

## 'WOMEN'S SPEAKING JUSTIFIED': WOMEN AND DISCIPLINE IN THE EARLY QUAKER MOVEMENT, 1652–56

by KATE PETERS

**I**N October 1655, two Quakers, Priscilla Cotton and Mary Cole, imprisoned in Exeter gaol, published a warning to the priests and people of England.<sup>1</sup> It was in many ways a typical Quaker tract, decrying the national Church of England, and urging people to turn to the inner light of Christ, rather than rely on the outward teachings of the national Church. But Priscilla Cotton and Mary Cole also levelled the following bitter accusation against England's ministry:

thou tellest the people, Women must not speak in a Church, whereas it is not spoke onely of a Female, for we are all one both male and female in Christ Jesus, but it's weakness that is the woman by the Scriptures forbidden. . . . Indeed, you your selves are the women, that are forbidden to speak in the Church, that are become women.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Profs Patrick Collinson, Patricia Crawford, and Ann Hughes, all of whom have commented on drafts of this paper. Unless otherwise stated, all manuscript references are to material held at London, Friends' House Library.

<sup>2</sup> Priscilla Cotton and Mary Cole, *To the Priests and People of England, we Discharge our Consciences* (London, 1655), pp. 6–8. The London bookseller George Thomason dated his copy on 16 Oct. 1655. Many Quaker tracts were collected by Thomason, a bookseller and collector who literally bankrupted himself in an attempt to obtain a copy of everything published during the tumultuous years of the 1640s and 1650s. Beyond ensuring the survival of thousands of books from this period, the Thomason Collection is significant because he noted the date of acquisition on the title page of each tract he obtained. Thomason's dates are useful as an approximate guide to when tracts were published, or when they were in circulation in London. Where relevant, this essay will note Thomason's dating of the tracts under discussion. Details of his dating system, and of the history of the Thomason Collection as a whole, are given in the introduction in G. K. Fortescue, ed., *Catalogue of the Pamphlets, Books, Newspapers and Manuscripts relating to the Civil War, the Commonwealth, and Restoration, collected by George Thomason, 1640–1661*, 2 vols (London, 1908). For a more recent discussion of the Thomason Tracts, and especially the validity of using his dates, see Stephen J. Greenberg, 'Dating civil war pamphlets, 1641–1644', *Albion*, 20 (1988), pp. 387–401, and Michael Mendle, 'The Thomason Collection: a reply to Stephen J. Greenberg', *Albion*, 22 (1990), pp. 85–93.

This short Quaker tract may well have been sold and passed around the south west of England by Priscilla Cotton's husband, Arthur, who distributed other Quaker books in the area.<sup>3</sup> If so, he seems to have regretted it. The following year, Arthur Cotton wrote to the Quaker leader, George Fox, requesting more Quaker ministers for the two counties of Devon and Cornwall. His letter was unusually specific, asking Fox for preachers, 'which power and wisdom Guides', and then elaborating: 'and Rather men Friends For they doe nott Care to here any women Friends'.<sup>4</sup>

This paper is an examination of gender dynamics in the very early Quaker movement between the years 1652 and 1656, the first years for which we have any records of the movement, and a crucial period for its establishment as a national phenomenon. The kind of conflicts described in the opening cameo were an important dynamic in the development of the Quaker movement. Far from being a movement, as is often assumed, which was enabling of women like Priscilla Cotton and Mary Cole, it will be proposed that, from a very early date, leaders of the movement developed a series of ambiguous arguments about the status of women which served to legitimize and limit their presence in the Quaker movement. The attitudes of men like Arthur Cotton were central to the very early establishment of internal discipline and organizational structures. The perceived need to curb and control unruly women contributed in a very important way to the development of the movement's organization. This paper will argue that a doctrinal position on the spiritual equality of women, and on their fitness for public ministry, was very carefully presented in print; while at the same time practical, disciplinary strategies were developed for controlling the public role of women within the movement.

Quaker women have for a long time been a celebrated part of women's history. Hailed as 'Mothers of Feminism' and 'incipient feminists', they are remarkable for their public role in the developing Quaker movement.<sup>5</sup> Women preached and led meetings for worship;

<sup>3</sup> An example of this is in a letter from Arthur Cotton to George Fox, 20 Feb. 1656, Swarthmoor Transcript [hereafter Sw Tr] 1: 628. In 1664, one Nicholas Cole of Plymouth – probably a relative of Mary Cole – was named as a distributor of Quaker books. PRO, SP 29/109, fo. 44. I am grateful to Michael Frearson for this reference.

<sup>4</sup> Arthur Cotton to George Fox, 18 Nov. 1656, Sw Tr 1: 630.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret Hope Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism: the Story of Quaker Women in America* (San Francisco, CA, 1986); Christine Trevett, *Women and Quakerism in the Seventeenth Century* (York, 1991), p. 10.

they were prolific authors of published Quaker tracts; and they engaged audaciously in religious debate with ordained puritan ministers. In the seventeenth century, Quaker women preachers undertook itinerant preaching missions of staggering proportions; like the former servant, Mary Fisher, who travelled with Ann Austin to New England and Barbados, and later moved on to Turkey where she gained an interview with the Sultan.<sup>6</sup> The defiant public activity associated with Quaker women in the mid-seventeenth century has been described time and again by historians.

One of the reasons for this is that Quaker women are more accessible to historians than other women of the same period. Because of the unusually conscientious approach of early Quakers to recording their own history, we have access to autobiographies, spiritual testimonies, and printed tracts by early Quaker women. Accounts of their trials and imprisonments are recorded in Quaker books of sufferings; they wrote, and appear in, hundreds of Quaker letters still preserved at the Friends' House Library.<sup>7</sup>

The traditionally strong public role of Quaker women is reflected in their compelling presence in denominational histories. Mabel Brailsford wrote the first narrative history of seventeenth-century Quaker women in 1915, only four years after William Braithwaite's magisterial study of the beginnings of the movement as a whole.<sup>8</sup> In 1922, the first account of the social origins of early Quaker ministers included an analysis of the social status of women ministers; a subject which has not been attempted subsequently.<sup>9</sup> One woman in particular towers over the history of early Quakerism: Margaret Fell, the 'Mother of

<sup>6</sup> Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley, CA, 1992), pp. 168–9.

<sup>7</sup> The role of women in recording Quaker history is in itself interesting, from Elizabeth Hooton and Margaret Fell keeping copies of their letters from 1652, to Emily Jermyn and Charlotte Fell Smith transcribing the Swarthmoor and Abram Barclay manuscripts in the nineteenth century. For Hooton's decision to keep copies of everything she wrote, see Thomas Aldam and Elizabeth Hooton to George Fox, Autumn 1652, A. R. Barclay Mss 1: 16, fo. 54.

<sup>8</sup> Mabel Brailsford, *Quaker Women* (London, 1915); W. C. Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism* (London, 1911).

<sup>9</sup> Ernest E. Taylor, 'The first Publishers of Truth: a study', *JFHS*, 19 (1922), pp. 66–81. Compare with Barry Reay, 'The social origins of early Quakerism', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 11 (1980), pp. 55–72; and also idem, 'Early Quaker activity and reactions to it, 1652–1664' (Oxford University D. Phil. thesis, 1979), pp. 37–8. Phyllis Mack argues that Quaker women from London tended to be of higher social status than those from the north of England: Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 186–96.

Quakerism', who ran the national headquarters of the movement from her home at Swarthmoor Hall, Lancashire, who organized national preaching missions, who helped to fund the movement, and who later lobbied hard for the setting up of separate women's meetings. Margaret Fell, never entirely forgotten by historians, has recently been revamped, and her latest biographer has reminded us of her central role in the developing Quaker movement.<sup>10</sup>

More recent studies of Quaker women reflect the expanding discipline of women's history. There is an increasing tendency to remove Quaker women from their immediate denominational context and to study them instead within the tradition of women's activism.<sup>11</sup> The roots of the Quaker movement lie in the turbulent years of the English revolution, in particular, in the atmosphere of increased religious toleration of the republican regimes of the 1650s. It is well known that women were active participants of many radical movements in the 1640s and 1650s. The sects and gathered churches which proliferated in the period provided a unique opportunity for women, and sometimes quite humble women, to play a significant public role.<sup>12</sup> Patricia Crawford's work on women's published writing shows a sharp rise in the number of women's publications, which addressed broad political and religious issues.<sup>13</sup> Patricia Higgins has examined women's petitions to parliaments and the political demonstrations mounted by women in London; and Phyllis Mack, Dorothy Ludlow, and Patricia Crawford have examined the activities of radical female sectaries.<sup>14</sup> This was the period of

<sup>10</sup> Isabel Ross, *Margaret Fell, Mother of Quakerism*, 2nd edn (York, 1984); Bonnelyn Young Kunze, *Margaret Fell and the Rise of Quakerism* (London, 1994). Margaret Fell is not the only early woman minister to have been the subject of a biography; see also E. Manners, *Elizabeth Hooton: First Quaker Woman Preacher (1600–1672)*, JFHS, Supplement series, 12 (London 1914); Lucy Hodgkin, *A Quaker Saint of Cornwall: Loveday Hambly and her Guests* (London, 1927).

<sup>11</sup> In 1991, Christine Trevett felt the need for a new feminist study on Quaker women in the seventeenth century, and, in her own words, wrote it, 'because no-one else had'. Trevett, *Women and Quakerism*, p. vii.

<sup>12</sup> This was famously argued by Keith Thomas nearly forty years ago in his seminal article, 'Women and the civil war sects', *P&P*, 13 (April, 1958), pp. 42–62. There has been an explosion in scholarship in this field over the past twenty years, much of it very usefully assimilated in Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England, 1500–1720* (London, 1993), esp. pp. 119–82; eadem, 'The challenges to patriarchy: how did the revolution affect women?', in John Morrill, ed., *Revolution and Restoration. England in the 1650s* (London, 1992), pp. 112–28.

<sup>13</sup> Patricia Crawford, 'Women's published writings, 1600–1700', in Mary Prior, ed., *Women in English Society, 1500–1800* (London, 1985), p. 269.

<sup>14</sup> Patricia Higgins, 'The reactions of women, with special reference to women

'the world turned upside down', 'when women preach and cobblers pray'.<sup>15</sup>

The activities of Quaker women have been integrated into this wider phenomenon of female activism in the English revolution; indeed, the extensive Quaker sources mean that Quaker women often form the mainstay of the argument that women were radical participants of the English revolution, threatening to 'shake patriarchy's foundations'. The numerous published writings of Quaker women have been singled out and studied by feminist literary critics as important examples of 'female' writing.<sup>16</sup> Most recently, Quaker women have been studied as examples of female spirituality and self-consciousness.<sup>17</sup>

Increasingly scholars argue that the public activities taken on by women in the revolutionary period ultimately reinforced rather than challenged patriarchal society.<sup>18</sup> Women justified and qualified their behaviour by affirming the inferiority of their sex, or claimed that their authority to act was based on spiritual, rather than actual worldly, equality with men.<sup>19</sup> They thus reinforced patriarchal assumptions that women, as women, should not behave in this way.

Discussions of female participation in the early Quaker movement also emphasise the spiritual impulse behind the women's extraordinary behaviour, and recognize it as equally limiting. Christine Trevett wrote

petitioners', in Brian Manning, ed., *Politics, Religion and the English Civil War* (London, 1973), pp. 179–222; Dorothy Ludlow, "'Arise and be doing": English preaching women, 1640–1660' (Indiana University Ph. D. thesis, 1978); eadem, 'Shaking patriarchy's foundations', in Richard L. Greaves, ed., *Triumph over Silence* (London, 1985); Phyllis Mack, 'Women as prophets during the English Civil War', *Feminist studies*, 8 (1982), pp. 19–45; Crawford, *Women and Religion in England*, chs 6–8.

<sup>15</sup> Anon., *Lucifers Lacky* (1641), sig. A3, cited in Michael Watts, *The Dissenters. From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1985), p. 83.

<sup>16</sup> Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing 1649–88* (London, 1988); Margaret Ezell, 'Breaking the seventh seal: writings by early Quaker women', in her *Writing Women's Literary History* (Baltimore, MD, 1993), pp. 132–60; for a statistical analysis of Quaker women's writings within the context of other women's writing, see Crawford, 'Women's published writings, 1600–1700', pp. 265–74.

<sup>17</sup> Elaine C. Huber, "'A woman must not speak": Quaker women in the English left wing', in Rosemary Reuther and Eleanor McLaughlin, eds, *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York, 1979), pp. 154–81; the most substantial and authoritative study of this subject is Mack, *Visionary Women*.

<sup>18</sup> Patricia Crawford, echoing the question posed by Joan Kelly, 'Did women have a Renaissance?', wonders whether women in mid-seventeenth-century England had a revolution, and seems to think not: Crawford, *Women and Religion*, p. 5; see also eadem, 'The challenges to patriarchalism', pp. 112–28.

<sup>19</sup> Mack, 'Women as prophets', pp. 19–38.

in 1991: '[T]his was no brand of radical feminism which was being offered, revolutionary though it was in its way. . . . It was spiritual equality which was being held out to [Quaker women].'<sup>20</sup> Phyllis Mack, in a very important and extensive study, has argued that the ecstatic prophecy and public preaching of Quaker women was based on a negation of gender which was implicit to the whole of Quaker theology: both women and men in the Quaker movement insisted that they preached as 'disembodied spirits' in the Light of God, rejecting any worldly or carnal identity. At the same time, Mack argued that the non-spiritual, mundane existence of Quaker women was shaped by a celebration of women as 'nursing mothers of Israel'; and that the perception of them as providers and nurturers fed directly into the organizational and institutional developments in the Quaker movement as a whole.<sup>21</sup>

The focus on female religiosity or spirituality has had the effect of divorcing women from the immediate political context of the early Quaker movement. To some extent, non-denominational historians of Quaker women deny them agency in the development of Quaker ideas and fail to see them as active participants in the movement's growth. Recent works on Quaker women by Mack, Christine Trevett, and Elaine Huber all studied the 'Quaker doctrines' which shaped the women's spirituality as an established, immutable, and homogeneous mass. A major factor in the spiritual empowerment of women is seen to be George Fox himself. Christine Trevett was in no doubt that George Fox was the first Quaker proponent of women's preaching; Elaine Huber argued that George Fox should be credited for 'insisting on leadership roles for women'; Phyllis Mack wondered why Fox was 'so receptive to the authority of women'.<sup>22</sup>

Thus the argument is that Quaker women were at once empowered by the liberty they derived from their spirituality; and at the same time limited in the degree of female awakening this involved because the Quaker notion of spirituality was essentially ungendered: women had to stop being women in order to enter the public arena of the Quaker ministry.

<sup>20</sup> Trevett, *Women and Quakerism*, p. 52.

<sup>21</sup> Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 134, 236–61.

<sup>22</sup> Trevett, *Women and Quakerism*, pp. 13–14, 47–8; Huber, 'A woman must not speak', p. 160; Mack, *Visionary Women*, p. 240. Mabel Brailsford also devoted the whole first chapter of her book to the influence of the teachings of George Fox on the women of the Quaker movement: Brailsford, *Quaker Women*, ch. 1.

## Quaker Women and Quaker Discipline

In this paper the issue is addressed somewhat differently. Rather than arguing that women were empowered in the Quaker movement by virtue of pre-existing, and implausibly enlightened, attitudes of leaders like George Fox, it examines the development of Quaker justifications for women's preaching as a dynamic feature of the early movement; and argues that the issue of women's preaching was incorporated into the nascent doctrines and disciplinary structures of the movement.

\* \* \*

Those Quaker tracts which discussed the rights of women to preach constituted only a very small proportion of Quaker literature. Of the three hundred or so Quaker tracts printed between 1652 and 1656, only four addressed the issue at any length.<sup>23</sup> And although Quaker women were active ministers and remarkably prolific female authors of their time, none of them addressed the argument themselves. Despite this, the very existence of an argument in favour of women's preaching is rightly perceived as significant and has contributed to the view that the early Quaker movement was empowering of women.<sup>24</sup>

The argument over Quaker women's preaching has been dominated by the fact that the case was very famously propounded by Margaret Fell, in 1666. Fell's pamphlet, *Women's Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed of by the Scriptures*, has attracted much attention from women's historians. An edition of it was reprinted in 1989. Moira Ferguson counted it a piece of feminist religious polemic. Isabel Ross, the Quaker biographer of Margaret Fell, hailed it as the first book to be written by a woman since the Reformation which argued for the spiritual equality of women.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> The texts are: Richard Farnworth, *A Woman Forbidden to Speak in the Church* (London, 1654), reprinted in 1655; Ann Audland *et al.*, *The Saints Testimony Finishing through Sufferings* (London, 1655); Priscilla Cotton and Mary Cole, *To the Priests and People of England* (London, 1655); George Fox, *A Woman Learning in Silence* (London, 1656).

<sup>24</sup> But note the important caveat that seventeenth-century texts about the role of women are frequently misread by historians: 'because they can so readily be situated in the context of gender politics, they are never fully situated in the political and discursive specificities of the early modern period'. Diane Purkiss, 'Material girls: the seventeenth-century woman debate', in Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss, eds, *Women, Texts and Histories 1575-1760* (London, 1992), p. 70.

<sup>25</sup> Margaret Fell, *Women's Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed of by the Scriptures* (London, 1666, re-issued by Pythia Press, London, 1989); Moira Ferguson, ed., *First Feminists: British Women Writers 1578-1799* (Bloomington, IN, 1985), p. 114; Ross, *Margaret Fell*, p. 201.

It is problematic to equate Fell's work, written in 1666, with the emerging Quaker movement of the early 1650s. Margaret Fell was, by 1666, established as a major leader of the movement. Her wealth and social status were considerable: as wife and later widow of judge Thomas Fell, Margaret Fell oversaw a substantial farming estate and maintained her gentry status; after the Restoration she met Charles II to discuss religious toleration with him.<sup>26</sup> In 1669, she married George Fox, and together in the 1660s and 1670s it was their work which consolidated the Quaker movement into a respectable and disciplined Church. Fell's gentry status was very important in establishing the respectability of the Quakers, indeed on occasion more important than her gender as a significant counterweight to the perceived humble status of George Fox.<sup>27</sup> Fox and Fell collaborated over the establishment of separate women's meetings in the 1660s, in the face of serious internal opposition by other Quaker leaders; and both the Fox–Fell marriage, and the publication of *Women's Speaking Justified*, have been seen as part of the attempt to defend the meetings.<sup>28</sup> In this context, *Women's Speaking Justified* has been described as 'cautious' and lacking in the 'charm and wit' of other Quaker women's writing, and 'far more careful and conservative' than the actual preaching activities of women over the preceding decades.<sup>29</sup>

There are clear parallels between Fell's work and the handful of texts which actually posited the right of women to preach in the 1650s. In many ways Fell's work of 1666 was an expansion of these texts, and can be seen, like them, as part of an attempt by the Quaker leadership to normalize and legitimize the potentially disruptive public preaching of women in the Quaker movement.

The first Quaker pamphlet which posited the right of women to speak was written by a leading Quaker author, Richard Farnworth. It was circulating in London in the first half of January 1654, and so was probably written around the end of 1653; by all accounts, it can be

<sup>26</sup> Young Kunze, *Margaret Fell*, pp. 65–82, esp. pp. 78–9. Thomas Fell died in 1658.

<sup>27</sup> Bonnelyn Young Kunze, 'Religious authority and social status in seventeenth-century England: the friendship of Margaret Fell, George Fox, and William Penn', *ChH*, 57 (1988), pp. 170–86.

<sup>28</sup> Young Kunze, *Margaret Fell*, pp. 154–5.

<sup>29</sup> Trevett, *Women and Quakerism*, p. 54; Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity*, p. 45. Elaine Hobby is also quite correctly at pains to make mention of the earlier visionary Quaker works which vindicated women's preaching in far more extravagant terms before the Quaker 'official stance on the subject became ever more guarded' (*ibid.*, p. 45).



## Quaker Women and Quaker Discipline

considered a significantly early Quaker tract.<sup>30</sup> It was called, rather perversely, *A Woman Forbidden to Speak in the Church*, but despite the title was a case well argued from scriptural texts. Indeed, Farnworth rather modishly took on race, class, and gender on the frontispiece, quoting from Galatians 3:28: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.' The point of the tract was to counter the argument from the Pauline edicts that a woman should not speak in the church; and that she should learn from her husband in silence and all subjection.<sup>31</sup> The central justification used by Farnworth for women's public speaking came from the book of Joel: 'And it shall come to pass, in the last dayes, saith the Lord, I will pour out my Spirit upon all Flesh; your Sons and Daughters shall prophesy.'<sup>32</sup>

Farnworth began his tract by considering the term 'church'. For him, it was not a physical or 'carnal' building, but 'is made all of living stones, elect and precious, [1 *Pet.* 2. 5.] and the Saints, their Bodies are made fit Temples for the Holy Ghost to dwell in [2 *Cor* 6.16.]'.<sup>33</sup> By defining a church as the people who comprise its congregation, it would be more acceptable that women should be allowed to speak 'in the church': it established that women spoke first and foremost as spiritual beings.

From this, Farnworth very rapidly went on to dismiss gender as a significant criterion in determining who should be allowed to speak in the 'church':

that which is flesh is flesh, and that knoweth not the things of God, neither in male nor female, but is adulterated from God, but that which is spirit is spirit, and is born of God, either in male or female, that knoweth him, and that is permitted to speak in the Temple.<sup>34</sup>

Farnworth also cited examples of female prophets from the Bible to show that women were likely to serve well as messengers of the holy spirit. Paul 'writ to the Romans to receive Phebe, which was a Servant

<sup>30</sup> The stationer George Thomason obtained a copy on 18 Jan. 1654.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. 1 *Cor.* 14.34; 1 *Tim.* 2.11.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Joel 2.28; and also Acts 2.17–18.

<sup>33</sup> Farnworth, *A Woman Forbidden to Speak*, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

or Minister to the Church at Conchrea'; he had likewise commended Priscilla and Aquila; and also Mary 'who bestowed much labor on us'. Farnworth paid particular attention to Tryphena and Tryphos, 'delicious or delicate, two godly women, and beloved of the Lord, who laboured with Paul in the Gospel'.<sup>35</sup> Farnworth gathered all of his examples of female ministry from Romans 16, and so did not over-exert himself in his case study. His broader discussion conflated an attack on worldly wisdom and professional ministry with a justification of female ministry, arguing that spiritual integrity superseded gender: 'Let all carnal Wisdome in Male as well as in Female keep silence, for that is not permitted [*sic*] to speak, it is adulterated from God; and the natural man knowes not the things of God.' From this, it was a short step to arguing that women's weaker natural state lent itself to their greater receptivity to God:

all the Wisdom of the world it knoweth not God, who is a Spirit, and he chuseth the weak things of this world to confound the things which are mighty, I Cor. 1.27.28.29. and the Woman is counted the weaker Vessel, but the Lord is filling that Vessel full of his Wisdom, and ruleing it by his holy Spirit he dwelling in his Temple.<sup>36</sup>

Farnworth's argument appeared more pragmatic at the end of his tract when he finally returned rather neatly to his original dichotomy of the carnal and spiritual definition of the Church. He now provided – again referring to two biblical female prophets – a much more immediate and recognizable justification for the necessity of women to speak in the church, and one which referred to the actual nature of early Quaker worship:

But to *Aquila* and *Priscilla* salute me, and to *the Church that is in their house*, I Cor. 16.19, and let her speak by the Spirit of the Lord the things of God made manifest unto her, for if she be not permitted to speak in the Church, and the Church be in her house, she must not speak, but go out of her house.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Farnworth, *A Woman Forbidden to Speak*, p. 7. Compare with Romans 16.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

## Quaker Women and Quaker Discipline

Farnworth's conclusion was based on the fact that women held an important role in the early movement, of hosting meetings in their houses. The first pamphlet expounding the Quaker doctrine of 'allowing women to speak' was based on ideas of the spiritual equality of women and men, but also responded to a need to legitimize the existing functions carried out by Quaker women.

Farnworth's pamphlet was reprinted the following year, in 1655. In 1656 George Fox also published a tract which discussed the rights of women to speak. Like Farnworth's, this carried the similarly perverse title, *The Woman Learning in Silence*; and Fox spent his first page citing almost verbatim from the Pauline edict forbidding women to speak without apparently contradicting it.<sup>38</sup> Yet once under way, Fox's pamphlet reiterated the arguments of spiritual equality, scriptural precedent, and the fact that true preaching from the spirit essentially denied any worldly identity, as first expounded by Farnworth to justify women's preaching.

The intellectual presentation of spiritual equality in the Quakers' published writings was based, as Mack argued, on a negation of 'worldly' gender; the right of women to prophesy did not empower women, as women, with any worldly agency. These two tracts, placed in the context of other contemporary Quaker writings, contributed to the construction of a wider argument that placed other limitations on women.

Earlier, in April 1653, Richard Farnworth had written another tract which dealt more practically with the position of women in the Quaker movement. This tract, entitled *An Easter Reckoning*, contained a section called 'The Lords free love-offering to his own people', or 'How everyone is bound in duty to be in subjection to the Lord, and to walk in obedience to his commands'.<sup>39</sup> This outlined the proper social relations between God's own people in a godly commonwealth, beginning with children's 'dues or duty' to parents, servants' duties to their masters, magistrates' duties to God, and ending with instructions to alehouse keepers and warnings to 'whoremongers and adulterers'.<sup>40</sup> Under the heading 'Wives dues or duty to their husbands', Farnworth exhorted:

<sup>38</sup> Fox, *Woman Learning in Silence*.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Farnworth [and Thomas Aldam], *An Easter Reckoning* (London, 1653), sig. Alr.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17–20.

Wives, be in subjection to your own husbands, and love them in the Lord, walking in obedience to his commands, and be not angry, nor proud, nor stubborn, nor cross, nor hasty, nor peevish, nor perverse, do not scold, nor braw, nor lye, nor swear, for God doth forbid it; but be loving, and meek, gentle, and lowly minded, and be in subjection to the Lord, and live in love one with another; let not the woman usurpe authority over the man, but be in subjection, as Sarah was, who obeyed Abraham, and called him Lord; and be chaste, and sober minded, and stay at home, and waite upon the Lord, and give glory to his name, in yeelding obedience to his commands, that he may be honoured and glorified for ever.<sup>41</sup>

To husbands, Farnworth was rather less exacting in his recommendations: 'Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved his Church, and gave himself for it, and be loving and gentle to them, according to the command of the Lord.'<sup>42</sup>

*An Easter Reckoning* is an astounding tract because it appeared so early in the history of the Quaker movement, and yet established rules for the maintaining of Quaker discipline. It is clear from private correspondence that Farnworth and other Quaker leaders frequently circulated letters to be read at the local meetings which were springing up across the north of England. These similarly amount to a sort of early Quaker church discipline; yet for two reasons Farnworth's printed tract is more remarkable. First, the private manuscript exhortations between early Quakers more frequently related to forms of worship, urging friends not to lose their faith, and to meet often together for worship. Farnworth's printed tract, which was strongly reminiscent of the more common Christian conduct books, was concerned with real issues of social hierarchies and patriarchal control.<sup>43</sup> Secondly, Farnworth's tract was intended for a wider audience than isolated Quaker meetings. At least one hostile reader encountered the tract, for he referred to it in a printed work of his own attacking the Quakers; and we can be certain that other readers outside

<sup>41</sup> Richard Farnworth [and Thomas Aldam], *An Easter Reckoning*, pp. 18–19. Cf. Eph. 5.21, Col. 3.18–25, 4.1.

<sup>42</sup> Farnworth, *An Easter Reckoning*, p. 19.

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion of the genesis of the wider, but very similar 'protestant family', see Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England* (London, 1988), pp. 60–93.

## Quaker Women and Quaker Discipline

the Quaker movement would have seen the tract.<sup>44</sup> *An Easter Reckoning* was a very early statement of Quaker conduct, intended to publicize Quaker doctrines to an audience who would undoubtedly be hostile, and in particular hostile to the predominance of unruly, outspoken women in the Quaker movement.

If the link between *An Easter Reckoning* and Farnworth's later publication of *A Woman Forbidden to Speak* seems tenuous, George Fox made it abundantly clear. In his own tract, *The Woman Learning in Silence*, he abandoned on page two his account of the wonders worked by women prophets in the Bible, to expound boldly on seventeenth-century patriarchy:

Husbands love your Wives, and be not bitter against them. Wives submit your selves first to your Husbands as unto the Lord: The Husband is the head of the Wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, and is the Saviour of the body: Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so let the Wives be subject to their own Husbands in everything. Husbands love your Wives, even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctifie and cleanse it by the washing of water by the Word, that he might present it a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, that it should be holy without blemish.<sup>45</sup>

In Fox's view, then, Quaker women, like all wives, were to be cleansed, and sanctified. They were to have their spots, wrinkles, and blemishes removed. There were thus very clear limitations to his 'receptivity of their authority'; and he stated them in the very tract in which he justifies their role as prophets.

The other printed Quaker tract of the early 1650s which defended women's public speaking affords a greater insight still into the influence of Quaker men in propounding the argument for the right of women to preach. Because it was written jointly by men and women, and described a series of events at a Quaker trial, it provides evidence of the very different attitudes of men and women in the Quaker movement to the activities of women, and to the perceived need to justify them to a hostile public.

<sup>44</sup> Luke Fawne *et al.*, *A Second Beacon Fired* (London, 1654).

<sup>45</sup> Fox, *Woman Learning in Silence*, p. 2. Cf. Eph. 5.25-7.

The tract, called *The Saints Testimony Finishing Through Sufferings*, was written by a group of Quaker prisoners at Banbury in 1655. Usually authorship is ascribed to the Quaker Ann Audland, although in fact many Quakers contributed to it.<sup>46</sup> The tight chronology leading up to the publication of the tract is important.

Ann Audland was wife of John Audland (c. 1630–64), a yeoman from Westmorland, who had served in the army in the Civil War, and had been a preacher to a group of Seekers since 1650.<sup>47</sup> Ann Audland herself, born in Kendal in 1627, had been educated for a time in London where she made contact with gathered churches, before returning to Kendal and the Preston Patrick Seekers, and marrying John Audland in 1650.<sup>48</sup> In September 1654, John Audland and his travelling companion John Camm travelled from London to Bristol on a Quaker preaching mission, passing through Banbury and Oxford. Once they arrived in Bristol they sent a letter to their wives in the north, Ann and Mabel, asking them to undertake a preaching mission to Banbury.<sup>49</sup> Ann Audland, leaving her young child behind at Kendal, travelled to Banbury with Mabel Camm and Mabel Camm's servant, Jane Waugh, arriving there on 13 January 1655; shortly afterwards, Ann Audland and Jane Waugh were imprisoned for assaulting the local minister and using 'blasphemous words'.<sup>50</sup> Ann Audland took issue with the grounds of her imprisonment, which she argued were unlawful; and on 5 February 1655 she explained why in her first tract, written in prison, and called *A True Declaration of the Suffering of the Innocent*. It was published in London and in circulation by early March.<sup>51</sup>

The recording of Quaker sufferings and trials in print was already an established genre of Quaker writing. Ann Audland would in all

<sup>46</sup> Audland, *The Saints Testimony*.

<sup>47</sup> For John Audland, see Richard Greaves and Robert Zaller, eds, *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century*, 3 vols (Brighton, 1982–4), 1.

<sup>48</sup> DNB; Dictionary of Quaker Biography (typescript index available at Friends' House Library, London).

<sup>49</sup> I infer this from a letter by John Audland and John Camm to Edward Burrough and Francis Howgill, 13 Sept. 1654, A. R. Barclay Mss 2: 157; see also 'The Journal of John Audland', in 'Letters of John Audland, 1653', Sw[arthmoor] Mss Box P2/15, pp. 32–4.

<sup>50</sup> Braithwaite, *Beginnings of Quakerism*, p. 199. Ann Audland requested of Burrough and Howgill: 'Let mee heare how the childe at Kendall doth' in a letter from Banbury. Ann Audland to Edward Burrough and Francis Howgill, [26 April 1655], A. R. Barclay Mss 2: 175.

<sup>51</sup> Ann Audland, *A True Declaration of the Suffering of the Innocent* (London, 1655). George Thomason obtained a copy on 3 March 1655.

## *Quaker Women and Quaker Discipline*

probability have seen many similar accounts, and was evidently confident of her purpose in writing: 'This', she explained to the local Justice of the Peace, 'was I moved to write to clear my conscience of thee, and leave thee without excuse, that when the Book of Conscience is opened, thou mayest remember that thou wast warned in thy life-time.'<sup>52</sup>

Ann Audland made little reference to her sex in her first tract, of which she was the sole author, concentrating instead on the legal injustices wrought upon her, and by extension upon the nation. She subsumed her female identity as author under that of her identity as a Quaker, as did her male colleagues: the frontispiece stated that it was written: 'By *Anne Audland*, whom the world scornfully calls **QUAKER**'. The word Quaker appeared in large capitals on a single line, the largest word on the page.

Here we see the practical implications of the doctrine that it was through the spirit rather than the flesh that men and women were to prophesy. By emphasising that she was known to 'the world' as a Quaker, she was implying that she had another spiritual identity, which remained hidden from those who knew no better. The similarities with her male co-religionists must be stressed: the stylistic affectation of insisting in Quaker publications that they were known only 'to the world' as Quakers, or by their proper names, was by now widespread and an integral part of the Quakers' printed identity, which stressed the spiritual above the worldly. Ann Audland was perhaps more explicit than her male contemporaries in her use of this device in conjunction with reference to her gender, as the frontispiece also sported the citation from Acts 2.18: 'And on my servants and on my handmaidens, I will poure out in those dayes of my Spirit, and they shall prophesie.'

Inside the tract, she also stated that Christ 'is one in the male and in the female'.<sup>53</sup> Beyond referring to these biblical texts, however, Ann Audland developed the argument no further. If we can consider the brief reference to these texts as a justification for her behaviour as a woman, it was based on the negation of the significance of her gender, rather than on an attempt to qualify or normalize it.

Perhaps as a result of Ann Audland's alacrity in publishing an account of her sufferings, and also because of the very sophisticated

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

news network of Quaker correspondence, events at Banbury rapidly became a focal point for other Quaker missionaries.<sup>54</sup> A number of Quaker ministers, including Richard Farnworth and Robert Rich, as well as more women (Sarah Tims and Margaret Vivers), came to Banbury from Bristol, Gloucestershire, Berkshire, and elsewhere; and over the course of the summer of 1655 each was imprisoned in turn.<sup>55</sup> An account of their imprisonments and trial at Banbury Quarter Sessions in September 1655 was published in November. It was this jointly authored work, *The Saints Testimony Finishing Through Sufferings*, which proffered a further justification of women's public speaking. In this tract, indeed, a far more vivid picture was painted of the role played by women in the Quaker movement. The justification for women's preaching was juxtaposed to dramatic accounts of women's public activities in the movement. The account of the trial was clearly intended to demonstrate that public hostility to the Quakers was born out of an hostility to women: when Sarah Tims was called to the bar, apparently well versed in Quaker legal tactics:

she desired to know by what Law they committed her; and one *John Austine*, called Mayor, answered, *that sweeping the house, and washing the dishes was the first point of law to her* (or words to that effect) so sent her back again to the Prison, she not being charged with any breach of the Law.<sup>56</sup>

Margaret Vivers posed more of a problem to the court, and it was

confessed that they had *Margaret Vivers* (who had spoken to the Priest in the *Steeplehouse* . . .) there, neither for whoredome, felony, nor theft, . . . yet it was the Mayors mind that she should be there, but whether she had committed any offence or no, they

<sup>54</sup> News of Ann Audland reached Kendal and thence Margaret Fell: Thomas Willan to Fell, 10 May 1655, Sw Mss 1: 235, 247. John Audland sent news of his wife to Edward Burrough and Francis Howgill in London: A. R. Barclay Mss 1: 116, 2: 175. Audland also informed John Wilkinson and John Storey of the prisoners in Banbury just as they were about to set off for London from Wiltshire in early April: John Audland to John Storey and Wilkinson, 1 April 1655, A. R. Barclay Mss 1: 28.

<sup>55</sup> Audland, *The Saints Testimony*, p. 2. See also John Audland to Margaret Fell, 1 Oct. 1655, Sw Mss 1: 391, who noted that Bristol heavyweights Captain Edward Pyott, Dennis Hollister, Thomas Gouldney, Walter Clement, John Camm, and Robert Rich had gone to Banbury for the assizes.

<sup>56</sup> Audland, *The Saints Testimony*, mispaginated, sig. Bv.



## *Quaker Women and Quaker Discipline*

could not tel. . . [T]he man that had kept her in custody, did object against a woman speaking in the church; it was asked whether the Spirit of God might not be permitted to speak in the Temple of God, yea or nay; the which by some was answered and granted that it might.<sup>57</sup>

At this point in the tract, the account of the trial was suspended, and there duly followed the familiar section proving the spiritual equality of men and women, and the biblical precedent for women prophets.<sup>58</sup> It is only later in the tract, when Richard Farnworth's trial is recorded, that it becomes clear that it was he who spoke in court on the right of women to prophesy:

there was a few words spoken concerning the Objection of the womans non-permission, . . . and when it was asked them on the Bench, if the Spirit of God might not speak in the Temple, they were then put to a stand, or partly silent about the same; and *R.F.* then and there said, if any of them would deny it, he would by plain Scripture prove that the Spirit of God might speak in his Temple (meaning either in the body of male or female).<sup>59</sup>

The presence of so many women in court had clearly raised the hackles of the authorities. The presentation of the trial in the Quakers' published account stressed the unsympathetic and unreasonable response of the prosecuting authorities: the women, like other Quaker prisoners, were not being tried under any law, and the justices' recourse to insulting the women was presented as petulant buffoonery. Even Farnworth's reasoned attempt to prove the legitimacy of his female colleagues' preaching was contrasted, in the tract, with the boorish inadequacy of the authorities' response:

when *R.F.* was there speaking about the Saints bodies being the Temples for God to dwel in . . . *John Austine*, who is called a Justice, [said], if God did dwel in them, . . . where was his legs,

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

&c. for the which *William Allen*, called a Justice, gave a secret check, seeming to be troubled thereat.<sup>60</sup>

The presentation of the authorities as both crass and ridiculous made Farnworth's justification of his female colleagues easier. On one level, which must not be discounted, he was defending his silenced fellow prisoners' right to speak publicly, reiterating the by now well-rehearsed argument for spiritual equality.<sup>61</sup> But on another level, the tract was attempting to normalize the unusual public activities of the Quaker women. The exchange on the subject of the 'Women's non-permission' took place, in the published account of the trial, between men. It presented the women as fundamentally wronged by the justices, and thus suggested that they deserved to be defended. And, finally, the printed account of the trial with its justification of women's preaching, appeared in the wake of a highly charged public trial at which several women were present. Farnworth was already concerned with the public presentation of the position of women in the Quaker movement, as has been seen not only in *A Woman Forbidden to Speak*, but also when he had set out 'The wives dues or duty to their husbands' in 1653. In this context, his public defence of their behaviour in court can be understood as an attempt to defuse public criticism of unruly Quaker women.

\* \* \*

If we turn to evidence beyond the published arguments defining or justifying women's right to speak in public, it is clear that women played a very important part in the early Quaker ministry. Whatever the problems of historians in explaining their active participation in the movement, it is nevertheless irrefutable that women were an accepted and even pre-existing component of the membership. The leaders of the movement, however, increasingly saw them as problematic and felt the need to constrain their behaviour; and the very first aspects of internal Quaker organization grew out of a need to curb their behaviour and enforce discipline on the movement.

<sup>60</sup> Audland, *The Saints Testimony*.

<sup>61</sup> The Quaker doctrine of spiritual equality was by now being discussed in Quaker meetings in Edinburgh. The puritan minister of Terling, John Stalham, who had visited Edinburgh in March 1655, was sufficiently well versed in the argument to be able to relay it in his tract, *Contradictions of the Quakers* (Edinburgh, 1655), p. 7.

## *Quaker Women and Quaker Discipline*

Internal correspondence between Quakers describes an early movement in which women were active and accepted participants. The itinerant Quaker minister Thomas Taylor wrote to George Fox from Leicestershire in 1655, describing how he had met up on his travels with the Yorkshire Quaker, Margaret Killam, who had been holding a meeting at Swannington, and how they 'walked downe in the morning to Nun Eaton to see frends and there is a pretty convincement upon some women there, and a young man or two, but none come forth but shee that was formerly'.<sup>62</sup>

Recruiting in this case, then, came largely from women. As interesting as this was the apparent acceptance with which Thomas Taylor viewed Margaret Killam's missionary work: 'But at Nun Eaton we stayed not long [he explained], for shee M:K: was to be next day . . . at Barrow at a meeting'.<sup>63</sup> This attitude was very common. Women were very often described on the road, travelling from town to town, arranging meetings, and sending news and greetings to their fellow missionaries.

This kind of acceptance occasionally extended to a clear welcoming of women. Francis Howgill spoke of an important conversion in Ireland of

the most eminent house in the towne and they are of the treue seed. She was a baptiste and they Cast her out for heresy . . . , a nouble woman she is, she declare agaynst the prest in publicke and was moved to declare agaynst the baptists and one day the markt day toke a load of Bookes of the highest prestes in the nation and burned them In the street, and these things are a good smell.<sup>64</sup>

William Dewsbery, writing to Margaret Fell with news that the servant turned minister, Mary Fisher, had reached Barbados, in addition related that 'Justice Crook's wife is prichous in her Measur and many of the handmads of the lord is very betyfull in the power of our god; who is Caryng on his work all over'.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Taylor to George Fox, Lichfield, 16 March 1655, Sw Mss 3: 30.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Francis Howgill to Margaret Fell, c. Jan. 1656, A. R. Barclay Mss 1: 65, fo. 192.

<sup>65</sup> William Dewsbery to Margaret Fell, 15 Oct. 1655, Sw Mss 4: 141. Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 168–70.

A very good reason for the acceptance by Quaker men of the participation of women in the movement is that they were already there. The term 'Quaker', it is often asserted, was first used with reference to a group of women in Southwark in 1647, who were reported to 'swell, shiver and shake'.<sup>66</sup> The rapid growth of the Quaker movement was achieved essentially by the linking up from around 1652 of established groups of radical sectarians and Seekers, whose ideas already reflected more or less the newly publicized Quaker beliefs. Among these were groups of women sectaries. An early centre in London to which northern Quakers first travelled was a meeting at the house of Simon Dring in Moorfields, where there was 'none but two women' who were preachers; and the link with them was probably the northern woman Isabel Buttery (a friend of James Nayler and other northern missionaries), who distributed some of the first Quaker tracts in London.<sup>67</sup>

This female network may well have extended beyond the Quaker movement.<sup>68</sup> In 1654 the prophet and Fifth Monarchist Anna Trapnel published an account of her journey from London to Cornwall. Women featured heavily in the account. Before she left, Anna Trapnel conferred with her 'sisters' about the necessity of her going; on the way, she dined at an 'old disciples house' in Exeter, belonging to widow Winters, who frequently entertained travelling 'saints'. Trapnel also stayed with the former Barebones M.P. Colonel Robert Bennett in Devon, and his wife and daughters travelled on with her for part of her journey, as far as the house belonging (as she described it) to the sister of Captain Langdon. She stayed, indeed, in a number of households where the women featured heavily. Upon her arrest and return to Bridewell in London, she described once again how her 'sisters' visited and stayed with her in prison.<sup>69</sup> The encountering of so many women, on a journey which was apparently spontaneous and ordered by the will of God, is in itself interesting. Two years later, however, two Quaker women from Bristol, Sarah Bennett and Mary Prince, travelled to Cornwall, passing through Devon and staying, apparently, in the same places. They too stopped off to see Colonel Bennett and his wife,

<sup>66</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, Clarendon State Papers 2624, MSS Clarendon vol. 30, fo. 140r.

<sup>67</sup> Alexander Delamain to Thomas Willan, 1654, Sw Mss 3: 93.

<sup>68</sup> Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 146-7.

<sup>69</sup> Anna Trapnel, *Anna Trapnel's Report and Plea* (London, 1654).

## Quaker Women and Quaker Discipline

and expected to find Anna Trapnel there. On their confrontation with Colonel Bennett, Mary Prince described how 'love rose in him and he owned my words to be true and was brought tender', and they left some of their books with him. The two women had less success with Mrs Bennett, who listened, they reported, to 'all that was saide but theare is A hie sperite in her', which they attributed to the enduring influence of Anna Trapnel.<sup>70</sup> What is nonetheless clear is that there were known households which the itinerant godly of the 1650s would visit; that the women in these households were important targets; and that other women knew about them. It is out of exactly this milieu that the Quaker movement grew: it needs to be restated that women were a central part of this network.

More evidence of a sense of solidarity between Quaker women comes from their own correspondence. Letters between women typically salute exclusively women: the barely literate Sarah Bennett sent greetings in a letter to Margaret Fell and her daughters, to John Camm's wife, and to Ann Audland.<sup>71</sup> She had probably met Ann Audland at her trial in Banbury, and Mabel Camm and the daughters of Margaret Fell when they had travelled to Bristol; but it is highly unlikely that she had met Margaret Fell herself, whose name and reputation had clearly permeated south.<sup>72</sup> The significance of Margaret Fell, indeed, cannot be overstated as a clear inspiration to women ministers.<sup>73</sup> Ann Audland wrote to Margaret Fell: 'Blessed art thou amongst all women the standard of righteousness.'<sup>74</sup> Ann Dewsbery, a woman we hear little of otherwise, although her husband, William, was an active Quaker missionary, wrote in rapture to Margaret Fell after meeting her for the first time: 'blesed be the time that ever I saw thy face'. At the end of her letter, she gave news of her husband and explained, 'but I did not aquant him that I was to writ to you'.<sup>75</sup> Quaker women ministers

<sup>70</sup> Mary Prince and Sarah Bennett to George Fox, [June, 1656], Sw Mss 3: 116.

<sup>71</sup> Sarah Bennett to Margaret Fell, Bristol [1656], Sw Mss 4: 71.

<sup>72</sup> Margaret Fell's daughters Margaret and Sarah were in Bristol in June or July 1655; John Audland to Edward Burrough and Francis Howgill, 2 July 1655, A. R. Barclay Mss 1: 58.

<sup>73</sup> Phyllis Mack makes the important point that men also wrote to Margaret Fell, the main recipient of Quaker correspondence, in equally enthusiastic terms. This does not deny the fact that Quaker women ministers had a unique role model in Margaret Fell. Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 153–4.

<sup>74</sup> Ann Audland to Margaret Fell, [1655], Sw Mss 1: 22; cf. Luke 1.28.

<sup>75</sup> Ann Dewsbery to Margaret Fell, 1 March 1656, Sw Mss 4: 142.

corresponded autonomously with each other; and openly encouraged and inspired one another.

The organization of the early movement also supported women in very practical ways: again, the role of Fell is crucial. In 1654 Margaret Fell initiated the setting up of the central Quaker fund at Kendal, into which local groups from the northwest of England made donations of money. The Kendal Fund is central to the history of the early movement: it financed the itinerant ministry and Quaker publications, covering the cost of shoes and travelling cloaks, horses, books, and postage.<sup>76</sup> The accounts of money disbursed from the Kendal Fund also show a number of women receiving money for journeys and clothes. Ann Dixon from Grayrigg was given 10s. in April 1655 for going to London 'or into the south parts as moved', and thus was not only free to travel independently, but was clearly expected to travel where and how she wanted.<sup>77</sup> The Yorkshire minister Barbara Pattison, imprisoned in Plymouth gaol where she published a tract with Margaret Killan, received £1 5s. for clothes and 'other necessaries'; in December 1654, Alice Birkett received 2s. 6d. for a pair of shoes, and 3s. for going to hear a Quaker trial at the Quarter Sessions in Cheshire.<sup>78</sup>

The existence of the Fund emboldened women. Rebecca Ward borrowed 20s. from the Quaker William Gandie of Frandley, Cheshire, and, when her father refused to pay him back, she arranged for William Gandie to be paid from the Kendal Fund. She also asked for some money to be given to her father, who 'was much burthened with friends passing upp and down', relying on his Welsh hospitality as they waited for a crossing to Ireland.<sup>79</sup> The servant Dorothy Waugh took off on a journey with Agnes Wilson which aroused the indignation of the keepers of the Fund, for she 'never Acquainted us of her Journey and hath taken six or seven shillings of a friend and Bidd him tell us of it'.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>76</sup> For a more detailed account of the Kendal Fund and its significance, see M. Kate Peters, 'Quaker pamphleteering and the development of the Quaker movement, 1652–1656' (University of Cambridge Ph. D. thesis, 1996), pp. 92–6.

<sup>77</sup> George Taylor to Margaret Fell, Sw Mss 1: 215.

<sup>78</sup> George Taylor and Thomas Willan to Margaret Fell, [1655], Sw Tr 3: 543; Margaret Killan and Barbara Pattison, *A Warning from the Lord to the Teachers and People of Plimouth* (London, 1656). George Thomason dated his copy 29 Dec. 1655; George Taylor to Margaret Fell, 1654, Sw Mss 1: 215.

<sup>79</sup> George Taylor and Thomas Willan to Margaret Fell, [1655], Sw Mss 1: 238.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* They found this particularly galling as Agnes Wilson had already been given 3s. for the journey, which they clearly considered adequate funding.

## Quaker Women and Quaker Discipline

The accounts of the Kendal Fund are very revealing about the public activities of women in the Quaker movement. That money was given to women as well as to men underlines the acceptance of women's ministry within the movement, but also, more importantly, provides very real evidence as to how these women were given (and were sometimes bold enough to borrow in advance) the means to travel about the country.

In many ways, then, the organization of the early Quaker movement was very accommodating of women. Yet despite the expectation by men that women would act as preachers, there was frequently a sense, hinted at in the published account of the Banbury trial, that their presence was also fraught with difficulties. Much of the wariness of Quaker men, as has been seen in the printed tracts on the position of women, stemmed from the fear that women provided an easy target for public ridicule of the movement.

\* \* \*

London's gutter-press equated the presence of women in the Quaker movement with suggestions of sexual depravity. A few weeks after the Quakers established a permanent presence in the capital, a quasi-Royalist journal, *Mercurius Fumigosus, or, The Smoking Nocturnal*, carried a titillating report in October 1654 about

divers Erroneous Teachers, called *Quakers* that every day seek to delude *young Maidens*, to inoculate their *spirits* into them, and make them young gods and Goddesses; no less than four they diverted not long since, *Who were so holy, they could know no sin, Yet quickly after became quick within*.<sup>81</sup>

One of the earliest serious puritan attacks on Quaker principles was that they held the doctrine 'of community in worldly things', which some of them '(did they speak out) extend to break marriage bonds'.<sup>82</sup> More specific still was the accusation that George Fox had seduced Margaret Fell and a number of other women, using a potent mixture of sexual charm, ribbons, and (it was hinted) witchcraft to attract women to him. Accusations such as these were rapidly and publicly

<sup>81</sup> *Mercurius Fumigosus, or, The Smoking Nocturnal*, 18–25 Oct. 1654, p. 186.

<sup>82</sup> Joseph Kellett et al., *A Faithful Discovery of a Treacherous Design* (London, 1653), p. 42.

denounced by leaders of the Quaker movement, most dramatically when some of them presented themselves at the house of a London printer demanding substantiation of his allegations.<sup>83</sup>

Wariness about how women in the Quaker movement could be portrayed is clearly apparent in the development of internal discipline structures. The quashing of rumours began within the movement itself, and demanded strict controls by the leadership. In 1653 the Quaker Thomas Lawson was ordered by Fox to write a paper to 'send among friends' to clear his name of some rumours being 'tattled' about him. The rumour had sprung from his interruption of a sermon with an unnamed Quaker woman who had been denounced by the congregation as a whore, and the two of them had been accused of sexual depravity. Lawson – not apparently the woman – was asked to explain the allegations made against him to others in the movement. In the paper he duly submitted to Margaret Fell, Lawson, as well as denying any impropriety on his part, was very concerned to describe how the rumour had spread: 'the outward minde standing on looked forth at the reports of the world, and being at liberty tattled them abroad, without any ground, but onely by heresay, so things spread abroad, and are carried up and down'.<sup>84</sup>

James Nayler, who would later be associated with unruly women in a far more serious way, was deeply conscious of the need to refute public or published allegations of sexual impropriety in the movement. When two puritan ministers, William Cole and Thomas Welde, sneered at Christopher Atkinson's 'very immodest familiarity (to say no more) with a woman of his way, in the sight of a godly Minister at Kendale', James Nayler took up the taunt in his reply. '[T]o make a ground for your slander, ye say (to say no more) but why, to say no more? if ye know more, why doe you not speake the truth, but slander in secret?'<sup>85</sup> Within months of this confident public refutation of the accusations against Atkinson, private letters circulating between Quaker ministers reported, in scandalized tones, Christopher Atkinson's actual adultery with a woman in Norwich. Atkinson was formally ejected from the Quaker movement by a gathering of ministers at

<sup>83</sup> Thomas Aldam, *The Searching Out the Deceit* (London, 1655), pp. 1–4; see Peters, 'Quaker pamphleteering', pp. 160–3.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas Lawson to 'Friends', Sw Mss 1: 246.

<sup>85</sup> William Cole, Thomas Welde, et al., *The Perfect Pharise under Monkish Holines* (London, 1654), p. 49; James Nayler, *An Answer to the Booke called The Perfect Pharisee* ([London], 1654), p. 27.



## *Quaker Women and Quaker Discipline*

Norwich.<sup>86</sup> Substantiated internal reports of licentious behaviour were taken seriously, while publicly they were refuted or defused whenever possible. The case of Christopher Atkinson is an eloquent example of the Quaker movement's ability to present a virtuous public image, while at the same time developing disciplinary structures to control and contain unruly behaviour.

Phyllis Mack argues that the Quakers were bound by an extraordinary sense of community in which the role of women as nurturers and providers for the household was cherished and extended to the organization of the movement as a whole.<sup>87</sup> But in the concern of the early Quaker men to protect the movement, there is also a sense that women could do very real damage. In 1658, Richard Hubberthorne wrote to Fox with an account of a highly troubled meeting:

yesterday wee had A meetinge at the bull and mouth and mildred was there in all Impudence and I haveinge spokne somthing in the livinge power of the lord to the people shee was tarmented and shee resolved soe to speake as that I should not speake any more to them and when she had spokne untill her naturell brith was spent she againe still did strive to speake and often tould the people that they should not heare A word from mee stay as long as they would together for she intended to speake as long as they stayed and in the livinge power of the lord I was cept and moved to stay: the meetinge begun at the 3 hower and wee stayed almost untill midnight for I was to stay and much of the lord was found in it for she did soe strive in her wickednes untill all her naturall parts was spent and her senses distracted that she was even realy mad and truth reaignd in pure dominion and in the life of truth was all freinds refreshed to see the deceipte to wast and destroy itselſe till it retained noe streingth and freinds in the life weare kept and reioyced over it: and the world was satisfied Concerninge it and Could see it and Judge it yet she said that the next meeting shee would Come in more power and we should not speake A word but the next meetinge shee did not come at all for shee hath soe destroyed her

<sup>86</sup> Richard Hubberthorne to George Fox and James Nayler, 10 Dec. 1654, Sw Tr 2: 569; Richard Clayton to Margaret Fell, 12 July 1655, Sw Tr 1: 564; George Taylor to Margaret Fell, 14 July 1655, Sw Mss 1: 239. See also Peters, 'Quaker pamphleteering', p. 33.

<sup>87</sup> Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 228–35, 236–61.

naturall parts that shee is soe horsie that shee Cannot speake at present: and it is like gods Judgments will Come upon her sudainly.<sup>88</sup>

This account suggests the intensity of the leadership struggle between Hubberthorne and 'Mildred'; the very clear distinction between the natural parts of the woman, which were wicked and distracted, and the spiritual responses of others at the meeting, epitomizes the distinction between carnal and spiritual, which in print Richard Farnworth had attributed to 'male' and 'female' in the opposite sense. Hubberthorne's letter is also very important because 'Mildred in all Impudence' was clearly known to Fox, and Hubberthorne was keeping him informed. In the same letter, Hubberthorne reported that Francis Howgill's sister Mary, for the past six months 'hath been much in these Counties of Essex suffolke and norfolke wheare she hath done hurt for she ministereth Confusion amonge freinds'. Hubberthorne's solution to the problem, he informed Fox, was to hold a general meeting in the area to reassure friends shaken by Mary Howgill's preaching.<sup>89</sup> We thus see emerging an early form of church discipline, with recognized leaders like George Fox and Margaret Fell, and intermediary scouts who reported on any ministerial deviance, or even implemented temporary measures to counter the ill effects on the movement.

There are frequent examples of this kind of early internal group discipline, centring on the potential threat posed by women. The Quaker minister Thomas Aldam, imprisoned in York Castle, was particularly meticulous: in 1652 he called in Richard Farnworth and William Dewsbery on two separate occasions to speak to his fellow prisoner Jane Holmes, who had fallen, he said, into 'pashon and Lowdnesse' – not a common problem reported among male Quaker preachers. But she refused to 'come to Judgement', and took a separate room in the prison, with Mary Fisher. Thomas Aldam described the situation very gravely in a letter to Margaret Fell, and asked, scrupulously, that any money sent to the prisoners should be expressly

<sup>88</sup> Richard Hubberthorne to Fox, 20 March 1656, Sw Tr 2: 593.

<sup>89</sup> Mary Howgill had been at the centre of controversial preaching for some time. In June 1656 she had visited Cromwell; in July of that year she travelled to Dover, and as a result published a piece of prophecy, *A Remarkable Letter of Mary Howgill to Oliver Cromwell, called Protector* (London, 1657).

## Quaker Women and Quaker Discipline

directed to one group or the other as they no longer ate together.<sup>90</sup> Two years later, still in York Castle, Aldam sent another woman, Agnes Wilkinson, to Margaret Fell. She, Aldam said, had 'acted contrary to the light, in filthynes', and was 'cast out of the light with them who was partakers with her'. Aldam asked Fell to set a watch over her and 'keepe her out from Amongst Friends' until she repented.<sup>91</sup>

There were heightened fears about the role of women in the public ministry voiced around the time of the James Nayler crisis in late 1656. This, Patricia Crawford and Christine Trevett have both argued, centred around the assumption of leadership by Martha Simmonds as much as by James Nayler.<sup>92</sup> In July 1656 William Caton and George Fox discussed 'the women, or rather sisters', in Cornwall that had been 'fellow helpers in the Gospell'; George Fox said little to it, but suggested 'that some of them might Cease'.<sup>93</sup> In August 1656, Richard Clayton, a Quaker missionary in Ireland, sent back to Margaret Fell 'a filthy decetfull wench' lest 'she should have ca[u]sed the truth to have sufered'.<sup>94</sup> William Caton we find paralysed in Sussex in early 1657, refusing to go to Amsterdam because of rumours there of a woman 'gone distracted'. Edward Burrough wrote to Fox in February 1657, concerned by a 'short little maide', and urging him to take her out of the ministry and find her a more suitable post as a servant-girl somewhere, as many friends 'hath ben burdened by her as by her ministry . . . and to some she was an offence in bedfordshire'.<sup>95</sup>

The majority of early cases of internal Quaker discipline revolved around the perceived need to temper the behaviour of women, or indeed to 'cast them out' of the still nascent movement. Much early discipline of men, as in the case of Christopher Atkinson, touched on

<sup>90</sup> Thomas Aldam to 'Friends', [Nov. 1652], Sw Mss 3:40; Aldam to Thomas Towndrowe [1652/3], Portfolio 36:114; Brailsford, *Quaker Women*, p. 22.

<sup>91</sup> Thomas Aldam to Margaret Fell, 30 Oct. 1654, Sw Mss 4: 89.

<sup>92</sup> Crawford, *Women and Religion in England*, pp. 173–80. This paper deliberately avoids discussion of James Nayler's infamous fall from power in the Quaker movement, the ramifications of which were so cataclysmic. I would argue that the tension surrounding the status of women in the movement clearly pre-dated the spectacular events surrounding Nayler, Martha Simmonds, Hannah Stranger, and Dorcas Erbury. The Nayler case can be better understood against the background of a movement where gender was always an important and problematic dynamic.

<sup>93</sup> William Caton to Margaret Fell, 23 July 1656, Sw Mss 1: 313.

<sup>94</sup> Richard Clayton to Margaret Fell, 5 Aug. 1656, Sw Tr 1: 568.

<sup>95</sup> William Caton to Margaret Fell, Sw Mss 1: 314; 1: 366; Edward Burrough to George Fox, A. R. Barclay Mss 1: 36, fo. 100.

sexual transgression with women, or on rumours of it. The leaders of the early Quaker movement made very real and pragmatic decisions about the propriety of the ministry for many Quaker women. Their monitoring and ejection of wayward women foreshadowed developments in the systematic holding of meetings and circulation of epistles which characterized the Quaker movement of the 1660s and beyond. Public refutations of accusations of sexual transgression in the movement did not rehearse the right of women to preach. Private letters also made very few references to the spiritual equality of women and men. It becomes all the more convincing, in this context, that the tracts by Fox and Farnworth were written not as impassioned pleas for the right of their sisters to preach, but as a careful appropriation and legitimizing of their behaviour as women.

\* \* \*

The current surge of interest in female spirituality or religiosity is a very important and welcome development for our understanding both of the experiences of women, and of the nature of religion in early modern European society. But we need to be very careful about how we contextualize women's religious experiences. The records surrounding Quaker women are very accessible, and highly seductive. As a result, the writings and doings of Quaker women have to some extent been plundered by historians as stirring examples of how strong religious convictions could empower women in the seventeenth century. It is very clear that the Quakers' emphasis on immediate spiritual religious experience had important implications for the role of women in the movement, allowing them equal authority with their male co-religionists.

There is a danger, though, in isolating women from the wider Quaker movement, which is the implicit and often unstated consequence of using Quaker women's records as a means of understanding female religiosity; in an important sense this detracts from the role of women in the Quaker movement. This paper began with a well-known extract from a piece of writing by Priscilla Cotton and Mary Cole, in which they denounced England's ministers as women, 'that are become women', and who should themselves be forbidden to preach. Although the inversion of gender as a literary device was not uncommon, the spectre of two women venturing into print in order to command ordained ministers to be silent is an eloquent example of the ways in which Quaker women were empowered to act. However,

## *Quaker Women and Quaker Discipline*

this is to see the exchange primarily in terms relating to gender. Two years earlier another Quaker author, one William Tomlinson, denounced England's ministry with the same slur: 'the mighty men of Babylon have forborn to fight, they have remained in their holds; they are become as women, *Jer.* 51.30'.<sup>96</sup> William Tomlinson's gendered language as a means of attacking the national ministry is less celebrated than his co-religionists', but it is significant. Gendered language was not uncommon in much early Quaker writing; and it was a device used by male and female authors alike. Priscilla Cotton and Mary Cole were primarily the authors of a Quaker tract: they wrote as 'prisoners in Exeter gaol for the Word of God', and throughout their writing reflects the hundreds of Quaker tracts which had already been published, and with which they were undoubtedly familiar.

One conclusion to draw from this is that women were empowered by the Quaker movement in very practical ways as well as by the intensity of their religious experience. One of the reasons for the public activities undertaken by Quaker women was that they were enabled by the 'worldly' organization of the early Quaker movement, much of it initiated, it should be remembered, by Margaret Fell herself. Women like Priscilla Cotton and Mary Cole were familiar with Quaker tracts: Priscilla Cotton's husband himself circulated them around his home town of Plymouth. Quaker women were helped in their public preaching and ministry in other ways, too: they received money, support, shelter, and inspiration from the developing organization of the movement.

Wider conclusions force us to reconsider the contribution of women to the development of the Quaker movement as a whole. It has been shown that the doctrinal arguments presented by Quaker leaders to justify women's preaching developed as the movement itself was growing: they were a dynamic part of the movement's development, and emerged out of the pragmatic need to justify and contain the public ministry performed by Quaker women. Rather than examining Quaker women as an interesting but separate sub-plot within the history of the Quaker movement, we should see the origins of Quakerism in more gendered terms. Women were enabled by the organizational structures of the very early movement. Yet the

<sup>96</sup> William Tomlinson, *A Word of Reproof to the Priests or Ministers* (London, 1653), p. 28.

explanation that this was due to George Fox's own enlightened attitude is unconvincing. As the Quaker movement consolidated, a wide variety of attitudes towards women were evident, justifying their preaching role in ungendered terms, arguing for a fairly traditional Christian model of family and social relations, and finally denouncing and punishing unruly women. All of these attitudes were developed out of a pragmatic need to respond to the high public profile of women in the movement. Most of them also find some resonance with broader seventeenth-century patriarchal expectations. This paper has deliberately focused on the four earliest and formative years of the Quaker movement, in order to argue that the very creation of church discipline, and the consolidation of recognized Quaker beliefs, were gendered processes. The activities and experiences of Quaker women must be examined in the context of their movement as a whole: conversely, we understand much more about the Quaker movement if we include women in the history of its development.

University College London