

## Session 8: November 18, 2018 – Making decisions, Part 2

Mike, Richelle, David, Emily, Wendy, Nina

### 1. Revisiting Session 7 – Quaker decision-making process

- *Learning to wait and observe, instead than rushing to find a solution and act. This is the essence of the Quaker decision-making process. The emphasis is on the process rather than the outcome—even if the group knows they must eventually come to a decision. Quakers seek an outcome that includes everyone, even if not everyone agrees to the decision.*
- *How Quaker decision-making deals with dissent: Quakers seek unity with a group's decision. This means that everyone present is able to commit to supporting that decision, even despite any personal disagreements with it. Sometimes a Friends will oppose a decision yet feel conscientiously able to “stand aside”; that is, to have her dissent recorded while allowing the group to proceed, and to agree not to obstruct or sabotage the chosen action.*
- *More rarely, a Friend may be led to “stand in the way” of a decision. This act is not the same thing as a veto. Instead, it places a responsibility on both that Friend and the whole meeting to continue “threshing out” the matter, seeking more clarity that will, they hope, lead to unity.*

### 2. Discussion: Three Friends shared examples of how these Quaker approaches to conflict work.

- One Friend told of opposing the hiring of a particular Quaker organization applicant, until the clerk asked if her opposition was so strong that she needed to stand in the way. With some silence to consider, she was able to discern that it was not, so instead she “stood aside.”
- Another told of an event where speaker [Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM](#), reminded his audience that Catholics are Catholic *Christians*: “And Christians do not kill.” His comment opposing the doctrine of “just war” was not technically “standing in the way,” but it is a fine example of “speaking truth to power,” similar Quaker principle.
- The third example was Ambler's retelling of a story ([Attachment 1](#)) from Barry Morley's [Beyond Consensus: Salvaging Sense of the Meeting](#) (Pendle Hill Pamphlet #307, 1993).

Friends shared further personal examples of Quakers dealing with conflict situations.

- One Friend shared about Quaker founder George Fox's experiences of speaking directly with Oliver Cromwell, at that time Lord Protector of England, during the era of persecution of the Quakers. The story is recounted in the Wikipedia article on Fox ([Attachment 2](#)).
- Another shared a story told by Jim Douglass about radical peace activist Quakers who had an opportunity to speak with President John F. Kennedy ([Attachment 3](#)). “Among their challenges to him was a recommendation that the United States offer its surplus food to the People's Republic of China. China was considered an enemy nation. Yet it was also one whose people were beset by a famine.”

### 3. Discussion of Handout 8.1 – “What makes all this possible?” ([Attachment 4](#))

### 4. Discussion of Ambler's segment, “What makes it difficult?” (pp. 80-81) – Friends shared personal examples and reflections.

- One Friend spoke about the challenge at the start of meeting for worship of “coming down from the stress of the week.”
- Another spoke of the inward light as being for the whole world, not just for us. “A power of light that leaves from [meeting for worship] for others to catch.”
- Another asked, “What am I vilifying in [President] Trump that I don't I really like in myself?”

- This last comment opened into a discussion about the danger of liberal American culture's setting up of "Trump-ness" as "the enemy." One Friend affirmed that Quaker seek to understand the personhood of *everyone* around us. Therefore, we need to open to understanding the personhood of Trump and those who support him.

#### **Scheduling and homework**

- *Next session* – Sunday, December 16<sup>th</sup>, 12:30pm, following meeting for worship and potluck.
- *Reading* – From Ambler's *The Quaker Way*, Chapter 5, "Living Faithfully"
  - [The Quaker way of living](#) (82-86)
- *Practice* – Notice how you deal with conflicts over the coming month, especially times when you try to apply the Quaker way of facing conflict (not necessarily "solving," but "dealing with"). Bring examples you feel comfortable sharing to the next session.

**Rex Ambler, *The Quaker way*, Chapter 4, pp. 76-77**

I will give you an example, from Barry Morley's own meeting in America. At the end of a business meeting the clerk asked if there was any other business. A woman Friend, Linda, stood up to say that she recently walked down the lane to the meeting house... but she broke off her story to cry. Friends waited. She then, a little more composed, resumed her story. It had been Memorial Day, and she saw men with guns in the Quaker graveyard.

Another Friend tried to explain:

'There are people buried in the graveyard who served in the military. The men were honoring them.'  
'But they were in my graveyard with guns', Linda said through tears.

Other Friends expressed sympathy with her distress. Others expressed anger that such a thing should be allowed. But once again the situation was explained:

'They're from veterans' groups. They decorate the graves of veterans every Memorial Day'.  
'After all,' someone added, 'we knew they had served in the military when we allowed them to be buried there'.

This looked like stalemate. Then a Friend said:

'If a choice has to be made between Linda feeling as she does, and men with guns in the graveyard, that is not a difficult choice'.

Linda's feelings, and those of others too, had now been taken note of and recognized. An older Friend asked Linda:

'Do you have strong feelings about the veterans being remembered?'

Having been heard, and hearing the others, Linda was able to reply:

'No. I have no objection to the men being remembered.  
'Might we allow them to decorate the graves but leave their guns outside?'

suggested the older Friend. Another Friend supported this:

'I can approve of that if it is acceptable to Linda'  
'Yes,' said Linda, 'I would find that acceptable'.  
The meeting fell silent, and then adjourned.

A year later, quite unexpectedly, Linda reported to the meeting that she had visited the graveyard on Memorial Day to check on the veterans.

'They left their guns outside when they went in', she said.  
'The silence that followed', comments Morley, 'amplified the sense of unity we had felt a year earlier'.

## George Fox's Encounters with Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Fox#Encounters\\_with\\_Cromwell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Fox#Encounters_with_Cromwell)

Cromwell was sympathetic to Fox and almost agreed to follow his teaching—but persecution of Quakers continued.

Parliamentarians grew suspicious of monarchist plots and fearful that the group travelling with Fox aimed to overthrow the government: by this time his meetings were regularly attracting crowds of over a thousand. In early 1655 he was arrested at Whetstone, Leicestershire and taken to London under armed guard. In March<sup>[36]</sup> he was brought before the Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell.

After affirming that he had no intention of taking up arms Fox was able to speak with Cromwell for most of the morning about the Friends and advised him to listen to God's voice and obey it so that, as Fox left, Cromwell "with tears in his eyes said, 'Come again to my house; for if thou and I were but an hour of a day together, we should be nearer one to the other'; adding that he wished [Fox] no more ill than he did to his own soul."<sup>[37]</sup>

This episode was later recalled as an example of "speaking truth to power", a preaching technique by which subsequent Quakers hoped to influence the powerful.<sup>[38]</sup> Although not used until the 20th century, the phrase is related to the ideas of plain speech and simplicity which Fox practiced, but motivated by the more worldly goal of eradicating war, injustice and oppression.

Fox petitioned Cromwell over the course of 1656, asking him to alleviate the persecution of Quakers.<sup>[39]</sup> Later that year, they met for a second time at Whitehall. On a personal level, the meeting went well; despite disagreements between the two men, they had a certain rapport. Fox invited Cromwell to "lay down his crown at the feet of Jesus"—which Cromwell declined to do.<sup>[40]</sup> Fox met Cromwell again twice in March 1657.<sup>[41]</sup> Their last meeting was in 1658 at Hampton Court, though they could not speak for long or meet again because of the Protector's worsening illness—Fox even wrote that "he looked like a dead man".<sup>[42]</sup> Cromwell died in September of that year.

**Jim Douglass on The Hope in Confronting the Unspeakable in the Assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy – Coalition on Political Assassinations Conference  
20 November 2009, Dallas, Texas**

**“JFK Meets the Quakers”**

<https://ratical.org/ratville/JFK/Unspeakable/COPA2009.html#s2o>

In the final weeks of his presidency, President Kennedy took one more risky step toward peace. It can be seen in relation to an amazing meeting he had the year before [on May 1, 1962] with six Quakers who visited him in his office. This is the President with six Quakers – just the seven of them.<sup>[62]</sup>

One thousand members of the Society of Friends<sup>[63]</sup> had been vigiling for peace and world order outside the White House. President Kennedy agreed to meet with six of their leaders. So that’s all we have to do to see the President – just vigil outside the White House – he’ll invite you in.

I have interviewed all three survivors of that meeting with the president, from 47 years ago. They remain uniformly amazed – they were amazed then and they’re just as amazed today when they talk about it – these are radical peace activists, they’ve all been arrested multiple times (as have I for that matter) – they remained uniformly amazed at the open way in which the President listened and responded to their radical Quaker critique of his foreign policy.

They said they’d never met anybody who listened as well as he did. As one of them said you could tell he wasn’t thinking of something to say to them, and he wasn’t countering or whatever – although he said honest things as we’ll see in a moment here.

Among their challenges to him was a recommendation that the United States offer its surplus food to the People’s Republic of China. China was considered an enemy nation. Yet it was also one whose people were beset by a famine.

Kennedy said to the Quakers, “Do you mean you would feed your enemy when he has his hands on your throat?” The Quakers said they meant exactly that. They reminded him it was what Jesus had said should be done. Kennedy said he knew that, and knew that it was the right thing to do, but he couldn’t overcome the China lobby in Washington to accomplish that.<sup>[64]</sup>

## Handout 8.1 – *The Quaker Way*, Chapter 4: Making Decisions “What makes all this possible?” (pp.78-80)

What makes the Quaker way of decision an issue practicable, then, is that:

*We pause between contributions,*

not jumping in as soon as we get a chance, and not interrupting.

*We speak to the meeting as a whole,*

not to an individual in particular, especially not to the Friend who has just spoken.

*We defer to the clerk.*

Like the players in an orchestra, we wait till we have a cue from the 'conductor' that we are free to speak. In a large meeting this normally involves standing up or raising a hand and waiting to be called. In a small meeting a look or a nod may be enough.

These three could be summed up by the advice of George Fox, 'Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts'.

*We listen attentively to everyone,*

even the least articulate or knowledgeable.

*We speak briefly and to the point,*

avoiding the desire to make a speech.

*We avoid rhetoric and manipulation,*

which may persuade people temporarily, but not convince them deeply.

*We may prepare our minds beforehand, but not our opinions!*

The clerk has to bear that in mind too, since anxiety about an item on the agenda may persuade her to settle her own mind about it first.

These four can be summed up by Fox's words again: 'Let truth be the head, and practise it'.

*We keep silent while the clerk writes a Minute.*

The temptation is to chatter while the clerk scribbles quietly at the table, but she is trying to get 'the sense of the meeting', so she needs our quiet support.

*We unite on a Minute, not on a vote.*

We're looking to agree, not on the proposal that carries the day, but the form of words which expresses the sense of the whole meeting.

*We delay till another meeting if unity is not achievable.*

Even if only one member cannot accept the Minute, it will be better for the meeting, and the decision, if we wait until we can all accept it - whatever it then is.

*We submit to the Minute once it is accepted,*

which is a test of how seriously we take the process of being led by the Spirit.

These last four may be summed up briefly by Fox's 'Mind the oneness'.

These are not rules, in the strict sense. They are models of good practice. There are no sanctions against not following them, but our experience has been, historically, that if we do not follow the practice we shall miss out on the clarity and confidence that come with it.

But Friends find that out for themselves. It is part of the experimental nature of our faith that we test our practice continually by experience, if only to confirm, sometimes, that we got it right the first time.

Once we are (re)assured of this, we can commit ourselves wholeheartedly to the discipline, and hold on in faith when the process seems to be stuck or dragging on endlessly. Nothing is more heartening than to see it come right in the end.