Lord saith, 'this is my beloved Son, hear ye him [Mark 9:7]; this is the prophet which Moses saith, like unto him that God would raise up, whom the people should hear, whom we do hear, that speaks from heaven [Heb. 12:25]; at sundry times, and in diverse manners, God spake to the fathers by the prophets, but now in these last days hath spoken to us by his son [Heb. 1:1f].<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Punshon, *Portrait*, 37.

<sup>13</sup> Benson, "Teaching About Christ," 29.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Douglas Gwyn, *Apocalypse of the Word: The Life and Message of George Fox (1624-1691)* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1984), 120.

For Fox, Christ's office of Prophet was pivotal for his theology.<sup>18</sup> This makes sense when we consider that, according to Fox, the human dilemma was knowing and doing the will of God, and Christ was the answer to that dilemma.

Fox's message that Christ has come to teach His people Himself did not go unnoticed in the seventeenth century English society in which the institutional church was being accused from many different sides. Discontented Christians were looking for an apocalyptic solution. Consequently, the emerging movement of the Religious Society of Friends drew the attention of two disparate groups: religious extremists and authorities of the religious establishment. These are important to note because they represent criticisms that spring from a misunderstanding of Friends and an underestimation of their Christology.

The Ranters were an unorganized, but influential, spiritual (not Christian) group that espoused a sort of pantheism and antinomianism.<sup>19</sup> They severely blurred the distinction between the human and the divine, rejected the Christian Scriptures, and attributed the leading of the Spirit to justify various acts of immorality. The Blasphemy Act of 1650 was aimed directly at them.<sup>20</sup> When Quakers established a form of corporate accountability the Ranters among them began to quickly evaporate.<sup>21</sup> That is, it was one thing to accept the freedom of discerning God's leading, it was quite another to accept the responsibility of having that discernment affirmed by a Christ-centered community of faith.

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<sup>18</sup> Benson, "Teaching About Christ," 26.

<sup>19</sup> Punshon, *Portrait*, 30, 31.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>21</sup> Howard H. Brinton, *Guide to Quaker Practice* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1955), 31, 20.

Unfortunately, but understandably, Quakers were susceptible to being prosecuted under this same Act. From a distance it appears that Ranters and Quakers had these things in common: the Bible was not recognized as their final authority, perfection was an attainable ideal, and they claimed a strong sense of the presence of God's Spirit.<sup>22</sup> Upon closer examination, however, the difference was enormous. The difference was Christ. The Quaker understanding of the Scriptures, and perfection, and the presence of God's Spirit all turned on the person of Christ. Quakers were distinctly Christocentric, and the Ranters were distinctly not Christocentric. This is a pivotal point with significant implication in Quaker faith and practice. Throughout this paper the author assumes a Christocentric Quaker theology. However, that cannot be presumed at every point in Quaker history.

Quakers often used the term "the Light" to describe the presence of Christ. For instance, Margaret Fell wrote. "The Prophet, Christ Jesus, him by whom the World was made, who lighteth every Man that cometh into the World...saith *Learn of me*.... And he that heareth not this Prophet, he heareth not the Light, which he is lighted withal, that cometh from the Prophet."<sup>23</sup> In this example the correlation between Christ and the Light is unmistakable. However, in general usage and in Quaker usage, "the Light" can be detrimentally ambiguous. This author is reluctant to use that historically and biblically justified term because of its ambiguity.

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<sup>22</sup> Punshon, *Portrait*, 32.

<sup>23</sup> Margaret Fell, *A Brief Collection of Remarkable Passages and Occurrences Relating to the Birth, Education, Life, Conversion, Travels, Services, and Deep Sufferings of that Ancient, Eminent, and Faithful Servant of the Lord, Margaret Fell; But by her Second Marriage, Margaret Fox. Together with Sundry of Her Epistles, Books, and Christian Testimonies to Friends and Others; and also to those in Supreme Authority in the several later Revolutions of Government* (London: T. Sowle, 1710), p. 143; quoted in Benson, "Teaching About Christ," 31.

Lewis Benson makes the emphatic claim that the "...one principal reason for the abrupt shift of emphasis that neutralized the revolutionary character of the Quaker cause"<sup>24</sup> was the separation of the Light from Christ:

The seventeenth-century Quaker apologists were the first of a long succession who regarded the 'Inner Light' as the central distinguishing principle of the Quakers. This Quaker doctrine of the 'Inner Light' seemed to be always evolving into a theory of religion which was increasingly remote from the Christian revelation and the witness of the Bible. Soon after Fox's death there was a total cessation of the preaching that 'Christ has come to teach his people himself.' Fox's whole functional Christology went into eclipse.<sup>25</sup>

It is not within the scope of this paper to thoroughly investigate the Quaker usage of "the Light." This paper is concerned about Fox's Christology. In Fox's Christology "incessantly, inevitably, and unalterably George Fox identifies and defines the Light as Christ."<sup>26</sup> The indispensability of understanding the Christocentricity of Fox's theology is not only applicable in comparing Quakers with Ranters in the seventeenth century, but, as Benson has observed, it is the key to the spiritual vitality of the Friends movement.

This is not an issue that justifies any smugness on the part of evangelical Friends. Benson also observed that the "Christ-centered" Quakerism of the eighteenth century up to his own time (written in 1974) owed very little to Fox's Christology!<sup>27</sup> More pointedly, he observes, "The churches are still preaching a Christ who has less power to save than God intended.... The saving word that needs to be spoken now is not forthcoming either from the great churches or from the Quakers."<sup>28</sup> The "saving word" that Benson claims is

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>26</sup> T. Canby Jones, "The Nature and Functions of the Light in the Thought of George Fox," *Quaker Religious Thought* 16, # 1&2, no. 39-40 (Winter 1974-75): 53.

<sup>27</sup> Benson, "Teaching About Christ," 32.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 33.

not being preached is the essence of Fox's Christology: Christ has come to teach His people Himself.

### *Fox and the Bible*

To repeat, for Fox the basic human dilemma was how a person could know and do the will of God. The eternal light of Christ preceded the darkness that seeks to overcome it (Jn. 1:1-5). The cure for those living in darkness and disobedience is to hear and obey the word from their Creator. Salvation, consequently, is turning to the light from the darkness by hearing and obeying the Word.<sup>29</sup>

Hearing God's word, then, is essential in living in His order. For many Christians of Fox's day and our own times, this meant reading and understanding The Bible. Fox and the early Quakers had a high regard for the Bible, which was their holy Scriptures. Anyone familiar with the Bible cannot help but notice how the writings of Fox and many early Quakers were replete with scriptural references. The natural manner in which biblical texts were woven into their very sentence structure stands as a testimony to their familiarity and regard for the Bible. Barclay wrote candidly, "...we consider the scriptures undoubtedly and unequivocally the finest writings in the world."<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, despite all of their inspiration and beauty, the words of the Bible are not to be confused with the Word (Logos), as Christ Himself is named in the first chapter of the Gospel of John. "The Scriptures are a part of the Revelation of God. They are the *words* of God, not the *Word*, the last term being reserved for Christ, of whom the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Barclay, *Barclay's Apology in Modern English*, ed. Dean Freiday (Elberton, NJ: by the editor, 1967), 46.

Scriptures are the declaration.”<sup>31</sup> The point being, yet again, that Christ will teach His people Himself. Fox put it this way:

Now concerning the Holy Scriptures, we do believe that they were given forth by the Holy Spirit of God through the holy men of God ... and that they are to be read, and believed, and fulfilled, and he that fulfills them is Christ; and they are ‘profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. iii: 16,17).... And we do believe that the scriptures are the words of God.<sup>32</sup>

The scriptures of truth are the words of God and not the word... and Christ who was before the scriptures were given forth, by whom the world was made, is the word of God, who fulfilled the words; the scriptures end in him, who was before they were spoken forth.<sup>33</sup>

Fox questioned neither the veracity nor the inspiration of the Bible. The issue at hand, to which he repeatedly returned, is that it was necessary for the Scriptures to be made alive in the heart of a person for that person to respond in obedience.<sup>34</sup> The Bible is surely God-inspired. Nevertheless, these Scriptures are not an end in themselves, because it is these very inspired words that point us to Christ. Christ Himself is the ultimate objective and authority.

It is this quality of the immediate presence of Christ that puts “Christ” in “Christopraxis.” Ray Anderson maintains “...because Scripture is a form of Christopraxis, its infallibility is located in the Christ of Scripture as the only true Word of God and not merely in Scripture as a product of inspiration that could somehow be detached from Christ.”<sup>35</sup> This is very close to the point Jesus was making when He said,

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<sup>31</sup> Arthur O. Roberts, "George Fox's Concept of the Church" (Ph. D. diss., Boston University Graduate School, 1954), *DA* (1954): 76.

<sup>32</sup> Fox, *Journal*, 604.

<sup>33</sup> George Fox, *The Works of George Fox*, vol. III, *The Great Mystery* (State College, PA: New Foundation Publication, 1990), 462.

<sup>34</sup> Gwyn, *Apocalypse*, 123.

<sup>35</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 56.

“You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (Jn. 5:39-40). Jesus was not questioning the veracity or the inspiration of the Bible. However, He was sharply critical that one could separate Christ Himself from the Scriptures that began with Him and return back to Him.

Anderson offers an example of Christopraxis: Jesus is not just the subject of our preaching, but He is the One who proclaims Himself through the act of the proclamation of the preacher.<sup>36</sup> This was Fox’s point regarding Scripture. The words of Scripture pierce one’s heart when the Word (Christ) is reading the words to the reader. The final authority then, is not the Bible, but the Word behind the Bible. The emphasis upon the Word illuminating the Bible resulted in an eschatological and apocalyptic hermeneutic. That is, because Christ is actively establishing His kingdom, something very important is happening in the present. Consequently, the reader of Scripture can expect to understand words recorded long ago to be enlivened with fresh meaning in light of the current work of Christ.

An apocalyptic conflict takes place at the interface of the old order apart from Christ and the new order in Christ. The church stands at that interface, and participates in the struggle until the culmination of history.<sup>37</sup> In the following quote by Fox one can see how he viewed the church at the interface between the work of God as recorded in the Scriptures, the work of God in the present, and the culmination of history. The apocalyptic urgency of this letter still burns within the souls of those who read it as if they were the intended recipients:

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Gwyn, *Apocalypse*, 115, 16.

Dear Brethren, In the mighty Power of God go on... Dwell in the Life of God... Preaching the Gospel to every Creature, and Discipling them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit... So, in the Power of the Lord Jesus Christ preach the Everlasting Gospel, that by his Power the Sick may be healed, the Leprous cleansed, the Dead raised, the Blind Eyes opened, and the Devils cast out. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ go on, that that of God in all Consciences may witness, that ye are sent of God, and are of God... to bring up all into the Head Christ, and into the Life, which gave forth the Scriptures; for there's the Unity.<sup>38</sup>

Fox's reverence for the Bible in the preceding quotation is evident. However, the unity in the kingdom of God, as Fox notes, is not in the Scriptures, but in Christ. This is what made his hermeneutic especially apocalyptic: the presence of Christ, the living Word. Notice in this passage that Fox is calling the church to intensive ministry. But it is "that of God in all Consciences" that will make those efforts effective for the Kingdom. Christ has come to teach His people Himself. The Word is apocalyptic in the sense of revealing or unveiling what had previously been hidden..<sup>39</sup> Fox was insisting on Christ's presence. His Christology emphasized Christ fulfilling all of His offices. That is, Christ is fully functional in the present. Consequently, using the vocabulary of this paper, Fox's Christology included an expansive view of Christocracy in which Christ, in all His offices, was building His church. According to Fox's theology, the true church can *only* be built by Christ.<sup>40</sup>

### *Immediate Guidance and Scripture*

The Quaker emphasis on the immediate guidance of Christ through the Holy Spirit was understood by the first generation of Friends to be a fulfillment of Scripture in the present moment for a particular circumstance. This guidance was understood to

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<sup>38</sup> George Fox, *A Day-Book of Counsel & Comfort: From the Epistles of George Fox*, ed. L. V. Hodgkin (London, UK: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1937), 78, 79.

<sup>39</sup> Gwyn, *Apocalypse*, 125.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.



neither contradict nor add to the biblical revelation. Instead, the immediate guidance of Christ was a particular leading of the eternal Word of God through the working of the same Spirit that inspired the writing of the words of Scripture.

The founding Friends made frequent references to the Word, as described in John 1, Who has been from the beginning, and Who lives forever, and Who is the same Word that discerns the thoughts and intentions of one's heart (Heb. 4:12).<sup>41</sup> The Word was emphasized as being the inspirer of the written words of the Bible, as was demonstrated in the previous section. In fact, it is the Word-inspired words (Scripture) that turn the reader of Scripture back to the Word Who remains the source of inspiration for all ages. Elizabeth Bathurst reflected this line of thinking in her writing in 1679, "This is the Word to whom the Scriptures directs us, as a Light unto our feet, and a Lanthorn unto our Paths, to guide our feet in to the way of peace; the very entrance of which giveth Light; yea, it giveth Understanding to the simple."<sup>42</sup>

In his *A Catechism and Confession of Faith* Robert Barclay detailed the rationale that the Scriptures necessarily point us back to the Word. His argument is as follows: God, Who made the light shine out of the darkness, illumines our hearts through the person of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Jesus clarified that no one knows the Father except through the Son (Mt. 11:27), and that the Son is, in fact, the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Jn. 14:6). Furthermore, it is by the Spirit that the Son reveals His knowledge, because it is the Spirit that searches all things, including the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:9-12). Therefore, since it is by the Spirit that Christ reveals the knowledge of God, it is true that the children of God are those who are led by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:9, 14). The

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<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth Bathurst, "Truth's Vindication," in *Hidden in Plain Sight: Quaker Women's Writings 1650-1700*, ed. Mary Garman, et al. (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1996), 351.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

superior quality of the Scriptures is based on their inspiration by the same Holy Spirit, and the Scriptures are, therefore, not open to personal interpretation (2 Pet. 1:20, 21). Furthermore, it is this same Spirit that inspired the Scriptures that also leads us into all truth. Jesus Himself urged the Scriptures be searched because they ultimately testify of Him (Jn. 5:39).<sup>43</sup> That is, the inspired words of Scripture always point back to the eternal Word from which they began.

Whether the issue is Scripture or guidance, the bottom line is always the eternal Word. This point is repeatedly made by Fox himself who wrote, "For I saw in that Light and Spirit which was before Scripture was given forth, and which led the holy men of God to give them forth, that all must come to that Spirit, if they would know God, or Christ, or the Scriptures aright, which they that gave them forth were led and taught by."<sup>44</sup> Thus, Hugh Pyper uses the term "logocentrism" to describe the "Quaker hermeneutic of presence and transformation.... At the heart of everything is the immediate presence of the Word."<sup>45</sup> The context in which Pyper comments is that of biblical hermeneutics. However, this logocentrism is also characteristic of the Quaker hermeneutic of the workings of God on earth in general, of which the revelation of Scripture and personal guidance are each a part.

Therefore, the emphasis on the immediate guidance of the Spirit is absolutely not intended to displace the authority of the Scriptures, but to fulfill them. These same Scriptures teach the *necessity* of being led by the Spirit of God. Barclay wrote, using his typical collage of biblical texts, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the

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<sup>43</sup> Robert Barclay, Early American imprints. 1st series, 1773, File: 12661, *A Catechism and Confession of Faith*, Philadelphia, PA, Joseph Cruikshank, in Market-Street between Second and Third Streets.

<sup>44</sup> Fox, *Journal*, 33.

<sup>45</sup> Hugh S. Pyper, "Can There Be a Quaker Hermeneutic?" *Quaker Religious Thought* 30, #97, no. 3 (September 2001): 67, 68.

Sons of God. For this is the Covenant that God hath made with the House of Israel, he hath put his Laws in their Mind, and writ them in their Hearts; and they are all taught of God.”<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, Barclay clarified in his *Apology* that no present revelation of the Word could contradict the revelation of the Word-inspired Scripture. Neither could a present revelation add to the inspired text.<sup>47</sup> Barclay stated explicitly, “We firmly believe that there is no other doctrine or gospel to be preached other than that which was delivered by the apostles.”<sup>48</sup> So, while Barclay adamantly stood against the suggestion of the revelation of a new gospel or doctrine, at the same time he pled passionately for the acknowledgement of the work of the Spirit to reveal particular insights into the established gospel and doctrines.<sup>49</sup> This logocentric understanding of the immediate guidance of Christ through the Holy Spirit, as a fulfillment of Scripture in the present moment for a particular circumstance, is the basis for this author’s thesis that Christ’s direction can be known and followed.

### **GOSPEL ORDER: *CHRISTOPRAXIS***

If Christ Himself is building His church then one would expect a congregation to manifest Christ in their faith and practices. Fox and the Quakers had a description for this manifestation of Christ in the faith community: *gospel order*. Gospel order was the practical rule of thumb for 17<sup>th</sup> century Quakers. In Lewis Benson’s exhaustive indexing of the writing of George Fox, no subject is referred to as frequently as gospel order.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Barclay, "Catechism,".

<sup>47</sup> Barclay, *Barclay's Apology in Modern English*, 63.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Lewis Benson, "The People of God and Gospel Order," in *The Church in Quaker Thought and Practice*, ed. Charles F. Thomas (Philadelphia, PA: Faith and Life Movement, 1979), 22.

Practices peculiar to Quakers such as unprogrammed worship, the peace testimony, and even wedding particulars are expressions of gospel order. However, if we are to understand gospel order, we must not be misled by curiosity with traditions that may appear unusual to some. The *singular* issue in determining gospel order was the presence of Christ Himself in the lives of those who followed Him, and in their gathered communities of faith. “Gospel order is the order that God gives his people when they gather together to experience the living presence of Christ in their midst and to be governed and ordered by him.”<sup>51</sup>

If one takes the possibility of a life “governed and ordered” by Christ seriously, as stated above, one’s entire life will be transformed. Hence, gospel order necessarily developed significant implications for both personal life and public life:

Gospel order is a rich, multivalent concept and experience in Quaker faith. It ties together the covenantal relationship with God, the in breaking of God’s new order, and the church’s patterns of faithful living. It unites, as intrinsic elements in its understanding of the church, the inward life of prayer and worship, the daily life of caring and accountability in the meeting-community, and prophetic witness in the world.<sup>52</sup>

Benson notes that in Fox’s long and fruitful ministry he really only focused on two tasks: the proclamation of the gospel and the establishment of gospel order:<sup>53</sup>

As we examine the *content of the gospel* Fox preached, it is clear that it contains the seed of a new kind of ordering for the people of God. *At the heart of his gospel message is the proclamation that Christ is alive and that he is present in the midst of all who gather in his name. Christ is present among his people in a functional way. He is their prophet, teacher, priest, king and orderer. This is the great new feact of the new covenant—that Christ is present in the midst of his people as ruler, governor and orderer, and it is as he reveals himself in these*

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>52</sup> Sandra Cronk, *Dark Night Journey: Inward Re-Patterning Toward a Life Centered on God* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1991), 43.

<sup>53</sup> Benson, “People of God,” 18.

*roles, functions or “offices” that we come to know him, and to know ourselves as a people who are ruled, governed and ordered by him.*<sup>54</sup>

Gospel order was the direct manifestation of this gospel. The key elements of this new order were the discernment of Christ’s direction and the community of faith in which this discernment must be sought and checked.

### *Listening and Obeying*

Fox understood gospel order to be a return to a relationship between God and people that was intended in the first place. That relationship had been broken by the Fall, and was essentially healed through Christ. Because, through Christ, we have the capacity to listen and obey, we can enter into life ordered by God. This can be compared to how God orders the natural world:

So both the earth and the sea, and all things therein, are kept in their order by the word and power of God, by which they were made, by which they were upheld. So all the works of the Lord praise him, and so do all men and women that are in the truth, which makes them free from him that abode not in the truth, in whom there is not truth. So all God’s free people or children, (that are made free indeed by the truth,) are in the order of the truth, and in the order of the spirit of God, and in the order of the gospel, and are in the order of the light, the life in Christ, and are over the foul spirit of disorder.<sup>55</sup>

Key elements for Fox’s gospel and its subsequent order included in the preceding quotation are:

- God’s order is kept by His word and His power
- Those who have been made free by God’s truth live in the order of that Truth.
- God’s Spirit, Light and Life are juxtaposed with the, “foul spirit of disorder.”

Some critics of this perspective, that we enter God’s ordered life through listening and obeying, argued that God’s leading cannot normally be discerned. To this Fox responded,

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>55</sup> George Fox, *The Works of George Fox*, vol. VI, *The Doctrinals: Volume III* (State College, PA: New Foundation Publication, 1990), 183.

No, you say, and teach ... that there is no hearing Christ's voice nowadays, and that is strange, cannot you hear his voice, he stands and knocks at the door of your hearts? ... I believe, if a man should knock at your door, and tell you of a benefice of a thousand a year, you could open your doors soon enough ... but Christ knocks at your door, and you say and tell people, there is no hearing his voice nowadays.<sup>56</sup>

Other critics countered that to claim to recognize the voice of God is too awesome an assertion to rely on so subjective a foundation. Subjectivism is the primary weakness of gospel order. There is room for error. Men, such as, Aldam, Huntingham, Ibbits, Perrot, and Naylor embarrassed themselves and Quakers by misguided, if not heretical, behavior supposedly performed in obedience to Christ.<sup>57</sup> The vitality and dynamism of a gospel order based on listening and obeying the present Christ needed the boundaries and stability of universally recognized Truth. So, Barclay carefully asserts, "These divine inward revelations are considered by us to be absolutely necessary for the building up of true faith. But, this does not mean that they can, or ever do, contradict the outward testimony of the scriptures, or proper and sound judgment."<sup>58</sup>

Barclay includes as a check on the subjectivity of inward revelation the parameters of the testimony of Scripture and sound and proper judgment. This is an important function of the community of faith that will be examined in the next section. Note, however, that he does not diminish the role of inward revelation despite its inherent risks. He deems it necessary simply because there is no adequate substitute for the direction given by Christ Himself. That, in fact, is precisely the point. "The deeper this sense of humbling inadequacy soaks into our minds, the more open we are to realize the wisdom of seasoned spiritual guides like François de Sales or George Fox who both

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<sup>56</sup> Fox, *Works V*, 355.

<sup>57</sup> Walter R. Williams, *The Rich Heritage of Quakerism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), 94.

<sup>58</sup> Barclay, *Barclay's Apology in Modern English*, 16.

insisted that the task of all spiritual guidance is to take men to Christ, to bring them to the living Listener, and to leave them there.”<sup>59</sup> This discernment of the immediate leading of Christ necessitates a response, a prophetic response. Fox said:

“And therefore all friends, that are come to witness the Holy Ghost and faith, in which the true praying and building is, which give victory over the world, which is the gift of God... keep your meetings, and being met together, as you are moved, speak; for they spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, as the spirit gave them utterance....”<sup>60</sup>

That is, the hearer would need to declare the will of Christ either by speaking it, or by acting it, or frequently, by both. Roberts writes, “Thus Fox would have a prophetic ministry in the worship of the Restored Church. It is part of his concept of his emphasis upon the continuity of revelation and inspiration. Therefore, he is not positing an end of audible, demonstrable worship, but an infusing of the gospel order with the power of God.”<sup>61</sup>

The “unprogrammed” worship of these Quakers was also a manifestation of gospel order. The idea was not especially complicated. The assumption was that Christ was present, and they could gather and expectantly wait for Him to move among them. Whatever direction might come during a gathered meeting might well find expression outside the meetinghouse. Thus, yet another aspect of gospel order embodied

a prophetic witness to the larger society. This witness was expressed through what came to be called “testimonies:” plain speech; simple or plain dress; the refusal to go to war, take an oath, or pay tithes to the state church, etc. These testimonies were very important for the interior life of the individual Friend and had a profound effect in shaping the life of the meeting-community.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Douglas V. Steere, Author, *Where Words Come from*, Swarthmore Lecture Pamphlet (London: Friends House, No date), 26.

<sup>60</sup> Roberts, “Fox’s Concept,” 150.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Cronk, *Dark Night*, 11.

### *Discerning Within Community*

George Fox has a counsel which I prize very much: “Know one another in that which is eternal.” Churches ought to be places where men may know one another *in that which is eternal*. But in many a church the gulf between individuals on the deep things of God is an impassable gulf, and souls are starving and dying of inner loneliness. Would that we could break through our crust of stilted, conventional reserve, and make our churches centers of a living communion of the saints.<sup>63</sup>

There can be no expression of gospel order apart from a community of faith.

Gospel order is well described as, “a living communion of the saints.” This mutuality is of significance in worship, business and spiritual formation. In order to emphasize the mutuality in the life of gospel order, this author frequently refers to a local congregation as a “community of faith” rather than a “church” or “meeting.”

In the early Quaker expression of gospel order, worship and business were not distinct entities. In both activities the participants listened for God’s leading, and when appropriate, verbalized that leading for the sake of the constituency. In a meeting for business another action was sought: the affirmation of the community regarding a verbalized leading. Practically speaking this was the means of an inner leading becoming a prophetic word or deed shared by the meeting-community:

While Friends would certainly recognize the place of personal prayer and personal discernment of God’s leading, yet our major ways of listening to God and discerning God’s will are in the meeting for worship and the meeting for business, both corporate patterns. Thus, the inward life is not structured primarily in individualistic terms but in communal ways.<sup>64</sup>

This process was integral to the life of the community. It served as a check against error, and an attestation to God’s direction for this people of God. This has an important bearing upon spiritual formation. It becomes more of the same. That is, just as

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas Kelly, *Reality of the Spiritual World*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet no. 21 (Place not available: Publisher not available, 1948), 58.

<sup>64</sup> Cronk, *Dark Night*, 15.



discernment of God's direction is not an individual project, neither is the larger field of spiritual formation. Yes, discernment is integral to spiritual formation, but it is a discernment firmly rooted in the community of faith:

Unlike some Christian traditions where spiritual guidance is largely an individual process involving the faithful person and the guide, in Quakerism the process is more communal. The elders were the overseers of this communal process of spiritual formation.... As the Friends movement matured, a whole culture of listening developed. Elders were responsible for keeping these avenues of listening spiritually alive.<sup>65</sup>

Consequently, in a gospel order, worship, business, and spiritual formation can only be understood as expressions of a community of faith.

In a remarkably short time Quakers developed distinctive expressions of gospel order based upon the reality of the present Christ. It was inevitable that they would be considered a separate movement, and eventually, a denomination. The intent, however, was to call all Christians to an order of life and church that was of God's design. Gospel order was not "invented" to distinguish Quakers from everyone else. On the contrary, their message was a plea to the church to *be* the people of God:

For early Friends the phrase "people of God" was not a name, but a description of the experiences they had had of the gathering power of God, operative and manifest in their midst. As they saw it, God was raising up a people to be the bearers of a vision and a mission. At the heart of this calling was a restored sense of the living Presence of God, Christ as the head of the church, and what it means to hear and obey the will of God....<sup>66</sup>

The "culture of listening," cited in the Cronk quote above, was intentionally cultivated in the Friends' approach to worship and business. Outside of Friends one may not be inclined to think of a business meeting as an exercise in listening. However, this remarkable perspective was true among the Friends.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>66</sup> Charles F. Thomas, "Being a People of God," in *The Church in Quaker Thought and Practice*, ed. Charles F. Thomas (Philadelphia, PA: Faith and Life Movement, 1979), 27.

## QUAKER DECISION-MAKING:

### *THE ART OF VOLUNTARY ATTENTION PRACTICED WITHIN A CULTURE OF LISTENING*

The Friends' approach to business developed within a particular historical context, and was distinguished by several peculiarities. This section begins with an overview of the origins of the meetings for business. This is followed with a general description of a Friends' business meeting. Certain attributes of that meeting are then described. The particular attributes examined are unity, the clerk, worship, and community. The section concludes with a list of difficulties inherent in this decision-making method that will need to be addressed in an effective model.

#### *Origins*

One would expect a tradition emphasizing the immediate guidance of Christ to be susceptible to *mis*guidance. After all, if Christians have difficulty agreeing upon certain points of interpretation in the written words of the Bible, one would expect there to be significant differences among them in interpreting the inherent vagaries of the unwritten movement of the Spirit. Early on Quakers demonstrated the validity of that suspicion. The Ranters were a radical spiritualist group alluded to previously. Their unbounded interpretation of the Spirit's guidance led to the Blasphemy Act of 1650. For example, in their moldable theology humanity was restored to its sinless state in Christ, therefore, anything a person did was, by definition, not sin. That reasoning justified questionable activities from cursing to fornication.<sup>67</sup> Ranters found in the yet-unorganized Quaker

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<sup>67</sup> Michael J. Sheeran, *Beyond Majority Rule: Voteless Decisions in the Religious Society of Friends* (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1996), 8.

movement some leeway for their misguided theology. In a parallel manner two influential Friends, James Naylor and John Perrot, maintained that one needed to honor one's individual leadings even if they utterly contradicted Friends' beliefs.<sup>68</sup> These examples of misguidance deserved the harsh criticism they received, and demanded a response.

The Quakers at this time were only a loosely organized movement rallied by the preaching of George Fox. They lacked an institutional structure or polity to mobilize a response to the real problems emerging within their movement. Consequently, their response, which began to emerge to the challenge of misguided individuals, was also defining the substance of Quaker practice. Letters from that era indicate an immediate appeal to the function of elders, which resulted in definitions of authority, which culminated in the establishment of the organizational structure of monthly, quarterly and yearly meetings. William Dewsbury, who had established the East Riding Friends Meeting, distributed a general epistle in 1653 calling for local meetings to choose one or two mature and discerning Friends to oversee and care for the meeting.<sup>69</sup> Dewsbury's counsel was sometimes offered in an authoritarian, prophetic tone, claiming to be God's word to His people.<sup>70</sup> In fact, as structure and parameters were being established, it was not uncommon for Friends leaders to invoke the authority of the prophet.<sup>71</sup>

However, the authority of lone prophetic voices, however respected and true, would soon become subject to the corporate affirmation of the Spirit's leading. Appeals began to surface tempered by petitions to be responsive to the Spirit. For instance, these humble words temper the advice included in a letter from Balby Friends in 1656: "Dearly

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>70</sup> Howard Brinton, *Friends for 300 Years: The History and Beliefs of the Society of Friends Since George Fox Started the Quaker Movement* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1952), 99.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all, with the measure of light which is pure and holy, may be guided: and so in the light walking and abiding, these may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.”<sup>72</sup> So, even though this letter had been written “from the Spirit of Truth to the children of light,” it lacks an authoritarian tone.<sup>73</sup> Rather, the Balby Friends appealed to the recipients of that letter to attend to that same Spirit of Truth who they believed led them to write the epistle. In fact, Rosemary Moore notes that it was as if the Balby Friends added this gentle disclaimer to counter the detailed instructions they had just written.<sup>74</sup> Perhaps they thought their own directives inappropriate for a movement hoping to be guided by the Spirit. Three years later, an epistle was written from the General Meeting of Skipton. It includes this counsel, “That the power of the God-head may be known in the body, in that perfect freedom which every member hath in Christ Jesus; that none may exercise lordship or dominion over another, or the person of any be set apart, but as they continue in the power of truth...”<sup>75</sup> The emphasis is emerging that the Friends meetings are to be led by Christ rather than by people who are appointed to authoritative roles.<sup>76</sup>

When Fox was released from a three-year imprisonment in 1666 he began an intensive four-year campaign to formalize the organizational structure of Friends. In England and Ireland Fox established monthly meetings as the local administrative configuration for the Society of Friends.<sup>77</sup> The premise of these monthly meetings

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>74</sup> Rosemary Moore, *The Light in Their Consciences: Early Quakers in Britain 1646-1666* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 138.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 101.

remained that Christ would lead His people Himself with the pivotal qualification that the discernment of the gathered community was more reliable than the individual's sense of the Spirit's leading.<sup>78</sup> The issue of controversial individual "guidance" had finally been formally addressed by an enduring structure that subordinated individual leading to corporate discernment.<sup>79</sup>

This could easily have been death-by-institutional-policy of the charismatic dynamic that defined the Friends' movement. By the grace of God, it was not. "Nor was this action simply a substitution of institution for charisma. It is properly described as substituting communal charismatic decision for individual charismatic decision."<sup>80</sup> It is important to note how this administrative core of the local meetings (churches) was not an organizational structure as much as it was a responsibility to discern. The monthly meeting was established to pay attention to Christ, understand His direction, respond accordingly, and to do it together. This will become even more evident as the structure of the Quaker business meeting is examined.

### *The Quaker Business Meeting*

"I have a bias," writes Luke Timothy Johnson, "I think there ought to be some connection between what a group claims to be, and the way it does things.... This could be tested by looking at several places where churches express their life, but a particularly important and revealing place is the process of reaching decisions."<sup>81</sup> In the seventeenth century Friends began a form of decision-making that corresponded to what they claimed

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<sup>78</sup> Sheeran, *Beyond Majority*, 21.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, "The New Testament and the Examined Life: Thoughts on Teaching," *Christian Century* 112, no. 4 (1-8 February 1995): 12.

to be. Its essence can be understood in the model of the Quaker business meeting. A Quaker business meeting is essentially a simple affair: an item for consideration is brought before the deliberating body; the group considers the item, attentive to the Spirit; a sense of the meeting is gained and its decision noted. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's 1972 *Book of Discipline* offers this description of a business meeting:

Meetings for the transaction of business are conducted in the same expectant waiting for the guidance of the Spirit as is the meeting for worship. Periods of worship, especially at the beginning and end, lift hearts and minds out of self-centered desires into an openness to seek the common good under the leadership of the Spirit of Christ. All matters are considered thoughtfully, with due respect to every point of view presented. When a course of action receives the general, though not necessarily unanimous, approval of the group, the presiding clerk formulates the sense of the meeting and it is recorded in the minutes. No vote is taken; there is no decision made by a majority, who override opposition. Action is taken only when the group can proceed in substantial unity.<sup>82</sup>

Howard Brinton's description gives a sense of what it is like to participate in a Friends meeting for business:

Every meeting should hold a business session at least once a month. This should be preceded by a time of worship in order that the spirit of worship may pervade the transaction of business. In both the meeting for worship and the meeting for business, guidance is sought from the Spirit of Truth and Life by whose operation the group is brought into love and unity.

The business before the meeting is generally presented by the clerk.... The members of the meeting should freely express their opinions regarding the action which they think should be taken. By listening to these expressions the clerk seeks to gather the sense ... of the meeting as a whole. When the discussion has reached a stage that indicates that the meeting is arriving at a fair degree of unity, the clerk ... prepares a minute which states the judgment at which he thinks the meetings has arrived.

On matters which require it, time should be allowed for members to deliberate and to express themselves fully. A variety of opinions may be voiced until someone arises and states an opinion which meets with general approval. This agreement is signified by the utterance of such expressions as "I agree," "I approve," "That Friend speaks my mind." If a few are still unconvinced they may nevertheless remain silent or withdraw their objections in order that this item of business may be completed, but if they remain strongly convinced of the validity

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<sup>82</sup> Sheeran, *Beyond Majority*, 47, 48.

of their opinion and state that they are not able to withdraw the objection, the clerk generally feels unable to make a minute.

When a serious state of disunity exists and feelings become aroused, the clerk or some other Friend may ask the meeting to sit for a time in silence in the spirit of worship. The effect of this quiet waiting is often powerful in creating unity.<sup>83</sup>

Elton Trueblood identifies four conditions that he observes to be necessary for this decision-making process to work.<sup>84</sup>

- *The nature of the group*: GROUP SOLIDARITY – The group members really care about each other.
- *The mood of the gathering*: AN EXPECTATION OF CORPORATE GUIDANCE – Friends are convinced that there is a right way that can be found.
- *The qualifications of participation*: ALL PRESENT MAY SHARE IN THE DELIBERATION OF THE GROUP. – “This general participation, on the part of ordinary persons ... makes a situation in which exceptional genius is more likely to appear.”<sup>85</sup>
- *The method of ascertaining the decision*: THE SENSE OF THE MEETING – Not a majority rule.

### *Unity in the Business Meeting*

When these four conditions are viewed together – solidarity, an expectation of corporate guidance, general participation, and a sense of the meeting – it is apparent that this is a *corporate* exercise in which the *unity* within the group is a high priority. The frequently stated objective of the sense of the meeting is about unity, rather than unanimity or consensus. Friends can be particular about their vocabulary at this point because the differences do matter. According to the Friends understanding, unanimity can occur in a majority rule environment when everyone happens to vote the same way.

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<sup>83</sup> Brinton, *Guide*, 30-33.

<sup>84</sup> Elton D. Trueblood, "The Quaker Method of Reaching Decisions," in *Beyond Dilemmas: Quakers Look at Life*, ed. Sceva Bright Laughlin (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1937), 112-16.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

Unity, however, is more complex. Unity includes a vital relational component. Friends find unity on what is best *for the meeting* or *as a meeting*, even though they may disagree on the particulars of an issue at hand.<sup>86</sup> Quoting Hallock Hoffman, “The unity sought is a recognition of what decision is proper for the meeting as a whole. Unanimity requires that all reach the same opinion on the issue to be decided. Unity requires all to reach the same conclusion about what should be done in the name of all, even when opinions may still differ.”<sup>87</sup>

Unity is also differentiated from consensus. Consensus can be the result of the group willing themselves to make a decision. Whereas in pursuing unity the group wills themselves to be led.<sup>88</sup> This is the key difference. There is another Participant in the room besides the members of the meeting. As one Friend has said, “Reaching consensus is a secular process. In sense of the meeting God gets a voice.”<sup>89</sup> That is, the primary principle of corporate guidance, as understood and practiced by Friends for three and a half centuries, centers on the common inspiration from the Spirit of Truth. If all attend to the same Spirit of Truth, it is presumed that unity is likely.<sup>90</sup> The necessity of the participation of the present Christ becomes especially evident when Friends are separated by sharply disparate views.

“The method without the faith will work so long as differences are not too great, but may then break down. The essential safeguard against such breakdown amongst Friends is the faith that God is, that there is a will of God for men

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<sup>86</sup> Paul A. Hare, "Group Decision by Consensus: Reaching Unity in the Society of Friends," *Sociological Inquiry* 43, no. 1 (January 1973): 76.

<sup>87</sup> "The Quaker Dialogue," in *The Civilization of the Dialogue*, vol. 2, 1 (Santa Barbara, CA: Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, 1968), 10.

<sup>88</sup> Barry Morley, *Beyond Consensus: Salvaging the Sense of the Meeting*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet no. 307 (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1993), 5.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Brinton, *Guide*, 31.



discernible by men, and that faithful following of such light as we have seen will lead into realizable unity.”<sup>91</sup>

The Friends method is not about deciding by any method who is right, but rather, discerning what is true.<sup>92</sup>

### *The Clerk in the Business Meeting*

The role of the clerk is critical in this process. Perhaps only in Belshazzar’s case did God intervene in a decision-making process by writing the divine will on the wall (Daniel 5). Although even in this extraordinary case, God’s intervention was still needed to interpret the handwriting on the wall. Friends have chosen a method of gathering to listen to the Lord together in silence and as one or another speaks. It is the clerk’s responsibility to lead in this listening process, and draw out the silver thread describing what the members of the meeting want, but did not know it until it was said.<sup>93</sup> Rufus Jones relates this boyhood memory:

The ‘clerk,’ ... was another one of those marvelous beings who seemed to me to know everything by means of something unseen working inside him! How could he tell what ‘Friends’ wanted done? – and yet he always knew. No votes were cast. Everybody said something in his own peculiar way. A moment of silence would come, and the clerk would rise and say: ‘It appears that it is the sense of the meeting,’ to do thus and so. Spontaneously from all parts of the house would come from variously pitched voices: ‘I unite with that,’ ‘So do I,’ ‘That is my mind,’ ‘I should be easy to have it so.’ And so we passed to the next subject.<sup>94</sup>

Consequently, the clerk’s responsibility is a charismatic one. A good number of the gifts of the Spirit listed in Pauline epistles, such as, discernment, administration,

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<sup>91</sup> Hugh L. Doncaster, *Quaker Organisation and Business Meetings* (London, UK: Friends Home Service Committee, 1958), 73.

<sup>92</sup> Trueblood, "Quaker Method," 118.

<sup>93</sup> Brinton, *300 Years*, 109.

<sup>94</sup> Rufus M. Jones, "The Sense of the Meeting," in *The Quaker Reader*, ed. Jessamyn West (New York, NY: The Viking Press, 1962), 412.

wisdom and knowledge are the very attributes Friends hope from their clerk.<sup>95</sup> That is what one would expect if this decision-making process is indeed the communal charismatic decision-making process, as it was described earlier.<sup>96</sup> Those kinds of gifts would seem likely to be exercised within the meeting by someone, if not by the clerk.

### *Worship and the Business Meeting*

With all the attention given to Christ's leadership in a meeting for business, one can see that a business meeting is intended to be a form of worship service:

The meeting for worship concerns *being* while the meeting for business concerns *doing*. What is implicit in worship becomes explicit in action. The meeting for business should, therefore, be preceded by a period of worship in which the hard shell of egocentricity is dissolved and the group united into a living whole. It is also well to conclude the business meeting with a period of silent devotion....<sup>97</sup>

A business meeting in which "the hard shell of egocentricity" was dissolved and the group was "united into a living whole" would be a qualitatively different environment for making decisions than often is the case. For Friends both worship and business were focused on seeking the face of God. The active role for the participant in either worship or business is a constant return to seeking the face of God. It is one of the great assumptions behind Quaker worship and business. The participant must do more than show up. He or she must "learn the art of voluntary attention."<sup>98</sup> George Fox put it this way:

Friends, keep your meetings in the power of God, and in his wisdom (by which all things were made) and in the love of God, that by that ye may order all to his glory. And when Friends have finished their business, sit down and continue

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<sup>95</sup> Sheeran, *Beyond Majority*, 100.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Brinton, *300 Years*, 106.

<sup>98</sup> Steere, *Where Words*, 38.

awhile quietly and wait upon the Lord to feel him. And go not beyond the Power, but keep in the Power by which God Almighty may be felt among you.<sup>99</sup>

### *Community and the Business Meeting*

The preceding words by Fox indicate a quality of worship: communal experience. That is, in corporate worship among Friends the expectation is to experience God together. That expectation is explicitly and implicitly repeated throughout the quote from George Fox. This communal experience is at the very heart of Quakerism and at the very heart of discernment by Friends. London Yearly Meeting's *Book of Discipline* (1934 edition) reads, "It is in the unity of common fellowship, we believe, that we shall most surely learn the will of God."<sup>100</sup> Quakers are not centered on a theory, but on the corporate experience of the presence of God.<sup>101</sup>

This emphasis upon a shared experience of God is implicit in the fundamental unit of the decision-making process: the *sense* of the meeting that is owned by all who participate. Although reason plays a part in the process of deliberation when the sense of the meeting is being sought, the process is more one of faith than reason.<sup>102</sup> Timothy Luke Johnson observes, "Faith says that God did not stop speaking when the Prophets died, nor even when God's Word was enfleshed in Jesus Christ. Faith asserts that God's Word is enunciated in every age and in every human life by the work of God's Holy Spirit."<sup>103</sup> The sense of the meeting is a shared faith experience including, but larger than, a shared understanding of facts and reasoning.

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<sup>99</sup> Brinton, *300 Years*, 106.

<sup>100</sup> Frances E. Pollard, Beatrice E. Pollard, and Robert S. W. Pollard, *Democracy and the Quaker Method* (London, UK: The Bannisdale Press, 1949), 44.

<sup>101</sup> Sheeran, *Beyond Majority*, 6.

<sup>102</sup> Morley, *Beyond Consensus*, 5.

<sup>103</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Decision Making in the Church: A Biblical Model* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1983), 26.

Hence, the role of the community is critical. It is generally assumed in this process that the participants know and care for each other and share beliefs.<sup>104</sup> Brinton maintains the success of the process to be in proportion to the familiarity and affection within the discerning body.<sup>105</sup> There is then a presumed foundation of community. Seeking God's face together enhances this foundation. The amazing quality of the Friends decision-making process is that it often strengthens the community upon which it is dependent. Furthermore, once a decision is made the implications of that decision generally fall upon the community itself. That is, the grace of God has inspired the group for a particular action. And also by God's grace the vehicle of fulfilling that action is in place: the community itself.<sup>106</sup> Yet, in our haste to make decisions in a more "expedient" manner we sometimes forego the very process that strengthens our community of faith.<sup>107</sup> The urgency of the decision too easily supplants the imperative of the community. Dea Cox observes, "The purpose of the way we do business is community-building, rather than making decisions. The great gift of it is building community. As you move toward the Center, community is formed. Although this is a good means of making decisions, *that is not the point.*"<sup>108</sup>

Hugh Doncaster offers this comprehensive summary of the Friends decision-making process quoted from London Yearly Meeting's 1942 edition of *Church Government*. It includes each subject highlighted in this section: discernment, unity, the clerk, worship, and community.

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<sup>104</sup> Pollard, Pollard, and Pollard, *Democracy*, 52.

<sup>105</sup> Brinton, *300 Years*, 111.

<sup>106</sup> Keith Esch, "Christian Obedience," *Quaker Religious Thought* 16, #1-2, no. 39-40 (Winter 1974-75): 52.

<sup>107</sup> Morley, *Beyond Consensus*, 25.

<sup>108</sup> Dea Cox, interview by Charles M. Orwiler, 19 June 2002, Portland, OR.

The order which Fox was so concerned to see come into being has continued as one which links the individual members together in a congregation, and links these again into a wider community, giving scope for each to share in the common service; it gives a place to women as well as to men, it depends on the willingness of the members to seek the divine guidance and to find it together, not by obedience to an external authority but by faithfulness to an indwelling Spirit. It involves forbearance, joint effort and constant willingness to learn from one another, and above all a looking to God for guidance and waiting upon God when difficulties arise. Its meetings reach decisions not by vote or show of hands, but through arriving at what by general consent is felt to be the judgment of the whole body. Its meetings are served by clerks whose task it is, not to impose their own decision, but to interpret and express the judgment of the whole body. The final appeal in every case is to the Spirit of Christ enlightening and guiding those who strive to follow him.<sup>109</sup>

### *Difficulties with the Quaker Decision-Making Process*

The Quakers have demonstrated a church decision-making process founded upon paying attention to Christ that builds community in the process. However, the methodology is not without difficulties.

1. *It is time consuming.* Business after the manner of Friends is an exercise in waiting on the Lord. "...Pressures imposed by urgency must not be allowed to erode the process. Quaker business procedure, subjected to a clock, is always corrupted."<sup>110</sup> Anything more than a minimal agenda will impose the pressure of urgency simply because of time.
2. *The presiding clerk may not be adequately gifted.* Michael Sheeran notes that the most obvious problem is that a clerk may be gifted in discerning the sense of the meeting, but lack necessary organizational abilities. Or, the clerk may be organizationally gifted, but lack a gift of discernment.<sup>111</sup> In either case the

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<sup>109</sup> Doncaster, *Quaker Organisation*, 100.

<sup>110</sup> Morley, *Beyond Consensus*, 14.

<sup>111</sup> Sheeran, *Beyond Majority*, 104.

position of clerk, which is the hinge pin of the meeting, debilitates the function of the meeting.

3. *“Ungifted” and “gifted” Friends may abdicate or usurp responsibility.* Sheeran has also observed that “gifted” Friends who are respected for their discerning ability can be a hindrance.<sup>112</sup> The “ungifted” Friends may tend to abdicate their responsibility to listen or speak. Or, the “gifted” Friend may capitalize on his or her position in the meeting to promote a personal agenda under the guise of discerning a direction.
4. *There is at times a limited understanding of discernment.* Friends are respected for the valuable contribution they have made to the understanding of corporate spiritual discernment. However, their understanding of discernment has at times been narrow, being relatively uninformed by the broader Christian community.<sup>113</sup> This author believes the practice of spiritual discernment among Friends could be strengthened by drawing upon the practice and instruction regarding discernment developed in other traditions within Christianity.
5. *A common understanding of the process can be lacking.* For Friends’ decision-making to function in larger groups, a minimum threshold of “well-seasoned Friends” is needed: respected participants who appreciate and facilitate the process.<sup>114</sup> A system dependent upon general participation requires a commonly shared understanding, which may well *not* be the case.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 104, 05.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>114</sup> Brinton, *300 Years*, 110.

6. *A model developed in seventeenth and eighteenth century England may need significant adaptation for twenty-first century application in North America.*<sup>115</sup>

For instance, one of the differences between the early days of Quakerism in England and the present age in North America is the time available to dedicate to meetings for business. Doncaster observes that many of the early Friends were employed by Friends and were released from work to attend some meetings for business.<sup>116</sup> That liberty is rarely the case today. Furthermore, early Friends exhibited a patient flexibility in allowing for extended meetings of waiting on the Lord. One could certainly argue that twenty-first century Friends need to learn to do the same. Nevertheless, if that lesson is to be learned, it must be learned in a culture that typically assigns given blocks of time for given activities, including the time allowed for either worship or business.

7. *The process is difficult.* Finally, despite its simplicity, the procedure is difficult. It requires spiritual maturity, discipline, faith, humility, patience, and careful listening. Early on in the Friends experiment Isaac Penington wrote (From *Some Queries Concerning the Order and Government of the Church of Christ*: an undated publication probably written from Alisbury Prison in 1666),

It is not an easie matter, in all cases clearly and understandingly to discern the Voice of the Shepherd, the Motions of God's Spirit, and certainly to distinguish the Measure of Life from all other Voices, Motions and Appearances whatsoever. Through much growth in the Truth, through much waiting on the Lord, through much Fear and Trembling, through much Sobriety and meekness, through much exercise of the Senses this is at length given and obtained. And yet there is a preservation in the meantime.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Doncaster, *Quaker Organisation*, 80.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Trueblood, "Quaker Method," 109, 10.

In subtitling this section, “The Art of Voluntary Attention Practiced Within a Culture of Listening,” this writer has combined phrases borrowed from Douglas Steere and Sandra Cronk. These combined phrases catch the essence of the Friends’ decision-making process. Implementing this process can be difficult, especially when we attempt discernment without being well-practiced in the art of voluntary listening within a culture of listening. It would be easier to simply vote and go home. The intention is not to pursue difficulty. Rather, the intention is to pursue Christ’s direction, and discerning Christ’s direction is often more difficult than simply voting based on personal opinion. The assumption in seeking Christ’s direction together is that no single person possesses all of God’s truth.<sup>118</sup> That is, we need each other to discern Christ’s leading. Yet, the prophetic voice can be lost or irrelevant in a majority rule. Furthermore, the prophetic voice can also emerge as many voices are heard. Metaphorically speaking, the attempt is not to discern which pile of puzzle pieces is larger. Instead, the hope is to assemble the puzzle as each person contributes a piece, and together the completed picture is discovered and valued.

Furthermore, corporate discernment is the unique privilege of the church.

Pursuing business after the manner of Friends is a function of being a disciple of Christ.

Punshon writes:

First, those who participate must have turned to the light, have been converted, and have a deep and lasting relationship with Jesus Christ. Second, they must have taken up the cross and must have engaged in an inward turning away from self-interest to devote themselves to God and to serve the interests of others. Third, the business method requires waiting with patience and confidence for the will of God to be revealed instead of rushing to judgment on the basis of one’s own principles or convictions.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Paul N. Anderson, *With Christ in Decision Making* (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press).

<sup>119</sup> John Punshon, *Reasons for Hope: The Faith and Future of the Friends Church* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 2001), 248, 9.



Followers of Jesus might choose this approach to decision-making because it is, in fact, an exercise in following Him. The opportunity to discern the direction of the living Christ is a remarkable privilege that is certainly worth the effort of working together to achieve that objective.

### SUMMARY

The thesis of this chapter is that a model of church leadership in which paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction, and responding in holy obedience has a historical precedent: the Religious Society of Friends. This thesis was substantiated by reviewing the development and practice of decision-making, especially in the meetings for business in the Quaker tradition. The Quakers were founded on a theology of Christocracy: the rule of Christ. This theology resulted in a Christopraxis they called gospel order. Gospel order was a way of life and faith that based on the assumption that Christ was present to teach His people Himself.

A primary manifestation of gospel order was the decision-making process. Early in their history Quakers were compelled to develop a recognized means of weighing the validity of questionable “leadings” of the Spirit. A process of corporate discernment was established that became the foundation for their fundamental decision-making mechanism: the meeting for business. Consequently, the Friends’ meeting for business is an exercise in corporate discernment in which the meeting pays attention to Christ, seeks to understand His direction through a unified affirmation, and then responds accordingly in holy obedience. This exercise in corporate discernment presumes a community of faith, and builds that community in the process of corporate discernment and subsequent

obedience. This decision-making process is not easy. Certain inherent difficulties must be addressed for the process to accomplish its desired end. In order for this author to lead his community of faith into a Christocratic decision-making process, a culture of listening will need to be developed in which the art of voluntary listening can be developed. A plan for developing a culture of listening will need to address each of the seven difficulties listed previously.

## **Chapter 4**

### **DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF LISTENING**

In the previous chapter we saw how Quakers began in the seventeenth century with the transforming theme that Christ was present to teach His people Himself. The Quakers believed it was a Christian's responsibility to listen to Christ, understand His direction, and respond in holy obedience. This belief led to a form of worship and living that were characterized by attentiveness to Christ. The resultant lifestyle of attentiveness to Christ can be described as a culture of listening. That culture of listening was established before Quakers developed much of an organizational structure. Nevertheless, when a structure of authoritative decision-making became necessary, they developed a model of corporate discernment that was consistent with their beliefs and their existing culture of listening.

The problem addressed in this paper is, "How can the decision-making process for business meetings in First Denver Friends Church be a process dependent upon paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction, and following in holy obedience?" The aspiration of this paper is to recover the Christopraxis of the early Friends' decision-making process into the decision-making process of a particular contemporary Friends church. If our decision-making praxis is to be a consequence of our theology and our culture, then we will need a theology that Christ has come to teach His people Himself and establish a culture of listening. The fundamental Christocratic theology is in place. However, the *practical* theology demonstrated by a culture of listening is weak.

The principal thesis of this chapter is: A decision-making model based on paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction and responding in holy obedience is practiced within a culture of listening. At the close of the previous chapter significant difficulties were identified in regard to the Quaker decision-making process. In particular, the process is problematic, not because it is complex, but because careful attentiveness is difficult for a group to achieve. Yet, a culture of listening is inherent to the central theme of Quakerism that emphasizes attentiveness to Christ. Therefore, a basis for understanding and practicing a culture of listening in a contemporary environment must be established. Three attributes of a culture of listening will be proposed based on the author's interpretation of the narratives of the Council of Jerusalem and Quaker history. A subsequent thesis is developed as a corollary to the first: Leadership in a culture of listening is defined in terms of the three attributes of a culture of listening: the apocalyptic Word, the narrative of the apocalyptic Word, and the community of the apocalyptic Word.

### ATTENTION DEFICIENCY

Living in the information age means being inundated with data whether we want it or not. Necessarily, we ignore scores of appeals for our attention every day. This is the reason Evan Schwartz, a writer for *Wired* magazine, wrote that America might become "The first society with Attention Deficit Disorder ... the official brain syndrome for the information age."<sup>1</sup> Schwartz's unofficial diagnosis rings true, and it warns that teaching our congregations how to pay attention may be even more important and necessary than

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<sup>1</sup> John L. Locke, *The De-Voicing of Society: Why We Don't Talk to Each Other Anymore* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 131.

ever. Warnings closer to home have sounded before. In 1891 Caroline Stephen feared the relevance of the Quaker practice of waiting quietly on the Lord would be lost “in these days of talk and of breathless activity.”<sup>2</sup> Thirty years later Rufus Jones expressed his alarm that a paid pastoral system among Friends “alters the entire conception of the Society of Friends and puts its central idea in peril.”<sup>3</sup> Jones defines this “central idea” plainly:

Friends assume that a group of men and women, meeting together, without any sensible appeal to eye or ear, can become conscious of a divine presence; can feel that this meeting-hour is more than a hyphen between a past and a future, since in some real way there has been an experience of eternity here in the midst of time.... So to reconstruct the type of meeting ... that this central feature should be lost would be a calamity both to Friends and to the world, now seriously in need of a demonstration of the value of worshipful hushes.<sup>4</sup>

The quotations from Stephen and Jones indicate a concern about something being lost that goes beyond a peculiar form of worship. They are concerned about conceding the notion of waiting and listening to a culture too much in a hurry to pay attention. The central idea in Fox’s theology was that Christ has come to teach His people Himself. If Friends are not rooted in listening to Christ, regardless of the worship or decision-making format, they truly have lost the central idea. Caroline Stephen proposed that if there were to be a revival of Quakerism it would have to spring from a return to the founding principles of the tradition.<sup>5</sup> That seems to be what Rufus Jones was afraid of losing, and that is what Lewis Benson (in 1974) called to be rediscovered when he charged three centuries of Christ-centered Quakers of conforming to evangelicalism rather than

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<sup>2</sup> Caroline Emelia Stephen, *Quaker Strongholds* (London: Edward Hicks, 1891), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Rufus M. Jones, *The Later Periods of Quakerism*, vol. II, *The Later Periods of Quakerism* (London, UK: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1921), 990.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 990, 91.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen, *Quaker Strongholds*, 10.

proclaiming “Fox’s revolutionary and challenging message about Christ.”<sup>6</sup> These three authors, from different generations, all share in their concern that Friends are in danger of losing their grasp on the central theme that originally defined Quakerism.

The central theme upon which Friends were originally founded was that Christ had come to teach His people Himself. Consequently, a lifestyle of attentiveness developed that this author is characterizing as a culture of listening. The phrase, “culture of listening,” does not seem to be a common one in Quaker literature, but the concept is. A culture of listening exists in a community of faith when the members of that community maintain an attitude of attentiveness to Christ in the activities that constitute the life of that congregation.

Returning to this central theme will not likely take place by imitating the behavior of Fox and his contemporaries. Lewis Benson says, “Those who take up again the revolutionary task that was begun by the first Quakers will have to learn to fulfill this task in a world that has vastly changed since Fox’s day.”<sup>7</sup> It is the intent of this author to take on this task to a significant degree within a single congregation in a world vastly changed from Fox’s day. So, the search is for enduring principles of a community of faith characterized by attentiveness to Christ (i.e. a culture of listening), and contemporary application of those principles in the decision-making process of a church. Both the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 and the Quaker experience describe congregations attentive to Christ among them. From these two narratives, three common elements stand out as timeless elements of cultures of listening:

- The apocalyptic Word

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<sup>6</sup> Lewis Benson, "George Fox's Teaching About Christ," *Quaker Religious Thought* 16, #1-2, no. 39-40 (Winter 1974-75): 32.

<sup>7</sup> Benson, "Teaching about Christ," 33.

- The narrative of the apocalyptic Word
- The community of the apocalyptic Word

### DEFINING A CULTURE OF LISTENING

#### *The Apocalyptic Word*

The apocalyptic Word is the *Logos* who has been from the beginning, through whom all things are made, and who is God. Continuing to borrow vocabulary from John 1:1-3, the apocalyptic Word was life and that life was the light of all people. The apocalyptic Word was revealed most plainly to humankind in the person of Jesus. Jesus is the apocalyptic Word. Why not just use the term “Jesus,” or in a more Quakerly fashion, “the Present Christ?” Of course that terminology is fine. However, for the purposes of this paper the term “Word” is used to describe Christ to emphasize the function of Christ to communicate with humankind. Christ has come to teach His people Himself. The modifier, “apocalyptic” is added for two reasons. First of all, it is somewhat alarming. “God here and now intrudes into human existence in powerful, sometimes frightening, and frequently ambiguous ways.”<sup>8</sup> “Apocalyptic” is intended to cause the reader, and especially the author, to stop and realize that the presence of Christ turns the world order upside down and inside out. Second, the sense of revealing or unveiling is also intended. To the author’s knowledge the descriptive phrase “apocalyptic Word” does not appear in Douglas Gwyn’s *Apocalypse of the Word*.<sup>9</sup> However, Gwyn’s perspective inspired the use of this phrase.

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<sup>8</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Decision Making in the Church: A Biblical Model* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1983), 30.

<sup>9</sup> Douglas Gwyn, *Apocalypse of the Word: The Life and Message of George Fox (1624-1691)* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1984).

Gwyn describes Fox's gospel as the apocalypse of the Word in at least three ways. One way the Word is apocalyptic is that salvation history is revealed and culminated in the very person of Jesus.<sup>10</sup> The old covenant is fulfilled, and Jesus *is* the new covenant. A second way the Word is apocalyptic is by revealing the truth of Scripture to the hearts of people, and then incarnating that very truth in people.<sup>11</sup> The words of Scripture are life-transforming, not just because they are true, but also because the Word *is* the way, and the truth, and the life. Finally, the Word is apocalyptic because those experiencing the living Christ are receiving an advance taste of the coming Kingdom of God.<sup>12</sup> The apocalyptic Word reveals, transforms, and ushers in the Kingdom of God. That is the testimony of Fox's life and message.

In Acts 15, the church was scrambling to keep pace with the apocalyptic Word. A new paradigm was needed to explain acts of the Holy Spirit such as the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8), the Gentile Pentecost (Acts 10), and the missionary call of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13). The Word was opening their eyes to a new understanding of salvation history. Consequently, old passages of Scripture were being reinterpreted in light of the present work of Christ. Christ was present in all His offices, and their world order was being turned inside out and upside down.

Fox's gospel was revolutionary because the present Christ functioning in all His offices was necessarily apocalyptic. How could it be otherwise? Benson claims the revolutionary nature of Quakerism was withdrawn precisely at the point when the doctrine of the inner light was separated from Christ the prophet.<sup>13</sup> The "light" was no

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>13</sup> Benson, "Teaching About Christ," 30, 31.



longer apocalyptic, when it was no longer Christ. Fox's criticism of his Christian contemporaries was similar. That is, even if one confesses Jesus to be the Son of God, and salvation comes by faith in Him, does one also recognize the apocalyptic presence of Christ in the present moment? It is at this point that evangelical Friends must be especially wary of having a doctrinal Christ without having an apocalyptic experience of Christ. In order to emphasize the necessity of experiencing Christ, Friends have been careful to avoid substituting an experience of Christ with a doctrinal statement about Christ. Sheeran acknowledges the value of experience as long as it is present, but in his Jesuit tradition one is doctrinally confident of the presence of Christ even when one does not have an experience of Christ at a particular moment.<sup>14</sup> At this point evangelical Friends share common ground with our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters in that we have doctrinal statements. The question for us then becomes whether we will be satisfied with a collection of words about God, but forego the experience of God.<sup>15</sup> In that case the Word would no longer be apocalyptic.

Rubem Alves captures the sense of the apocalyptic Word in a helpful metaphor.

He compares the living Word to a bird in flight, and doctrine as the bird in a cage:

Protestant theology was born when the magical-poetic power of the Word was rediscovered.

and democratized.

Every individual was to read the scriptures as one reads a poem, alone, without any intervening voices of interpretation. Hermeneuts were to be silent, so that the believer could hear the voice of the Stranger: the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit. It was believed that the forgotten words written in the flesh and the Word coming from the past would meet and make love – and the miracle would happen. If, by sheer grace, the Wind blew and the melody which was not there was heard, the dead would be resurrected.

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<sup>14</sup> Michael J. Sheeran, *Beyond Majority Rule: Voteless Decisions in the Religious Society of Friends* (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1996), 88.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

But soon the demands of power realized that the freedom of the Wind is dangerous, because it blows where and how it wills. So, they tried to domesticate it and flying birds were put inside word-cages:

Images became dogmas  
Metaphors were transformed into doctrines,  
Poetry was rewritten as 'confessions.'<sup>16</sup>

This author assumes the value of doctrine does not need to be defended in this paper.

However, doctrine can never be a substitute for the apocalyptic Word. If the Word is only a doctrine, then we need only to memorize, not to listen. However, in a culture of listening, the Word is apocalyptic, and consequently we are on the edge of our seats attentive to what the Spirit is doing *now*.

### *The Narrative of the Apocalyptic Word*

It is here that I see in the ideal of Quakerism the one perennially right and fruitful ideal of Christian life—obedience to truth in the fullest and highest sense; the living truth—not truth in the sense of accurate or orthodox belief about Christ, but of an actual partaking of His Spirit, who Himself *is* the Way, the Truth, and the Life; a learning through obedience to know His voice, and a continual witness-bearing to others of the reality and the power of His living presence and teaching.<sup>17</sup>

In the preceding quotation Caroline Stephen has beautifully summarized the Quaker experience of the apocalyptic Word. The Quaker emphasis is upon experiencing the Word. Consequently, the prominent form of Quaker writing has been the spiritual autobiography, generally referred to as a journal.<sup>18</sup> Quakers recorded their stories about their personal encounters with Christ. Their journals included remarkably few personal details, such as marriage or children, unless those details were integral to their spiritual

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<sup>16</sup> Rubem Alves, *The Poet, the Warrior, the Prophet* (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International, 1990), 102.

<sup>17</sup> Stephen, *Quaker Strongholds*, 162.

<sup>18</sup> Howard H. Brinton, *Quaker Journals: Varieties of Religious Experience Among Friends* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1972), ix.

pilgrimage.<sup>19</sup> In other words, these journals were the stories of the work of God in an individual's life. They were written in the truthfulness and plainness of speech that characterized Quaker humility. Keeping the focus upon God's activity was an effective means of preserving humility.<sup>20</sup>

One's personal identity emerges from the dialectical tension between one's chronicle (story) and one's interpretation of that story.<sup>21</sup> That is the process of a spiritual autobiography. It is a story of the activity of God that implores the individual or the faith community to reassess who they are in relation to God. This author has completed the necessary requirements for a certificate in spiritual direction from the Vincentian Center for Spirituality and Work in Denver, Colorado. He has continued with the Center as a supervisor for spiritual directors-in-training. In this model of classic spiritual direction, the director's role is to help the directee identify the activity of God in his or her life, and then respond appropriately. Writing and prayerfully interpreting one's spiritual autobiography frequently opens an individual's eyes for the first time to the possibility of seeing God's activity in one's own life. That is, when one tells one's story, and examines it prayerfully, one discovers that God has been actively involved in one's life even though the individual was not aware of that amazing fact at the time. Consequently, the possibility is aroused that the individual can examine his or her story in the present, and discern the work of Christ at hand. This discovery can transform a life. The key is the personal narrative of the work of God. The community of faith also has a collective memory by which individual stories are evaluated and the community story and identity

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 1, 2.

<sup>21</sup> George W. Stroup, *The Promise of Narrative Theology* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981), 124.

is developed and kept in a tradition.<sup>22</sup> This is precisely the dynamic evident in the Friends history as they shared and accumulated their stories of God's activity in their lives.

This dynamic is also evident in the narrative of the Council of Jerusalem. A key component in their decision-making process was listening to stories. Paul and Barnabas reported all that God had done through them (v. 4). There was concern expressed over how these stories squared with the Law (v. 5). A debate ensued. After a long time Peter stood and told another story of God's activity that begged for interpretation (v. 7ff.). Then everyone leaned forward and listened to many stories of the signs and wonders wrought by God as told by Paul and Barnabas (v. 12). The dialectical tension between chronicle and interpretation is especially evident in this instance. There is the chronicle of the authoritative text of the Bible, and the chronicle of the story of God's immediate activity. The apparent conflict requires an interpretation. That interpretation is eventually rendered, thus altering the church's identity. That identity is preserved corporately in tradition (the caged bird), but tradition is constantly challenged by the current work of the apocalyptic Word (the free bird). This is an inherent and valuable tension between the corporate memory of the community that changes slowly, and the dynamics of the present apparent work of God that can appear to change dramatically. The identities of both the faith community and the individual in that community cannot be adequately defined by either the present moment isolated from the prior work of God or by a memory of the past isolated from God's current work. The Acts 15 community was compelled to reconcile their chronicles (stories): past and present.

Stroup speculates that narrative is such a dominant literary genre in the Bible because its content is "radically this worldly and historical."<sup>23</sup> That is, the theology of the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 131.

Bible is extracted from the stories of God's activity in the lives of real people. Because Christ is present in all His offices, we can expect to experience Him. The stories continue. In a culture of listening we are attentive to the narratives of our experience of the apocalyptic Word, aware that Christ may be taking us somewhere we had not anticipated. At the same time we remain alert to the story of God's work that preceded us and is yet to come, recognizing how God's work among us is leading from what God has been doing to the consummation of His kingdom.

### *The Community of the Apocalyptic Word*

George Stroup defines community as, "A group of people who have come to share a common past, who understand particular events in the past to be of decisive importance for interpreting the present, who anticipate the future by means of a shared hope, and who express their identity by means of a common narrative."<sup>24</sup>

A properly functioning church meets and exceeds that definition at every point. This is especially evident in light of the current study of the apocalyptic Word by whom and in whom the community of faith is defined. In a previous chapter the community of faith was investigated at some length in comparison to the Divine Community. The Trinity was described as being an interactive relationship of mutuality and individuality. Consequently, the church functions as a community of mutuality and individuality because it is an expression of the nature of God. The church is intended to be, as Thomas Kelly put it, "the living communion of the saints."<sup>25</sup> Because this living communion of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 132, 33.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Kelly, *Reality of the Spiritual World*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet no. 21 (Place not available: Publisher not available, 1948), 58.

the saints functions in mutuality with God, our mission is not *our* mission. Making the same statement in a positive manner: when the church says “our” it should mean “God and us.” Our objective is to do the work of Christ in a manner parallel to Christ, Who only did what His Father commanded. The Council of Jerusalem illustrated this point precisely when the deliberations concluded with this unmistakable expression of mutuality with God: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28).

Since our mission is the mission of God and us, we need to *discern* God’s direction and activity. Johnson notes that despite our reluctance to address the issue of discernment, it is a clear expectation of the church in the New Testament. The members of the local church were to weigh prophesy in the assembly (1 Cor. 14:29), make tough decisions regarding those deviating from Christ’s church (1 Cor. 5:3-5 and Matt. 18:15-20), decide critical leadership issues (Acts 6:1-6), and define the very nature of the church (Acts 10:1-15:35).<sup>26</sup> To Johnson it appears that exercising discernment for disciplinary issues is the exception rather than the norm. The ordinary exercise of discernment in the congregation primarily includes talking about God’s activity in and out of the church.<sup>27</sup> The scriptural examples above illustrate that point. In the Corinthian church people listened to a potentially prophetic message given in an assembly. In Acts 6 a leadership structure was devised to meet a crisis after these leaders listened to the story of what was happening to the Greek widows. We have already reviewed the accounts in Acts 10-15 where the members of the church listened to each other talk about God’s

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<sup>26</sup> Johnson, *Decision Making*, 89.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

activities in an attempt to discern what was, indeed, of God. These narratives illustrate that such experiences of God function as the basis for discernment.<sup>28</sup>

However, narratives do not stand alone. A story of the purported activity of God is not necessarily a legitimate one. “Not every spirit is the Holy spirit, not every word God’s Word. Not every turning is a conversion. Not every kingdom is the kingdom of God.”<sup>29</sup> This is not a problem so much as it is the practical reality of frail humans attempting to respond to the mystery of God. A second practical reality, therefore, is the need to validate an individual’s leading. “The meaning, adequacy, and implications of personal religious experience and history call for the community’s discernment as it seeks to decipher God’s Word to it in the present moment.”<sup>30</sup> It is, as Johnson has described, the *community’s* responsibility to *discern* God’s movement. This ought to be accepted in humility, if not relief, by the individual. In the Friends’ tradition clearness committees (small group exercises of corporate discernment) and business meetings serve this purpose, as well as something considerably less formal: simply asking discerning companions to weigh a leading before declaring it publicly.<sup>31</sup> Ultimately, the activity of God reported by one member of the community is part of a larger movement of God in that same community. That is, one would normally assume a prophetic declaration would draw the community together in its shared mission with God.

A reason why faith communities are reluctant to assume the responsibility of discernment is because irresponsible and hurtful manipulation has occurred in the church

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 98, 99.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>31</sup> Sheeran, *Beyond Majority*, 26, 27.

in the name of discernment.<sup>32</sup> However, in the exhortations of the New Testament and the testimony of the Quaker witness, discernment is neither manipulative nor punitive. Rather, discernment is exactly what the church needs to pursue Christ's mission. That is, if we are to follow Christ in His work, we will need to listen for His direction and understand it, in order follow in obedience. Attending to Christ's direction and properly interpreting that direction is discernment. Therefore, it is not surprising that discernment is a normal function of the faith community. In a culture of listening the function of the community of the apocalyptic Word is to discern together the meaning of the story that is being told of God's work among us.

### LEADERSHIP IN A CULTURE OF LISTENING

#### *Leadership*

The decision-makers within a church are the key group among whom a culture of listening needs to be established if there is to be a culture of listening within the church as a whole. By definition, leaders influence people and shape behavior.<sup>33</sup> Those who make decisions within a church influence the members of that congregation and shape the corporate behavior of the congregation by the decisions they make, and the manner in which those decisions are made. Decision-makers are then, necessarily leaders. Therefore, decision-making, should not be considered an unspiritual administrative task. On the contrary, it is the very place where the faith life of the community meets the practical demands of living, as it is observed by William Taber:

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<sup>32</sup> Johnson, *Decision Making*, 89.

<sup>33</sup> Norman Shawchuck, *How to Be a More Effective Church Leader* (Indianapolis, IN: Spiritual Growth Resources, 1981), 6.



One could argue that the business meeting is at least as important as the meeting for worship, for it is the actual demonstration of the New Testament vision of a fellowship guided by, and obeying, the Spirit.... The meeting for business, if it be spirit filled and properly understood, is a hands-on, laboratory-like experience in which the whole fellowship comes face to face with the Spirit's demands.<sup>34</sup>

This pivotal significance of the decision-making leaders becomes apparent when we are reminded that it is Christ, in fact, Who is to be leading the church. The thrust of this paper could be described as an attempt to describe a model of leadership in a church that follows Christ. Leaders will lead in any organization. However, in a Christocracy leaders lead by following Christ. "Leaders lead by following" is a paradoxical statement. Similarly, "servant leader" is a paradoxical phrase. Both are true. To understand leadership in a biblical, Christocentric perspective, leadership must be understood as followership. The Bible itself says relatively little about leadership, but has considerable to say about followership.<sup>35</sup> The manner in which decisions are made matters because it matters whether or not leaders are following Christ as they exercise their leadership roles.

The Quaker doctrine that Christ has come to teach His people Himself has been frequently repeated in this paper. The sensible response to that premise is to pay attention to Christ, understand His direction, and follow it. However, the obvious question that pleads for an answer is, "How is that done?" If following Christ is to be the norm in a congregation there must be an answer for that question. If leadership is exercising influence and shaping behavior, and the desire is for a culture of listening, then leadership is needed to influence and shape the congregation into a culture of listening. Put simply, a leader says, "Watch me, I'll show you how to follow Christ's lead." Put more accurately, a group of leaders will say, "Watch us and you will see how we discern Christ's direction

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<sup>34</sup> William Jr. Taber, "The Friends Discernment Process: One View of Gospel Order," in *Friends Consultation Discernment* (Richmond, IN: Quaker Hill, 1985), 33.

<sup>35</sup> Leith Anderson, *A Church for the 21st Century* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1992), 222.

together.” In other words, for leaders in a church to exercise the influence in the congregation to move it in the direction of being a culture of listening, the leaders themselves must cultivate a culture of listening. Leaders in a culture of listening maintain an attitude of attentiveness to Christ as they influence people and shape behavior within their faith community.

### *Leadership and the Apocalyptic Word*

In the previous section an argument was made for three enduring principles of a culture of listening drawn from the narratives of the Council of Jerusalem and the history of Quakers. These three principles were named: the apocalyptic Word, the narrative of the apocalyptic Word, and the community of the apocalyptic Word. If leadership is to be a culture of listening, these principles will be evident in that leadership. In a culture of listening, leaders trust that Christ *is* building His church. This trust will be evident when leaders:

- Pay attention to, understand, and obey the written word of God.
- Choose fruitfulness over productivity.
- Know the urgency and joy of a divine mission.

Leaders in a culture of listening are attentive to the apocalyptic Word: they pay attention to, understand, and obey the written word of God; they choose fruitfulness over productivity; and they know the urgency and joy of a divine mission.

1. *In a culture of listening leaders pay attention to, understand, and obey the written word of God because the scriptural record is our baseline of understanding Christ, the Apocalyptic Word.* John 5:39 records Jesus’ plain declaration that the words of the Old Testament “testify on His behalf”. John’s Gospel itself says that it was written

“so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (Jn. 20:31). The authority and inspiration of the Bible has been affirmed in this paper. It is neither more nor less than the written word of God. Consequently, the anticipation of recognizing the activity of the apocalyptic Word in the world is largely contingent upon our knowledge of the character and will of God as revealed in the Bible.

Furthermore, because the Bible reveals the character and will of God in general and understandable terms, the Bible is also our primer on listening and obeying. In the Old Testament we read, “This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it (Josh. 1:8).” The author of Joshua realized the Mosaic Law was to be understood and obeyed by the citizens of Israel. In the New Testament we read, “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock (Mt. 7:24).” These words conclude the Sermon on the Mount. The author of Matthew plainly understood Jesus’ expectation to be that people would understand His teaching and act accordingly. Listening and obeying Scripture is the expectation expressed by the very words we claim are inspired and authoritative. However, that is not necessarily the response of those who affirm their inspiration and authority, as Dallas Willard contends,

It is the failure to understand Jesus and his words as reality and vital information about life that explains why, today, we do not routinely teach those who profess allegiance to him how to do what he said was best.... More than any other single thing ... *the practical irrelevance of actual obedience to Christ* accounts for the weakened effect of Christianity in the world today.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), xiv, xv.

Willard is observing that Bible-preaching Christians do not routinely practice what they preach. The issue is not works-righteousness, but rather life in grace. That is, having recognized that Jesus is the Savior of the world and accepted His gift of salvation, the response one would expect is eager obedience to the words of Life given by this One we now call Lord and Savior.<sup>37</sup> However, that obvious step of obedience to the teaching of the One we call Lord often does not happen. Willard is saying that, practically speaking, the Bible is irrelevant for those who claim to believe it when, for whatever reasons, they fail to see a direct correlation between the events and teachings of the Bible and their own lives.<sup>38</sup> He asserts that if one is to understand divine guidance one *must* be able to correlate one's own life with the contents of the Bible.<sup>39</sup> The present study of leadership in a culture of listening is a case in point. A leader must habitually correlate her own life to the revelation of Scripture if she presumes to influence others in discerning God's direction in circumstances often more ambiguous than listening and obeying the plain teaching of the Bible.

*2. In a culture of listening leaders choose fruitfulness over productivity because it is Christ who reveals, transforms, and ushers in the Kingdom of God.* One of the plain teachings of the Bible includes these words of Jesus: "Apart from me you can do nothing (Jn. 15:5)." Hearing and understanding Jesus' words lead us into the fruitfulness promised by Jesus. In Gwyn's explanation of the apocalypse of the Word, referenced earlier in this chapter, the Word is apocalyptic because in Christ the truth of Scripture and the history of salvation are revealed. Furthermore, Christ is the agency of transformation

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., xvi.

<sup>38</sup> Dallas Willard, *In Search of Guidance: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984), 36, 37.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 34.

in the life of the believer. Finally, those who experience the living Christ receive an advance taste of the coming Kingdom of God.<sup>40</sup> That is, it is Christ Himself who reveals, transforms, and ushers in the Kingdom of God. The Word is apocalyptic. If, therefore, the apocalyptic work of Christ were removed from our faith life, there would be nothing of significance left. Just as Jesus said, apart from Him we really can do nothing. Because we can do nothing apart from Him, our task is to remain or abide in Him, like a grape branch simply abides in the main vine. By simply abiding a branch bears fruit, but a branch that does not abide in the main vine is worthless because it cannot bear fruit (Jn. 15:1-7).

Apart from the main vine a branch can do nothing.

How then, does one abide in Christ? We abide in Christ's love by keeping His commands, which is precisely what Jesus modeled for us (Jn. 15:10). Jesus obeyed His Father's commands and remained in His love. This is not a reference to conditional love, but a way of life that is God's way of life. All of God's commands are about loving God and people (Mt. 22:36-40), so, of course, we abide in His love by obeying those commands. It could not be otherwise. This is why Willard writes that above all, divine guidance "is to be sought *only as a part of a certain kind of life*: a life of loving fellowship with the King and His subjects within the Kingdom of God."<sup>41</sup> Again, that is just the life Jesus lived in relation to the Father, and it is the life to which we are called. This brings us back to listening to and obeying God's commands. However, it also takes us to another place: how things get done in the Kingdom.

Jesus used the image of the branch and the vine to illustrate how things get done in the Kingdom. Christ advances the Kingdom through those who abide in Him. The fruit

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<sup>40</sup> Gwyn, *Apocalypse*, 113-22.

<sup>41</sup> Willard, *Search*, 30.

is clearly the consequence of the branch abiding in the vine, and not the result of the branch trying hard to produce something on its own. Henri Nouwen emphasizes that it is very important that we can distinguish between fruits and products, or between fruitfulness and productivity.<sup>42</sup> Products are something we can make. Fruit is something we cannot make. We can be productive apart from Christ. We cannot be fruitful apart from Christ. This is a critical issue in leadership because leaders want to make things happen. Leaders want to be productive. In a culture of listening, however, leaders desire to follow Christ, which will mean being able to discern between fruitfulness and productivity. The following chart may help clarify the difference.

Table 1. Productivity and Fruitfulness

<b>Productivity</b>	<b>Fruitfulness</b>
Skill Development	Prayer
Time Management	Waiting/Sabbath
Personnel and Resource Management	Loving God and People
<i>I must increase so Christ can increase</i>	<i>I must decrease so Christ can increase</i>

In this table productivity is juxtaposed with fruitfulness. Skill development produces a product. For instance, an individual can be trained in homiletics. As a result that person can prepare and present a sermon more skillfully. However, the preacher who understands that apart from Christ a perfectly presented sermon is worthless will pray fervently. The preacher will pray that the Spirit will convict the hearts of the listeners (Jn.

<sup>42</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Lifesigns: Intimacy, Fecundity, and Ecstasy in Christian Perspective* (New York, NY: Image Books, 1986), 60.

16:7-8). No amount of skill development is a substitute for the convicting work of the Spirit.

People who want to honor God in their ministry want to invest their time well. Therefore, time management in ministry is good stewardship of a precious resource. Because time is such a valued resource, doing nothing is the antitheses of productivity. However, if “doing nothing” is waiting on God, then it may be the epitome of fruitfulness. “The Quaker practice of waiting upon the Lord clears a space within and among men and women for Christ’s risen ministry to reach its full stature.”<sup>43</sup> There are dozens of admonitions in the Old Testament to wait for the Lord. Foster notes that when the disciples waited in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit as Christ commanded (Acts 1:4-5; 2:1), God had finally found a people who would wait.<sup>44</sup> Waiting on the Lord can take a number of forms, but it is always an expression of utter dependence on God: like bearing fruit.

Another example of good stewardship is management of personnel and resources. It is a good desire for a ministry organization to run like a well-oiled machine. However, if that well-oiled machine is not operating in the context of abiding in Christ’s love, it may be quite productive without being fruitful at all. Dr. Trueblood observed that Jesus neither wrote a book nor formed an organization. Instead He built a redemptive community: ordinary citizens whose primary attribute was their love.<sup>45</sup> Jesus may have been a productive carpenter. We know of two occasions when he was an enormously

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<sup>43</sup> Gwyn, *Apocalypse*, 166.

<sup>44</sup> Richard Foster, *The Book of Apostolic Acts*, lecture (George Fox College, Fall 1976), 4.

<sup>45</sup> D. Elton Trueblood, *Dr. Elton Trueblood: Memories & Reflections*, Video tape (Worcester, PA: Vision Video, 03/04 1990), 45 minutes, Christian History Institute.

productive fisherman! Overall, however, the record of Jesus' life is a story of fruitful dependence on the Father. The Son calls us to fruitful dependence upon Him.

At the bottom of the chart are two phrases suggested by Joe Roher that also juxtapose productivity and fruitfulness: *I must increase so Christ can increase*, and *I must decrease so Christ can increase*.<sup>46</sup> The intent is not to exegete the words of John the Baptist. Rather, these phrases represent a transition that comes from understanding fruitfulness and productivity. An enthusiastic disciple of Jesus might want with all his heart to make a difference for the Kingdom of God. He works hard to gain many ministry skills to increase his productivity. He is determined to “increase” so Christ can increase. However, in time he learns that there are essential aspects to Kingdom work that are not achieved by human effort. His skills and hard work are genuine assets. However, they are not Christ. As he gains understanding in fruitfulness, he learns to “decrease” by increasing in non-productive, yet fruitful, practices such as prayer, Sabbath, solitude, silence and loving service, so Christ can increase. In a culture of listening these practices that foster fruitfulness are highly valued, because it is, after all, Christ Who is building His church.

*3. In a culture of listening leaders know the urgency and joy of a divine mission because it is the work of Christ, and Christ is doing the work.* In the following remarkable letter written by George Fox, his overflowing joy and commitment to the ministry is evident, despite the persecution he was suffering. All this joy and commitment is for one gloriously redundant reason: the Lord is at work, Truth flourishes even in jails, the Seed Christ is over all, and the Lamb shall have the Victory.

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<sup>46</sup> Joe Roher, *Spiritual Life Conference* (Denver, CO: First Denver Friends Church, September 1999).



Sing and Rejoice ye Children of the Day, and of the Light; for the Lord is at work in this thick Night of Darkness that may be felt:  
 And Truth doth flourish as the Rose, and the Lillies do grow among the Thorns, and the Plants a-top of the Hills, and upon them the Lambs doth skip and play. And never heed the Tempests nor the Storms, floods nor Rains, for the Seed Christ is over all, and doth reign. And so, be of good Faith and Valiant for the Truth: For the Truth can live in the Goals [Gaols]. And fear not the loss of the Fleece, for it will grow again; and follow the Lamb, if it be under the Beast's Horns, or under the Beast's Heels; for the Lamb shall have the Victory over them all... So in the Seed Christ stand and swell, in whom you have Life and Peace; the Life that was with the Father, before the World began.<sup>47</sup>

This letter was written in September of 1663. By this time Fox had been imprisoned six different times including the unspeakably horrible eight months in Launceston Castle.<sup>48</sup> In the months prior to this epistle thousands of Quakers had been imprisoned.<sup>49</sup> Yet, Fox's attention is clearly upon the work of Christ rather than on the persecution of Quakers. He is a man at peace in the midst of a tempest. He is preoccupied with the work of the Present Christ, and delights in the Present Christ Who is doing His work. As the weighty decisions of the Council of Jerusalem concluded, their epistle was read to the congregation. They *rejoiced* at its message (Acts 15: 31). Judas and Silas lingered with the Jerusalem congregation for some time, and then were sent off in *peace* (v. 33). Despite the disparity of views and portentousness of the topic, the decision-making process concluded with peace and joy. Whatever difficulties beset leadership in a church, they are not likely to exceed the persecution Fox experienced or the enormity of the decision addressed by the Council of Jerusalem. In a culture of listening leaders are attentive to the work of Christ. Preoccupied with what Christ is doing, leadership is

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<sup>47</sup> George Fox, *A Day-Book of Counsel & Comfort: From the Epistles of George Fox*, ed. L. V. Hodgkin (London, UK: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1937), 158.

<sup>48</sup> Arthur O. Roberts, *Through Flaming Sword: A Spiritual Biography of George Fox* (Portland, OR: Barclay Press, 1959), 38.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

drawn into the apocalyptic work of Christ, and delights in working side by side with the Present Christ.

Queen Helen is an example of leadership and the apocalyptic Word. As a young man Jim was strongly influenced by this dynamic, African-American, Baptist minister.<sup>50</sup> She had a simple, powerful spirituality. For her, spiritual formation was simply doing what Jesus told her to do. She had some concern when Jim chose to attend seminary because she knew that simply following Jesus could get lost in the pursuit of grand ideas. When he returned from seminary Queen Helen asked two questions, “Does he still believe in the Holy Ghost?” and, “Does he still pray?” Queen Helen trusted in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, for which no seminary education would be an acceptable substitute. She knew Christ was really at hand, so certain things had to be. The Present Christ defined her approach to ministry. In a culture of listening, leaders know the urgency and joy of partnership with the apocalyptic Word. It defines their approach to ministry. They depend on Christ to influence and shape behavior because Christ’s church cannot be built apart from Him.

### *Leadership and the Narrative of the Apocalyptic Word*

Leaders in a culture of listening are attentive to the narrative of the apocalyptic Word: they listen to the stories of how Christ is building His church. The simplicity of this responsibility belies its significance. It is this author’s observation that leaders tend to be preoccupied with productivity (administrating programs and making decisions), and rarely stop to pay attention to the *fruit* of Christ being borne on the branches of their membership. Yet, it is this fruit that is defining how Christ is building His church. In our

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<sup>50</sup> James Williams, interview by Charles Orwiler, June 14 2002, Newberg, OR.

example from the Council of Jerusalem, it appears the turning point on the theological debate was doing something so simple, its profoundness can easily be overlooked: they listened to stories of how Christ was building His church. These stories were not being shared in the church basement while the important business was being taken care of elsewhere. On the contrary, the most important people attending to the most important business in the church stopped everything to listen to stories of Christ's activities and ponder their implications. In the prior section on the narrative of the apocalyptic Word the Friends' tradition of journaling was also cited. Many of these journals were stories of Christ's activity in the life of an individual and his meeting. These stories helped define the identity of Friends. In a culture of listening leaders are attentive to what Christ is doing in the life of their congregation.

Carol's story is an example of attending to Christ's unfolding narrative. Carol is a respected and an active member in the faith community where this author serves as pastor. Over a period of several years her career as a physical therapist has been unexpectedly interrupted, and then drastically changed. During this time of continuing change, Carol has been attentive to Christ. He has been teaching her what it means to trust in Him for her physical needs, and to follow Him when He leads to unexpected places. Occasionally during these years of transition Carol has shared during worship how God has been forming her through this continuing series of crises. These little pieces of her story have accumulated over time in the corporate memory of the congregation. Her story has become our story, and we recognize that Christ is at work among us in the person of Carol. Carol's story is part of our identity as a congregation. In the process her judgment became respected for its spiritual weight. That is, she is respected as an elder-

quality individual. She is respected for her walk with God. She is respected for demonstrating what faith can look like during a lengthy season of trials. Carol is not a high visibility personality. She is not a prominent leader. However, she is a recognized leader primarily because her story of Christ's work in her has become known, and the fruit of Christ is evident in her life.

Another example of attending to the narrative of the apocalyptic Word took place through a long range planning committee. This committee met to propose a future course for our congregation. The chairperson called the committee before the first meeting and asked the members of the committee to think about examples of how they had seen God at work in our congregation. They convened for the first meeting and began by taking turns around the table, each person sharing one of their examples. Each example was written on a white board. It took three trips around the table to accumulate all of the examples. There before the committee was a list of thirty examples of God's work among them. A holy hush settled on the group. There were some moist eyes in the room. The task of planning the future of the church was changed from trying to figure out what we needed to make happen to one of joining Christ in what He was already doing – and He was doing plenty to keep the church busy!

In both of these examples the pivotal action is the telling of the story of God's activity. The distinguishing attribute in a culture of listening is an attitude of attentiveness to Christ. The stories of Christ's work move attentiveness from the abstract to the concrete. Leaders in a culture of listening exercise influence and shape behavior by focusing upon the narrative of the apocalyptic Word as it unfolds in their community of faith.

*Leadership and the Community of the Apocalyptic Word*

Finally, leaders in a culture of listening are attentive to the community of apocalyptic Word: they depend on the corporate discernment of God's will. This dependence is based on two principles of corporate discernment. The first principle is stated as well as it can be in the London Yearly Meeting *Book of Discipline*, "It is in the unity of common fellowship, we believe, that we shall most surely learn the will of God."<sup>51</sup> In a culture of listening the decision-making aspect of leadership on issues of discernment cannot be done alone. This principle represents a significant departure from the individualism that characterizes our society.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, in a culture of listening leaders are challenged to influence and shape the behavior of the members of the faith community to think primarily in terms of the *community* rather than thinking primarily in terms of the individual.<sup>53</sup> The problem is creating a culture within a congregation that runs counter to the larger society. That is the problem this paper addresses, and the focus of attention in the final chapter.

This leads to the second principle of corporate discernment: the purpose of the way we do business is community-building, rather than making decisions.<sup>54</sup> The principle brings into focus the implications of thinking first in terms of the community. When participants in a business meeting take up the agenda, is community building even on their minds? This author heard another pastor describe becoming a Christian and then attending his first church business meeting. He was active in his local union, and found

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<sup>51</sup> Frances E. Pollard, Beatrice E. Pollard, and Robert S. W. Pollard, *Democracy and the Quaker Method* (London, UK: The Bannisdale Press, 1949), 44.

<sup>52</sup> Sheeran, *Beyond Majority*, 112.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>54</sup> Dea Cox, interview by Charles M. Orwiler, 19 June 2002, Portland, OR.

the atmosphere of the church business meeting just as argumentative and divisive as at the union hall. He was thrilled. “Fight night at the Baptist church,” as he called it, was something to which he could relate.

Presumably, the preceding is an extreme example. However, veterans of church business meetings, and Friends’ business meeting in particular, know what it is like to leave the meeting feeling divided rather than unified. If the decision-making leaders shared the value that their task was to build community in the process of making decisions, it would change the manner in which decisions are made. This is the reasonable expectation of a group seeking the mind of Christ together, and committed to the principle that we find the mind of Christ in the unity of our common fellowship. Patricia Loring says, “Friends rely on the Holy Spirit moving within and among us, in our weakness, to form us in greater humility, yieldedness and authenticity of love as we confront the vicissitudes of human life together.”<sup>55</sup>

When leaders are committed to the corporate discernment of God’s will, a means of decision-making will be needed that unites rather than alienates the participants. Cox observes that most Evangelical Friends churches are in the grip of what he calls “scientific management.”<sup>56</sup> He is referring to common decision-making methods practiced in the business world. We are familiar with such things because they are precisely the methodologies we bring with us from our jobs to the church business meetings. Cox knows what he is talking about having been an effective administrator in a secular environment. Having been well practiced in “scientific management” in his professional world, he disdains those practices in the Friends business meeting because

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<sup>55</sup> Patricia Loring, *Listening Spirituality: Corporate Spiritual Practice Among Friends* (Washington Grove, MD: Openings Press, 1999), 36.

<sup>56</sup> Orwiler, Cox Interview.

they remove Christ from the decision-making process and take the joy out of making decisions.<sup>57</sup> If he used the methodologies of his office with his family, he would alienate them immediately.<sup>58</sup> The metaphor of the family is precisely appropriate when one pursues decision-making in the context of the community of the apocalyptic Word. We can anticipate deep joy to be characteristic of a meeting for business as beloved brothers and sisters attend to Christ.<sup>59</sup>

### SUMMARY

The principal thesis of this chapter is: A decision-making model based on paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction and responding in holy obedience is practiced within a culture of listening. This culture of listening exists in a congregation when the members of that community maintain an attitude of attentiveness to Christ in the activities that constitute the life of that congregation. A culture of listening based on attentiveness to Christ was an early trait of Quakerism because of their Christology that Christ had come to teach His people Himself. However, the notion of a culture of listening runs counter to our secular culture, and it is a culture that Quakerism itself struggles to maintain. Consequently, there is an apparent need to define this culture of listening in order to practice it.

Three key elements of a culture of listening were drawn from the narratives of the Council of Jerusalem and Quaker history.

- The apocalyptic Word
- The narrative of the apocalyptic Word
- The community of the apocalyptic Word

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Taber, "Friends Discernment," 35.

These elements are indispensable in what this paper is defining as a culture of listening. The apocalyptic Word is the living Christ Who brings to life the written word of God, and Who is leading the ministry of His church. The narrative of the apocalyptic Word is the unfolding story of Christ's work. This narrative is both the record in Scripture as well as the work of God experienced in our own lives. The community of the apocalyptic Word is the body of Christ: a congregation of believers. The Council of Jerusalem was cited as an example of how these three attributes functioned in that culture of listening, as well as examples from Quaker history.

Intentional effort on the part of the leadership in a congregation will be necessary to maintain a culture of listening. Since leadership and decision-making are inextricable, the role of leadership within the environment of decision-making will be crucial to establish a culture of listening. As a corollary to the thesis above it was argued that leadership in a culture of listening would be a function of the three named attributes of a culture of listening. Because leaders are attentive to the apocalyptic Word, leaders in a culture of listening pay attention to, understand, and obey the written word of God; they choose fruitfulness over productivity; and they know the urgency and joy of a divine mission. Because leaders are attentive to the narrative of the apocalyptic Word, leaders in a culture of listening listen to the stories of how Christ is building His church. Finally, because leaders are attentive to the community of apocalyptic Word, leaders in a culture of listening depend on the corporate discernment of God's will.

In the course of defining this culture of listening three difficulties surfaced, that are all variations on the theme of creating a culture that runs counter to the existing social and church culture. The first difficulty is what Dallas Willard described as the "practical



irrelevance of actual obedience to Christ.” Defining a culture of listening within a Friends theological paradigm requires obedience to Christ be of the highest practical relevance. The second difficulty is the pervasive tendency to choose productivity over fruitfulness. It might be thought of as a corollary to the previous difficulty. That is, those who do not grasp the practical relevance of obedience to Christ are unlikely, if not unable, to understand fruitfulness in comparison to productivity. The third difficulty is leading the congregation to think primarily in terms of the community rather than the individual. This parameter is essential if a congregation is to pursue corporate discernment. These three difficulties, in addition to the six difficulties listed in the previous chapter will all need to be addressed if the proposed decision-making model is to be credible.

In the next chapter the author will introduce a model of decision-making for a contemporary congregation. The model will be designed around the work of Charles Olsen’s *Set Apart Lay Leader’s* project, the biblical and theological principles of the second chapter, the tradition of Friends, and the peculiarities of a particular Friends church. The author will demonstrate that the proposed model attempts to address the difficulties that are likely in a discernment-based decision-making process. Furthermore, the model will be tempered by the experience of this particular Friends church. Consequently, the proposed model is intended to be an eminently practical description of a decision-making process for a local church in which attention is given to Christ, His direction is understood, and the congregation is encouraged to follow in holy obedience.

## **Chapter 5**

### **A MODEL FOR A DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN AN EVANGELICAL FRIENDS CHURCH**

The problem addressed in the paper is: How can the decision-making process for business meetings in First Denver Friends Church be a process dependent upon paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction, and following in holy obedience? The initial claim was that such a decision-making process could be found in a model for decision-making in which the corporate discernment of God's direction and the corporate affirmation of obedience to that discerned direction takes place in an environment of worship. The basis for this claim is the content of Chapters Two, Three, and Four.

In Chapter Two the author established that paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction, and responding in holy obedience are normative practices in biblical church leadership. The biblical record indicates that God intends to lead God's people as they listen and obey. Furthermore, Christ demonstrated what it means to follow God's lead by listening and obeying. God's intent to lead His people is fulfilled in Christ as He is now Head of the church, and the church is to listen and obey Christ. This is the dynamic process the author identifies as Christocracy. Because Christ is leading the church, leadership in Christocracy includes discerning Christ's direction in particular situations in holy obedience. Listening and obedience are not responsibilities of leadership in isolation. Rather, listening and obeying are normative practices of decision-making within the context of a community of faith. The proposed model is a discernment-based model because the fundamental activity in the model is paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction, and responding in holy obedience as we seek to discern that direction together.

The Quaker model of decision-making was outlined in Chapter Three. This model exists as a historical precedent for a discernment-based model of decision-making in the church. Quakerism was founded upon a theology of the immediate rule of Christ (Christocracy). Friends defined a lifestyle of gospel order based on the presence of Christ in their communities of faith. One aspect of gospel order was a decision-making process that was considered worship because it required the same attentiveness to Christ as their services for worship. A congregation can pay attention to Christ in the process of making decisions, especially if that process is a manifestation of the familiar exercise of worship. In the proposed model the meeting for business is reconstructed to explicitly be meetings for worship on the premise that the same attentiveness to Christ required in worship is required in a discernment-based decision-making process.

The model described in this paper consistently reflects an experiential approach to decision-making consistent with the Friends tradition. In this model the decision-makers are repeatedly directed to address the question of what is God calling us to do or be. This leads to an emphasis of prayerful discernment that is the responsibility of all the participants. Attentiveness to the work of God is encouraged by the sharing of accounts of how the decision-making participants have witnessed God at work in the ministry of the church. These movements of God are interpreted in light of the narratives and doctrines of the Bible. Finally, the objective of corporate discernment is reached when the congregation or group can affirm together what seems good to them and to the Holy Spirit. The process is designed to be dependent upon Christ speaking to the hearts of ordinary Christians through the Holy Spirit, and that company affirming together God's direction in the present moment for a particular circumstance.

The corporate attentiveness required for a discernment-based decision-making process is described as a culture of listening. In Chapter Four the qualities of a culture of listening are detailed since the notion of corporate attentiveness runs counter to our common culture. Three characteristics of a culture of listening were named based on Quaker history and the biblical paradigm of the Council of Jerusalem. These three characteristics are: the apocalyptic Word, the narrative of the apocalyptic Word, and the community of the apocalyptic Word. The proposed model is founded upon these characteristics. The presence of Christ (the apocalyptic Word) is the basis of a model that approaches business as worship. In this model great attention is paid to the narrative of the Bible, and the narrative of Christ's present work in the congregation. Finally, the decisions that are made spring from the unified assent of the community of Christ.

In this chapter it will be demonstrated that a model of a discernment-based method of decision-making has proved to be effective in a contemporary setting. This paradigm will be applied to the particular setting of First Denver Friends Church in a detailed model of a decision-making process for business meetings dependent on paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction, and responding in holy obedience. The result is a model for decision-making in which the corporate discernment of God's direction and the corporate affirmation of obedience to that discerned direction does take place in an environment of worship.

## THE SET APART LAY LEADERS PROJECT

### *Purpose and Objectives of the Project*

In 1990 Charles M. Olsen received a one-year planning grant from the Lilly Endowment to evaluate the state of church governance in the United States. He discovered a high level of frustration and sometimes disillusionment among church board members. Much of their disappointment stemmed from an absence of spirituality in the practice of the business of the church. The members were hoping to develop and deepen their faith through their ministry on the board. Instead, they often found “business as usual.”<sup>1</sup> He then began a three-year project known as Set Apart Lay Leaders. The purpose of the project was to develop and test strategies for integrating spirituality and administration in church board meetings. The hope was to find spiritually invigorating means of attending to church business that would be life giving rather than life draining.<sup>2</sup>

## THE FOUR-PRACTICE MODEL

The model developed in Set Apart Lay Leaders is described in detail in Olsen’s book, *Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders*. In this model there are four fundamental practices that have been successfully adapted and implemented in a variety of church environments. These four practices are:

- History giving and story telling
- Biblical-theological reflection
- Prayerful discernment
- “Visioning” the future<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Charles M. Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards Into Communities of Spiritual Leaders* (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 1995), xi.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

The third practice of prayerful discernment is heavily influenced by the Friends model of decision-making. The other three practices are complementary to decision-making in an Evangelical Friends church. It is the intent of this chapter to demonstrate how the use of these four practices will give practical handles to create a culture of listening in which we will attend to Christ as we attend to our business.

### *Result from Testing the Set Apart Lay Leaders Model*

The testing took place with fifteen churches. Five of these churches were actively involved in the model. Another five churches were intentionally addressing the issue of integrating spirituality and administration, but using their own methods rather than the model being tested. The final group of five churches was a baseline group that maintained a position of disinterest to the subject matter. Olsen cites eight significant observations from this comparison study. However, the only one alluded to at this point in this paper is this simple observation: the model works.<sup>4</sup> A collegium of people interested in board development was gathered annually to evaluate the effectiveness of the model. Olsen says:

The collegium ... concluded that the model introduces a new paradigm for boards: *The individual board member is no longer seen as a political representative but as a spiritual leader. The board or council is no longer seen as a group of corporate managers, but as the people of God in community. The meeting is no longer seen as a litany of reports and decisions held together by "book-end" prayers but as "worshipful work."*<sup>5</sup>

The outcomes of spiritual leadership, community, and "worshipful work" show promise that this model is compatible with the Friends model of decision-making as

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., xiv.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., xii, xiii.

described previously in this paper. Another member of the collegium, Mennonite historian, Robert Kreider, commented:

This is a countercultural enterprise. Here is a call to resist the seductive drag of modernity—individualism, competition, compartmentalization, specialization, secularization, professionalization—to create community. And a special kind of community—a blessed community of praise, study, caring, discernment, and hope. Here is the vision of inviting the church council to become a nucleus for the renewal of the church.... This is a call for a shift in congregational power from the elite few to the noncredentialed many (the laity)—a shift, not a transfer or displacement. Here is a vision of every member a pastor, a serious Bible student, a student, and a teacher.... We are working with a concept of leadership as servanthood.<sup>6</sup>

These observations from the collegium were not intended to define a mandate for Quaker decision-making, yet their observations come close to achieving that end. In the terminology of this paper, the emphases of the Set Apart Lay Leaders Project dovetail perfectly with the emphases in this paper on the apocalyptic Word, the narrative of the apocalyptic Word, and the community of the apocalyptic Word.

#### **THE APOCALYPTIC WORD AND THE SET APART LAY LEADERS MODEL**

Olsen maintains that business in communities of faith must “march to the beat of a different drummer” than secular business. The difference turns on this single dynamic: Churches are to be asking the question, “What is God calling this congregation to do or be?”<sup>7</sup> This is the realm of the Apocalyptic Word. This is the work of discernment. Olsen’s perspective agrees with the perspective of this paper that the work of discernment is a difficult one to grasp. In fact, prayerful discernment was identified as the weak link in

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 87.

the model.<sup>8</sup> Hopefully, that link can be strengthened as the model is practiced within the Friends tradition.

Olsen recommends that spiritual practices such as Bible reading, prayer, silence, meditation and contemplation are appropriate activities in the board meeting because the board's very purpose is to seek the mind of Christ.<sup>9</sup> If the purpose of the meeting for business is to seek the mind of Christ, and if these are the means of seeking the mind of Christ affirmed by the Friends' tradition as well as centuries of the broader Christian tradition, then these practices, indeed, ought to be integrated into the meetings of business in the church.

The narrative of the apocalyptic Word is a strong component in this model. Three of the four components of this model are expressions of the narrative of the apocalyptic Word. At a designated time in a normal business meeting, time is taken to reflect on the activity of God in the life of the congregation. Then these examples are augmented by consideration of biblical narratives or principles relevant to the current circumstances of the congregation. At another point in the business meeting, time is taken to reflect on where God seems to be taking the congregation (visioning). In some circumstances it is appropriate to review the history of God's work in building this church over the years. All these combine to form a narrative flow of how Christ is building His church in a particular congregation. This is the nature of business in this model: *Decisions are being consciously made in the context of the unfolding story of Christ's work among His people.*

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 39.



Finally, the observations from the collegium noted previously made clear references to the establishment of community in this process of decision-making. Olsen observes that while the parliamentary method can be useful within some church structures, it is not useful in a discernment-based approach to decision-making because the “parliamentary method assumes that no community base exists from which to interact and decide.”<sup>10</sup> This perspective broadens the credence of the Friends’ perspective of community being indispensable in corporate decision-making.

Henri Nouwen has made the same point. In a lecture given at Earlham School of Religion, he demonstrated how communion, community and ministry are interdependent.<sup>11</sup> He began with the premise that everything Jesus did was in community because of His dependence on the Father. This point was also established in the second chapter of this paper: A Biblical and Theological Foundation. He went on to note how in the record of Jesus’ life, we never see Him ministering alone. The great saints in history, Nouwen added, always formed community as a fruit of communion. From that community ministry springs when we ask ourselves the question, “What are we to do?” Nouwen’s paradigm can be pictured in this manner:

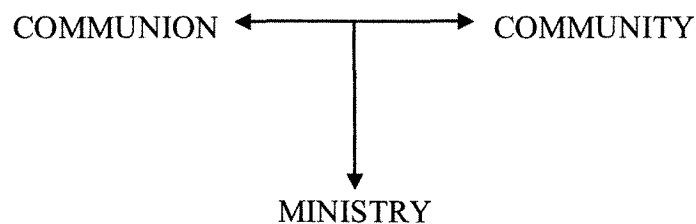


Fig. 2. Communion, Community, Ministry

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>11</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, "Communion as the Source of Christian Leadership," Lecture (Earlham College, Richmond, IN, 30/January 1991).

“Communion, community and ministry” captures the essence of the Set Apart Lay Leaders project. It is a good summation of the community of the apocalyptic Word responding corporately to Christ among them. Furthermore, it is quite a nice summation of the Friends’ ideal of meetings for worship, business, and the birth of ministry within the faith community.

### **MEETINGS FOR BUSINESS PATTERNED AFTER MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP**

Friends aspire for their meetings for business to be infused with genuine worship. After all, they are both intended to be exercises in communion with Christ. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting’s 1972 *Book of Discipline* puts it this way:

Meetings for the transaction of business are conducted in the same expectant waiting for the guidance of the Spirit as is the meeting for worship. Periods of worship, especially at the beginning and end, lift hearts and minds out of self-centered desires into an openness to seek the common good under the leadership of the Spirit of Christ.<sup>12</sup>

What is the “expectant waiting for the guidance of the Spirit?” The value of waiting for the Spirit’s guidance can be held by pastoral and non-pastoral Friends. However, each would likely answer the question differently because the means of waiting for the guidance of the Spirit is pursued quite differently in their respective venues. Of course, the same could be said if Catholics or Presbyterians or Methodists attempted to answer this question.

Some church boards in Olsen’s study discovered how patterning their meetings for business after their worship liturgy reminded them constantly of their task being

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<sup>12</sup> Michael J. Sheeran, *Beyond Majority Rule: Voteless Decisions in the Religious Society of Friends* (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1996), 47, 48.

worshipful work.<sup>13</sup> This was precisely the practice of early Friends who patterned their meetings for business directly after their meetings for worship. Worship among evangelical Friends is different from that which Friends practiced in the seventeenth century. In fact, worship among the churches in Olsen's study is different from seventeenth century Quaker worship, yet, a form of handling business can be practiced in each environment that captures the heart of the Friends' approach to decision-making: Christ has come to teach His people Himself. They have succeeded by patterning their business after their worship even though their worship is not Friends worship. Therefore, it is this author's view that an Evangelical Friends church can regain the essence of the Friends' decision-making process of paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction, and following in holy obedience by patterning their meetings for business after their meeting for worship. In the next section this model will be detailed for the business meetings of the congregation and Executive Council of a particular Evangelical Friends church. William Taber puts the importance of this in perspective:

The Friends business meeting can not be described as just the peculiar Quaker form of getting things done; rather it should be seen as an essential part of the spiritual formation and the spiritual growth of every seasoned Friend, for it is that place through which we learn to walk hand in hand with each other and the Spirit out into the world to do the work of committed and obedient disciples.<sup>14</sup>

One learns discernment by practicing it. We come to know God by being faithful to God. That is, we come to know God by being faithful to God's will as we understand it.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, one can understand a meeting for business to be a meeting for spiritual formation. We invite God's formation as we seek to understand and follow the Spirit's

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<sup>13</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 24, 25.

<sup>14</sup> William Jr. Taber, "The Friends Discernment Process: One View of Gospel Order," in *Friends Consultation Discernment* (Richmond, IN: Quaker Hill, 1985), 34.

<sup>15</sup> Danny E. Morris, *Yearning to Know God's Will: A Workbook for Discerning God's Guidance for Your Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 29.

lead. In this case our model for spiritual formation is the worship service. In the meetings for worship at First Denver Friends Church we commonly schedule the following six elements:

- Call to Worship
- Congregational Singing
- Sermon
- Open Worship
- Offering
- Prayer

Most of these six elements appear in the worship services most of the time. There is freedom to choose which elements are appropriate for a particular service, and the order in which those elements might be introduced. The key point is that this particular congregation is familiar with these particular structures of attending to Christ. They are, to a degree, held in reverence, and certainly valued by the members of the congregation.

These six elements will be used to form the superstructure for a meeting for business. Within these elements Olsen's four practices will be evident. The order of service applied to the business meeting will be no more secret than the order of service for a meeting for worship. Indeed, they are both meetings for worship, and an intentional course is being set to keep the meeting's attention on Christ.

### *Call to Worship*

Allow five minutes.

A call to worship in a worship service can take many forms. However, the intent is always the same: to lead the congregation into intentionally focusing their attention to

God. Such a call, writes Olsen, “is centered in the presence, will, and purpose of God.”<sup>16</sup> One is reminded of Douglas Steere’s appeal to worshippers to learn “the art of voluntary attention.”<sup>17</sup> The exercise of that art begins in the call to worship. It is here that the participant in worship or business attempts to turn attention from whatever else to Christ alone. At First Denver Friends Church silence serves this purpose well. The silence may or may not be accompanied by an inspirational reading to help lend focus.

### *Congregational Singing/Personal Accounts of God’s Activity*

Allow fifteen minutes.

In services for worship congregational singing provides a means for the corporate testimony of the goodness and greatness of God. It is appropriate to sing in a meeting for business. However, the issue at hand in this process is becoming aware of God’s story that is unfolding among us. Consequently, a more direct approach than singing is preferred. Individuals are invited to share briefly their witness of God at work. This transforms committee reports. Rather than reporting income and expense statistics, the Missions Committee chairperson reports how several months earlier the committee was stumped by their financial shortfall. In the ensuing months God has generously compensated for that shortfall in ways for which the committee simply cannot take credit. Financial statistics are critically important in the management of an organization. There must be effective means of communicating that information responsibly. However, at this point in the meeting for business, the focus is *solely* upon what is perceived to be the work of God among the congregation. After several have shared, a corporate testimony to

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<sup>16</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 16.

<sup>17</sup> Douglas V. Steere, Author, *Where Words Come From*, Swarthmore Lecture Pamphlet (London: Friends House, No date), 38.

the goodness and greatness of God will have been given. This would be a grand moment to respond in a hymn of praise and worship.

This is an exercise in story telling. It is not complicated. However, its simplicity must not be allowed to belie its significance. Olsen reports that one of the collegiums studying the project concluded that story telling is the single most effective practice in integrating spirituality and administration.<sup>18</sup> The significance of community has been emphasized many times in this paper. A primary means for developing community on a board or in a business meeting is through the telling of stories.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, according to Olsen, congregations who habitually mention God as a player in their activities tend to be vital faith communities. The stories seem to free people to witness to God's work, and visitors to these churches are able to sense their vitality.<sup>20</sup>

The Executive Council of the author's church has been practicing this discipline for one year under the guidance of the author (the pastor). The members of the Executive Council were encouraged to reflect and share how they were witnessing Christ build our church over the previous several months. This exercise was substantiated by teaching in Sunday worship on Christ building His church. In subsequent meetings the members were asked to share how they had seen Christ at work in their committees since the last Executive Council meeting. The group grew in their confidence to share these stories over several months. Their participation is now consistent, eager, and inspiring.

Olsen offers two cautions in the exercise of story telling. First, the stories must be concise. Those present know they have come to deliberate the business of the church.

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<sup>18</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 56.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

Prolonged story telling can undermine the intended value.<sup>21</sup> Olsen also learned from a South African pastor that one must be careful to listen for stories that represent a new direction for the congregation.<sup>22</sup> This pastor said they were long accustomed to telling stories, but those stories could become only self-affirming. There needs to be an ear for the prophetic message that may not be a comforting one.

### *Sermon/Biblical Reflection*

Allow ten minutes, including discussion.

Sermons at First Denver Friends Church are always based on biblical texts. A sermon is intended to bring the relevance of the ancient written word of God into the contemporary life circumstances of the congregation. The biblical reflection in the meeting for business serves the same purpose. The biblical reflection is not to be understood as a devotional thought disconnected from the business at hand. Rather, it is the presenter's responsibility to identify a story of God's current activity within the congregation and relate it to a biblical narrative or principle. The objective is to underscore the relevance of our current story by weaving it together with the work of God in Scripture. The author has been practicing variations on this method for one year in Executive Council, and it appears to be effective in bringing a focus on Christ. Frequently, the biblical reflection precedes the personal accounts of God's activity.

For example, a Sunday sermon from 2 Samuel 6 emphasized how being a person after God's own heart means to carefully hold God in reverent awe, guarding against our tendency to move from grace to presumption. This principle and the story of King David

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

from which it springs are woven into the circumstance of the business meeting. The presenter refers to the wonderful gifts of God that have been named earlier in the meeting, and in several prior meetings. Then the presenter cautions against presuming upon God's gifts, and asks the group to identify indicators to warn themselves against slipping towards presumption. The discussion closes with prayers of thanksgiving, worship and repentance.

The fundamental skill of a business meeting is attentiveness to Christ.<sup>23</sup> So, the first thirty minutes of the business meeting have begun with three exercises closely identified with worship by the participants. The intent is to have the group be attentive to Christ both in attitude and in the awareness that He is actively at work building His church. The experience of the Executive Council over a one-year period demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach, even while it is still being refined.

### *Common Consent*

The meeting now proceeds to the business of the meeting. There are some issues that require the consent of the business meeting, yet they are not discernment issues. Membership applications and approval of nominees for offices usually fall in this category. Frequently, these are items for glad approvals. These are not to be glossed over. Nevertheless, they are to be handled efficiently. There is no immediate parallel between these actions of a business meeting and any action in a meeting for worship.

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<sup>23</sup> Taber, "Friends Discernment," 36.



### *Open Worship/Prayerful Discernment*

Open worship in a Friends worship service is understood to be communion with Christ. Friends aspire to commune with Christ in meetings for business. The model being detailed in this section is an attempt to preserve and maximize communion with Christ for the duration of the meeting. In the meeting for business there are issues for which the pertinent question will be, “What does God want us to do?” This is the time for prayerful discernment that emerges from communion with Christ. Associating this portion of the business meeting with the open worship portion of the worship service functions to remind the participants of the nature of the exercise they are undertaking. Earlier in this paper discernment was defined as attending to and understanding Christ’s direction for the church. Olsen defines discernment slightly broader as seeing “the movement of God,” or “seeing from God’s perspective.”<sup>24</sup> Danny Morris defines spiritual discernment as “the capacity to see our lives clearly in light of God’s will.” These three definitions are quite similar, and point to the pertinent question, “What does God want us to do?” This is hardly a simple question to answer in many circumstances. At the conclusion of Romans chapter 11, the Apostle Paul stands in awe of the vastness of God’s will that necessarily surpasses human understanding. However, just a few verses later he encourages disciples of Jesus to test and approve the will of God (Romans 12:1, 2). Discernment is the work of the church. Nevertheless, it is not an easy assignment.

Discernment is a time-consuming endeavor. A group cannot expect to attend to several issues that require discernment by unity in a short period of time. A decision-making group can expect to only make a few discernment decisions in a year, and

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<sup>24</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 88.

perhaps one or two such decisions in a single meeting.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, there is simply no time available for most operational issues in the discernment-based business meeting. Because discernment takes time, the space in the meeting needs to be preserved for prayerful listening and discernment. Furthermore, the items presented for discernment must be carefully chosen because there is not time for many. In order to manage a business meeting so as to preserve the necessary time for discernment, a carefully prepared agenda is essential.

The crucial issue in assembling an agenda is determining which issues require a consensus decision of prayerful discernment, and which do not. Dr. James Means suggests that different circumstances require different leadership orientations. One orientation is a Task Orientation and the other is a Social Orientation..<sup>26</sup> A Task orientation increases productivity. It is the means by which things get done. Authoritative leadership is appropriate in this context as plans are implemented and problems are solved in a timely manner. On the other hand, Social Orientation increases cohesiveness. Values-based decisions and policies are made in this environment that strengthen relationships within an organization. Consequently, authoritarian leadership in this context is inappropriate and consensus decision-making is preferred. Both orientations are equally valuable in their appropriate contexts. For instance, choosing to undertake a major building project in a church may require the unified support of the congregation. Therefore, a decision-making process will need to be followed that draws the congregation together behind the project. This is the context for a Social Orientation.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>26</sup> James E. Means, "Adjustments of Leadership Style," Unpublished class notes (Denver Seminary, Denver, CO: PME Department, Summer 2001), 5.

Discernment and consensus will be indispensable in making a decision that strengthens the congregation.

“Consensus” is a commonly-used term in non-Friends literature regarding decision-making in the church. Such is the case with the principles credited to Dr. Means above. However, as described earlier in this paper, from a Friends perspective there is a difference between consensus and unity. Consensus can be a purely secular endeavor. However, Friends assume the participation of the living Christ to bring unity (not necessarily unanimity) to those seeking the sense of the meeting. Consequently, in these discussions the author prefers to use “unity” rather than “consensus.”

If the decision is made to proceed with the project, then progressively more of the decisions require a Task Orientation as the plan is being implemented. In assembling an agenda for meetings for business, there is frequently an abundance of curiosity about these implementation issues. However, there is not enough time for them. Operational items are handled outside the meetings for business.<sup>27</sup>

The following chart illustrates a paradigm for determining which issues require unity deliberation, and which should be delegated for a bureaucratic resolution.

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<sup>27</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 43.

Table 2. Democratic – Bureaucratic Continuum

<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <span><b>Democratic/Participatory</b></span> <span><b>Bureaucratic</b></span> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center; margin-top: 5px;"> <span>←</span> <span>→</span> </div>		
Unity		Delegation
<b>Value-Laden Judgments</b>  <b>Making Policy</b>  <b>Community Building</b>	<i>(Note: There is never a place to stubbornly pursue personal preference.)<sup>28</sup></i>	<b>Problem-Solving</b>  <b>Implementation</b>  <b>Task Orientation</b>

If the issues are value-laden judgments, making policy, or critical for the health of the community, then unity decision-making, which invites a high level of participation, is effective. If the issues are ones of problem-solving, implementation or task completion, then these are delegated to the appropriate responsible parties. The annual budget is an indispensable tool for implementation.<sup>29</sup> After it is approved by a democratic method, then virtually all the issues contained within the budget are delegated to the appropriate bureaucratic department or person. If the budget is carefully prepared and presented annually, a vast array of operational issues need not be addressed again.

With an understanding of which issues require prayerful discernment and unity, the clerk can prepare an appropriate agenda. When the time has arrived in the business meeting for prayerful discernment the clerk can remind the meeting of the similarity between this portion of the business meeting and the open worship portion of a worship

<sup>28</sup> Dea Cox, interview by Charles M. Orwiler, 19 June 2002, Portland, OR.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

service. Reading a statement such as the following can serve that purpose, as well as instruct the participants as to the nature of prayerful discernment of items for business.

### Business Meeting Statement and Query

The *Book of Discipline* of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting reads, “Meetings for the transaction of business are conducted in the same expectant waiting for the guidance of the Spirit as is the meeting for worship.”<sup>30</sup> This exercise of spiritual discernment is an expression of our faith that Christ is present to lead us in the way of truth and love. We believe that Christ’s intent is to move us, as Danny Morris and Charles Olsen have written, “closer to Him, closer to one another, and closer to the world that God wills.”<sup>31</sup>

The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting *Book of Discipline* counsels that, “All matters will be considered thoughtfully, with due respect to every point of view presented. When a course of action receives the general, though not necessarily unanimous, approval of the group, the presiding clerk will formulate the sense of the meeting and it is recorded in the minutes. No vote is taken.... Action is taken only when the group can proceed in substantial unity.”<sup>32</sup>

Our unity expresses the sense of the meeting about how God is leading our faith community. As Morris and Olsen have written, “It is an expression of our understanding of God’s wishes for our community and our faithful living.”<sup>33</sup> We must remind ourselves regularly that we are seeking God’s will, not simply human agreement.

In the tradition of Friends, queries are read in a meeting as a basis of reflective self-examination. A verbal reply is not expected. Rather, the participants in the meeting listen carefully to the reading of the query, and invite the Spirit to speak to their hearts regarding the subject of the query.

Query: At this time am I able to lay aside all my personal preferences and personal concerns for the greater preference and greater concern that God’s kingdom come and God’s will be done?

After reading the above statement and allowing a brief time for reflection on the query, the clerk introduces the items for prayerful discernment. The clerk concludes by

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<sup>30</sup> Sheeran, *Beyond Majority*, 47.

<sup>31</sup> Daniel E. Morris and Charles M. Olsen, *Discerning God’s Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1997), 23, 24.

<sup>32</sup> Sheeran, *Beyond Majority*, 48.

<sup>33</sup> Morris and Olsen, *Discerning*, 166.

identifying the sense of the meeting. Often the issue at hand does not yet require a decision, but does require prayerful listening. The clerk has carefully prepared an agenda for the purpose of the deliberation of the business meeting. The business meeting is the opportunity for Christ to lead the congregation especially through those who do not fill official leadership roles in the congregation or who may represent an overlooked or minority position. It is understood that in addition to the considerable preparations outside of the business meeting that may precede a given agenda item, the meeting waits in anticipation of being led by the Spirit, even in unexpected ways, through any person present in the meeting.

### *The Offering*

Allow ten minutes.

In a service for worship the offering is an act of worship when financial gifts are given as an expression of offering oneself to God as a living sacrifice. Worship can be very abstract. However, when one places money in the collection, one's faith finds a concrete expression. In a meeting for business that is modeled after a meeting for worship, a time is preserved to offer to God our response of holy obedience to God's design for our church as we have discerned it. Prayerful discernment can be difficult and emotional work. When the place of common understanding is reached, it is appropriate to celebrate God's guidance, and offer to God what we will do in response. The meeting for worship began with recollections of God's activity among us. In the process of prayerful discernment we uncover where we believe God is leading us. These are specific acts of

God's mercy. In the spirit of Romans 12:1 the meeting responds by offering itself as a living sacrifice in light of God's mercy.

This can be done simply. The discernment process of that particular meeting can be summarized. A few minutes can be given to imagine the future and acknowledge where it appears our current responsibilities are leading. Then, in a time of prayer, those responsibilities can be spoken to God as our commitment to obediently follow where we understand Christ is leading us. It is easy to forgo this exercise of offering at the conclusion of a strenuous meeting. However, the value of this offering should not be overlooked. We need to be reminded that we are part of an unfolding narrative of Christ building His church, and that we are pursuing that course together. The common vision and shared commitment need a final clarification before the group disperses.

### *Prayer Throughout*

In a meeting for business that is intended to be communion with Christ, any point in the meeting can inspire prayer, just as any point in a worship service can call for prayer. In some church business meetings different participants volunteer to be praying during fifteen-minute segments of the business meeting.<sup>34</sup> As a result there is a foundation of prayer continuing throughout the meeting. Other groups have found it helpful to have three or four individuals take notes during the meeting for the sole purpose of identifying issues of prayer or petition that will be included in times of prayer.<sup>35</sup> Whether a structure is used or not, the point is the same: prayer is eminently appropriate during the deliberations of the business of the church.

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<sup>34</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 23.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

The following chart summarizes the comparison of meetings for worship and meetings for business as outlined in this section.

Table 3. Worship and Business

<b>Order of Meeting for Worship</b>	<b>Purpose of Particular Activity</b>	<b>Order of Meeting for Business</b>
Call to Worship	Intentionally refocusing attention towards God	<i>Call to Worship/Silence</i>
Congregational Singing	Corporate testimony to the goodness and greatness of God	<i>Testimony to the work of God among us</i>
Sermon	Relating the written word of God to our lives	<i>Biblical Reflection</i> : weaving God's story in Scripture with God's story unfolding in our church
No parallel in the meeting for worship		<i>Common Consent</i> : Approval of non-discernment items of business.
Open Worship	Communion with Christ	<i>Prayerful Listening/Discernment</i> : Uncovering God's design in the business of our church
Offering	Offering ourselves as living sacrifices in view of God's mercy	<i>Offering to God our corporately-discerned responses</i>
Prayer Throughout	Dialogue with God	<i>Prayer Throughout</i>

### *Comparing the Proposed Model with Practical Experience*

The activities described in a year of minutes (2002) from the meetings of Executive Council and Business Meeting at First Denver Friends Church can be arranged in nine categories:

- *Biblical-Theological Reflection* (BTR): This happened exclusively in Executive Council where the pastor led the group in a time of biblical and theological reflection regarding their responsibilities.
- *Call to Worship* (CW): This indicates the opening of a meeting by turning the participants' attention to Christ.



- *Common Consent (CC)*: Issues such as membership approval, yearly meeting nominations and concerns, and staff action plans are issues that fall under the direct responsibility of the business meetings. These issues usually do not require a discernment-based decision. However, these are issues of vital concern to the congregation, and they certainly need the affirmation of the meeting for business.
- *Delegation (D)*: These items were brought to the meeting, and need to be delegated for attention outside the meeting for business.
- *Information Distribution (ID)*: Verbal committee and staff reports usually simply pass on information to the listener. This is not a good use of business meeting time unless that information is integral to the function of that particular group. Almost all of the reports referred to in this study were judged to be *not* integral to the function of the congregational business meeting or the Executive Council. However, the information is important to the congregation and needs to be channeled through more effective information channels than a meeting for business.
- *Prayerful Listening and Discernment (PLD)*: Prayerful listening is an integral part of corporate discernment. In most meetings for business, there are no items for prayerful discernment. However, there are nearly always issues that require prayerful listening. In this model for decision-making, an environment is being created for the specific purpose of prayerful listening and discernment.
- *Prayer Throughout (PT)*: When time is taken at any point in the meeting for business, it is indicated as such.
- *Testimony (T)*: These are scheduled times when members of the meeting share stories of God's work which they have witnessed.
- *Visioning the Future (V)*: These are times when the group considered where God seems to be leading the congregation.

In the following tables, one year of minutes from meetings for business are categorized by the kind of action taken and the amount of time needed for that action. The purpose is to see if the time needed for business of the business meeting (i.e., Common Consent issues and Prayerful Listening/Discernment issues) allow enough time for the added dimensions from the proposed model. Some issues have been eliminated from the meetings for business, primarily by channeling reports to Information

Distribution channels, and also delegating some items to responsible parties outside the meeting for business. The tables below itemize the agenda items, identify them according to the preceding nine categories, and give an approximate time needed for each.

Sometimes italicized comments are added to the items for the purpose of clarification or consideration for future handling of such an item.

Table 4. 1-02 E.C.M.

JANUARY 2002 EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEETING		
Category	Item	Minutes Needed
PT	Opening prayer time	5
CC	Review of the calendar of responsibilities for Executive Council for the coming year	30
CC	Review of the calendar of responsibilities for the Business Meeting for the coming year	30
CC	The Building Committee shared their plans for classroom modifications. <i>This issue has implications on a variety of responsibilities represented on Executive Council.</i>	10
ID	Missions report on their activities	0
CC	Little Friends budget	10
ID	Spiritual Life report on their activities	0
ID	Youth pastor report on youth activities	0
PT	Closing prayer	5
	Total Minutes	90
	Total Minutes for Common Consent and Prayerful Listening/Discernment	80

Table 5. 2-02 B.M.

<i>February 2002 Business Meeting</i>		
Category	Item	Minutes Needed
PT	Opening time of prayer	5
CC	Previous meeting minutes read and approved	5
CC	Staff Action Plans read and approved. Housing allowances approved.	30
ID	Missions report regarding Romania	0
ID	MDC report on activities	0
ID	Little Friends Report on activities	0
CC	Little Friends Financial report	10
ID	Stewards report on activities	0
CC	Membership application	5
PLD	Spiritual Life update on working with our divorced youth pastor and prayer in response	15
ID	Christian Education report on activities	0
ID	Report on assistance given to an elderly member	0
ID	Reminder regarding the Christian Ministries Convention	0
CC	Reminder to pass yearly meeting concerns on to the chairman of our delegates	1
ID	Report on an open house at Quaker Ridge Camp	0
	Total Minutes	71
	Total Minutes for Common Consent and Prayerful Listening/Discernment	66

Table 6. 2-02 E.C.M.

<i>February 2002 Executive Council Meeting</i>		
Category	Item	Minutes Needed
BTR, CC, PLD, T, V	The entire meeting was dedicated to reviewing where we have seen God at work among us in the last six months especially in regard to our Big Four priorities: Habitually Thinking Outside the Walls of the Church, Developing Ministers, Building Community, and Refurbishing the Building. Then time was spent critiquing our effort and visioning the future for Executive Council, especially in regard to "thinking like pastors."	90
PT	Closing prayer	5
	Total Minutes	95
	Total Minutes for Common Consent and Prayerful Listening/Discernment	NA

Table 7. 3-02 E.C.M.

<i>March 2002 Executive Council Meeting</i>		
Category	Item	Minutes Needed
PT	Opening time of prayer	5
BTR, T	The pastor shared thoughts continuing from the previous meeting regarding thinking like pastors. This was integrated with a letter from a new church member regarding her frustration as a “church stupid” person trying to become involved in our church.	20
ID	Staff reports from Susan, Alan and Chuck	0
CC	Q&A regarding staff reports	15
CC	Yearly meeting rep information arrived late, and the chairperson of the reps needs direction on what to do. Decision made and delegated.	5
ID	Ministries Development report on their activities	0
CC	Discussion on use of classroom space as per recommended classroom modifications by the Building and CE committees	15
ID	Stewards reported on their activities	0
ID	Missions reported on their activities	0
PLD	Spiritual Life led a report and discussion regarding the Solemn Assemblies and the state of our youth pastor and her family	45
PT	Closing prayer	5
	Total Minutes	110
	Total Minutes for Common Consent and Prayerful Listening/Discernment	80

Table 8. 4-02 B.M.

<i>April 2002 Business Meeting</i>		
Category	Item	Minutes Needed
PT	Opening time of prayer	5
CC	Minutes read and approved with alterations	5
D	Request for building use	0
CC	Membership approvals	10
CC, D	Nominations and issues for yearly meeting were presented for approval. <i>It is inappropriate to ask for input on nominations and issues during the meeting for business. Input is gathered before the business meeting.</i>	10
ID	Building changes as discussed between CE and the Building Committee	0
PLD	Prayer for Vacation Bible School	5
ID	Ministries Development reported on their activities	0
ID	Missions reported on their activities	0
PLD, CC	Missions presented traveling minutes for approval for Max and Abby and Randall. <i>Consider reading and presenting these during a worship service.</i>	10
ID	Stewards reported on their activities	0
ID	Staff reports from Susan and Alan	0
CC	Q&A regarding staff reports from Susan and Alan	10
CC	Resignation of youth pastor considered	20
CC	A report from the Building Committee was requested	5
ID	Thanks were given from the Van Meter family	0
PLD	The question was raised of how we would continue to relate to our former youth pastor and her family	10
PT	Closing prayer	5
	Total Minutes	95
	Total Minutes for Common Consent and Prayerful Listening/Discernment	85

Table 9. 4-02 E.C.M.

<i>April 2002 Executive Council Meeting</i>		
Category	Item	Minutes Needed
PT	Opening time of prayer	5
BTR, PT	The pastor led in a discussion on Macchia's "Requisites for Renewal"	20
ID	Report of Music and Outreach Minister	0
CC	Q&A regarding report of Music and Outreach Minister	5
PLD	Debriefing the loss of our youth pastor and subsequent plans for the youth pastor and her family, and plans for the youth ministry	60
ID	Ministries Development Committee reported on their activities	0
CC	An approval was needed regarding health insurance coverage for an employee at the child care center	15
PLD	Closing prayer	5
	Total Minutes	110
	Total Minutes for Common Consent and Prayerful Listening/Discernment	85

Table 10. 5-02 E.C.M.

<i>May 2002 Executive Council Meeting</i>		
Category	Item	Minutes Needed
PT	Opening time of prayer	5
ID	Stewards report on their activities	0
ID	Missions report on their activities	0
ID	Ministries Development report on their activities	0
ID	Chairperson of yearly meeting reps reported on the activity of the representatives	0
CC	A report was given regarding the status of the youth program in the absence of a youth pastor	5
ID	Pastor's report	0
CC	Q&A regarding the pastor's report	5
BTR	The pastor led a discussion on recruiting volunteers. <i>Since the Ministries Development Committee was not yet ready to make this approach a proposal, this discussion would probably have been better saved for another time. Nevertheless, it did have value in terms of a continuing emphasis on learning to think like pastors.</i>	20
PT	Closing prayer	5
	Total Minutes	40
	Total Minutes for Common Consent and Prayerful Listening/Discernment	10

Table 11. 6-02 B.M.

<i>June 2002 Business Meeting</i>		
Category	Item	Minutes Needed
PT	Opening time of prayer	5
CC	The minutes were read and approved as corrected	5
ID	Reports from Chuck and Alan	0
PT	Christian Education reported on their progress regarding a potential youth pastor. Time was taken to pray in this regard.	5
PT	Prayer was offered on behalf of our child care center director whose sister is quite ill	5
T	The chairman of the Ministries Development committee shared how he has seen God at work in the congregation	5
ID	Ministries Development reported on their activities	0
ID	Missions reported on their activities	0
ID	Stewards committee reported on their activities	0
D	Questions regarding the fate of trees in the parking lot were delegated to the Building Committee	0
PT	The chairperson of the yearly meeting delegates led in a time of prayer for our yearly meeting sessions	10
	Total Minutes	35
	Total Minutes for Common Consent and Prayerful Listening/Discernment	5

Table 12. 6-02 E.C.M.

<i>June 2002 Executive Council Meeting</i>		
Category	Item	Minutes Needed
BTR, PLD, PT, T, V	The entire meeting was similar to the February meeting. There was a time of biblical and theological reflection. Testimonies were shared regarding God's work among us. We tried to piece together what God might be shaping us to be especially in regard to the Marriage Task Force, EPIC, and the School of Ministry.	90
PT	Closing prayer	5
	Total Minutes	95
	Total Minutes for Common Consent and Prayerful Listening/Discernment	NA

Table 13. 7-02 E.C.M.

<i>July 2002 Executive Council Meeting</i>		
Category	Item	Minutes Needed
PT	Opening time of prayer	10
CC	Q&A regarding the reports of the Child Care Center Director and Minister of Music and Outreach	10
ID	Ministries Development reported their activities	0
CC	Christian Education gave an update on youth ministry	10
ID	Missions reported on their activities	0
CC	Treasurer reported on our financial state	5
CC, D	The yearly meeting chairperson asked what sorts of issues from yearly meeting should be reported to the business meeting. <i>The appropriate action would be for the chairperson to propose items to report to business meeting, and ask for the common consent of Executive Council.</i>	5
CC, PLD	A request was brought from the Spiritual Life committee regarding a leave of absence for the pastor to work on his doctorate	30
D	The director of the child care center brought up a custodial issue. <i>The appropriate action would have been for the concern to be considered first with Stewards, and then brought to Executive Council for approval as a proposal.</i>	0
PT	Closing prayer	5
	Total Minutes	75
	Total Minutes for Common Consent and Prayerful Listening/Discernment	65

Table 14. 8-02 B.M.

<i>August 2002 Business Meeting</i>		
Category	Item	Minutes Needed
PT	Opening time of prayer	5
CC	The minutes were reviewed and approved	5
PLD, CC	A proposal was presented for Executive Council regarding the pastor's leave of absence to work on his doctorate	10
PT	Prayer was asked for Little Friends Child Care Center	5
CC	Membership applications were considered	10
CC	Nominations were presented by Ministries Development	5
PT	Prayer was requested for the process of considering a youth pastor, and for the youth committee	10
PT	The chairperson of Missions asked for prayer for the Missions Conference	5
ID	Stewards reported on their activities	0
D	A concern about being able to hear in the sanctuary during the worship services was delegated to Spiritual Life	2
ID	Minister of Music and Outreach report	0
ID	Pastor's report	0
T	The pastor shared a story of inspiring volunteerism from the congregation	5
PT	Closing prayer for a number of issues	10
	Total Minutes	72
	Total Minutes for Common Consent and Prayerful Listening/Discernment	30

Table 15. 8-02 E.C.M.

<i>August 2002 Executive Council Meeting</i>		
Category	Item	Minutes Needed
PT	Opening time of prayer	5
BTR	The pastor led a discussion regarding thinking like pastors	10
CC	The possibility of an All-Church Planning Day was discussed and responsibilities delegated	20
ID	Missions reported on their activities	0
ID	Ministries Development reported on their activities	0
ID	Stewards reported on their activities	0
CC	Stewards gave an update on the carpet replacement. <i>This item is important information for Executive Council because it involves a large amount of unbudgeted dollars.</i>	5
CC	A Christmas Store item was delegated to a committee for deliberation	5
D	A proposal for an equipment purchase was brought to the meeting. The proposal needs to come through a committee before Executive Council	0
ID	Christian Education reported on their activities	0
ID	Little Friends reported on their activities	0
CC	The Building Committee reported on the state of completion and the state of available funds. <i>This is an important "heads up" for potential budgeting implications.</i>	10
ID	Spiritual Life reported on their activities	0
PT	Closing prayer for a number of issues	10
	Total Minutes	65
	Total Minutes for Common Consent and Prayerful Listening/Discernment	40

Table 16. 9-02 E.C.M.

<i>September 2002 Executive Council Meeting</i>		
Category	Item	Minutes Needed
CC	The minutes were revised and approved	5
BTR, T	The pastor led a discussion on Mary and Martha. The group spent time reflecting on how they had seen God at work.	20
CC, PLD	The 2003 proposed budget was presented	60
CC	An update was given on the All Church planning day	5
ID	Missions reported on their activities	0
CC	Missions recommended a traveling minute for David	5
CC, D	The Stewards chair asked for a confirmation for his authority to proceed on the gym carpet	5
	Total Minutes	100
	Total Minutes for Common Consent and Prayerful Listening/Discernment	80



Table 17. 10-02 B.M.

<i>October 2002 Business Meeting</i>		
Category	Item	Minutes Needed
PT	Opening time of prayer	5
CC	The minutes were approved	5
CC, PT	Information was shared regarding the approaching missions conference and prayer was asked regarding next year's chairperson	5
ID	Ministries Development reported their activities	0
CC	A membership application was considered	5
T, PT	A report for answered prayer for Little Friends was shared. Further prayer was requested	5
D	A question was raised regarding follow-up on VBS. <i>This should be referred to Christian Education or Spiritual Life</i>	0
CC, PLD	The treasurer outlined the proposed budget. This led to discussion regarding the youth ministry	30
	Total Minutes	55
	Total Minutes for Common Consent and Prayerful Listening/Discernment	45

Table 18. 10-02 E.C.M.

<i>October 2002 Executive Council Meeting</i>		
Category	Item	Minutes Needed
PT	Opening time of prayer	5
CC, PLD	Line of credit issues were discussed regarding improvements of buildings and grounds	30
CC, PLD	A letter was approved to be sent to RMYM regarding our potential contribution reduction	15
CC	A proposal regarding the custodians was presented	10
ID	Missions reported on their activities	0
ID	Spiritual Life reported on their activities	0
ID	Stewards reported on their activities	0
PLD, CC	The Christian Education chairperson presented a proposal for a youth pastor's position	45
PT	Closing prayer	5
	Total Minutes	110
	Total Minutes for Common Consent and Prayerful Listening/Discernment	100

Table 19. 11-02 E.C.M.

<i>November 2002 Executive Council Meeting</i>		
Category	Item	Minutes Needed
CTW, T, BTR, PT,	The meeting opened with a time of silence followed by a time to report on how we have seen God at work among us. There was a reflection on a scripture passage. We prayed.	15
CC, PLD	The proposed budget for Little Friends was reviewed	30
ID	Ministries Development read their list of officers and committees	0
CC	Missions inquired about a line item in their budget	5
CC, PLD	The revised 2003 budget was considered. It was agreed that we lacked a sense from the congregation on four important issues. Those will be the subjects of our next business meeting.	120
CC, PLD	Spiritual life brought a concern regarding staff management. <i>The group was too spent to consider this item.</i>	15
CC	The plan for the All Church Planning Day was reviewed. <i>The group was too spent to consider this item.</i>	15
	Total Minutes	200
	Total Minutes for Common Consent and Prayerful Listening/Discernment	185

Table 20. 12-02 B.M.

<i>December 2002 Business Meeting</i>		
Category	Item	Minutes Needed
PT	The meeting opened with a time of prayer	5
CC	The minutes were revised and approved	5
PLD, P, T, V	The final presentation of the budget was delayed for the purpose of listening. Twenty minutes each were given to listen to presentations and discussion regarding youth ministry, yearly meeting financial support, and building improvements. Ten were given to listen and discuss church planting. Each installment was closed with a time of prayer. <i>Discussion was freer, and listening easier, knowing that no decisions would be made.</i>	100
CC	The Ministries Development Committee's recommendation for committees and officers was read for approval	10
CC	The All Church Planning Day was introduced to the meeting	5
PT	The meeting closed with prayer	
	Total Minutes	125
	Total Minutes for Common Consent and Prayerful Listening/Discernment	120

*Observations:*

1. The following chart summarizes the time needed in each meeting for Common Consent issues and Prayerful Listening/Discernment issues.

Table 21. Time allotment

<i>Minutes Spent in Common Consent and Prayerful Listening/Discernment in 2002</i>		
	Business Meeting	Executive Council
January		80
February	66	NA
March		80
April	85	85
May		10
June	5	NA
July		65
August	45	40
September		80
October	45	100
November		185
December	120	
<b>Average</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>81</b>
Average (Omitting high and low)	60	76

2. The times from the Executive Council meetings of February and June are designated “Not Applicable” (NA) because they were meetings of an unusual format without clearly differentiated boundaries between activities contained in those meetings. Both meetings were 95 minutes in total length.
3. Although extraordinarily long and short meetings are represented on the lists, the average times spent in Common Consent (CC) and Prayerful Listening and Discernment (PLD) varied little whether meetings of exceptional length and brevity are included or not.

4. The time in meetings for business actually needed for “doing business” (CC and PLD) is surprising little: less than an hour and a half in Executive Council, and about one hour in Business Meetings.

*Concerns:*

1. The absence of *verbal* committee and staff reports raises the concerns of general lack of information and accountability. Those are viable concerns, in light of which these considerations must be emphasized:
  - a. Communication of information is vitally important within a Friends congregation. However, communicating only by verbal reports to Executive Council and Business meeting reaches well less than ten percent of the congregation. If communication is important, then it is important to use better ways of communicating than in meetings for business. This requires a shift in expectations by the congregation and congregational leaders in how information is distributed.
  - b. The proposed model for a business meeting is patterned after a service of worship. Information can be distributed by other means than in a meeting for business. Information distributed in a meeting for business detracts from the atmosphere of worship unless it bears directly on items for Common Consent or Prayerful Listening/Discernment.

- c. Committee chairpersons and staff are strongly encouraged to verbally report on the activity of the Spirit observed during the fulfillment of their duties. Stories of the work of God do contribute to an atmosphere of worship, and are inspiring to the listeners.
  - d. It is vitally important that written reports be distributed in a timely manner, and that those reports are read by parties responsible for accountability.
2. Why should a chairperson or congregation member want to attend a business meeting if they will not be giving or hearing reports of committee and staff activities?
- a. Those who come to meetings for business to hear reports of committee and staff activities can find that same information elsewhere, and can respond to the appropriate committees or individuals.
  - b. This is a change in the content of meetings for business. The priority is neither exchange of information or making decisions. The priorities are paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction, and following in holy obedience.

### **PROPOSED TYPICAL MEETINGS FOR BUSINESS**

Based on the approximately eighty minutes needed for the pursuit of Common Consent and Prayerful Listening/Discernment in an average meeting for business, the

following outline for a typical business meeting is proposed. It is not possible to accurately predict the necessary time for some items in a business meeting. Furthermore, corporate discernment can require substantial blocks of time, and should not be subject to rigid time restrictions. Nevertheless, experience, as represented in the preceding tables, indicates that the following time estimations are realistic.

Call to Worship (5 minutes): The clerk opens the meeting with a time of silence to attend to the Present Christ. The clerk may choose to open or close the time with an inspirational reading.

Testimony (15 minutes): The attenders are invited to share how they have seen God at work within the ministry of the congregation since the last meeting. This is an important time where the participants see that Christ truly is building our church.

Biblical Reflection (10 minutes): The pastor or other chosen person leads the group in a brief, prepared biblical reflection directly applicable to the work of God witnessed within the congregation. The intent of this reflection is for the business meeting to connect their unfolding story with the narrative of the biblical record.

Common Consent (40 minutes): Items are considered that require the affirmation of the business meeting, but would not be identified as issues of discernment. These issues would include membership applications, approval of nominees, and information distribution necessary for the meeting.

Prayerful Listening and Discernment (40 minutes): A prayerful, listening attitude is called for in the meeting by the reading of the Business Meeting Statement and Query. Then items are presented, and when appropriate, a sense of the meeting is identified.

Offering (10 minutes): Adequate time is preserved at the conclusion of the business to reflect on the work God is doing in the congregation, where God seems to be taking the congregation, and what response of holy obedience is forming at the meeting. The meeting prays accordingly.

Prayer Throughout (10 minutes): At any point in the meeting for business it is desirable and appropriate to pray.

The total time for the above meeting is 130 minutes. Two hours and ten minutes is a length respectful of the schedules of our volunteer leaders. If, in assembling the agenda, the clerk perceives the meeting will likely be longer, the clerk can make some accommodating adjustments. Nevertheless, the clerk will always need to plan to preserve the sense of worship in the meeting. Experience demonstrates that allowing eighty minutes for business deliberations is nearly always adequate, and not infrequently, is more than enough time.

Nevertheless, it would be a misconception to conclude that business deliberations should only take eighty minutes. A time allotment does not determine the deliberations in the meeting. Rather, the items for consideration determine the time necessary for deliberation. The nature of any item may require careful and lengthy deliberation that may or may not be foreseen by the clerk. In this case, the clerk may need to guard the sense of worship in the meeting by directing the meeting's focus toward the item for business and away from the clock. Or, the clerk may discern that the item needs more time than is available at the moment, and a future meeting is scheduled to allow for adequate consideration of the item for business.

### *Crucial Issues for First Denver Friends Church*

In developing and experimenting with components of this model, the church leadership expressed an interest in growing in their understanding of business as worship. As various church leaders critiqued this model, the concern was frequently voiced that business meeting participants would be concerned that communication was being diminished, and that some items that used to come to business meeting are no longer addressed in that context. They correctly observed that change is being proposed that will alter the process of decision-making in our church. The members of our church value their freedom to participate in the decision-making process, and specific efforts will be needed to preserve, enhance, and encourage that participation. We will need to build on shared values to meet a common objective, maintain open and accessible communication, and consider these changes together. Furthermore, we have been doing our business in particular way for a long time. Altering well-worn habits will require careful, intentional action. Therefore, if the preceding model of business as worship is to function effectively at First Denver Friends Church, certain issues will need to be addressed peculiar to this faith community. These issues are:

1. Embrace the conviction of business as worship.
2. Create and adopt new structures for informing the congregation.
3. Prepare an agenda to plan for careful use of business meeting time.
4. Build community to strengthen trust for delegation.

Embrace the conviction of business as worship. Change does not come easily.

Therefore, proposed change needs to be justified by a worthwhile objective. The hope of following Christ's leadership more closely by pursuing business as worship is the objective that justifies the proposed changes in this model. We desire our meetings for business to be meetings for worship. To achieve that end, we will need to develop



together effective means of gathering information, contributing opinions, and problem-solving outside the meetings for business, while preserving business meeting time for paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction, and responding in holy obedience. The preceding model was developed to achieve the latter; more work is needed on the former.

Create and adopt new structures for informing the congregation. The free flow of information and welcome participation by the membership is integral to the operation of a Friends church. This congregation holds firmly to the Friends value that concerns are funneled upward from individuals to boards and staff, rather than the other way around.<sup>36</sup> Preserving a free flow of accessible information is indispensable to preserving the value of the congregational business meeting. Removing information distribution in the business meeting itself means that information needs to be readily available elsewhere. When the present clerk and two former clerks reviewed this model, they voiced the urgent need to keep the congregation informed and invite their participation.

Creating and adopting new structures for informing the congregation is largely a matter of creating and adopting new mindsets for informing the congregation. The business meeting is not the place to herald information. However, there are several available means of informing the congregation that are more effective than making a report in a meeting for business. Similarly, those who would like to participate in an operational decision can do so at the appropriate committee meeting or with the appropriate person. The business meeting is not the place to inquire about the difficulties with the sound system in the sanctuary. However, there is a better place than the business

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<sup>36</sup> Jack L. Willcuts, *The Sense of the Meeting*, ed. Susan Willcuts Kendall (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 1992), 73.

meeting to voice that concern where it will be heard. New means of communication will require an administrative structure for reminding the congregation in a timely and continuous manner how they can participate.

Prepare an agenda to plan for careful use of business meeting time. We have little chance of gaining a sense of worship in our meetings for business apart from a carefully managed agenda that has been prepared in advance. An agenda eliminates items that are not yet ready for deliberation. An agenda provides the space and priority needed for items of discernment. An agenda preserves the elements of the meeting that contribute to a worshipful atmosphere. An agenda encourages preparation by the participants in the meeting that enhances both their presentation as well as the subsequent deliberation of their item for business. The responsibility of the clerk to prepare the agenda will be described in greater detail in the next section. However, all of the participants in the business of the church will need to make the necessary adjustments for an agenda to be prepared in advance of meetings for business.

Build community to strengthen trust for delegation. The model proposed in this chapter requires fewer corporate decisions about operational issues and a higher degree of delegation than is currently practiced. Increased delegation requires increased trust.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, developing community through the process of business must be emphasized in order to establish the trust necessary for the delegation of operational responsibilities.

Building community in the business meeting appears to be a more difficult task than in Executive Council because there is a greater variation of participants from one meeting to the next. Frankly, this author is not sure how this will develop. Again, the role

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<sup>37</sup> Means, "Adjustments," 5.

of Executive Council participants in the meeting for business will be influential.

Furthermore, the practice of worship will bond the group. A former clerk who reviewed this model selected this phrase from this chapter as being especially significant, “no decision can be a good decision that divides rather than unites.” He recommended this phrase be repeated often.

An important issue in establishing and maintaining community will be the business meeting’s participation in spiritual formation in the course of the meeting. In a spiritual formation group led by this author, the participants responded to a question regarding how they were learning to depend on Christ by participating in this group. The answers were very strong statements of corporate spirituality. The following are some representative responses shared by the group:

“I experience Christ like a spiritual transfusion from the rest of the group.”

“As other people listen to my story, they help me see Christ in the mundaneness of my own life. I, then, am better able to see Christ in their stories.”

“We experience dependence on Christ together. It happens individually, but not just individually. Somehow we are doing this dependence on Christ together.”

These responses were surprising to the author because the responses arose during the flow of an ordinary meeting where a discussion of corporate spirituality was neither implied nor intended. These responses were encouraging in two ways. First, they were an indication that the participants in the group had unintentionally, but effectively, moved beyond an individual spirituality to a corporate spirituality during their eighteen months in the group. Second, community was formed in the course of pursuing spiritual formation together. This experience lends credence to the hope of growing into a

corporate spirituality and establishing community in meetings for business that also attempt to depend on Christ in an environment of spiritual formation.

### **ROLES OF THE PRESIDING CLERK, THE PASTOR, AND EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

In addition to the four crucial issues listed above there are three crucial roles to be filled for the effective pursuit of business as worship. The three roles are those of the presiding clerk, the pastor, and Executive Council. For this model of worship as business to work in Executive Council at least two people will have to hold the vision for that model.<sup>38</sup> Olsen insists that one of the two needs to be the pastor. In the Friends' model certainly the clerk would be the other.

#### *The Presiding Clerk*

The general responsibilities of the presiding clerk are outlined well by Hugh Doncaster:

The clerk's functions are first to bring before the meeting such business as it is right to consider on any particular occasion, to arrange for this to be done in an orderly and efficient way, and to ensure that relevant information is available. Subsequently it is his business to see that decisions are implemented. But in between these "secretarial duties", he "presides over" or "takes the chair at" the meeting. Neither term is correct; he is neither president nor chairman. He will listen carefully, from time to time direct the meeting to consider particular points, make sure that full free discussion has taken place, perhaps suggest a period of quiet waiting if discussion seems to be reaching deadlock. He will record the sense of the meeting as clearly and concisely as he can as soon as he can detect it. But it is not his function to influence the meeting in one or another direction, still less to give a casting vote. If he has strong views, he must be self-effacing and as far as possible weigh the sense of the meeting without prejudice.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 77.

<sup>39</sup> Hugh L. Doncaster, *Quaker Organisation and Business Meetings* (London, UK: Friends Home Service Committee, 1958), 69.

In this description it is apparent that the clerk's primary responsibilities are engaging the meeting in the process of corporate discernment, and subsequently, identifying the sense of the meeting. The "secretarial" responsibilities are supportive of the clerk's primary responsibilities. Consequently, the qualifications of a "discernmentarian" are precisely the qualifications of a clerk:

The discernmentarians should be spiritually sensitive and caring. He or she should be a good listener and thinker and should have no personal agenda to protect. The discernmentarians should be nurtured in prayer and should be able to identify the spiritual gifts of other people; he or she should be fair. The discernmentarians should have the patience to see an issue through without rushing the process and should be accepted and trusted by everyone in the group.<sup>40</sup>

In the model of worshipful business presented in this chapter, the clerk has three primary responsibilities that are more specifically defined than the general definitions above. These three responsibilities are:

1. To prepare an agenda that facilitates worshipful business
2. To build community during the business deliberations
3. To be familiar with the process of corporate discernment

Prepare the agenda. When deciding on the issues appropriate for the business agenda the clerk must carefully separate out those operational, problem-solving, or implementation issues that can be handled outside the meeting for business. The clerk can ask herself, "Is this a value-laden issue or a problem solving issue?" If it appears to be a value-laden issue, whether the matter is an item for discernment can be further clarified by asking, "Does God have anything to do with this issue?"

Ignatius held matters of discernment to always be questions that can be answered with a "yes" or "no."<sup>41</sup> This is a helpful insight in preparing an agenda and clerking a meeting. If a proposal cannot be framed in such a way that the group can carefully weigh

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<sup>40</sup> Morris and Olsen, *Discerning*, 71.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

a “yes” or “no” response, then the issue at hand is not ready for discernment. In that case the issue is often one of problem-solving, and business meetings are poor venues for problem-solving.

The difficulty may also be one of lack of information. Information gathering necessarily precedes problem-solving. The business meeting can be a helpful venue for gathering perspectives from the constituency. That information is then taken outside the meeting to be deliberated by a problem-solving group before the issue returns to the business meeting. In either case, the clerk is careful to keep problem-solving outside the business meeting in order to preserve time for the primary function of corporate discernment.

In many Friends business meetings participants are accustomed to bringing issues from the floor of the meeting. A prepared agenda almost precludes items for consideration brought without forewarning. The point of preparing an agenda is not to discourage requests from anyone. Rather, the hope is that each item will be channeled into the venue where it receives the best attention possible. The clerk is responsible to respond appropriately to each request. The congregation is responsible to meeting the clerk’s published deadline for items to be considered for the agenda. Prudently limiting the quantity of business serves to preserve the quality of the business meeting.

Build community during the business deliberations. The clerk is aware of the imperative dynamic of building community in the process of corporate discernment. Therefore, both in the preparation and implementation of the agenda, the clerk is attentive to the need to build relationships within the congregation and with God.<sup>42</sup> Since the task of the meeting is to uncover a decision together, rather than make a decision by any

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<sup>42</sup> Orwiler, Cox Interview.

means, the clerk is aware that no decision can be a good decision that divides rather than unites.

There is a place for making non-relational decisions. However, that place is not the environment of unity. The clerk understands this dynamic that underscores the need for a carefully prepared agenda. For example, the Christian Education department may be considering ordering curriculum from a publisher not associated with the denomination. If that information is brought to a general business meeting for their approval, strong opinions could likely surface. Is this really an item for *discernment*? Hopefully, the Christian Education department can be trusted to make good decisions in this regard. The responsibility of curriculum has been delegated to them, and it is not an item for unity decision-making by the congregation.

Deliberation of this issue in a congregational business meeting or Executive Council costs both time and division among the constituency, if even for a half hour. In this case, is there is not likely a potential gain worthy of the potential cost. The clerk is aware of unifying the community of faith around value-laden issues, and avoiding dividing the community over implementation issues.

Be familiar with the process of corporate discernment. Barry Morley offers a simple and effective description of the discernment process in a Friends' business meeting. He identifies three components in the process of arriving at the sense of the meeting.<sup>43</sup>

The first component is that of *release*. An item presented for deliberation may evoke an emotional response from one or more individuals. The words of the person may

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<sup>43</sup> Barry Morley, *Beyond Consensus: Salvaging the Sense of the Meeting*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet no. 307 (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1993), 16-19.

or may not clarify their concern. However, their emotion belies an important underlying concern. The clerk patiently rides out high emotional tides, attentive to the value that may not be clear even to the speaker. Discernment will not take place until the tide has had a chance to recede.

The second component is *long focus*. The long focus is that the ultimate objective is not to get one's way, but to find the sense of the meeting. The sharing of good thinking is of great value. The competition of ideas is too short-focused to achieve a sense of the meeting. The clerk is not interested in managing a debate, but in facilitating the discovery of the sense of the meeting. A fruitful path leading to the discovery of the sense of the meeting is the weighing of prospective leadings that one may sense or hear during the course of the meeting for business. Paul Anderson offers these questions to test one's leadings:

1. Is this leading in keeping with the teachings of the Scriptures?
2. Are there examples from the past that may provide direction for the present?
3. Is a leading self-serving, or is it motivated by one's love for God and others?
4. Does it matter who gets the credit?
5. Is the ministry of Jesus being continued in what we do?<sup>44</sup>

These parameters for testing one's leading suggest the importance of careful speaking in a context where the hope is to discern the sense of the meeting. Quakers were known from their beginning for affording women the opportunity to speak, because the authority to speak was given by the Spirit Who filled both men and women. Fox was also sure to remind that without the Spirit's anointing neither men nor women should speak in church.<sup>45</sup> We remain fallible mortals who see through the glass darkly. Both because

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<sup>44</sup> Paul N. Anderson, *With Christ in Decision Making* (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press).

<sup>45</sup> Douglas Gwyn, *Seekers Found: Atonement in Early Quaker Experience* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 2000), 219.



what we see is tangled up with our humanity, and also because seeing is, nevertheless, possible, we need reminders to speak carefully in meetings for business.

Morley identifies the final component as the *transition to Light*. Ultimately, it is in Christ that the sense of the meeting is recognized. This underscores the importance of retaining an attitude of worship during the deliberation of business. The one place in which the community of faith finds itself drawn together in heart and mind is in Christ, the Head of the church. As Morley observes, these three components weave in and out of each other as the meeting progresses. Facilitating a discernment process is a sensitive assignment: being sensitive to people and to the Spirit. It is a *process*, and the clerk must retain a sense of that process.

### *The Pastor*

A discernment-based decision-making process is an involved and important praxis of faith. It is the most common place where the members of church leadership *together* integrate their faith and their practice. Furthermore, the process being described has been identified as being counter-cultural. Is there a more important and fertile venue for discipleship than among a group of volunteer leaders being tested to integrate their faith and practice in a manner that often runs counter to the secular world in which they live? The need here is not for the pastor to be an administrator, but for the pastor to be a spiritual director.

“A spiritual director is ... one who stands alongside another, listening and paying attention to the inner spiritual movements in the experience of God.”<sup>46</sup> Following the living Christ is the very definition of discipleship, but what does that look like at a given

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<sup>46</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 53.

moment? How does one leave the ways and means of the secular business world as one enters the church boardroom? How does one “uncover” decisions rather than “make” decisions? Help is needed.

Olsen writes of attending to two movements in spiritual direction: “(1) ways in which surrender, relinquishment, and letting go to God are happening and (2) ways in which taking hold, caring for what God cares about, and responding to a deep inner calling are taking shape.”<sup>47</sup> Surrendering to the work of the Spirit, and identifying the Spirit’s calling are the substance of a Friends’ meeting for business. These are rarely issues in any context outside of the church. The pastor is the recognized spiritual leader of the church. The pastor must attend to these things and lead others to do the same. This is the role of a spiritual director.

This role is fulfilled by:

- Sensitively drawing out the stories of the congregation.<sup>48</sup> The value of the congregation’s narrative has been repeatedly emphasized. It is the pastor as spiritual director who consistently recognizes the value of hearing our story.
- Helping the congregation reflect on its story as God’s story.<sup>49</sup> If the congregation is to begin to see the work of God in their midst as a real chapter in God’s unfolding story of redemption, someone must keep bringing it back to that perspective. This is not practiced outside the church. The pastor repeatedly brings the congregation back into the flow of God’s narrative.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 78.

- Listening and talking to leaders in one-on-one settings.<sup>50</sup> Attending to Christ is an acquired tendency. The pastor coaches leaders from the perspective of their own lives and responsibilities.
- Creating a trusting environment in which listening is encouraged.<sup>51</sup> Above all, a spiritual director knows how to listen. Above all, the congregation needs to learn to listen to God and each other. The spiritual director facilitates an environment of listening.

In Olsen's model and in this author's model the assumption is that the Executive Council must become a venue for individual and corporate spiritual formation in the context of church leadership.<sup>52</sup> It is the pastor's responsibility as *pastor* to lead the council in that direction.

### *Executive Council*

It is not unusual to read of the effectiveness of the Friends' approach to business varying inversely with the size of the group.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, Sheeran maintains that the key to successful corporate discernment in a larger group is a large enough percentage of participants who are of one mind regarding the nature of the procedure.<sup>54</sup> It is impossible to be specific on the percentage. The issue is one of group dynamics, including the respect the larger group has for those who are of one mind regarding the process. The implication here is not that a coalition is present in the business meeting that is of one

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>53</sup> Frances E. Pollard, Beatrice E. Pollard, and Robert S. W. Pollard, *Democracy and the Quaker Method* (London, UK: The Bannisdale Press, 1949), 53.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Sheeran, interview by Charles M. Orwiler, May 02 2002, Denver, CO.

mind on a particular decision. Rather, there is present a quorum of individuals who will pursue business as worship. They are practiced in attending to the Spirit in the process of deliberating business. Their presence positively influences the participation of the larger group to function as a culture of listening.

The small group that is instrumental in the decision-making at First Denver Friends Church is the Executive Council. A method that would be intended for a congregational business meeting of up to fifty should first prove effective with a group as small as a dozen. Executive Council is the place to begin. That becomes the laboratory for corporate spirituality for the congregational business meeting. This author speculates that the method will go no farther in the larger congregational business meeting than it is practiced by Executive Council.

There are a number of examples for making the establishment of this model the top priority in Executive Council:

- Obviously, in the context of this paper, this model is the preferred decision-making method.
- Executive Council meets twice as often as the congregational business meeting.
- Attendance at Executive Council is quite consistent.
- Executive Council is composed exclusively of leaders. Consequently, its influence is multiplied far beyond the meeting room.
- A unified Executive Council that shares a common understanding of the procedure would likely provide the minimum quorum of understanding at a

congregational business meeting to expedite the function and adoption of the model in the business meeting.

In fact, the inverse of the reasons above provides ample substantiation for why this model would be impossible to implement without first being adopted by Executive Council. Consequently, the role of the Executive Council is critical in the implementation of this model. Executive Council is influential, and that influence must be applied carefully. As the members of Executive Council become familiar with a discernment-based model of decision-making, they will have the opportunity of extending this culture of listening into the business meeting and their respective committees. Executive Council's leadership is one of broadening the base of attending to Christ considerably beyond what is taking place in the current decision-making structure. Because of the influence of Executive Council, a growing percentage of the congregation can come to discover how Christ leads His church through ordinary members of this congregation.

Danny Morris suggests six barriers to the adoption of a discernment model in a congregation. These will be reviewed briefly below since all of them have a direct bearing on the function of Executive Council. Three more difficulties observed by Charles Olsen are included.

1. *People resist change.* Correction: *Learn a new approach to conducting meetings.*<sup>55</sup> The significance of the role of Executive Council has been detailed above regarding its role in the congregation's learning a new approach. Executive Council has demonstrated a desire to move in the direction of this model. Nevertheless, this model

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<sup>55</sup> Morris, *Yearning*, 129-30.

requires noteworthy change from our current practices. Learning a new approach will take two to three years.

*2. Consensus is impractical. Correction: Understand the consensus principle.*<sup>56</sup>

Fortunately, this church has an established respect for the principle of consensus. We have room to grow in understanding unity. To grow in understanding we need to become more familiar with the Friends tradition of unity based on the presence of Christ.

*3. The church is like a business. Correction: Train left-brain people to do right-brain work.*<sup>57</sup> There are many aspects of church business that *are* “like a business.”

Those venues need to be respected and participants unleashed accordingly who function well in that capacity. At the same time corporate discernment is understood as the foundation of the decision-making in the Friends church. The ways and means of this form of decision-making must be carefully modeled by those who understand, and learned by those who are gaining understanding.

*4. The pastor is in charge. Correction: The “pastor in charge” finds a higher way to be the pastor.*<sup>58</sup> In particular, the higher way, as described in this project, is for the pastor to facilitate Christ’s leadership. There exists a solid respect between the church and the pastor in the context of First Denver Friends Church. There is no call for authoritarianism, and the pastor is encouraged to find “a higher way to be the pastor.”

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 132, 33.

However, the pastor is often too quick to speak, which dampens dialogue and encourages dependence upon him.

5. *Natural leaders and power people in the church control decision.* Correction:

*Lay leadership finds a higher way to be the church.*<sup>59</sup> Mutual respect among the lay leaders is the norm. Lay leaders want to be shown the “higher way” of leadership. However, change takes effort, and they will need to be convinced that this change is worth the effort.

6. *Busy people favor brief meetings.* Correction: *Church leadership must decide*

*whether it prizes expediency or spiritual guidance.*<sup>60</sup> A leader in this church’s leadership environment must respect the time necessary for discernment. Simultaneously, the meeting must respect the busy leader’s time, and plan meetings that use individual’s time most effectively. Again, the value of the properly-prepared agenda is emphasized. This author is convinced that spiritual guidance *is* the expedient way when pursued properly. However, this is a point of growth for all of us. Not all of our leaders are familiar with this principle or convinced of its practical value.

7. *“Corporate spirituality” is a foreign and uncomfortable concept.*<sup>61</sup> This is

where the strong pastoral role as a spiritual director is required. Patience and persistence over the long haul will be parallel to the process in a spiritual formation group. An annual retreat for the purpose of formation and planning would expedite this process. Executive

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 133, 34.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 134, 35.

<sup>61</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, xv.

Council is the model. If they cannot practice a corporate spirituality, it is difficult to imagine the congregational business meeting succeeding.

8. *A discernment model requires a carefully differentiated rhythm of discernment and implementation.*<sup>62</sup> This is a barrier for us because the church's annual planning cycle could use significant refinement, especially with regard to anticipating agenda items months in advance. Again, a retreat for formation that also provides a rested environment to plan the year would serve the church well. Without the retreat the pastor and clerk should meet to prepare the annual planning cycle to be reviewed and approved by Executive Council.

9. *Corporate discernment assumes the practice of individual discernment by participating members.*<sup>63</sup> This is an important issue for the church. Although corporate discernment is understood in a general sense, there is not a common base of understanding or practice regarding individual discernment. The answer for the congregation lays in a long-term, systematic, consistent foundation of spiritual formation. However, it is practically impossible for the members of Executive Council to add a meeting for spiritual formation apart from meetings for business. Consequently, the pastor, as spiritual director, must use the context of Executive Council to encourage and model the practice of discernment on an individual basis. Yet again, such a process would be expedited in an annual retreat.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 89.



The significance of the role of Executive Council is evident and encouraging. When the Executive Council practices a decision-making model in which it listens to Christ, understands His direction, and responds in holy obedience, the life of the church could be transformed.<sup>64</sup>

### ADDRESSING PROBLEMS

In Chapter Three seven difficulties were named with regard to the Quaker decision-making process. In Chapter Four three difficulties were named with regard to developing a culture of listening. The proposed model has addressed these ten difficulties as described below.

1. *The Quaker decision-making method is time-consuming.* Yes, the process of discernment is necessarily time-intensive. Purging the business meeting agenda of items that can be handled better elsewhere preserves time for prayerful discernment. Furthermore, following an order of worship in the meeting for business preserves an environment in which the sense of the meeting is gained with the greatest effectiveness and efficiency.

2. *The presiding clerk may not be adequately gifted.* There is no substitute for giftedness. However, delineating clear expectations of the clerk can help a clerk perform what can be a somewhat ambiguously-defined responsibility. Furthermore, preparing an agenda before both Executive Council and Business Meeting will lend considerable help to the administrative task of the clerk. Working in tandem with the pastor as spiritual

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., xvi.

director will help relieve the clerk of the responsibility of spiritual discernment. That is, as the pastor brings the group along in becoming a culture of listening, this will facilitate the process of the group's working together to find a sense of the meeting.

3. *"Ungifted" and "gifted" Friends may abdicate or usurp responsibility.* There are two components in the model to address this concern. The first is in the sharing of personal narrative. It is the author's observation that people catch the inspiration of sharing stories of God's work. The focus quickly becomes the grace of God, rather than the giftedness (or lack of giftedness) of an individual. Occasionally, the clerk or pastor can prompt more subdued members of the meeting to share stories of God's work.

The second component of the model that can positively affect this dynamic is the pastor's personally mentoring the members of Executive Council, especially regarding spiritual formation in the context of leadership. The strength of the model is developing Executive Council as a core leadership team to function well in a discernment-based model of decision-making. This, in turn, will have a positive effect on the congregational business meeting.

4. *There is often a restricted understanding of discernment.* This difficulty is paired with the concern listed earlier in this chapter of a system of corporate discernment in which the members may not practice individual discernment. The need for spiritual formation at this point is pressing, especially with the core group of Executive Council. The leaders in a discernment-based model must understand discernment.

Consequently, the pastor's role as spiritual director is again emphasized. The Executive Council needs the pastor to maximize the opportunities in the meetings for business for instruction and experience in discernment. The model of business as a worship service lends itself to spiritual formation of the participants. Introducing content on individual formation will necessarily take one outside the experience of Friends, who have focused almost exclusively on corporate discernment. In particular, the Ignatian approach to individual discernment is quite compatible with the corporate model of Quakerism. Individual mentoring opportunities as well as an annual retreat for Executive Council can greatly enhance this important growing process.

*5. A common understanding of the process can be lacking.* This is clearly the case at First Denver Friends Church. There are four components within the proposed model that explicitly and implicitly teach an understanding of the process. These are the four components: the agenda, the business order parallel to the worship order, the reading of the Business Meeting Statement and Query, and an annual planning and formation retreat for Executive Council.

*6. A model developed in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England may need significant adaptation for twenty-first century application in North America.* This model is an attempt to address that concern. In particular, this model is an attempt to apply the values of the culture of listening that emerged in the seventeenth century among Friends in a contemporary Evangelical Friends context. In this context worship and decision-making practices reflect, but do not replicate, the practices of the first few generations of

Quakers. Furthermore, the model is designed to function as an instructional model to help develop a culture of listening within a contemporary context that does not encourage attentiveness.

*7. The process is difficult.* It is the author's observation that Friends too often assume our method of decision-making to be easy because it is simple. It is, and ought to be, simple. It ought to look like laying aside all other things to attend to Christ Who is present among us. However, there are many things to lay aside, and that is the difficult part. We need to lay aside some of our expectations, our emotional investments, our biases, our pride, and our indolence to attend to Christ, understand His direction, and respond in holy obedience.

This is the work of the spiritually-disciplined life. The meeting for business is itself a spiritual discipline. It is not just a means of making decisions. The meeting for business is the art of voluntary attention practiced within a culture of listening. This art requires the discipline, instruction and practice necessary for any substantial human endeavor.

*8. The "practical irrelevance of actual obedience to Christ."* It is the intent of this model to demonstrate to every participant the practical relevance of obedience to Christ. In the model close attention is paid to the unfolding story of Christ in our lives. Attending to Christ's direction is woven into every aspect of the decision-making process. Finally, the "offering" time at the close of business is the opportunity to express specifically what obedience looks like for a particular people at a particular moment in time. The

development of a lifestyle of discernment on an individual basis (alluded to in #4) provides a foundation for the understanding of the practical relevance of obedience to Christ.

9. *The pervasive tendency to choose productivity over fruitfulness.* Understanding the value and difference of these two qualities is imperative in the workings of a discernment-based model of decision-making. Productivity is good, and its place is preserved distinct from the fruitful process of discernment. Work needs to get done, and that work is often obedience to Christ's direction. Nevertheless, apart from Christ we can do nothing. Fruit being born on the limbs of the church is dependent on the church abiding in Christ. The Friends' model of decision-making is an attempt to preserve fruitful abiding in a culture of productivity. The preparation of the agenda and the order of worship for the meetings for business are specific efforts to preserve fruitfulness.

10. *Learning to think in terms of the community rather than in terms of the individual.*

This is perhaps the most countercultural of these ten difficulties. In Olsen's study, this was identified as a pervasive difficulty.<sup>65</sup> Again, Executive Council is the key group in this model to develop into a group that begins to explore and understand corporate spirituality. The function of Executive Council is spiritual formation in the context of church leadership. The hope for growth in the congregation in understanding corporate spirituality rests to a significant degree in the growth of the Executive Council.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., xv.

## IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

### *0-3 Months*

#### I. Executive Council

- A. Continue practicing and developing Call to Worship, Biblical Reflection, and Testimony.
  - 1. These activities are introducing the Model by experience. The Model has not yet been introduced.
  - 2. Keep track of time on these activities as per the recommended times in the model.
  - 3. Ask two committee chairs to prepare a report in the form of reporting God's activity.
  - 4. By the end of three months, all reports are in the form of reporting God's activity.
- B. Add, with the cooperation of the clerk, a prayer person at the Council meetings.
  - 1. The prayer person will volunteer from the attenders for one meeting.
  - 2. His or her responsibility will be to pray throughout the meeting.
  - 3. A small placard on which "Prayer" is written will be placed before them to remind all that prayer is a foundation of our activity.
  - 4. At the close of the meeting the prayer person will lead in prayer regarding the issues of which she or he has noted during the course of the meeting.
- C. Prepare the agenda in advance.
  - 1. The Council members are informed of a deadline by which the clerk must have their items for agenda consideration.
  - 2. Pastor meets with the clerk so they can begin to develop expertise in preparing the agenda according to the Democratic – Bureaucratic Continuum.
- D. Pastor meets with two Executive Council members per month to listen and encourage.

#### II. Business Meeting

- A. Publish an agenda one week in advance.
  - 1. Request items in advance for the business meeting agenda, without requiring the items to be submitted in advance.
  - 2. Publish the agenda in the bulletin and on the Web site.
- B. Add a prayer person, biblical reflection and testimony to the business meeting.
  - 1. The prayer volunteer will serve in an identical capacity to that in Executive Council.

2. The pastor will offer a biblical reflection and give a testimony of Christ's activity in the congregation. Spontaneous participation will be invited.

#### *4-6 Months*

##### I. Executive Council

###### A. Continue

1. Call to Worship
2. Biblical Reflection
3. Testimony, especially in the form of committee reports
4. Prayer Person
5. Agenda Prepared in Advance
6. Pastor meets with two Executive Council members per month.

###### B. Discuss the Model

1. Prepare a readable version of the Model, and distribute to Executive Council
2. Schedule a fixed amount of time to discuss the Model in at least two meetings, with no pressure for decision.
3. Listen and revise.

###### C. The communication proposal

1. A task force is named to develop a communication proposal in light of the Model.
2. The proposal is approved, and implementation and revision begins.

##### II. Business Meeting

###### A. Continue

1. Publish agenda one week in advance.
2. Prayer person
3. Biblical reflection

###### B. Add reports as testimonies and feed back on communication.

1. Chairpersons offer their report in the form of a testimony to Christ's work (in addition to their otherwise published reports). Spontaneous participation is requested.
2. Feedback from the participants is requested regarding the performance of the new communication plan. Note: this communication model does not need business meeting approval or knowledge of the decision-making model. The communication changes all improve the current inadequate system.

*7-9 Months*

- I. Executive Council
  - A. Continue methods as noted above.
  - B. Adopt a revised decision-making model.
  - C. Detail a plan for implementation, which by now, should be a smooth transition.
  - D. Name a task force to develop a plan of implementation for the business meeting, which may include changes in the frequency of business meetings.
- II. Business Meeting
  - A. Continue changes introduced in previous meetings.
  - B. Continue to ask for feedback regarding the communication plan, and revise accordingly.
  - C. Add an Offering time during the meeting for business.

*10-12 Months*

- I. Executive Council Retreat
  - A. Primary purpose: Develop a culture of listening in which the art of voluntary attention can be practiced
  - B. Secondary purpose: Prayerfully prepare an annual agenda for Executive Council and the business meeting.
- II. Present a decision-making model for the approval of the business meeting.
  - A. Most, if not all, of the components of the model will have already been experienced by the participants.
  - B. A functioning communication plan is in place, and improved by several revisions.
  - C. The model has been revised to offer a discernment-based model of decision-making in which participation in the business of the church is increased from the prior model, and the congregation is grateful for the change.



## CONCLUSION

The motivation behind this project is my desire for our congregation to depend upon Christ to lead our church. If Christ is the Head of His church, including our local congregation, ought not our decision-making process, perhaps above all else, reflect the power and presence of our risen Lord who reigns as Head of our faith community? In this project I have addressed that question by posing the problem: How can the decision-making process for business meetings in First Denver Friends Church be a process dependent upon paying attention to Christ, understanding His direction, and following in holy obedience? In considering this problem I have established the principle of Christ's leadership in the church, and then offered practical methods for applying that principle by means of the proposed model for decision-making.

This project and its included model targeted a specific congregation within a specific Christian tradition. However, the aspiration for Christ to lead His church certainly transcends any local or denominational boundaries. Regardless of our traditions from within Christianity, we are called to live responsively to Christ, as Christ lived responsively to the Father. My experience with Christians is that they want to grow and abide in Christ. Furthermore, many of the leaders with whom I am acquainted in Protestant and Catholic churches and various parachurch organizations long for a means of pursuing the business of the church in a manner that is a faithful expression of their spirituality. Finally, as a pastor and spiritual director, I am often privileged to witness the amazement and joy of individuals who discover that Christ is truly at hand in their lives. I am convinced a church can make that same discovery in its corporate life.

In decision-making we can learn to be led by Christ rather than driven by the demands of the moment. Four questions were posed in the introductory narrative that are helpful in this regard:

- What would we need to do to attempt to seat Christ at the head of our meetings for business?
- What is the means of preparing a group for seeking the mind of Christ?
- Are there business practices and spiritual disciplines that we can incorporate into our routine decision-making so we are ready to seek God's face together when special needs arise?
- What would it look like to maintain a group of key leaders who understand their role to be integrating discernment of Christ's leadership into their own leadership responsibilities?

These questions were addressed by proposing a model in which business is pursued as worship. An order of service was recommended for the business meeting to prepare the group for seeking the mind of Christ while deliberating business. An emphasis was described in the model for maintaining an environment conducive to discernment: a culture of listening. Finally, the spiritual formation of a group of key leaders was described as instrumental in developing and maintaining a method of pursuing business as worship. A vital role for Christian leaders is to consider questions such as these, experiment with their own models, and then help each other refine those models. In this realm, Christian leaders cannot depend on secular leadership literature to show the way. It is our responsibility to define what decision-making looks like when Christ is our Head.

Evangelical Friends have the potential of being a prophetic voice, calling the church to heed the leadership of Christ. There is a genius tucked away in Quaker tradition about attending, discerning, and minding Christ that we understand too little, but it surely

remains within our reach. For those who aspire to pursue a means of decision-making based on knowing and following Christ's direction, Evangelical Friends have a structure in place that is congruent to that objective. The model proposed in this project can be applied within the established business practices of our churches. The model will need refinement in particular circumstances. It would be a fruitful exercise for a group of Friends churches, committed to learning again how Christ leads a church, to experiment with models of decision-making and cooperate in the mutual refinement of those models. By virtue of our tradition and existing business structure, Friends are in a position to spearhead such an endeavor for the sake of the larger church community, as well as for our own well-being. In the transformational days of the early history of Friends, these fledgling discernmentarians certainly did not have everything figured out, but they were focused on obedience to Christ, and they helped each other along the way. For Friends to exercise a prophetic role in this regard, we will again need to be driven by a singular desire to follow Christ's lead, and help each other along the way. In my congregation the introduction of this model is the beginning of an experiment in practical spirituality that can be critiqued and improved continuously. I invite others to join in the pursuit of doing business as worship.

May God's kingdom come and God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

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