

9-2019

## The Concept of Hierarchy and Doing Ministry in the Church: Evaluating the Roles of Leaders and the Use of Authority in Quakerism

Oscar Lugusa Malande

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/qrt>



Part of the [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Malande, Oscar Lugusa (2019) "The Concept of Hierarchy and Doing Ministry in the Church: Evaluating the Roles of Leaders and the Use of Authority in Quakerism," *Quaker Religious Thought*: Vol. 133 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/qrt/vol133/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Quaker Religious Thought by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact [arolfe@georgefox.edu](mailto:arolfe@georgefox.edu).

# THE CONCEPT OF HIERARCHY AND DOING MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH: EVALUATING THE ROLES OF LEADERS AND THE USE OF AUTHORITY IN QUAKERISM

OSCAR LUGUSA MALANDE

## INTRODUCTION

The authority existing within the hierarchy of leadership in the church, if not well exercised, can create deficiency and imbalances in the running of church affairs. In Quakerism, the expectation is that everyone equally participates in doing ministry. As people gather in the presence of God for service in worship, all barriers of inequality have to be brought down. Conflicts and disagreements of who is supposed to be in authority among church leaders should be discouraged. Therefore, there is need to share about definitions of hierarchy, ministry, and authority, the historical background of church leadership, role of church leaders, evaluations of the existing relationship among church leaders, and the future of the church leadership.

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

From the *New Oxford American Dictionary* the following definitions are given:

*Hierarchy*: A system or organizations in which people or groups are ranked one above the other according to status or authority.

*Authority*: The power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience, or the power to influence others, especially because of one's commanding manner or one's recognized knowledge about something; or a person with extensive or specialized knowledge about a subject; an expert.

*Ministry*: The work or vocation of a minister of religion, or the spiritual work or service of any Christian, or a group of Christians.

## THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CHURCH LEADERSHIP

When Quakerism began as a movement, the form of church leadership was not hierarchical. The structure of the church was guided by the well-known concept of Gospel Order, where Christ was the head and orderer of the Church.<sup>1</sup> In a pamphlet published by Western Yearly Meeting of Friends, *A Handbook for Elders*, it is reported, “the movement initiated by George Fox and his associates began with no thought [to] organization since they were directed solely by the desire for spiritual freedom and the right worship of God as prompted in their own soul.”<sup>2</sup> Later on, there was need for an organization where the office of the elder became functional, as noted, “the first step toward group control in the interests of good order and proper decorum recognized by early Friends as essential within the rapidly growing, informal leadership was acknowledgment of persons of strong character and good judgment as ‘elders.’”<sup>3</sup> It seems the earliest recognized church office was that of an elder whose role was to bring control for group order. Wilmer Cooper also reports, “The assertive leadership of appointed elders were a powerful force in the Society of Friends.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, office of the elder was central in the early formative period of Quakerism.

It is important to note that in this period of early formation of Quakerism even with the existence of different offices, there were no distinctions among church leaders. Peter Wood notes,

In their exuberant beginnings, the first generations of Friends made no sharp distinctions among elders, ministers, and overseers. Often the terms were used interchangeably. As meeting structure took shape in the late seventeenth century, those who showed spiritual authority who were grown in the power and life were appointed as elders or overseers by their meetings.<sup>5</sup>

As Wood argued, the basis for spiritual authority was a qualification for leadership in the church, which must have been the spirit of serving over others, but not lording over them. Even with the position of the clerk it was about serving, as indicated by John Punshon: “Quaker business meetings were (and are) held on the basis of silent

consideration of verbal contributions in an attempt not to achieve consensus, but to discern the will of God. At the table, as opposed to ‘in the chair’, the Clerk, a servant of the meeting, listened to the discussion and ‘weighed’ what was said in an attempt to get the ‘sense’ of the meeting.”<sup>6</sup>

In later developments though, there was a difference in the offices of the elder and the overseer.<sup>7</sup> Cooper explains, “Originally [elders’] role was to nurture and support the gift of ministry in their meeting for worship; by the turn of the nineteenth century, however, they had also become concerned about right belief as applied to the ‘approved’ writings and ministry of Friends. The overseers assumed the responsibility of enforcing acceptable behavior in line with the testimonies and beliefs of Friends.”<sup>8</sup> These roles were, however, taken over with pastors, as Cooper continues to elaborate,

A clerical class of leadership gave direction to worship and ministry in place of the corporate ‘waiting upon the Lord’ in silence. The leading roles of elders and overseers were gradually taken over by pastors who disregarded the traditional emphasis on the universal ministry of every person. This style of leadership led to programmed worship, which included Scripture reading, hymn singing, pastoral prayers, and prepared sermons.<sup>9</sup>

A point of analysis within this historical background was the shift in the church leadership that was brought about by programmed worship. The introduction of pastors came with a new way of leadership that was hierarchical. The participatory nature of doing ministry related to universal ministry changed. A chasm between the congregation and those who led them developed. Distinctions between the clergy and the laity unfolded. A clique of people seemed to be the ones controlling how ministry should be done.

The unfolding bigger picture here is how later on generations of programmed Quakers have been impacted by this historical background. In Quaker programmed worship meetings, everyone who is gathered in worship meeting are not sure if they are participating in ministry. For instance, the running of worship meeting can have conflicts between the clerk and the pastor. George Busolo, et al., argue in a chapter on “Quakerism in Africa”:

Worship meeting can be presided over by the presiding clerk and run by the recording clerk. This can cause conflict over the roles of the pastor and the clerk. There has been a longing among some Friends for the worship meeting to be presided over by the

pastor, but presiding clerks are sometimes reluctant to let this happen, especially in this part of the country.<sup>10</sup>

In maintaining the identity of equality as programmed Quakers then, this view gets to the understanding that all that are gathered in the presence of God are ministers is necessary. There is need for good relationship among church leaders strengthening and improving the working relationship in church leadership is vital in maintaining the growth of the church.

## ROLE OF CHURCH LEADERS

The distinctive roles of leaders described in the *Christian Faith and Practice in Friends Church: Friends United Meeting in East Africa* should be helpful towards the smooth running of the church affairs. Boundaries govern the area of jurisdiction for each church leader. For instance, the pastor's roles majorly concern *officiating meetings for worship*, and presiding clerk's roles majorly concerns *officiating meeting for business sometimes called the meeting of church governance*.<sup>11</sup> The two mentioned meetings have to be held separately. It becomes a problem when especially on Sunday, the day for public worship is to be presided over with the presiding clerk.

A quick look at the *Faith and Practice* shows that there is more weight given to church governance than meeting for worship. However, church governance meetings are also considered as worship meetings. Here equality is emphasized when making decisions in business meetings. In either way there seem to be some confusion in the roles stipulated. For instance, it is not clear if a pastor should be actively involved in business meeting or not.

All that is required of presiding clerk and other clerks to do is what theological training does to the pastor. Before pastors replaced the elders and the overseers, there was no need for training. In a recent graduation ceremony at Friends Theological College, Kaimosi, in the commissioning words, those who were graduating had to confess that they were now fully pastors. Here the main reason for ministerial training is to become a pastor, a position that should be revised to be inclusive of other types of ministry. Thus, those graduating should confess that they are ready to go out to serve in ministry. It attests to the spirit of equality. Either way, even those who train to become pastors are well equipped to even serve as clerks or even in other

ministerial positions like being teachers, missionaries, chaplains, administrators to mention but a few.

Church leaders in working together should embrace closer relationships. As Powers and Bruce articulate, “Those who provide ministerial leadership will desire closer relationship with each other as a means of becoming more effective in their work.”<sup>12</sup> Efficiency is significant in leadership as it leads to souls being nourished spiritually. The conflicting zone of crossing borders into another leader’s jurisdiction should not be seen as usurping of roles. Working out differences should be done amicably. Serving in any church leadership role should be taken as a calling. David Kadalie notes, “For those in leadership it is imperative to be motivated by a deep and real sense of call. This is the heart of ministry; seeing God’s call and direction and the joy of discovering how God uses you to fulfill His purpose. One’s sense of call will define their leadership experience.”<sup>13</sup>

The relationship of the pastor and the presiding clerk in the Quaker programmed churches has in the recent past generated a considerable amount of debate about who is in authority. The interactions I have had with the students I teach at Friends Theological College, Kaimosi, and in my experiences in doing ministry as a pastor in Vihiga Yearly Meeting of Friends, there is a feeling that the presiding clerk is the one in authority. The crux of the matter is how relating well among leaders in the church can be functional without looking at who is in authority. As church officers, the greatest call is to serve those who are gathered in the presence of God. Boice notes, “the primary reason for these offices is service to the people of God... when that end is not perceived, troubles follow.”<sup>14</sup> Key things to note include the responsibilities assigned and being equipped for the task, as Boice continues to articulate: “Although all Christians are to be engaged in service to the world and to each other, special responsibilities or service are given to some specifically equipped for the task”<sup>15</sup>

The authority behind the church offices has to be exercised with care. It can have negative impact when a church leader lords over instead of serving. For instance, a pastor by being trained in theological studies comes with authority owing to the knowledge acquired. Using this authority without humility when working with a presiding clerk and other church leaders who do not have theological training brings conflict. On the other hand, the clerk and other church leaders, as nominated church leaders, have authority that can be misused as the ones in charge causing conflicts with the

pastor. Authority is vested in Jesus Christ who calls church leaders into service. The model of leadership exemplified in Jesus' teachings as recorded in Scripture embraces servanthood in leadership. Loving one another is the greatest task in relating well as church leaders. It identifies with Christians' discipleship to Jesus Christ in becoming the salt, light, and letter to the world. Letting our lives speak as church leaders through good working relationships and loving one another is essential in maintaining the heartbeat of Quakerism.

### EVALUATING CHURCH LEADERS AND THEIR ROLES, AND USE OF AUTHORITY

Church leaders need to be evaluated now and then to be able to correct areas that impact the spiritual growth of the church. Below are some of the guiding questions that can be helpful in evaluating church leaders and their roles. There is room for amendment and correction if need be. It is the questionnaire that students from different parts of East Africa including Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda used.

1. In your own opinion who among the leaders in the Friends Church including the pastor has the authority over the other and why?
2. In which ways have you seen authority being used both in positive and negative ways?
3. What is the view of the congregants about church leaders?
4. Are the congregants satisfied with the current church leadership as structured? If yes or no, please give the reasons.
5. Do the church leaders understand the source of their authority, and if so from where?
6. With an emphasis on the use of authority, how can theological training effectively prepare people to serve in ministry?
7. Is the faith and practice book helpful to the church leaders? If yes or no, please explain. Do you think it is useful? If yes or no, please explain.
8. What kind of conflict of interests have you observed among the leaders of the church in exercising their roles?
9. State some of the deficiencies you have observed in church leadership.

10. Briefly explain the roles of the church leaders in your locality during worship and business meetings.
11. What vision do you have for the future of the church leadership in the Friends church?

The answers provided by students were helpful in giving a glimpse on church leadership. As an example, I will share some of the responses to three questions: one, five and nine. There were thirteen interviewees in total. I prefer not to mention names because it is not to be reported back to the yearly meetings. In the first question, seven interviewees responded that the presiding clerk is the one in authority. Various reasons were given as to why the clerk is in authority. One, is that the clerk regulates and coordinates most of the church activities. Another reason was that this is an inherited role from the missionaries. In these two responses there is need to look at why the clerk regulates most of the church activities and if what the missionaries initiated is still helpful. In other responses, there was this feeling that we are all equal and there was no one in authority. There were also responses showing that the pastor is the one in authority because the church is a spiritual entity. Again, here it is important to look at what it means for the church community being spiritual.

In responding to question five on the sources of authority, various responses were given by different individuals. Six of the interviewees' responses were that the church leaders' understanding about source of authority varies. In some cases, the source of authority is from the yearly meeting or monthly meeting. Other sources are from the knowledge they have acquired in training; other leaders are just confused as they think the source of authority is from George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, or Christ. Other interviewees responded that some church leaders do not know the source of authority; others believe it is from God or the Bible. As it is in these responses, one can decipher why at times authority can be misused when it is grounded in human precepts where there is no accountability to Jesus Christ who is the leader of the Church. There can be a tendency of lording over instead of serving as a church leader.

In the ninth question in responding to deficiencies, several were mentioned. It included disunity, hatred, nepotism, greed, lack of training, not adhering to *Faith and Practice*, lack of transparency and lack of self-esteem. This is an area that can critically be assessed with a view of strongly correcting the deficiencies. These are some of



the areas that directly affect how church leaders relate to each other. They are insightful responses to learn from in creating room to ask reflective questions, and correcting that which is wrong about the role of church leaders and use of authority rooted in the concept of hierarchy and doing ministry.

## FUTURE OF THE CHURCH LEADERSHIP

In the discussions, I have heard, and in looking at some of the responses I received, there is need in continuing to work towards improving church leadership. Creating awareness and having robust leadership training programs will give room to a more enlightened leadership in the church. For instance, having evaluative questions can be informative in preparing a leadership training manual or curriculum. Implementing a leadership training grounded in a servanthood model of leadership would help in rooting out the lording over mentality that at times can happen unknowingly. Coming into the realization that any position that a leader serves in is as equally important as others is necessary. An overhaul evaluation of the leadership roles in the *Christian Faith and Practice* handbook in the Friends church should be done in seeing what is fitting for the contemporary world and the future. Some of the church leadership positions should be looked into so that merging some of the roles could reduce them.

## CONCLUSION

I would want to note that I have not stopped thinking about this topic since I submitted the original paper. For instance, I have corrected some parts. Other ideas have also popped up that can be useful like interacting with Robert K. Greenleaf's and Margaret Benefiel's styles of leadership in servanthood and soul leadership, respectively. Other insights, ideas, observations, corrections and comments are necessary. Who knows what this could give birth to? It may be necessary to carry out further research that can deeply address issues to do with the concept of doing ministry, use of authority, hierarchy, and role of church leaders in Quakerism. This research is but a tip of the iceberg.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Boice, James Montgomery. *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive Readable Theology*. Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1986.
- Busolo, George ET AL., “Quakers in Africa” in *The Cambridge Companion to Quakerism*, ed. by Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion, 197 – 215. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Cooper, Wilmer A. *A Living Faith: An Historical and Comparative Study of Quaker Beliefs*. Richmond, Indiana: Friends United Press, 2001.
- Friends United Meeting in East Africa. *Christian Faith and Practice in the Friends Church*. Kisumu: National Printing Press, 2002.
- Kadalie, David. *Leaders Resource Kit: Tools and Technique to Develop Your Leadership*. Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 2006.
- Powers, Bruce P., ed. *Church Administration Handbook*. U.S.A.: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1997.
- Punshon, John. *Portrait in Grey: A Short History of the Quakers*. London: Quaker Home Service, 1984.
- Western Yearly Meeting of Friends, *A Handbook or elders*. 1995.
- Wood, Peter. *Eldering*. Argenta, B.C, VOG : Argenta Friends Press, 1987.

## ENDNOTES

1. Wilmer Cooper, *A Living Faith: An Historical and Comparative Study of Quaker Beliefs* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 2001), 3.
2. Western Yearly Meeting of Friends, *A Handbook for Elders* (1995), 6.
3. Ibid.
4. Cooper, *A Living Faith*, 4
- 5 Peter Wood, *Eldering* (Argenta, B.C, VOG : Argenta Friends Press, 1987), 4.
6. John Punshon, *Portrait in Grey: A Short History of the Quakers* (London: Quaker Home Service, 1984), 86.
7. Wood, *Eldering*, 4
8. Cooper, 4.
9. Ibid, 7.

10. George Busolo, et al., “Quakers in Africa” in *The Cambridge Companion to Quakerism*, eds. Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 206-207.
11. Friends United Meeting in East Africa, *Christian Faith and Practice in the Friends Church* (Kenya, Kisumu: National Printing Press, 2002), 5.
12. Bruce Powers., ed., *Church Administration Handbook* (U.S.A.: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1997), 249.
13. David Kadalic, *Leaders Resource Kit: Tools and Technique to Develop Your Leadership* (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 2006), 29.
14. James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive Readable Theology* (Leicester: Intersarsity Press, 1986), 630.
15. *Ibid*, 631.