BEYOND MAJORITY RULE

voteless decisions in the Religious Society of Friends

MICHAEL J. SHEERAN

Foreword

Quaker scholars like Caroline Stephen, Rufus Jones, Howard Brinton, Hugh Doncaster and Elton Trueblood have written helpful accounts of the decision making process that takes place in the Quaker meeting for business. But even in this ecumenical age it is something new to see ourselves mirrored, in the process of making group decisions, in this penetrating study that has been made by a Jesuit scholar, Michael J. Sheeran.

Having selected Philadelphia Yearly Meeting as his scene of focus and possessing an extensive knowledge of the history of the Religious Society of Friends, Michael Sheeran, over a period of two years (1973-75), had a chance to observe the actual process of decision making by visiting a wide range of local monthly meetings as well as annual yearly sessions of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. He also talked personally on the intricacies of the decision making process with Quakers in both the Philadelphia and New Jersey areas. At many points his telling anecdotes, and the searching queries that he raises in this lively sketch of contemporary decision making, indicate that he may well know us better than we know ourselves!

In 1977 his study was submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of Princeton University for a doctorate in politics and received its high commendation. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Friends, wishing to share this excellent study more widely, has encouraged its publication.

The initial third of the study, together with a sizable appendix, is devoted to a historical account of the first half-century of Quakerism in Britain and to its religious forerunners. Michael Sheeran selects with approval words from Thomas K. Brown: "The meeting for business is in essence, the meeting for worship focussed on specific matters." In his early chapters he describes with great care the meeting for worship and the experience of the Divine Presence that may come in the corporate waiting silence or in the vocal ministry that may grow out of that silence. It is out of the experience of the Presence in the midst that witness comes to the guidance that is to be found there and to the inner call for obedience to its direction.

Pope John XXIII once told of how in the first week after his consecration as Pope he could not sleep. He seemed crushed by the realization of his responsibility for the care of well over half a billion souls. At the

close of the week he finally fell asleep and dreamed that the Lord approached him and, using his new name said: "Giovanni, what in the world is the matter with you with this no-sleeping business? Do you think you are in this thing alone?" After that Pope John reported that he had no more trouble sleeping!

In the experience of the early Quakers, it was ever so clear to them that they were not "in this thing alone." In their local meeting for worship, they found a Presence and a Guide that over and over again confirmed for them Isaac Penington's piercing words: "There is that near you which will guide you. O Wait for it and be sure that ye keep to it" (99th Letter). When these local meetings for worship were charged with carrying out a monthly meeting for business, the mood of the meeting for worship, the openness for guidance and the close dependence and trust of each other went with it. Such a monthly meeting for business carried out the social responsibilities that were entrusted to it. There was the care of the families of Quakers who were in prison or whose property had been seized; the keeping of records of "sufferings" imposed on Quakers by the persecutions; the handling of the admission of new members; the care of marriages and burials; and even of dealing with any misconduct or any laxity in carrying out the Quaker testimonies. Such meetings also provided a committee of clearness in which personal leadings and concerns could be shared and if unity with them was found, they could be encouraged and given any needed support.

No matter how earthy the matters to be decided might be in such a corporate exercise of decision making as the meeting for business, it was never to lose its spiritual nature. In an epistle written from Worcester prison on January 30, 1675, George Fox made clear that at their meeting for business "Friends are not to meet like a company of people about town or parish business, neither in their men's or women's meetings, but to wait upon the Lord." William Braithwaite in his *Second Period of Quakerism* writes, "Every business meeting was concerned with knowing the mind of the Lord and sought to guide the action by the weight of spiritual judgment rather than by mechanical counting of heads or the rhetorical and argumentative skill of the speaker" (p. 278). In another telling paragraph William Braithwaite sums up the ultimate thrust of these local meetings for worship and business carried on as they were by ordinary Quaker farmers, artisans and traders: "The quiet meetings resolutely maintained up and down the land, remained the centers of power and offered an invincible resistance to persecution . . . . By

holding meetings through storms of persecution with unflinching tenacity, publicly and with open doors, Friends not only secured the continuance of their own Society but greatly contributed to the preservation of Non-Conformity as a whole."

In the closing pages of his account of early Friends, Michael Sheeran, in spite of his spirited defense of the necessity for centralizing the powers of Quaker governance in the closing decades of the seventeenth century, admits that it is in these earlier local monthly meetings that he found the decisive clues for the uniqueness of the Quaker corporate decision making. For all of their frailty and their exaggerated notions of infallibility, they contained, in his judgment, the seed and the genius of authentic Quaker decision making. It is to their plumb line that he returns in the remaining two-thirds of his book that is devoted to the contemporary scene.

As intriguing as Michael Sheeran's account of the seventeenth century origins of the Quaker decision making process may be, it is the hundred tightly-packed pages that record his findings of its contemporary use that make the book a particular treasure. Convinced as he is that Friends have something of first importance to share in their technique of reaching a viable resolution of their own problems, in these chapters he has collected and analyzed dozens of striking examples that lay bare the presuppositions of the Quaker process.

These presuppositions have a double edge to them. On the one hand, they differentiate the process from the many attempts that writers like Frank Walser or Stuart Chase have made to discover a secular voteless concensus that might be detached from the spiritual element that marks the genuine Quaker decision making experience. On the other hand, these presuppositions warn contemporary Quakers that when they grow lax and fail to carry them out, the process breaks down and only shabby imitations of it remain.

I know of no comparable analysis of these presuppositions that compares with what Michael Sheeran has managed to present. There is in the beginning the necessity of having a group of limited size who know and respect and trust each other. Members of this group must be willing to listen to each other with open minds, to learn from each other and be willing to feel into the shaping of a decision that upon occasions might be drastically different from anything they had previously conceived. They must have experienced in their meetings for worship and in previous gatherings for decision making, that they are not "in this thing

alone" but that given patience and sufficient openness there is a right resolution of the problem which they confront.

Along with this they must be assisted by a clerk whose qualities are radically different from an aggressive or a manipulative leader. The clerk, whom the group has themselves chosen, must be one who also knows that he or she is not "in this thing alone." They must be persons who have confidence in the process and trust that there is a right solution to be found. Clerks must have skill and patience and fairness and have such faith in the members of the group that they can receive their suggestions on the way to move and be able to formulate a minute that will finally meet with general approval without putting the matter to a vote. The process at its best presupposes that the clerk will not be hurried nor be "influenced by mere numbers or persistence . . . nor be hindered from making experiments by fear of undue caution nor prompted by novel suggestions to ill-considered courses." The clerk will listen with great care to "weighty Friends" but not give them undue attention.

Among the more common blockages to these presuppositions could be included: unwillingness on the part of members to attend Quaker business meetings regularly because of the danger of involvement in the carrying out of the decisions arrived at; unwillingness to come to such meetings with other then a fixed and unchangeable mind as to the outcome; unwillingness to lay aside pressure tactics to force an early decision; unwillingness to follow the Quaker caution "to use as few words as possible and as many as are necesary;" unwillingness to experience the communal togetherness that such an exercise involves; and unwillingness to be open for the transforming experience of a "covered" meeting which in silent periods in a meeting for business may take place. These are among the basic obstacles that contemporary Quakers must seek to correct if they are not to lose this treasure which they have inherited.

There is a modest but not especially convincing attempt in the closing chapters of the study to distinguish the "Christocentric" from the "Universalistic" Quakers in the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and to see whether one group is more qualified than the other for carrying out the full dimensions of the decision making genius of the Quaker business meeting. His conclusion is that above all other qualifications is the question of whether the Friend, regardless of the theological formulation of faith, has in the meeting for worship or in the meeting for business actually experienced the Presence and felt what obedience to the Guide

may mean. Earlier Sheeran had written: "Quakers do not begin with a theory. They begin with an *event*" (p. 5). This *event*, this knowing at first hand that the continuous revelation is still at work is, in his judgment, what really matters. It is at this point that he sees that the seventeenth century Friends and contemporary Friends, when they are authentic, are one.

Michael Sheeran might well have shared a passage here from his fellow Roman Catholic, Thomas Merton's experiential witness when he wrote: "You don't have to rush after it. It is there all the time. If you give it a chance, it will make itself known to you."

The gift of this study will search contemporary Friends to the core and our debt to Michael Sheeran is not small.

DOUGLAS V. STEERE

Preface

Roman Catholicism's Second Vatican Council urged Religious Orders to renew themselves by getting in touch with their roots. The Jesuit Order, of which the writer is a member, discovered in its earliest documents a forgotten decision making procedure called Communal Discernment. Members of the community were expected to share in decisions by praying about the issues the community faced, sharing with each other outcomes of the prayer, and moving through discussion and further prayer to virtually unanimous conclusions.

When Jesuits and other Catholic communities which share the Jesuit spiritual tradition began to implement Communal Discernment during the early 1970s, they found constant practical obstacles to success. In particular, lack of acceptance of the process, mistrust of other participants, and inability to put aside one's own interests seemed regular roadblocks.

A little more than a decade ago, this writer began to work with Catholic groups who were attempting to employ Communal Discernment in their major decisions. He decided to look for communities outside Catholicism which might have day-to-day experience with such a process. John C. Futrell, S.J., Director of Ministry Training Services in Denver, Colorado, suggested the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), a small religious family of some two hundred thousand members worldwide who have utilized Communal Discernment—without using the name—as their ordinary decision making process for the past three centuries. Under the direction of Harry Eckstein and Walter F. Murphy, Professors of Politics at Princeton University, the writer undertook a doctoral dissertation on the Quakers, attempting to trace the origins and current practice of their voteless decisions. This book is a revision of that dissertation.

In addition to analysis of historical and contemporary Quaker sources, the study relies heavily upon interviews with about one hundred and fifty members of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, the Quaker body selected for careful study. It would be foolhardy to attempt to thank all who were particularly helpful. Suffice it to say that the entire group of individuals who agreed to interviews, by their consideration and generous sacrifice of time, truly proved themselves Friends.

It is hoped that the book will be useful to Catholics and other Christians in tracing how Friends successfully employ a tradition of religious

decision making which is deeply embedded in Scripture but which other Christians have typically lost. In particular, the ways Quakers seem to avoid the problems which faced Catholics new to the method are explored.

Social scientists and political philosophers are invited to discover in Quakers what may be the only modern Western community in which decision making achieves the group-centered decisions of traditional societies. In the Conclusion, the author discusses Friends as a possible answer to the common contemporary wish for advancement beyond the fragmented individuation of "liberal" man.

Finally, the author hopes Quakers themselves will find in these pages a helpful mirroring of Friends decision making. Newcomers to Quakerism and those who find themselves in roles of leadership within the community may find in this study an outsider's understanding of the possibilities and pitfalls of the Quaker method of going beyond majority rule.

M.J.S.

Denver, Colorado
September 1983

Chapter I

An Overview of Current Quaker Decision Making

Prescriptions for Good Quaker Practice

By now the reader is familiar with the general procedures for decision making which characterize Quaker practice. Concretely, what is that method like today? This introduction offers an overview of the rules observed as they might be discovered by someone reading standard Quaker sources. Subsequent chapters flesh out this skeleton on the basis of 150 interviews with anonymous Friends, personal observations, and further written materials. First, then, some excerpts from Quaker texts.

True to tradition, contemporary Friends are chary of "binding the Spirit" by supplying ironclad regulations. The official *Book of Discipline* of today's yearly meetings typically begins with a citation from the letter written in 1656 by the Quaker Elders of Balby, the citation setting the tone of the book as advice rather than regulation.

> Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all with the measure of light which is pure and holy may be guided, and so in the light walking and abiding these may be fulfilled by the Spirit—not from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.[1]

The current *Book of Discipline* of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting* explains the process simply:

> Meetings for the transaction of business are conducted in the same expectant waiting for the guidance of the Spirit as is the meeting for wor-

* Held for one week each spring; all Friends in the Philadelphia area are invited to attend and to participate in area-wide decisions.

ship. Periods of worship, especially at the beginning and end, lift hearts and minds out of self-centered desires into an openness to seek the common good under the leadership of the Spirit of Christ. All matters are considered thoughtfully, with due respect to every point of view presented. When a course of action receives the general, though not necessarily unanimous, approval of the group, the presiding clerk formulates the sense of the meeting and it is recorded in the minutes. No vote is taken; there is no decision made by a majority, who override opposition. Action is taken only when the group can proceed in substantial unity.[2]

A typical set of suggestions for good procedure comes from London Yearly Meeting's *Book of Discipline:*

> As it is our hope that in our Meetings for Discipline the will of God shall prevail rather than the desires of men, we do not set great store by rhetoric or clever argument. The mere gaining of debating points is found to be unhelpful and alien to the spirit of worship which should govern the rightly ordered Meeting. Instead of rising hastily to reply to another, it is better to give time for what has been said to make its own appeal, and to take its right place in the mind of the Meeting.
>
> We ought ever to be ready to give unhurried, weighty and truly sympathetic consideration to proposals brought forward from whatever part of the Meeting, believing that what is said rises from the depths of a Friend's experience, and is sincerely offered for the guidance of the Meeting, and the forwarding of the work of the Church. We should neither be hindered from making experiments by fear or undue caution, nor prompted by novel suggestions to ill-considered courses.
>
> Neither a majority nor a minority should allow itself in any way to overbear or to obstruct a meeting for church affairs in its course towards a decision. We are unlikely to reach either truth or wisdom if one section imposes its will on another. We deprecate division in our Meetings and desire unanimity. It is in the unity of common fellowship, we believe, that we shall most surely learn the will of God. We cherish, therefore, the tradition which excludes voting from our meetings, and trust that clerks and Friends generally will observe the spirit of it, not permitting themselves to be influenced in their judgment either by mere numbers or by persistence. The clerks should be content to wait upon God with the Meeting, as long as may be necessary for the emergence of a decision which clearly commends itself to the heart and mind of the Meeting as the right one.[3]

Individual writers concur with this picture of decision making. They expand upon the expectation that a final decision often is superior to the reflections of any individual in the group. James Walker, for example, tells us:

> The business meeting is an occasion to use insight, and not an occasion for debate. After the facts of a situation are given and there has been time for consideration, members should try to state their judgment concisely and clearly. As this is done, new insights may come, and hopefully the final outcome will represent a group judgment superior to that of any one individual. Partiality has no place; rather we seek a decision that is right in the light of God's wisdom. After an individual has stated his own insight, his responsibility is over. Whether the meeting accepts or rejects the idea as given, the responsibility is on the group. If the group has reacted unfavorably, it will then endeavor to find a more creative approach.[4]

Thomas S. Brown, former clerk of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, urges Friends to avoid "delivering remarks the meeting has heard many times before." One should ask oneself, "Is this repetition from frailty or from God?"

Brown urges that, instead of wasting the meeting's time with the polishing of the minutes which express the meeting's agreements, this editorial power should be entrusted to a committee, "for the Kingdom of God does not come minute by polished minute."

In a similar desire to keep the proceedings efficient, Brown urges careful preparation of the agenda by the clerk and respectful adherence to the agenda by participants in the meeting:

> For the right holding of Meetings it is important for Clerks to have the known business meticulously prepared in advance of the session. Matters carried over from previous sessions should be noted and the persons who have been asked to take some action or to make a report should be reminded of the service expected. Members who wish to bring concerns before the Meeting should be urged to inform the Clerk in advance, and to have all possible relevant material in hand and to make their remarks brief and recommendations clear. If any member feels moved to rise in the Meeting to raise a major new concern, he should ask himself whether this matter might not better wait to receive the preliminary sifting of other Friends.[5]

The sweep of advice on how to participate, then, runs from mystical suggestions that one let God's promptings determine whether it is time to speak, to some very practical admonitions on the careful preparation of an agenda.

Meeting for business always begins with silence and closes in silence—a clear reminder that an atmosphere of worshipfully seeking God's will is to mark the gathering. Douglas Steere puts it well: "The Quaker meeting for business opens with an unhurried period of waiting

silence, and if the meeting is properly carried through, there emerges something of this mood of openness not to my wishes and my designs and my surface preferences but openness to the deeper levels where the Guide's bidding may have its way and where the problem may be resolved in quite a different way than had ever occurred to me."[6]

Examples of the Process

Even in such an atmosphere, differences of opinion may make agreement very difficult. In that case, no change is made until agreement is reached. An example is provided by Elton Trueblood using the apparently trivial conflict which arose over the enlargement of a burial ground:

> [T]he old burial ground in the meeting house yard was filled. Strong sentiment was expressed, when the matter was first discussed, both for and against the enlargement. Those in favor of enlargement pointed out the fact that many families could not be given space for burial without increasing the size of the plot and that failure to give space was unfair discrimination between families. Those opposed to enlargement showed that the proposed action would limit the playground of the school, situated on the same grounds, and that it made the section less desirable for residences. It must be understood that this subject was one on which many felt deeply. Those whose loved ones were buried in the tiny space allotted could not consider anything in connection with it dispassionately and it is not surprising that they could not. Others were equally unable to consider dispassionately anything affecting the life of the school children. To them it was a matter of interests of the dead against the interests of the living.
>
> Since a decision seemed impossible on the first evening, the clerk made no minute and the problem was allowed to rest a month. It was not until six months later, however, that the question was settled and settled in a satisfactory manner. The strong emotional tone wore off, and several tempered their former statements, until at last it was decided to make a sufficient enlargement of the grounds to care for those now in membership and to make other arrangements for the future so that the question would not again arise. This small enlargement was made in such a way as to do no harm to the playground, and all seemed to approve of the clerk's estimate of the sense of the meeting. Best of all the members did not feel that a weak compromise had been made, but rather that the very best plan had been followed.[7]

Nor is use of the method limited to exclusively Quaker groups. Burton R. Clark's description of faculty meetings at Quaker-sponsored Swarthmore College reveals the successful use of the method by a largely non-Quaker faculty:

> The chairman would not commonly ask for a vote on an issue, and no one would rise from the floor to demand a count of hands or the use of a ballot. The expectation was that a common solution would arise through rational discussion, with each person first accepting for himself the rightness or appropriateness of a particular position. While the chairman and everyone else waited, there would be a search for the consensus; as the drift of opinion became clear, minority points of view often faded. The minority would see that the agreement necessary for policy and action lay in another direction, and if that direction seemed reasonable, they would go along with it. But a strong minority view that would not dissolve was taken seriously. Rather than vote it down, participants would continue the discussion or would table the issue so that further thought, discussion, and persuasion could take place outside the meeting room in the ensuing days and weeks. The matter might then be raised again at a subsequent meeting or, if a consensus was still missing, dropped.[8]

From the preceding citations, it is not difficult to detect a number of factors which seem characteristic of Quaker decision making. Stuart Chase[9] suggests nine such principles:

1. unanimous decisions—no voting;
2. silent periods—at start of meeting and when conflict arises;
3. moratorium—when agreement cannot be reached;
4. participation by all with ideas on the subject;
5. learning to listen—not going to meeting with mind made up;
6. absence of leaders—the clerk steers but does not dominate;
7. nobody outranks anybody;
8. factual-focus—emotions kept to a minimum; and
9. small meetings—typically limited numbers.

But which of these principles are fundamental and which derivative? Does Quaker unanimity entail the universal endorsement of decisions which it appears to? What goes on in the silences? Are all participants truly equal or only nominally so? Are emotions simply suppressed? To what extent does the method depend on the religious vision of Friends? Is a Quaker meeting for business really the leaderless body it appears?

In the chapters which follow we shall explore each of these questions in an attempt to bring the reader beyond the superficial comprehension which is the fruit of most of the descriptions one finds in print. Thus prepared, one should be able to attend Quaker business meetings with some sensitivity to the dynamics which are not otherwise obvious. Perhaps even some members of the Religious Society of Friends may find in these pages an occasional light on how his or her own meeting for business proceeds.

The sequence of topics deserves explanation. The writer has decided not to arrange all the important topics first (or last), with secondary matters placed in secondary positions. Instead, the focus is upon two central and subtle matters: the nature of unity in a decision and the systems of belief which seem to underlie successful use of the method. All other topics are introduced at points where they seem most apt for clarifying or being clarified by these central issues. For example, Chapter One discusses the atmosphere expected at a Quaker business meeting. This prepares the reader for an assessment of a primary issue, the nature of unity, which will be discussed in Chapter Two.

Similar questions might also be asked in making decisions about whether to retain inactive resident members on the rolls of the monthly meeting. Retaining as members virtually all who have not explicitly asked that their names be removed from the list—the practice of many monthly meetings—tends to reduce membership to a meaningless level; one can remain a Friend even if one's participation in the community's life is limited to occasional inquiries into the state of one's grandfather's grave. Honestly recognizing that such individuals are not full members might underscore the importance for Quaker life of the shared religious experience which gathers individual members beyond atomic existence into a unity. Once again, the experiential root of Quakerism might receive the prominence it deserves.

Speculation: Quakerism's Message for the American Future

A number of the writer's confreres in graduate school, upon hearing that this study dealt with Quaker decision making, presumed that he would find the Quaker process to be a variant on the unanimous consent of the United States Senate or the tendency of United Nations committee chairmen to declare that "there being no objection, the committee approves the following." Some Friends suggested the same conclusions, often pointing to the United Nations in particular as a secular example of Quaker method.

The author's research has convinced him that almost exactly the opposite is true. In the United States Senate, unanimous consent is typically a device for approving matters which arouse no one's opposition and is used as a method of expedition. Unanimity thus means that the matter is trivial or noncontroversial. The members of the Senate are not called upon to change from the atomic vantage point of their own and their constituents' interests to a community-based perspective. They simply affirm that the matter does not adversely affect their set of interests.

In the United Nations, unanimous consent is very frequently a way for nations to avoid going on record. By making arrangements behind the scenes, nations reach a compromise inconsistent with the official formulations of their individual foreign policies but seen as advantageous, here and now, to their national interests. By the subterfuge of failure to vote, they can preserve their officially formulated positions, yet serve their immediate national needs. Such a procedure may imitate some aspects of Quaker decision making, but it lacks both the change from national to community interest and the commitment to participate in achieving the

agreed goal which are central to the Friends process.[4]

Another area suggested from time to time as an instance of the Friends style of decision is the deliberations of the corporate board. Although we do not wish to argue that such instances never occur, we must suggest that many apparent similarities between the Quaker style of decision making and those of the board room are only coincidental. We recall a Friend who commented enthusiastically about a Philadelphia corporation he knew which reached unanimous decisions at its board meetings with only rare exceptions. However, another Friend, a member of a number of corporate boards, remarked:

> Sure, corporations' boards of directors almost always agree. That's just good business. You pick a management team and then you back them unanimously until some major segment of the board is dissatisfied enough to want to replace the team. Until you want to make that major change, you would only be weakening management unnecessarily by voting no or no confidence. So, when you vote yes, it has little in common with Quaker unity. This kind of yes just means you haven't enough votes to win yet.

In short, apparent parallels to Friends decision making seem to fall far short because they do not demand of the participant the characteristic Quaker change of viewpoint or burden the individual with the Quaker sense of obligation to make the decision work out successfully. In a fundamental sense, the supposed parallels differ from Friends decisions because the former do not presuppose that participants are in community.

Our speculation thus raises a fundamental issue. Individualized, atomic man cries out for community. He or she complains because of the inability to participate in a satisfying way in decision making that affects his or her life.[5] But individualized, atomic man is incapable of community because of the inability to surrender the individual-focused starting point which has been fundamental to Western culture since the beginning of liberalism.[6] Therefore all attempts by a person whose socialization has been locked into the atomic thought-world to achieve the community longed for are doomed to fail, doomed to imitate the externals of a participation based upon communion without ever quite attaining the communion itself that would transform those externals into reality.

Roberto Unger, Harvard political philosopher, argues forcefully that now is the time for a "total criticism," a critique of social theory which would not rest content to challenge parts of the present thought-world but would attempt to challenge that world's very roots. The outcome would

be a turning away from liberalism's atomic man so that tomorrow's man could once again escape the isolation of viewpoint basic to liberalism and find a fuller identity as part of an "organic group" whose good and goals would be the initial point of reference? Tomorrow's world of thought would go beyond liberalism in order to embrace a new level of community.

Our speculation leaves both Quakerism and the American future in doubt. If the American society becomes even more deeply mired in an atomic world view, we can expect the number of people capable of living in both an American and a Quaker universe to diminish gradually and constantly. Eventually, this could spell the end to such Quaker units as Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

On the other hand, if the hunger for community is strong and growing, might not the number of Americans who are ready for a group such as Friends be expected to increase? In that case, Friends would still face the great challenge of helping these people to enter the Quaker experience deeply enough to be able to change their basic thought-world from the atomic to the communitarian. But, if Friends are successful, groups like the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting might be the vanguard of a new revolution.

And so we conclude with Quakerism in an ambiguous state. Will the Religious Society of Friends become a victim of the atomic society or a beacon drawing that society to the community which its members crave?

Alfred North Whitehead remarks: "Profound flashes of insight remain ineffective for centuries, not because they are unknown, but by reason of dominant interests which inhibit reaction to that type of generality. The history of religion is the history of the countless generations required for interest to attach itself to profound ideas."[8]

Centuries ago, George Fox found on Pendle Hill an experience that spoke to his condition. Is it too much to suppose that modern seekers might find in the Religious Society of Friends the religious experience and worldview that would speak to theirs?

It is hoped that this book will be useful to Catholics and other Christians in tracing how Friends successfully employ a tradition of religious decision making which is deeply embedded in Scripture but which other Christians have typically lost. In particular, the ways Quakers seem to avoid the problems which face Catholics new to the method are explored.

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ISBN 0-941308-04-9