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Women in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers): The Relevance of their Experience in Envisioning a Gender-Inclusive Church[1]

Ursula Jane O'Shea

Many Christian women and men are expressing, and acting on, the desire to live in faith communities which value women and men equally. Their desire has sparked a variety of initiatives, within and between denominations, which attempt to inaugurate a more inclusive church.[2] I use the term "inclusive church" to refer to a faith community which allows and/or fosters the participation of women in its structures and values the experience of women in its ritual, language and imagery. The effectiveness of a community's attempts to include women is often not determined solely by pressures and politics within a local church or denomination but by wider ecumenical issues as well. For example, ecumenical sensitivities towards Rome, which is strongly opposed to women priests, has offset support for women's ordination in the Anglican community.

Progress towards including women fully in the life of the mainstream churches has been slow. Dominant forms of Christian theology and history have been patriarchal, committed to a hierarchical order of creation and redemption. An essential part of this understanding of the created

order is the authority of man over woman (Ruether 1983:94-99). However, a fragile thread of theological tradition has run counter to this through the Christian story which advocated emancipation for the oppressed and affirmed the equality of men and women (Schüssler Fiorenza 1983). Current debate about women's role in the churches has centred on the interpretation of key scripture passages about women and their place in the order of creation: does the New Testament require that women be emancipated or subjugated? In particular, are women fit for ordination? Stendahl pointed out that scriptural justifications of women's subjugation are based, either directly or indirectly, on reference to her subordinate position in the order of creation (1966:38-39). He urged that all parties in the debate need to be consistent in their reasoning: either women and men were created equal by God or they were not. He was critical of the line of argument which supported the emancipation of women in the secular sphere but reserved the right to subjugate women in the church by denying them ordination.

> [T]he question about the ordination of women is not a question about offices but a question about the right relationship between man and woman in Christ, whether it applies to political office, civil service, career, home life, the ministry or to the episcopate (Stendahl 1966:43).

Church hierarchies' attitudes to the inclusion of women have often reflected the kind of double-think which Stendahl criticises. In April 1988, Catholic bishops in the U.S.A. wrote a pastoral letter on the role of women in the church, *Partners in the Mystery of Redemption*. The pastoral acknowledged that sexism was a sin which has coloured the church's teaching and practices but nonetheless endorsed the Vatican's firm opposition to women priests. It is understandable that the exclusion of women from ordination to the priesthood has monopolised and focused the debate about women's role in Christian churches. Refusal to ordain women is a patent act of exclusion. It is also a potent symbol for other, less easily described exclusions: the absence of the feminine from language, ritual and divine imagery. Some feminists have argued that the ordination debate itself is a distraction if one intends a truly inclusive church, which, by its nature, would be non-hierarchical and therefore non-clerical (Hoad 1984:100-118). Opening clerical ranks to women would not necessarily achieve an inclusive church. Turning the hearts and minds of the faithful towards a church inclusive of all people would necessitate radical change from the present dispensation in which six-year-old boys could have roles in sacred ritual which are denied to mature and wise women in the community (Schneiders 1983:102).

As a model for evaluating alternatives to existing mainstream church structures it may be useful to examine the history and experience of women in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), a church which has had a reputation for equality between men and women for three hundred years. What guidance and cautions can faith communities who desire the full participation of women and men draw from the experience of the Religious Society of Friends?

To examine the inclusiveness of the Religious Society of Friends I shall first review the historical origins and theological justifications of women's inclusion in that tradition. I shall then consider the experience of contemporary Quaker women, examining the degree to which current attitudes and structures relate to the early Quaker tradition and the degree to which modern women experience the tradition as inclusive.

This discussion focuses on "unprogrammed" meetings in the Quaker tradition.[3] Unprogrammed meetings hold unstructured worship and have no professional ministry, characteristics which have shaped the role of women in the Society of Friends since the seventeenth century. Ethnographic material is drawn primarily from Australia Yearly Meeting, an offshoot of the London Yearly Meeting (where Quakerism began). Australia was a General Meeting under London until 1967 when it became autonomous.

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers): A Model for Inclusion?

Quakerism arose in the mid-seventeenth century in England, a period of social and political upheaval and fresh originality in religious insights. The politically ascendant Puritans had their own agenda of radical reform for English church and society. They put no intermediaries, other than Scripture itself, between "man" and God. However, they regulated the anarchic potential of this belief by emphasising the authority of the householder in the domestic sphere and the rule of the "saints" over the ungodly in public life. The householder stood in God's place to rule members of his house, including servants, children and women.

The Quaker was a different kind of radical. Quakerism extended, but also opposed, the reforming impulse of Puritanism because, like Anabaptists, Quakers stressed the divine authority of subjective inspiration. For Quakers, inward divine guidance became the ultimate authority in personal and community life, even in interpreting the Scriptures. The history of equality in the Religious Society of Friends evolved from the eschatological vision of its founder, George Fox. For Fox, Christ had returned to reign in the hearts of all believers and teach

them inwardly and directly. Men and women had equal access to this authority because the order of creation had been restored with Christ's second coming and the subjugation of women at the Fall was overturned. Ruether (1983:99-102) noted that this argument was used similarly by the Shakers and described it as "eschatological feminism". Eschatological equality was the Quakers' theological defence for their pioneering inclusion of women in ministry, thus overcoming the traditional impediment to women's equality with men posed by Genesis creation accounts (Fell 1667). Emphasis on individual responsibility and authority, based on faithfulness to inner guidance, shaped the organisation of the Religious Society of Friends and gave a solid foothold to women Friends as independent spiritual agents. Janette Gadt (1974:viii) maintained that "there was a necessary and compelling connection between Quaker doctrine and the unusual participation of women in the sect".

However, theories and doctrines of women's equality have not always promoted equality in practice. One aspect of Quaker life helped to cement the connection between a doctrine of equality and the participation of women: early Friends' characteristically used external "signs" as metaphors for inward realities (Bauman 1983:84-94). Some signs testified to the equality of all before God: Quakers addressed superiors, equals and inferiors in the informal "thou" rather than "you"; Quaker men refused to doff hats to anyone; they refused to use honorifics or polite formulas of greeting and address. These customs of plain speech and action often offended, but in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Quakers became renowned for their exactitude and sincerity. The purpose of Quaker signs was two-fold: to make outward behaviour consistent with inward convictions, and to confront complacency in others, opening them to God's spirit.[4] In this framework Quaker women's preaching was an outward sign of their inward conviction that God had called them to a ministry currently closed to women (Fell 1667:12). It also outraged Puritans and posed a fundamental challenge to the accepted social order of masculine dominance. Public debate between Quakers and Puritans over women's preaching undoubtedly aggravated the persecution Quakers suffered, but it also securely established women's ongoing participation in Quaker ministry as a key symbol of the new order they proclaimed.

Women's opportunity to participate in the ministry of the early Society of Friends was further enriched by other characteristics which made Quaker theology and life particularly attractive to women. Gender distinctions and stereotypes of masculinity and femininity were not rigid and early Quaker use of religious language and imagery reflected this. Quaker theology supported women called to ministry to step outside traditional social roles and to behave with "masculine" assertiveness in

their work. Furthermore, principles of equality between men and women overflowed into ideals for personal relationship and Quaker marriage. Perhaps most significant, Quaker style of worship and decision-making was predicated on the theology that inward divine inspiration within every Friend came from the Spirit of unity and its fruit was order and not chaos. Therefore members of the community were motivated to find and express unity in all business and spiritual matters. Quaker structures for worship and business promoted love, compassion, unity and meekness as key values and "maintained this 'feminine' aspect of their theology throughout the eighteenth century" (Gadt 1974:3).

Egalitarianism in the Religious Society of Friends was rooted in an apocalyptic world view not shared by twentieth-century Friends. It is mistaken, therefore, to interpret the experience of early Quaker women from a modern feminist perspective. In their historical setting, their extraordinary stories of travel, adventure and heroic deeds were not tales of women's liberation. According to journal accounts their experience was not one of finding themselves, or their own identity, but of losing themselves in submission to the power and authority of God within.[5] Submission was required of all Friends and early Quaker literature has a rich diversity of imagery whereby men Friends are praised for their tenderness and compassion and women Friends encouraged in their strength (Mack 1991). Similarly, divine imagery is used in both feminine and masculine forms and two of the most frequently used images for Christ and his role in the life of the believer were ungendered: "the Light" and "the Seed."[6] Early Quaker women preachers could claim their freedom, power and authority in the patriarchal world because the sinful effects of the past had been overcome by the *Parousia*, restoring the liberty of the primitive church and first creation. Spirit-filled women had transcended their fallen woman-nature and were recreated in equality with men in Christ. Quakers did not preach the emancipation of all women since, in their theology, the unconverted were still bound by the restrictions associated with the Fall.

One place where the practice of equality between men and women can be tested is in the relationship between husband and wife. Women of the Quaker meeting were to be equal and "helpsmeet" in their relationship with their husbands because the woman, like the man, had to be free to obey the leadings of the Spirit which came to her. George Fox (Nickalls 1975:557) wrote of his marriage to Margaret Fell that it was "a testimony that all might come into marriage as it was in the beginning", that is, before the Fall. Married men and woman who felt called to "travel in the ministry" had an equal obligation to do so. They left children, business and domestic matters in the care of their partner, often for years

of absence. Meetings also endorsed travel in the ministry for a woman Friend whose call was opposed by her husband.[7] The formula of Quaker marriage also helped to ameliorate the oppression of married women. Couples married each other in the presence of the community, without "hierling priests". The same vow, "to be loving and faithful", was given by both partners. Over 130 years ago, Quaker feminist Lucretia Mott commented that "in the true marriage relationship the independence of husband and wife is equal, their dependence mutual, and their obligations reciprocal".[8]

Nonetheless, tensions remained as early Friends tried to establish an alternative experience of marriage to that accepted in the wider community. Details of the Fell-Fox marriage were well documented and it seemed a model of mutuality and independence. In 1673 Fox reproved an Elder, one Nathaniel Coleman: "thy ruling over thy wife and Eldership is in the Fall" (Nickalls, 1975:667). Yet Margaret Fell (1667) denied that 1 Timothy 2:8-14 (urging the subjection of women) should silence a Spirit-filled woman speaking in church but allowed that it did apply to a woman's relationship to her own husband. The practice of equality within Quaker relationships did not always accord with the testimony of equality. As one contemporary Quaker scholar remarked, "Quaker records show that a man was more likely to be disowned (from the Society) for poor business acumen and bankruptcy, than for wife beating".[9]

In the early 1650s, both men and women were preaching ministers, but only men were appointed Elders to oversee the spiritual life of the community and women did not participate equally in administration and decision-making. In the 1670s, George Fox felt inspired that "gospel order" of the restored creation required that women should be included in the business decisions of the Society as well as in its ministry. Perhaps George Fox and Margaret Fell were canny enough in the ways of patriarchy to know that old habits die hard: to guarantee an inalienable role for women, they established separate women's meetings for business side by side with men's, with distinct spheres of authority. Fox's intention for these meetings was twofold: some matters were the concern of women into which men ought not pry; and women would deal more confidently with business when not in the presence of men (Punshon, 1984:92). Power still clearly resided with the men and the men's meetings but the move towards separate women's business meetings provoked discord among early Quakers. Known as the Wilkinson and Story controversy, the anti-woman faction threatened schism, in the face of which George Fox and Margaret Fell staunchly maintained the right and competence of women to take a part in Quaker business.[10]

The authority of women's meetings in matters under their jurisdiction was not token: women's meetings could determine if a couple was "clear" for marriage, and they controlled funds for the relief of Friends and their families in need.[11] Despite encouragement from George Fox for women to participate at local and regional levels (Trevett 1989:19-20), local meetings were autonomous and the involvement of women varied markedly from meeting to meeting. The national gathering of London Yearly Meeting (men only) had no parallel women's meeting until 1784.[12] The experience and confidence which came to women Friends through exercising authority, administering money and public speaking contributed to the successful performance of many later Quaker women in the wider public domain. For example, Elizabeth Fry (prison reformer) and Lucretia Mott (anti-slavery campaigner and feminist) came from Quaker Meetings. Margaret Hope Bacon considers that it was the "training" of women in Quaker women's meetings which provided the impetus and competence in the first wave of feminism. A hugely disproportionate number of the early feminists were from the Quaker tradition (Bacon 1989:1-2).

The power of women within Quaker meetings has fluctuated through various periods of history. From the earliest days of the Society the practice of equality among women and men Friends was a vexed issue. Although women were recognised as "ministers" along with men, by 1701 there was some expectation that they would know their place even in spiritual matters, as this Minute from the Men's Morning Business Meeting indicated:

> This meeting finding that it is a hurt to Truth for women Friends to take up too much time, as some do, in our public meetings, when several public and serviceable men Friends are present and are by them prevented in their serving, it's therefore advised that the women Friends should be tenderly cautioned against taking up too much time in our public meetings.[13]

The influence of Quaker women ministers continued to wane during the eighteenth century as many Friends prospered financially. During the evangelical revival of the nineteenth century, the authority of women was less recognised than in any period of Quaker history. In the early part of the twentieth century, separate women's meetings were discontinued in England and from 1907 London Yearly Meeting was attended by Friends without distinction by gender. It was presumed at that time that men and women now could work in full and equal partnership within the Society without separations.

Was the optimism of English Friends in 1907 well founded? Had equality been achieved between men and women Friends? Certainly for contemporary Quakers of the unprogrammed tradition the equality of Quaker women in their history has had the status of a formative myth. It is a treasured axiom among them that "women and men have always been equal" in the Religious Society of Friends. However, the strength of the myth has determined which facts about gender relations in the history of the Society are remembered and retold by members. The myth has also been self-sustaining, in that its very strength may have silenced comment from women Friends who experienced covert sexism in the Society.

Quaker Women Today ... Measuring Up Equally?

Beyond the myth of equality, what is the actual status of women in the Religious Society of Friends today? Could contemporary Quakerism offer itself as a model for an inclusive church? Recent interest in gender equity has given rise to a variety of indicators used to measure women's inclusion in organisations. For example, most feminists and administrators working in secular organisations are aware of: the level of women's representation in structures; the exercise of influence in mixed groups (who gets to speak, for how long and to what effect); formal and informal participation in decision-making processes. Using quantitative measures like these, women's participation in the Society of Friends appears to confirm the impression of equality.

Like most churches in Australia, Quakers have had more women than men in membership over the last twenty years. In one local meeting, only once in a four-year period were equal numbers of women and men observed at Sunday Meeting for Worship. Regularly, between two thirds and three quarters of the worshippers in this meeting were women. Quakers have differed from other churches in the high proportion of women members who held positions of authority and influence. Women, traditionally excluded from ecclesial hierarchies, have been prominent at all levels of Quaker organisation because, in the absence of a professional clergy, members shared responsibilities. Records showed the extent of women's participation: in 1986 all the regional meetings in Australia were served by a woman as Clerk (administrator and convener of business meetings) and the Presiding Clerk of Australia Yearly Meeting was also a woman that year – a historic photo for the archives; in 1991 the national Treasurer, Secretary and Presiding Clerk were women; in one local meeting all of the "Elders" were women over a five-year period. This evidence has confirmed that Quaker organisation and administration has had room for women.

What aspects of the Quaker tradition contributed to the ongoing prominence of modern Quaker women in the structures of their Church? Openness to one's inward guidance and faithfulness in following it have been regarded as essential spiritual qualities for both men and women. The theological importance of personal spiritual insights as the ultimate guide for one's life remained fundamental to Quakerism: for the twentieth-century woman Friend, as well as for her seventeenth-century foremother, the inward authority of the Spirit formed the basis of her autonomy. Quaker worship and business meetings were structured to depend on the inward guidance of all present.

Unprogrammed Quaker Worship was silent, waiting for the Divine Presence. If spoken contributions occurred, they were not expected to reflect what the individual wanted to say, but to arise from divine inspiration moving through the whole group. The appropriate demeanour of the Quaker worshipper was receptive, waiting, submissive, faithful, open but also active. Unlike other church services, anyone present, man or women, experienced Quaker or newcomer, could shape the group's experience of worship if "inspired" by the Spirit to speak. The Quaker meeting has valued receptive and submissive virtues, traditionally regarded as "feminine" in the wider culture, as qualities essential for openness to the Spirit and to the self-discipline required of those attending Quaker worship which can be susceptible to anarchy or hi-jack.

Modern Quaker decision-making followed the tradition of the early Friends and expected that meetings would find unity if all members were open to the will of the Spirit. Decisions were taken by groups who waited for "unity" on a matter before moving forward.[14] Usually a Friend spoke only once on a matter and allowed a pause for consideration between each contribution. When the Clerk discerned that a "way forward" was clear he or she produced and read a Minute stating the decision. If the group approved the Minute by remaining silent that item of business was finished. Quaker business style encouraged women who may have been discouraged by competitive or talk-down styles of many patriarchal decision-makers (even ecclesiastical ones).

Emphasis on receptivity in Quaker spiritual life has been balanced by strong social and ethical convictions. For example, a Quaker would be likely to believe that, under all circumstances, one ought to speak the truth. The training in assertiveness which this "plain speech" gave to many Quaker women cut away some effects of socialised reticence and the desire to please. Quakerism also provided women with a rationale and a model for social action in the wider culture as part of their spiritual discipline. Involvements included peace actions, non-violent workshops and demonstrations, anti-racist training, and prison reform and thus go

beyond what has commonly been encouraged as the "good works" of Christian women's groups.

This brief overview shows that there are influential factors which encourage Quaker women to take equal part with men in the Society of Friends: a theology of spiritual and personal autonomy based on inward guidance; full participation in the various offices and roles of the Society; congenial involvement in decision-making; and fostering a spiritual life likely to build on women's patterns of socialisation while encouraging the exercise of non-traditional strengths and virtues.

Quaker Women Today ... Feeling Equal?

Given the reputation for equality in Quaker history, and the evidence of modern women's participation in the Society, do Quaker women experience equality? Episodes observed or reported during fieldwork among Australian Quakers have shown an underside of the seemingly egalitarian Society. Generally these episodes have been unrelated instances, typical of expressions of sexism to be found in any group: women's contributions at times being trivialised or attributed to their husbands or another male, unconscious use of exclusive language in prayer and ordinary speech, intentional use of exclusive language, separate women's meetings being resented, refused or invaded.

Both men and women Friends reported instances of sexism in the Society similar to their experience elsewhere, although most added that they had expected more of Quakers. Friends who presumed to name or challenge sexism within the Society found that their experience and opinions were often not heard, or were devalued in subtle ways, hard to quantify, and therefore harder to correct. Lacking the usual markers of oppression which confirm the inequality of women in other churches, some Friends struggled to describe or correct a covert and benevolent sexism which the group's self image could not admit to. The "equality myth" is so strong that aspects of Quaker history or theology have been shaped to accommodate it. For example, the originality and genius of the seventeenth-century Quaker "plain speech" campaign has been undervalued by twentieth-century Friends insisting that language is a trivial issue. Seventeenth-century "plain speech" proclaimed the proper social order for God's people and early Friends maintained it in the face of derision and persecution. It is ironic that the issue of inclusive language, another proclamation of proper relationships, can now be considered trivial. Similarly, modern Quaker women who have met separately have been harassed, described as divisive or pressured to include men. Yet their reasons for meeting are still those offered by George Fox in his original justification of separate women's meetings.

What Quakerism achieved for women has been over-estimated by those wanting to close the matter with the comfortable gloss of "men and women have always been equal". This equality myth decreed that sexism may exist in the wider culture but not among Friends; or, more insidiously, if a protest was made by a woman Friend who joined Quakers in her adult years, she was suspected of "projecting her own internalised oppression onto the Society of Friends".[15]

There can be no doubt that the women's movement and the second wave of feminism precipitated the current debate about women's role in faith communities. Despite Quakers' long history of women's participation, and the significant Quaker role in the first wave of feminism,[16] the second wave of feminism emerging in the Sixties caught Quakers by surprise (Bacon 1986:222). Preoccupied by peace and justice issues, Quaker women were not at the forefront of the second wave of feminism and many women Friends did not see what the feminist fuss was about. Others welcomed the new movement and grafted it enthusiastically onto the historical Quaker root of equality between women and men. Many new members joined Quakerism, attracted by its stand on peace and women's equality.

However, the graft between the Quaker tradition and secular feminism has not taken. Uncertainty lingered, and was exacerbated by an earlier theological shift within the Quaker tradition: the Religious Society of Friends had ceased to see itself as an eschatological community. Early Friends' understanding of women as independent spiritual agents was integral to their vision of God's order of creation restored by the *Parousia*. The loss of this effective theological base for women's liberation has been disempowering for Quaker Meetings, and the issue of women's equality more easily marginalised. No new theology of emancipation or liberation has been developed in Quakerism to replace their traditional inclusion of women as an eschatological imperative.

Without such a basis, how does Quakerism understand its own traditions of equality or respond to the challenges of contemporary feminism? Most of the time, symptoms of unease about women's equality remained unaddressed in Quaker Meetings, many Friends hopefully echoing the sentiments of 1907 London Yearly Meeting that "equality has now been attained". However, intermittent eruptions over language, a special women's meeting, or the use of Goddess imagery suggested that women's experience has not yet been fully integrated into the unprogrammed meetings of the Religious Society of Friends.

Clearly something different is necessary for women and men to be free of sexist bindings, fully themselves, easy together in the Spirit, mutually rejoicing in an inclusive church. Daphne Hampson (1990) has

suggested the Christian religion is essentially incapable of meeting the feminist challenge. However, many feminist men and women have stayed in the church, working to make it inclusive and drawing inspiration from neglected strands of the tradition which celebrate the equality of humanity in Christ (White 1991:3-10).

If equality and inclusion are to become realities in modern churches, where will the impetus come from? If, as some opponents claim, it originates only in the liberal wash from the secular boat of the women's movement then it should not be surprising that it reaches only the shallows of church structures.

Quaker experience, past and present, has implications for other Christian churches which take justice for women seriously. Foremost is George Fox's conviction that it is possible for a faith community to live according to God's restored order of equality between women and men, although it will mean running against the patriarchal grain in the church, in society and in ourselves. An inclusive church must go beyond evaluating justice in terms of numbers and structures which include women in the church as well as beyond social action for women's rights in the wider society. In addition to these essential elements, an inclusive church will work to bring about awareness in the faith community that feminism is not the world's problem imported into the Church but a matter of liberating Spirit transforming her people from within. It will require of the faithful keen discernment, honesty of judgement, and justice of action – acting justly now because God's reign has stipulated equality between women and men. Above all those who desire the restoration of God's reign should anticipate a conversion of heart and life as radical and disruptive of comfort and the status quo as that experienced by early Friends.

That is, the wellspring for an inclusive church must be theological and spiritual not ideological.

Notes

1 The editors wish to thank the Executive Editor of *Listening: Journal of Religion and Culture* (Lewis University, Illinois) for kind permission to reprint this article, which previously appeared in *Listening*, 27(2) (Spring 1992).

2 See Barbara Field (1989) for a discussion of the diverse attitudes to women priests in the Australian Anglican community, Linda Clark *et al.* (1981) for a discussion of worship suited to Christian women, and Marie Tulip (1984) for a discussion of Australian women in the Uniting Church.

3 In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries some Yearly Meetings in the United States adopted an evangelical Protestant model for their church

life including the appointment of ministers and structured worship. Such "programmed" meetings are also found in South America and parts of Africa as a result of missionary activity.

4 For example, at times Quaker men went to prison for their refusal to doff their hats in court. Quaker hats were removed only in prayer to God. Hat honour or bowing to mark another's rank was unacceptable to egalitarian principles.

5 See Margaret Hope Bacon (1986:29-33) for a description of the reluctance with which many women undertook ministry.

6 Nonetheless, negative female imagery was used extensively by men and women Friends in addressing Puritan opponents; for example, references to the bond-woman, Hagar (Gen 21:10) and the woman of Babylon (Rev 13:1-2) (Fell 1667).

7 See Margaret Hope Bacon (1986:24-41) for examples of Quaker women's travelling ministry up to 1800 with reference to the priority of the spiritual call over domestic responsibilities.

8 Quoted by the Family Life sub-committee of the New England Yearly Meeting Committee on Ministry and Counsel (1985), *Living with Oneself and Others: Working Papers on Aspects of Family Life*, 16.

9 John Punshon, Quaker Studies Lecture, Spring, 1987.

10 For a full discussion of the establishment of women's meetings, see Ross (1949), chap. 19.

11 Since many Quakers in the first half-century of the movement spent long periods in prison for their beliefs, the women's relief work kept the fledgling society together under intense persecution.

12 Yearly Meetings in the United States had men's and women's meetings from the seventeenth century.

13 Quoted in Quaker Women's Group (1986):16. See 11-22 for a review of women's ambivalent relationship with the Society of Friends.

14 However unity and unanimity are not synonymous in a Quaker meeting and the processes were designed to achieve the former without waiting for the latter.

15 In the fieldwork, there has been no clear division along gender lines between those who are, and those who are not, sensitive to, or distressed by, incidents of sexism. Both men and women find it a crucial issue for the Religious Society of Friends, and both men and women have described it as "trivial", "divisive", or "selfish".

16 Seneca Falls Convention which began the first wave of feminism had significant Quaker leadership.

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