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A Critique of Quaker Accountability

WILMER A. COOPER

The purpose of this paper is to deal with the question of accountability in the light of our need to be answerable to one another in the community of faith, which for us means the Friends Meeting.

The term accountability will be addressed in two ways: First, the question of how we exercise and balance freedom and discipline in our life together within the Meeting. Secondly, the question of whether in our faith and practice we are in historical continuity with the original Quaker vision. Thus the objective will be to assess accountability in these two respects from the early period to the present, and in the light of our performance to indicate some signs of warning as well as signs of hope for the future of the Society of Friends.

THE CURRENT CRISIS IN LIGHT OF THE EARLY QUAKER NORM

Although Friends have been in almost perpetual crisis since their beginning in the middle of the 17th C, certain conditions now prevail which make the situation different in degree, if not in kind. Furthermore, the crisis is accompanied by a sense of forboding when one thinks of what is at stake for Friends now, as well as in the future.

To evaluate the current situation it may be helpful to recall how early Friends defined their community of faith, the role accountability played in it, and some of the departures from this understanding which have taken place through the years. If we define and articulate "the early Quaker norm" we will have something against which we can assess where we are and where we are going.

In defining their community of faith, early Friends used mainly Biblical images such as "the Body of Christ," "the People of God," "Children of the Light," and "Publishers of Truth." They functioned organizationally under what George Fox called "the Gospel Order." Thus we are immediately involved in a Quaker theology of the church and a doctrine of ecclesiology.

Descriptively speaking, Friends came together out of a sense of being gathered in the Spirit of Christ which united them as the "People of God." To be so gathered by Christ as the head of the Church provided a structured community of faith out of which...
Contributors

Although there is no question that Wilmer A. Cooper considers Richmond, IN the center of Quakerdom, he is widely known to Friends of other persuasions. His primary concern, not only during 18 years as founding Dean of the Earlham School of Religion -- the first accredited theological seminary for Friends -- but since, in a dozen other ways, has been the restoration and/or preservation of the faith content of Quakerism. He was a founder and first Chairman of QTDG (1958-1965), chairman for the ten years of its existence of the post-St. Louis Faith and Life Panel, a founder of the more recent Quaker Hill Consultations of Friends.

He and Barrett Hollister, the two American-Quaker Delegates to the Uppsala Assembly of the WCC (1968) launched the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial study of Violence, Non-Violence, staffed for the WCC by Australian Methodist David Gill. Possessor of a B.D. from Yale Divinity School and a Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University, Wil's M.A. was from Haverford, his B.A. from Wilmington College.

At the 25th Anniversary Banquet of ESR in June, Wil and his wife Emily were honored by creation of a Wil and Emily Cooper Scholarship Fund to provide 10 full scholarships for ESR, to mark his retirement then. It was announced that pledges of $150,803 had already been made toward the goal of $250,000.

Wilmer Cooper has become so identified with theology that his four years in a Civilian Public Service Camp during WW-II, and seven years as Administrative Secretary of the Friends Committee on National Legislation tend to be forgotten.

Patricia Edwards-DeLancey serves two Friends meetings at Fairview and Martinsville in southeastern Ohio as pastor. She is a Ph.D. candidate, with course-work completed, at Iliff School of Theology, Denver, CO. A more complete note appears in QRT #58.

At 70, Dorothy H. Craven is youthful in ideas and actively engaged in some teaching and in service as part of the Ministry Team at University Friends in Wichita, KS. Her favorite courses include Shakespeare, World Literature, and Quaker Literature. A recorded minister of Mid America Yearly Meeting since 1979, she serves as secretary of that YM's Christian Ministries and Vocations Division.

After elementary and secondary school teaching she became an Instructor in English at Illinois Wesleyan, then an Assistant Pro-

Friends lived and went forth in ministry. This may be contrasted with being gathered out of a particular concern as is often the case today, such as the peace testimony, or a group of social concerns. Shifting to concerns as the basis for gathering often means diversity of starting points rather than being gathered into a convenant relationship to God and to one another.

From this lack of focus and gatheredness, Quakerism appears to many (Friends and non-Friends alike) to be in essence an expression of individualism, a form of religious democracy based on the assumption that through the Light within every individual has private access to God with little or no attention given to a corporate relationship to God. Extreme examples of this differ little from the Ranterism that plagued Friends in the 17th-C England, namely, the belief that each person should seek his/her own inner leading and then act on it. This, of course, is just the reverse of the traditional belief of Friends that the corporate discernment of the gathered meeting is more trustworthy than the leading of any given individual. That is what made it possible for the group to arrive at a common sense of unity as all sought the Light of Christ together.

John McCandless1 has summarized the Friends' understanding of the church as a "...vision of what it means to be a people of God: a community of the committed, bearing a vision of Truth around which the community is organized, demonstrating the power of the Spirit of God, a prophetic people, a worshipping and praying people, a people on mission, a people marked by moral and ethical sensitivity."

It should also be noted that early Friends coupled this understanding with a Biblical norm to provide discipline for the group. Like the Anabaptists who preceded them, Mt 18:15-17 was their guide for dealing with offenders, as Barclay's Anarchy of the Ranters2 makes clear:

If your brother sins against you, 
go and tell him his fault, between you
and him alone. If he listens to you,
you have gained your brother. But if
he does not listen, take one or two
others along with you, that every word
may be confirmed by the evidence of two
of three witnesses. If he refuses to
listen to them, tell it to the church;
and if he refuses to listen even to the
Church, let him be to you as a Gentile
and a tax collector. (RSV)
Early Quakerism was therefore religious individualism, with everyone interpreting his/her own leading and doing his/her own thing. Rather, the norm was that because we can all come into a common unity through the Light of Christ within, it is possible to be a covenanted people of God responding to his will and purpose for us. This may indeed mean that individuals will follow their own leading, but they will do so with a sense of responsibility and accountability to one another in the community of faith, and with the further sense that their actions are initiated by God.

DEPARTURES FROM THE NORM

Most separations among Friends have resulted from a "crisis of accountability" of one sort or another. Certainly the Naylor episode in the 1650s was the first major instance. In the 1660s John Perrot and the "hat men" developed scruples on a number of counts which placed them at odds with the main body of Friends. There is no need here to cite a whole series of examples where individual leadings took pre-eminence over the corporate group's discernment, but the Perrot controversy will serve as an example of an early and repeated disciplinary problem with which the Society has had to deal.

After becoming a Friend, and on a trip to the East, Perrot was confined to prison in Rome. There he not only had a religious opening that removal of the hat during time of prayer, and the customary handshake following meeting were improper, but that all human arrangements for meetings should be placed under the direction of the Holy Spirit, even to the point of doing away with any stated time for meeting for worship. These stands put Perrot at odds with other Friends. But to make matters worse Friends at this particular time were suspected from the outside of being in league with militant radical groups, and many Friends were jailed, including George Fox himself. Nevertheless, in spite of this trouble both within and without the Quaker movement, by 1666 Friends united in a specially convened meeting of ministers in London to deal with internal offenders, such as Perrot.

Richard Farnsworth authored a minute at that meeting which subordinated the individual leadings of Friends to the corporate group. This was published in 1666 just after Fox's release from prison and just before the death of Farnsworth himself. William C. Braithwaite considers this the point where Friends became a Religious Society, coupling it with the extensive organizational work...
culture-bound. We saw and opposed evils that others did not see as evil at all; we did it again and again. But we managed to do this by living within our own Quaker culture and by having a testimony against worldliness; by erecting barriers between us and the world.

Today's sadfad-ridden Quakerism has jettisoned those attitudes (in the name of relevance, of course) and I do not see us as particularly free of the surrounding culture except as to inherited testimonies from former days. The individual Christian may still hope to be freed by the Lord from surrounding cultural attitudes, but I have my doubts about our church, and I have no doubts at all about our nation. America cannot touch other nations, with whatever noble intentions, except to corrupt; this is the true meaning of American power, the final lesson of Vietnam.

R. W. Tucker

Editor's Response: There were several reasons for quoting Dr. Brouwer's reaffirmation of the "true American dream" statement adopted by the NCCC Governing Board in May 1981. I mentioned the loss of his brother Ed in the Korean War and his own disillusionment with that war. Because of space limitations I did not print what followed: "Over the years since, I have watched his country [Ed's], my country, our country, become ever more entangled in the web of superpower rivalry - both under administrations Democratic and administrations Republican."

My own respect for the NCCC was another reason. Although the 28 years of my ecumenical service on behalf of FGC have been largely through the WCC, I think of E. Raymond Wilson and Francis Brown, among others, who gave long service to the NCCC on behalf of Philadelphia YM, a charter member of the NCCC, and Lydia Stokes, the NCCC's first woman vice-president years ago.

In the face of the fact that the NCCC almost became defunct under the combined 60 Minutes and Reader's Digest attacks (with the Wall Street Journal thrown in for good measure), and the fact that as a result the NCCC had been through a major three-year restructuring, what Arie Brouwer was saying seemed "courageous" to me. The NCCC had also been literally "occupied" several times by groups protesting its commitments or its foreign-policy stands.

Like Rob Tucker, I am convinced of the value of traditional Quaker witness in faithfulness to the call from our Risen Lord, "Follow me." Like John Woolman, who subtitled his antislavery message "Recommended to the Professors of Christianity of Every

which Fox, Dewsbury, and others had carried out.3 From then on Friends took quite seriously the government of a church based on what Fox called "the Gospel Order." Instead of taking their cue for church organization directly from Scripture, Friends held that the living Christ is the head of the Church and the chief orderer thereof. Thus, within fifteen years of their beginnings, Friends had dealt firmly with disciplinary matters and had provided for accountability to God and one another.

TESTING THE NORM IN THE MIDDLE PERIOD OF QUAKERISM

Many other things happened in the 18th and 19th Cs to test the accountability of Friends to one another and to test their faithfulness to the early Quaker vision and norm. Most important for our purposes was the crisis over the system of Elders (and later Overseers) which arose to have oversight of ministry and worship and the moral conduct of Friends. Eventually the Elders also supervised doctrinal orthodoxy. Even though the system of Elders was well intentioned it finally exceeded its proper bounds. It became an oppressive power group which not only displaced the ministers as the dominant group among Friends, but far surpassed them both in authority and power.

By the turn of the 19th C, hardening of the spiritual arteries and an enforced Christian orthodoxy brought about a series of separations. This was coupled with the Quietistic influence on Friends and the almost indiscriminate disownment of members for marrying out of meeting, violating plain dress, or other minor infractions. The hedge of orthodoxy and disciplinary action which had been thrown around the Society of Friends took nearly a century to overcome.

The inroads of evangelicalism into the Society of Friends in the 19th C, as a kind of renewal effort, brought with it many new practices in worship and ministry which seemed foreign to traditional patterns of "waiting upon the Lord" in silent expectancy. Again these new patterns of faith and practice, which came largely from the Wesleyan Methodist influence, raised in a different way the question of Friends accountability to the early Quaker vision. A large segment of Friends in the late 19th and early 20th Cs lost their sense of history and identity with Friends beliefs and testimonies and tended to look more and more like another Protestant denomination.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY METAMORPHOSIS OF FRIENDS

As one looks at the 20th-C situation of accountability among Friends there is a mixed response. On the one hand many new and

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positive things have happened during this century to bring new life and vigor to the Society of Friends, while at the same time there have also been departures from the norm in faith and practice. Not only have evangelical Friends adopted a modified pattern of faith and practice, liberal Friends have also moved in new directions which are cause for concern.

But on the positive side, let us first catalog some of the new and innovative things Friends have done to bring new life and signs of hope. Organizationally speaking and in terms of outreach in mission and service there has been a flowering of Quakerism in this century unequalled in our history. Beginning around 1900 a number of new associations of Friends formed: Friends General Conference, Five Years Meeting (later Friends United Meeting), and eventually the Evangelical Friends Alliance. Conservative and Independent Friends have not formed such associations. Another natural outgrowth of this development was the formation of Friends World Committee for Consultation, and its auxiliary, the Wider Quaker Fellowship.

There were major developments in both mission and service types of work as well. Not only did the American Friends Board of Missions (formed in 1894) see its work in Kenya become the largest single concentration of Friends anywhere in the world, other mission boards carried out work in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, Alaska, the Far East, and India. The American Friends Service Committee began during World War I and has become the largest single Quaker service enterprise, with an annual budget of more than $16 million dollars. During World War II the first formal religious lobby of any denomination, Friends Committee on National Legislation, was established in Washington, D.C. On the global level Friends became involved with the United Nations through the Quaker United Nations Program.

From the 17th C on, Friends have been active in the development of schools at all levels. Beginning with the lower grades and working their way up through the high school and boarding school level, they eventually established a dozen colleges and three post-graduate centers. Friends now maintain more than 80 schools in North America. On a non-academic basis there has been the establishment of yearly-meeting and regional conference/retreat centers, together with many yearly-meeting youth camps and work-camp projects. During World War II Civilian Public Service Camps were opened for conscientious objectors. Young Friends have held important conferences and youth pilgrimages over the years, culminating in the first religious tradition. The murderer who says, "God told me to do it," is a classic case. And the adulterer who protests, "It was right because it felt right," is all too familiar.

Why should we permit Christianity rather than some other religion to shape our experience? If we examine ourselves and our civilization, we come to realize that Christianity forms the basis of our lives. It is the means by which our society has survived and from it is derived everything worthwhile that gives meaning to our individual lives. To embrace some other religion would probably be an act of rebellion unworthy of either tradition.

How should one arrive at that point of view? There's the mystery! For some it comes from necessity, for some from the fear of the Lord. Some would say it is the work of the Holy Spirit. Having tasted of the the forbidden tree, we try to understand and explain in terms of influences and hormones, but in the end faith is probably always an act of Grace.

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Letter

To The Editor:

This is written in response to the words the editor of QRT printed with approval in #59 from Arie Brouwer's acceptance speech as newly elected General Secretary of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.: "In the strength of its best traditions and by reason of its place in the world, [the United States] can do more for justice, peace and freedom than any other nation in today's world."

I read these words with the same chill up my back that I felt when I heard John F. Kennedy promise that America would "bear any burden." The missionary impulse is rooted in noble purpose, but it turns into Cold War Liberalism, which in time turns into hot wars and the death of liberalism. The problem is that we don't know how to work except through American corporations which are in business to make money, not to be charitable. The problem is that we are culture-bound, provincial, and arrogant.

The great virtue of the Society of Friends, over three-and-a-half centuries, is that to an astonishing degree we managed not to be
standing of sacrifice; the latter shows similarities to the loneliness of the Temptation. The one, if too casually taken, runs the risk of overlooking the human; the other focuses so heavily upon the human plight that the divine action can pass unnoticed.

There are at least two areas, however, in which these disparate interpretations of the Atonement find unity. One is in result and the other in experience. Both the cosmological atonement and the internalized atonement lead to a situation in which the moral law, through which God is perceived, is upheld and the society healed with the offender profoundly restored.

At the experiential level— one notices in passing how Quaker it is to stress experience — the disparate interpretations of the Atonement find unity in a sense of awe and humility: in the face of one’s own nature, in the perception of one’s relationship to society, and in the vision of God. Such experience is made possible, I would say, less by a philosophical discussion of principles like accountability or even love and justice than by a contemplation of the multifaceted story set side by side with the events of our earthly lives. Good narrative has the property of being understood in many ways and supported by different kinds of reasons at different periods. The most profound stories like the most profound laws will stand from age to age, though our justifications for them may crumble in less than a century.

Risking then a flimsy 20th-C explanation of why we should accept the whole Christian story, I want to try to answer one more of Larry’s objections. All of us who have gone to school in recent centuries encounter obstacles to belief: deistic and mechanistic philosophies, talk of innate human dignity, proud reflections on human accomplishment, and misapplied evolutionary theories. With religious thought now relegated by law strictly to the private sector, it becomes easier and easier to assume that we are the inventors and technicians of our prosperity. If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, we are not educated to wisdom but at best to clever technicianship and at worst to figuring out ways to bend the system for private gain. Hence the accountability crisis.

I escape the scientific outlook of my age no more than the next fellow. In advocating a life disciplined to reflection on the Bible and our religious tradition, I am motivated at least in part by the contemporary conviction that our experience is shaped by what we let shape it. Indeed I am haunted by the behaviorist notion that this might be the whole story. Certainly there is good reason to be suspicious of “religious experience” that is not shaped by an enduring

World Young Friends Conference in 1985. There are a growing number of retirement homes for the elderly under Friends auspices. Some important professional and interest groups have formed, such as the Friends Conference on Religion and Psychology, the Quaker Theological Discussion Group, and the New Foundation Fellowship. These amazing developments in the 20th C, including others not named, have constituted a blossoming of Quaker life and influence unparalleled in the history of Friends.

Yet in spite of this heartening flowering of the institutions and fruits of Quakerism, we have to ask whether the religious and spiritual foundations are healthy enough to give long-term support to all this branching and proliferation. Have we overexpanded to the point of depleting the source and nurturing ground of Quakerism, particularly the local meeting? In my 1966 Johnson Lecture at Friends United Meeting I stated: “...we are in danger of withering on the vine, numerically and spiritually, unless something is done to feed and nurture” this very source of life. “Nor should we take lightly the fact that our growth pattern has leveled off, and in many cases is on the decline. To the extent that Friends have shown new strength, life, and vigor in the 20th C, it may be that we have been living on our heritage and the borrowed spiritual capital of the past...”

CULTURAL AND THEOLOGICAL ACCOMMODATION

On the other side of the Quaker ledger, in the 20th C significant changes have taken place in the faith and practice of Friends, both evangelical and liberal. Reference has already been made to the changed pattern of worship, ministry, and theological emphasis adopted by evangelical Friends. Following their lead in the 19th C, programmed pastoral meetings became the pattern for nearly two-thirds of American Friends. Some of these have now been caught up in the “church growth” movement of modern Protestantism, with little emphasis on Quaker testimonies and distinctives. The more liberal pastoral Friends have tried to keep in perspective their Quaker heritage and remain faithful to the Quaker testimonies. Yet their attempt at Quaker renewal has remained partial and sometimes disappointing.

The other big change which the 20th C has brought has come among Friends of unprogrammed and liberal persuasion both in North America and around the world. To make itself relevant, liberal Quakerism has accommodated itself to a series of cultural and theological changes while maintaining the traditional forms of worship
and ministry. While we cannot ignore demands to become relevant, when accommodations are made, it is important that we be clear about "who we are" in terms of the foundations of our faith. Without this we will lose our sense of where we are going, and thus our sense of purpose and destiny.

In trying to understand a changing world and accommodate ourselves to the new scientific age; many Friends, especially those of a liberal persuasion, began to re-examine a lot of religious and Biblical assumptions about the outer world of nature as well as the inner world of the self. For example, one can interpret the whole life and thought of Rufus Jones (a formative 20th-C figure) as an attempt to give a positive and constructive response to all of these issues -- a valiant effort, however one may regard his particular response.

What are some of the changes which have come in the 20th C which need to be evaluated from the standpoint of being accountable to the early Quaker vision and norm?

1. The identification of Quakerism with mysticism has become a 20th-C custom among many Friends which is often more confusing than helpful. Certainly Quakerism can be considered a form of mystical religion, or at least it has mystical elements, but it should not be confused with certain forms of classical and eastern mysticism which have little in common with Quaker spirituality. Quakerism is a spiritual form of religion which acknowledges God's mediation of himself and his will through historical events and phenomena. But because Quakerism stresses the spiritual as over against the historical and physical, it sometimes borders on gnosticism, namely, the tendency to so spiritualize life that it ignores the incarnational nature of God's revelation. The life of the Spirit has limited meaning and significance until it becomes embodied in the outward forms and events of history. Most forms of mysticism shy away from this kind of emphasis. The frequently quoted Quaker adage, "let your lives speak," is a good example of the way the immanent and transcendent ought to be visibly joined.

2. "That of God in everyone" has become the code phrase for liberal Quakerism without taking fully into account the way George Fox used this term in the 17th C. All too often it is now interpreted as meaning that there is little need for God to transcend our humanity. For some it represents a kind of "romantic humanism" which in effect asserts that "everyone is his/her own God." This in turn lends itself to a form of religious individualism which violates the very idea of being a gathered people of God, and undercuts our sense of responsibility and accountability to the corporate body of Friends.

Response

RUTH M. PITMAN

Larry Kuenning's comments on my paper are organized as an invitation to Friends who are dissatisfied with the absence of Christian standards and the lack of accountability in the Society to come out and join a community with a "real discipline." Although I share Larry's separatist sympathies and am no less critical than he of Friends who opt for compromising unity, we dare not overlook the fact that the problems posed by separation are indeed grave. Let me only suggest that one approach to them might be -- if the militant pacifists will forgive me -- a comparison with the theory of "the just war." But to respond to Larry by discussing the moral and theological issues raised by separation -- be it individual or group separation -- would carry us even farther from the substance of my scattered offerings.

I would like instead to spend my limited space on a better look at the Atonement and on a response to Larry's perhaps just charge that I argue a weak basis for faith.

Larry is quite correct in noting that I have placed two different understandings of the Atonement side by side at the end of my paper. One interpretation is a cosmological understanding of Christ's death as part of God's plan to redeem fallen mankind. True to my century, I have given this story a psychological basis by asserting that atonement is a necessary part of human survival, the only means by which society can be restored in the face of inevitable transgression, which would destroy the law that gives society cohesion.

The other interpretation is an internalized, spiritualized one, in which Christ's death is understood symbolically as the death of willful self through discipline and grace. This interpretation is the one more often preached about by early Friends, Wilburites, and old-style Hicksites. Liberal Friends as adherents of popular psychology have no use for it, hoping instead to find individual fulfillment through self-expression and manipulative social techniques.

The two interpretations emphasize different parts of the Biblical narrative to such an extent that one may well ask if this is one story or two. One interpretation stresses the Lamb of God, crucified and resurrected. The other, Christ's life, and ministry, passion and triumph. The former contains echoes of the Old Testament under-
Among the structures to develop is your relation to other church organizations. There is a disagreement, here, between moderate separatists and radical separatists. The moderates would establish the new community but keep one foot in the ancient churches of their tradition. The radicals say you should come out of them all. The early Quakers were radicals.

There is also a difference between independent separatists and catholic separatists. The independents see no need for structural ties between their own little community and other discipleship groups. The catholics (small “c”) say that all discipleship communities should be connected for disciplinary purposes. The early Quakers were catholics.

This approach is not for those who put their faith in human organizational skill. To them it may be crazy — more outrageously simplistic than Ruth thought her own approach. I propose it for those whose faith is in God’s power to make something out of people’s faithfulness. I don’t know how many of these there are. As Ruth says, the problems about accountability are rooted in a crisis of faith.

NOTE

1. Ruth’s sociological perspective on law and leadership, though of a different temper from classic Quaker treatments of this subject, may be inescapable in the face of a modern neo-Quaker dilemma. In original Quaker theology, the leaders’ understanding of the law carries the day because the same Truth that inspires it also confirms it to the followers. But what if the followers’ sense of inner guidance confirms the leaders’ errors? The diversity of interpretations among neo-Quaker groups shows that this must sometimes be happening. Can classical Quaker ecclesiology be maintained intact in the face of this experience?

3. The secularism of our age has influenced Quakerism in more ways than is often realized. Some Friends espouse a secular humanism and agnosticism whose secular values appear to its “god.” This bears little resemblance to the prophetic vision of George Fox and his overwhelming sense “that the power of the Lord is over all.” This secularism has been accompanied by philosophical and political individualism which has impacted the faith assumptions and practice of Friends both evangelical and liberal. Whether the goal is personal salvation (for the evangelicals) or self-realization (for the liberals) the connectedness with the church as the “Body of Christ” and the “People of God” is discounted, if not lost.

4. “Universalist Friends” make up a new form of Quakerism which wants to disengage itself from the historical and Biblical roots of the Quaker faith, and to disassociate Friends from Christianity. The claim is that religious pluralism is the wave of the future, and that Quakerism as they define it should provide a bridge for the religions of the world. Universalist Friends ignore the authentic Quaker universalism held by George Fox, which was so clearly spelled out in Robert Barclay’s Apology, namely, that Christ (the universal Logos of God), whether known by that name or not, is available to all honest seekers after God. Moreover, Friends believed that this Christ was the source of salvation for all humankind.

Universalist Friends only exacerbate the problem Friends already face of how to accommodate our existing pluralism without becoming completely fragmented. This leads to what Hugh Doncaster has described as, “any Friend can believe anything and the Society of Friends stands for nothing.” Or in the words of Lewis Benson, Quakerism is “a refuge for those who want freedom to follow their own individual bent in an atmosphere that is mildly religious and fiercely tolerant.” Not only is the survival track record for such pluralism and individualism nil in church history, it could lead to a religious anarchy and disaster for the Society of Friends.

5. The “consensus” method of Quaker decision making has substantially altered the traditional “sense of the meeting” search for divine guidance. Consensus is the substitution of a political/sociological model for a religious one. Even though the consensus method of doing business is much preferable to majority-minority voting, the underlying assumption that there is a common will of God for the meeting is often ignored. Guidance by the mind of Christ in a spirit of worship and prayer is very important in setting aside self-
will and manipulative strategies. The historic Quaker view was that as Friends seek the Light of Christ together, they shall be brought into a common sense of unity.

CAN WE ACHIEVE A QUAKERISM OF RENEWED ACCOUNTABILITY?

It is well known that convinced Friends outnumber birthright Friends in a substantial number of meetings and yearly meetings, even in some of the traditional centers of Quaker beginnings. We can be grateful and thankful for this growing edge of Friends, but we must be vigilant in helping new members and new meetings gain sufficient knowledge of the history and tradition of Friends, so that they will not deny or misrepresent the very things they hope to sustain in their new-found association. At the same time, these newer meetings and newer Friends have something to teach all of us as we try to envision a new future for Friends.

If this critique of where we are seems to have been unduly hard on liberal Quakerism and evangelical Friends, a similar critique could also be made of those expressions of Quakerism which lie somewhere in between. In assessing the accountability or lack of it on the part of the various branches of Quakerism, there is plenty of blame to go around. Both evangelicals and liberals have preserved as well as violated certain elements of the early Quaker vision. Hence, in terms of responsibility for what has happened, we should not write off any segment of the Society of Friends.

If we are concerned about recovery of authentic Quakerism we will need to give further encouragement to such things as the re-discovery of Biblical and Christian roots in some quarters of liberal Quakerism. And we need to recognize that among evangelical Friends there have been valiant efforts by prominent and respected individuals to recover the essentials of the Quaker witness and testimonies within the evangelical tradition. Other important forces are helping Friends to recover the essential focus and vision of Quakerism. Among these there has been a quarter of a century of experience with the Earlham School of Religion. Friends from both evangelical and liberal persuasions have had life-changing experiences at ESR in terms of a new understanding and appreciation for their Quaker and Christian roots. This has affected their determination to make a difference as they go out to serve Friends in all branches of the Society, both at home and abroad.

It is easy to look at the many signs of decline and decay among Friends and perhaps conclude that God may not have any further use know who is good at what sort of ministry even if there’s no written list. And you know whether J.W. has repented of putting W.S. into the pond even if he hasn’t put it in writing. I am not praising smallness or deprecating formal structures; I wish our community were big enough to need more of them, and I encourage those who talk about a disciplined church to consider joining one.

Finally, to expand on Ruth’s comments on membership: I agree that the basic membership requirement should be a direction of the will, but toward what? Ruth says, “a dedication of the will to learn what a particular tradition teaches as it is lived.” Shouldn’t she have said, “to learn what Christ teaches as he is followed”? After all, Ruth’s tradition ~ Quaker Christianity ~ contains a strong protest against letting human traditions eclipse God’s law. But if the membership requirement should be a dedication of the will, can all the various meetings Ruth describes as antinomian become accountable communities by changing their membership requirements?

The obstacles are tremendous. Supposing you persuade a meeting to adopt the new membership standard, what do you do with those who came in under the old standard, whose life orientation is not a dedication to follow Christ? Will they change their life orientation just because the meeting has changed its rules? How will the meeting even mobilize itself to make this change, as long as these people are in it?

If you leave them in, you have the problem described in commenting on disownment: the community cannot form a corporate sense of the mind of Christ if half the members are not looking for it. Do you throw them out? Even assuming it could be done, I might question whether it is fair. These people joined because they were offered an antinomian environment. Even if the meeting repents of the offer, is it fair to change the arrangements now?

But there is an entirely different approach to the membership problem. It was the approach of the early Quakers, and it is also that of my own group. Call it the “separatist” approach; it goes like this: First, stop trying to change your meeting’s structure, which derives from the faith of its members and will not change unless they change their faith. Second, find those people (in your meeting or out of it) who have, or can be converted to, the Christian faith, in its full dedication to discipleship. Third, meet with those people, for both worship and discipline, and be ready to develop with them appropriate structures of accountability as Christ leads.
The yearly meeting and the book of discipline are other unmentioned structures which my community has found important, and which other neo-Quaker and neo-Anabaptist groups would do well to adopt. A yearly meeting (for discipline, not just for inspiration) brings different local groups under a single disciplinary structure. Among small disciplership communities today members are usually accountable to each other only within a particular group: one community is not accountable to another. If our predecessors had behaved that way, John Woolman's efforts to abolish slave-owning might have gone no further than Mount Holly Meeting.

A book of discipline preserves a clear record of the community's perception of Truth. If human memory is the sole source for what happened in previous years the rules can be changed inadvertently or even sabotaged. This is less likely to happen when the community's stand is available in writing. The group can still change its mind, but it must do so consciously and corporately.

I will comment fairly briefly on some of the other structures of classical Quakerism which Ruth mentions. She rightly stresses the radical change from upright life to skill as the criterion of leadership, representing a change of faith. Only a community that believes that God directs history, and that his purposes are best served by faithfulness to the moral Truth he reveals, will be willing to rank integrity ahead of competence in choosing leaders. Other types of leadership -- based on other beliefs -- also exist, of course. The "charismatic" leader who keeps his followers emotionally high needs neither bureaucratic competence nor more integrity if his followers take this "high" for the Holy Spirit.1

Although I agree that actions can take on symbolic significance which conveys more than official theology, I question one of Ruth's judgments, queries, and meetings of ministers and elders, since my community has found important, and which other neo-Quaker and neo-Anabaptist groups would do well to adopt. A yearly meeting (for discipline, not just for inspiration) brings different local groups under a single disciplinary structure. Among small disciplership communities today members are usually accountable to each other only within a particular group: one community is not accountable to another. If our predecessors had behaved that way, John Woolman's efforts to abolish slave-owning might have gone no further than Mount Holly Meeting.

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Although I agree that actions can take on symbolic significance which conveys more than official theology, I question one of Ruth's examples: the use of peculiar dress, originally called "plain" to signify what it was -- ordinary unadorned clothing, with the message, "Christ teaches plainness and humility." This gradually became an ethnic style whose message was, "We hold our religion by tradition." Now that Quakers have dropped ethnic dress, some fringe groups have imitated it, with the message, "We must be holy; don't we look it?" It still upholds a law, but is the law still God's?

It is hard for me to say much about such structures as acknowledgments, queries, and meetings of ministers and elders, since my community, and other Christian-disciple communities I know, are too small to need them. With six members you don't need many formalities. Problems will not go unnoticed even if there are no queries. You

for the Quaker witness that has become so confused and garbled. My own view, however, is that the early Quaker vision has been insufficiently realized for us to lay aside our work at this point. Neither do I think we should consider joining up with some other larger and numerically more successful group. Is not God still calling us to bear witness to and to live out the vision which George Fox and early Friends set before us? But as we respond to this calling there are basic questions which must be addressed now and for the future. These can only be summarized here, but perhaps that will be sufficient to stimulate further thought and perhaps inspire action.

SOME CRITICAL QUESTIONS FOR FRIENDS TO ADDRESS

In summarizing these points, it is suggested that we begin with the same assumption that William Penn proclaimed for our forbears in the 17th C, namely, that the early Quaker vision was "primitive Christianity revived." Integral to that was Friends belief in "continuing revelation," namely, that God's revelation is not closed but that God continues to reveal his will and truth to us today. But Friends also believed that such new spiritual leadings and openings would not cancel out or conflict with God's special revelation in the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus. They understood and experienced the resurrection of Jesus not only historically but in terms of the risen Lord who manifests himself through the Light of Christ within.

They also claimed, drawing heavily from the Gospel of John, that this disclosure of God to humankind was not confined to a particular time and place, but was universally available to all persons. As already indicated this constituted the universalism of early Quakerism. It is in this context of a Quaker heritage of faith and experience that I would like to single out some critical points for Friends to consider.

(A) **Friends today need to discover a sense of identity:** Who are we? Where did we come from? Where are we going? And most important of all, Whose are we? Generally speaking Friends have lost their identity, thereby seriously limiting their sense of purpose and destiny.

(B) **Friends need to recover a sense of religious authority:** Who is the author of our faith? What is the source of our religious experience? Most Friends would say that they want to emulate Jesus. To do so, we need to participate in his authority -- that of the living God whom he revealed.

(C) **Friends need to recover a sense of corporate accountability to one another as the "People of God" and the "Children of the
Light,” and to relearn seeking together the Light of Christ within. Coupled with this is the need to recover “the lost art of eldering” one another in those things which are eternal as well as those things which are communal and practical.

(D) Friends need to develop standards of membership. These must be based on a clear sense of purpose for the meeting with standards appropriate to that purpose. Non-creedalism does not mean freedom to believe and practice anything we want. As one Friend has said, “we need to be called out of disorder” into what George Fox called “the Gospel Order.”

(E) Friends need to be imbued with a message of hope. Such a message affirms not only the divine order, but a belief that this divine order will finally prevail. This hope must also extend to our own mission as Friends. We must have hope and confidence that God continues to work through us as individuals and as a Society in order to fulfill the calling which was originally given to Friends, and of which we are heirs today. The world is hungry for the Quaker message, because it is a message of hope for a world in travail.

We began this paper by raising the question about how we can be accountable to one another in the way we handle freedom and discipline within our community of faith, the Friends Meeting. And secondly, we asked whether in our faith and practice as Friends we are faithful to the early Quaker vision. Our performance record of accountability on these two counts has been erratic and inadequate. There are both warning signs as well as signs of hope as we assess what has gone wrong and as we attempt to chart new directions. A new sense of resolve and vigilance is called for if we are to fulfill our mission and calling as Friends.

As we ponder these things, the words of Jesus to his disciples may be appropriate for us: “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Mt 9:37-38). We are challenged to “shake the world for ten miles around,” as George Fox’s ministry “under the power of the Lord” was said to do in his day. May God empower us to demonstrate that kind of ministry in our day.

NOTES


idea of “Christ's death in our stead,” with no hint that these are distinct concepts. I cannot expound here on the distinction, but it has been very important in Quaker history and is relevant to Ruth's concerns. Emphasis on the latter concept at the expense of the former has led to some of the short-cut Christianity she laments in the Gurneyites.

On the subject of accountability, itself, I share Ruth's views enough that I may be able to supplement her presentation, and provide a few minor corrections, within her general framework. But my conclusions will be more radical than hers.

My first supplement concerns disownment. Disownment is not just a technique for maintaining the church's reputation, as embarrassing as it is when a member's behavior reflects poorly on the community's testimony to Christ. Such a member's sin against the community must be dealt with, but perhaps more important is another problem: the process of corporate decision-making has been undermined, since that is supposed to be based on corporate discernment of the mind of Christ. This relates to the question of who interprets the law.

In speaking to that question, Ruth rightly stressed the classical Quaker type of leadership, but she didn't mention that the rank-and-file members were also involved. Any new elaboration of the eternal law, such as the prohibition of slave-owning, had to be approved by the monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings of the members -- not just those of ministers and elders. And it had to be approved by the “sense of the meeting,” not just by majority vote.

But expecting to recognize a new moral principle, and make it binding, when a quarter of the members don't even care to live up to the principles already accepted, is like expecting the city of Detroit to impose tighter safety standards on auto makers. In the 18th C Quakers could strengthen their stand on slavery because their membership was -- basically and for the most part -- committed to corporate discipleship to Christ even in the face of suffering. This corporate solidarity was due in part to continuous weeding of those who weren't really committed. Even so the prohibition of slave-owning wasn't easily attained. With a lot of half-hearted members on board it would have been impossible.

Thus disownment of the recalcitrant is a necessity. Without it, the community soon ceases to be united in a faith that leads to a life of discipleship and taking up the cross of Christ. The diversity of moral practice in modern Quakerism, which hardly ever disowns anybody, is an example of the consequences.
LARRY KUENNING

Both Ruth Pitman and I think that there ought to be a community of Christian faith with a real discipline -- one with important similarities to the Quaker community of two and three centuries ago. We differ in how we apply this belief: I belong to such a community and she doesn't.

My community is small, as are the other communities I know that try to practice corporate moral responsibility. A symptom of the modern situation is that real accountability for Christian discipleship is hard to find outside of tiny pockets. The heirs of the radicals of earlier generations -- Quakers and many Anabaptists -- have moved away from this heritage. The very word "accountability" means to many of them merely to ask a few friends for advice, not that they have to explain their lifestyle to their meeting -- much less, that the meeting might demand changes.

Before considering church order, I want to comment on some weaknesses in the doctrinal foundations of Ruth's paper. All societies have law, but how are we to choose the right law, and why should we obey it when it is inconvenient? Ruth says this choice is based on "a certain amount of narrative." Yet narrative alone cannot convince us of a law if we have no moral perceptions to start with. Actually Ruth's practice here is better than her principle, for she supports the Ten Commandments not only with story ("the God who brought us out of bondage") but with implicit appeals to our own perceptions of the Light that gave forth the commandments reveal... the nature of Love itself.

Again, Ruth argues that we need a story, and recommends as a "20th-C faith" that we remain open to traditional stories in the hope that they will become meaningful as they are lived. But how shall we choose our stories? (The Bible? The Iliad? Paul Revere's ride?) Our need for some story or other, though a motivation for search, is no criterion of truth. (I'd care less about Christian tradition if I didn't think Jesus was resurrected.)

Ruth's reference to "Atonement" places side by side the traditional Quaker idea of crucifying the self and the traditional Protestant belief. By the Faith and Life Movement, June, 1979, and distributed by Friends World Committee, Section of the Americas. The volume is unquestionably one of the best sources on Quaker ecclesiology.

PATRICIA EDWARDS-DELANCEY

Wilmer Cooper's very helpful paper on the crisis of accountability which Friends face rightly points out that crisis is not new but has always been with us. From the early period Ranters, Diggers, Grindletonians, Levellers, Fifth Monarchy Men and others have posed crisis from without. And internally, it would seem from my researches, accountability and its meaning or interpretation has been at the root of most of the crises and historical splits among Friends.

Likewise in the late 19th and early 20th Cs, the fundamentalist vs. modernist split in mainstream Christianity was manifest within the Religious Society of Friends as well.

The Richmond Declaration was a response to Wesleyan revivalism, whose accountability took a Creedal form. Similarly, the cessation of the recording of ministers and discontinuation of the recognition of elders and overseers was a modernist-Friends reaction against institutional forms of accountability. Today there is a double polarity...