TRADITION VERSUS INNOVATION:
THE HAT, WILKINSON-STORY
AND KEITHIAN CONTROVERSIES[1]

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ABSTRACT

The post-Restoration period saw the development of the Society of Friends from an ill-defined religious group to a well-ordered denomination. This process of institutionalisation was marked by struggle between Friends' traditional emphasis upon the freedom of the light within to guide the individual and the need to impose some order upon the Society. The process saw perceived innovations develop into accepted traditions and is most clearly demonstrated by the Quaker controversies of this period.

The 'Hat Controversy' of the 1660s shows early resistance to the innovation of some Friends exerting their authority over the consciences of others. Although this controversy caused much upset at the time, discord was on a smaller scale than in subsequent divisions. This may indicate that the issue of authority was not as major a concern among Friends in the 1660s as it would later become. The attempted introduction of uniformity of practice through the system of business meetings led to the Wilkinson-Story Controversy of the 1670s and 1680s.

This was more serious conflict between the traditional authority of the light and the imposed authority of Fox and others, resulting in schism. By contrast, controversy resulted in the 1690s from George Keith's attempts to introduce uniformity of belief. His disownment and lack of success demonstrates that this was too great an innovation to be tolerated by the majority of Friends.

KEYWORDS

Controversy, Hat, Innovation, Keith, tradition, Wilkinson-Story.

INTRODUCTION

This article looks at the three major controversies which divided Friends during the post-Restoration period of the seventeenth century: the Hat Controversy, the Wilkinson-Story Controversy and the Keithian Controversy. The intricacies of each controversy will not be considered in great depth here. However, the way these disputes reflected Friends' attitudes to Quaker traditions and to the introduction of new ideas, or innovations, to their religious society will be examined. This article will demonstrate that the post-Restoration controversies were both cause and consequence of innovation. It will also be argued that post-Restoration Friends tended to view early Quaker principles as good and innovation as bad. However, when Quaker leaders were successful in persuading Friends to accept change, the innovations of one decade could become the traditions of the next.

It may seem peculiar to speak of tradition among Friends during the seventeenth century. The Society of Friends was barely a decade old at the time of the first of these three controversies, the Hat Controversy. Could Friends really be said to have developed any traditions by this point in time? In fact, certain behaviours and manners of proceeding did become established among Friends from their earliest days. Obvious examples include Friends' demonstrations of their rejection of worldly ranks: their refusal to doff their hats to those in authority and their use of the 'Thee' and 'Thou' terms of address for everyone, not just those of intimate acquaintance. Within a very few years, such things had become accepted practice among Friends and could already be regarded as their traditional way of doing things. More significantly, Friends adopted a distinctive doctrinal position from very early on. They believed in the power of the light of Christ within themselves to illuminate and guide individuals and to bring them to salvation. This central tenet united Friends long before they could be regarded as a coherent religious society.

Therefore, within a decade of their foundation, Friends had developed certain distinctive beliefs and practices. For convenience's sake, these may be referred to as Quaker tradition. However, in doing so, it is essential to realise that seventeenth century Friends would not have used the term themselves. To them, the word, 'tradition', smacked of the established church with its adherence to ceremonies hallowed by antiquity but lacking any biblical precedent. In giving themselves over to the guidance of the light, Friends had rejected the traditions and customs of formalised worship. They termed their adopted belief and practice, 'Truth'. When they wished to emphasise the permanence and longevity of their principles, they would use expressions such as 'primitive Truth' or 'the ancient testimony and principle of the Light'.[2] The term, 'ancient', was a common seventeenth century usage which Friends employed frequently and always as an expression of approval. Those who distinguished themselves

through their work to defend and promote Quakerism were termed 'ancient Friends', regardless of their age in years.

By contrast, the term 'innovation' was used by Friends only in a derogatory sense as the term harked back to the 'Laudian Innovations' of the early part of the century. Friends were hostile to the introduction of any new way of doing things which appeared to contradict early Quaker practice. This was because they believed that the light had directed them to their original principles. To go against these principles was to go against the light of Christ itself. However, by the time of the Restoration in 1660, some Friends had come to see that a certain amount of change was going to be necessary. They found that their priorities were changing.

During the earliest years of Quakerism, Friends and many others had believed that the end of the world was imminent. Friends believed that only those who embraced the Truth would be assured of salvation so their chief concern was to spread their message to as many people as possible. There was no need for long-term planning. However, with the Restoration of Charles II, hopes of an immediate eschatological event started to diminish.[3] Missionary work remained very important to leading Friends but now they also had to consider how to ensure the future survival of their religious society.

Even before the Restoration, the Nayler debacle of 1656 had increased public and governmental hostility towards Quakers.[4] Persecution further increased following the Restoration. The persecution of Friends posed a serious threat to their ability to survive as a religious group and it became apparent that certain changes would have to be made in order to overcome this threat. Firstly, some of the excesses of early Quaker enthusiasm would have to be curbed so that Friends would not bring too much public hostility upon themselves. Secondly, some organisational structure would be needed to bring coherence to the disparate groups of Friends around the nation. The latter innovation would enable Friends to encourage and advise each other during times of persecution. However, it also had the potential to be used to introduce uniformity of belief and practice among Friends.

It would be wrong to suggest that Friends prior to the Restoration had not realised the necessity of introducing some level of organisation to the movement. Rosemary Moore has given an excellent description of the gradual developments towards a regular church order among Friends, which began

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2   C. T[aylor], *An Epistle of Caution to Friends* (London, 1681), [title page]; Richard Snead et al., *An Exalted Diotrephes Reprehended* (London, 1681), [preface, p.4].

3   Christopher Hill is amongst those historians who have identified a diminution of eschatological prophecy and expectation following the Restoration: Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), p.355. Indeed, it has been argued that it was this post-Restoration realisation that there would be no immediate physical second coming of Christ which led such Friends as George Whitehead and William Penn instead to claim a spiritual, internal second coming: Stephen Trowell, 'George Keith: Post-Restoration Quaker Theology and the Experience of Defeat', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* Vol. 76, No. 1 (Spring 1994), p.125.

4   For a detailed description and analysis of James Nayler's re-enactment of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, his punishment and Friends' reactions, see Leo Damrosch, *The Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus: James Nayler and the Puritan Crackdown on the Free Spirit* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1996).

during the 1650s.[5] The need to deal with troublemakers within the movement was clear from the earliest days of Quakerism, with Margaret Fell initially taking responsibility for handling these people. Friends also needed to be able to cope with practical matters such as poor relief and marriage. However, during the 1650s, Friends did not specifically set out to establish an organisational structure for their movement. The development of early business meetings and the positions of 'elders' and 'overseers' among Friends developed naturally as Friends attempted to deal with practical difficulties and divisions as they arose. As Rosemary Moore has explained:

> Their first arrangements were designed to meet the needs of the moment, for, in the apocalyptic excitement of 1653, setting up a church organisation designed for the long term would have seemed an irrelevance.[6]

The need for organisation and for the means to limit the excesses of enthusiastic individuals was recognised during the 1650s. However, these did not become matters of urgent concern until 1656, with the embarrassment of the Nayler affair, and more particularly, with the increase in persecution and gradual diminution of eschatological expectation following the Restoration.[7]

During the post-Restoration period, Quakerism did develop from a disorganised sect into a well-ordered religious denomination. However, this process of institutionalisation was marked by bitter disagreement between those who embraced this transition and those who saw it as an abandonment of their early principles and an attack upon the light of Christ. The first post-Restoration manifestation of this struggle was the Hat Controversy of the early 1660s.

THE HAT CONTROVERSY

The man at the centre of the Hat Controversy was John Perrot, an Irish Quaker.[8] The division began around 1661 when Perrot returned to London after imprisonment in Rome. He accepted voluntary exile to Barbados in Autumn 1662 and died in 1665. In that short time, the Hat Controversy had reached much of southern England and Wales, Holland and many areas in America. In England, the controversy was relatively short-lived. It was essentially over by the end of 1666, when a meeting was held in London to restore unity. In Holland, division fizzled out around 1669 once Benjamin Furly, Perrot's main supporter there, repented. However, in parts of America, the division rumbled on into the 1670s at least.

5 Rosemary Moore, *The Light in Their Consciences: Early Quakers in Britain 1646-1666* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), pp.129-141.

6 Moore, *The Light in Their Consciences*, p.129.

7 Moore has claimed that the Nayler affair marks the beginning of the end of early Quakerism and the advent of a new, more restrained Quaker body and she has pointed out that one after-effect of the Nayler affair was to advance Quakers' understanding of themselves as a discrete organisation: Moore, *The Light in Their Consciences*, pp. 47, 132.

8 For a detailed biography of John Perrot, see Kenneth L. Carroll, *John Perrot: Early Quaker Schismatic* (London: Friends' Historical Society, 1971).

The Hat Controversy was essentially a struggle between those Friends who wanted to cling onto the spirituality and enthusiasm of early Quakerism and those who looked towards the long-term survival of Quakerism and wanted a more orderly and united religious society. John Perrot represented the spirituality of the early years of Quakerism: the traditional Quaker belief that each individual Friend should give himself or herself up completely to the guidance of the light within them. It was this central tenet which had attracted so many recruits to Quakerism and had made it such a thriving and vibrant religious group. Perrot himself had suffered greatly for his faithfulness to the light. He had been commanded by the Spirit to convert the Pope and Sultan to Quakerism and his efforts to do this earned him three years of incarceration and torture in the madhouse in Rome.[9]

In contrast to Perrot, by the 1660s, many leading Friends in England had started to see the dangers of the enthusiasm of the early Quakers. If taken to its extreme, the Quaker belief in the guidance of the Spirit could lead to antinomianism, with individuals attributing all sorts of outrageous behaviour to the leading of the light. The embarrassing activities of James Nayler and his supporters during 1656 had brought this danger home to both Friends and their opponents. Increased persecution following the Restoration also showed leading Friends that a certain amount of control needed to be exercised over the actions of enthusiastic individuals so that their behaviour would not bring worse sufferings upon Friends.

Fox and other leading Friends sought to distance the group from traditional Quaker excesses. It became common practice for Friends to judge the spirit of others. If a member felt moved to behave in a manner to which others objected, Friends would question whether this person really had been led by the light within. The Meeting might in fact conclude that the person had been acted upon by a wrong spirit. Indeed, the failure of the individual to comply with the sense or majority of a meeting came to be seen as evidence of a wrong spirit.

Perrot and his supporters did not believe that any Friends had the authority to judge the spirit of other Friends or to dictate how they should behave. They saw this as imposing a limitation upon the freedom of the light within to guide the individual. The most visible sign of Friends' behaving in a certain way merely because other Friends expected them to was the male Friends' habit of taking their hats off when they or others prayed. Therefore, Perrot levelled his attacks at this practice in particular.

Traditionally, Friends rejected the use of set forms during worship. They had therefore gone even further than most non-conformist groups in their abandonment of the rituals of the established church. Most notably, they had rejected physical baptism and the Lord's Supper. However, they maintained the custom of men removing their hats during prayer as a mark of respect to the Lord. Perrot recognised this ritual of removing hats as a set form imposed upon

9 For Perrot's account of his imprisonment, see John [Perrot], *A Narative of Some Sufferings of J.P. in the City of Rome* (London, 1661), pp.3-10.

Friends, possibly in opposition to their own consciences. Even before his return from Rome, Perrot issued testimonies against the removal of hats. By writing against this, he was defending Friends' ancient principle of acting only as immediately inspired by the Spirit. Each Friend should remove his hat for prayer only if he was immediately directed by the Spirit to do so and, in Perrot's words:

> if any Friend be moved of the Lord God to pray in the congregation of
> God fallen down with his face to the ground, without taking off the
> hat...let him do so in the fear and name of the Lord.[10]

Perrot's opponents did not see his attack as a defence of their ancient principles. Far from defending the light of Christ, they felt that he was opposing the light by opposing Friends' tradition of removing their hats during prayer. George Fox quickly issued a reply to Perrot's paper against the removal of hats. Unfortunately this does not survive but it began with the words, 'Great judgement will come upon you', which probably indicates its tone.[11] A later paper by Fox concerning this issue does survive. In this letter, Fox claims that those who keep their hats on during prayer are led to do so not by the Lord but by 'an earthly, dark spirit'. He also further denigrates the practice of keeping the hat on during prayer by pointing out its association with the enemies of Quakerism: Ranters and, later, James Nayler had kept their hats on as an expression of disunity with Friends.[12] Richard Farnsworth argued that it was Perrot who sought to introduce a new form into Quaker worship by bringing in what he termed, 'that innovation or new doctrine of keeping on the hat in prayer'.[13]

Clearly, both sides believed that they were defending Quaker traditions. However, they had different perceptions of tradition. To Perrot and his supporters, the original central tenet of Quakerism was all that mattered: complete submission of the individual to the leading of the light of Christ. There was no justification for any imposed limitation upon the Spirit, whether this be a set form in worship or the practice of judging Friends' spirits. To Perrot's opponents, the survival of Quakerism was the main concern. In a time of intense persecution, it was vital to the continuation of their ancient principles that early enthusiasm was curbed. The public image of Quakerism was of paramount importance. The division must be crushed since the world must not be allowed to see that

10   A paper signed, 'J.P.,' transcribed in Library of Society of Friends (LSF), Crosse MS, fo.12. This document is undated but is written by God's 'servant a prisoner in Rome'.

11   Carroll has identified this paper as item 52D in Henry J. Cadbury, ed., *Annual Catalogue of George Fox's Papers Compiled in 1694-1697* (Philadelphia, 1939), p.74.

12   *The Works of George Fox Vol. 7: The Epistles Vol. 1* (Pennsylvania, 1990), p.213, Epistle 214. Although Carroll dates this epistle 1661 and Braithwaite 1662, its reference to 'Jo. Perrot, whose end was according to his work' indicates that it may have been written shortly after Perrot's death in 1665. Another paper by Fox, believed to date from 1661 also survives. This is Fox's rather muddled attempt to explain why men must pray uncovered but women may not: *The Works of George Fox Vol. 7: The Epistles Vol. 1*, p.188, Epistle 199.

13   'Concerning putting off the hat in prayer written in the beginning of the sixth month, 1663,' signed, 'Richard Farnsworth,' transcribed in LSF, John Penington MS, Vol.4, fo.40.

Friends were divided. Men's practice of removing their hats must be defended lest Friends should appear to be irreverent before the Lord. Furly asked:

> Are we to regard the world's being offended? Are we to please them? Or
> to keep up a thing in a custom or tradition, without the leadings of the
> Spirit of God, because it seems to them to have been a comely order
> made by the Apostles...?[14]

In the political climate of the time, many Friends would evidently have answered, 'Yes.'

It is impossible to estimate how many followers Perrot attracted. In England, he seems to have gathered a reasonably large following but the division was mainly confined to London and East Anglia. Many of Perrot's supporters were Friends who had already become disaffected with the Quaker leadership and who saw this division as an opportunity for them to renew their attacks upon George Fox. John Harwood, for example, issued a vitriolic pamphlet against George Fox. In addition to accusing Fox of treating Perrot unfairly he also charged Fox with numerous other offences including fleeing from persecution and harbouring 'a secret intention of the usurpation of external government'.[15] James Nayler's former supporters and John Pennyman and his group of malcontent Friends quickly adopted Perrot as their champion and defender of the light within.[16] Better respected Friends, including Isaac Penington, also supported him for a while. However, the letters and publications of leading Friends successfully limited the spread of the controversy. In particular, the 'Testimony of the Brethren' of May 1666 formalised the very innovations to which Perrot and his supporters objected, by asserting the right of meetings to judge individuals and their gifts.[17] The fact that the controversy lasted only a few years indicates that the vast majority of Friends had come to realise the practical necessity of introducing certain controls over the behaviour of the individual.

In the wake of the Hat Controversy, George Fox set about establishing an organisational structure for what could now be termed the Society of Friends. He set up a national network of men's and women's business meetings which he hoped would unify Friends and prevent serious divisions in the future. In fact, it resulted in a controversy which would divide Friends throughout the country for some twenty years; the Wilkinson-Story Controversy.

14   A paper signed, 'Benjamin Furly,' transcribed in LSF, Crosse MS, fo.23. The paper is undated but was evidently written some time before Furly repented of supporting Perrot.

15   John Harwood, *To All People that Profess the Eternal Truth of the Living God* (London, 1663), pp.4-6. John Harwood was originally from Yorkshire. In 1655-56, he had travelled in the Quaker ministry with George Whitehead and they were imprisoned together in Bury St. Edmunds. However, three or four years later, he committed adultery with a widow and was condemned by Friends. Fox replied to Harwood's pamphlet with G[eorge] F[ox], *The Spirit of Envy, Lying and Persecution* (London, 1663).

16   Indeed Damrosch mistakenly views the Hat controversy merely as an aftershock of the Nayler debacle: Damrosch, *The Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus*, p.243.

17   'A Testimony from the Brethren who were met together at London in the third month 1666,' transcribed in LSF, John Penington MS, Vol.4, fos.43-45.

THE WILKINSON-STORY CONTROVERSY

The Wilkinson-Story Controversy began in Westmorland in the early 1670s and took its name from its two main protagonists, John Wilkinson and John Story. John Story played the more prominent role. As he travelled around the country, he spread the controversy all over England. Areas most affected included Bristol, Wiltshire and Berkshire. The controversy caused serious division among Friends, with Wilkinson-Story supporters actually leaving their local Meetings and setting up separate Meetings in some places. Those parts of the country which Story did not visit, still experienced the controversy through the printed pamphlets exchanged by the two sides.[18]

The Wilkinson-Story Controversy was essentially a reaction against the introduction of the system of business meetings. George Fox had been person- ally responsible for establishing this system of Monthly, Quarterly and Yearly Meetings and it is noticeable that this controversy involved more personal antipathy towards Fox himself than the Hat Controversy had done. Even before Wilkinson and Story began attacking these institutional innovations, a few Friends were starting to attack the imposition of Fox's authority over the consciences of individual Friends. They termed it 'Foxonian-Unity'.[19]

It is clear from the writings of Wilkinson-Story supporters, that they held Fox personally responsible for imposing innovations upon the Society of Friends. For example, when Friends issued a paper of condemnation against Wilkinson, Story and their supporters in 1677, Jeffery Bullock, responded, claiming:

> so far as I can understand, that the Criminal Facts, which these Quakers
> are charged to be guilty of, was that...they did not receive and embrace
> the orders of George Fox...[20]

William Rogers went further, arguing that by imposing these innovations upon Friends, Fox was largely to blame for causing the differences within the Society.[21]

The Wilkinson-Story adherents did not object to meetings for business in themselves. They clearly saw the need to deal with financial and other practical matters. In Wiltshire and in Reading, the Wilkinson-Story supporters even seized the minute books in order to continue recording the proceedings of their separate business meetings.[22] However, they did object to the hierarchical system of business meetings. They saw this system as a means of imposing the authority of a few Friends over the consciences of others, both on a local and national scale.

At the local level, for example, Friends in Preston Patrick, Westmorland, became embittered when the Monthly and Quarterly Meetings condemned them for worshipping in secret during persecution.[23] At the national level, the central bodies of Quaker organisation in London were the focus of resentment. The London Yearly Meeting was attended by London ministers and a couple of representatives from each county. It was not open to everyone, yet all Friends were affected by its decisions because its advice on all matters of Quaker life was passed down to every Particular Meeting, via the Quarterly and Monthly Meetings.

The Meeting for Sufferings and the Second Day's Morning Meeting were even more exclusive. They were attended by London Quaker ministers, with ministers from elsewhere being welcome to attend if they happened to be visiting London. The Second Day's Morning Meeting was particularly resented. The main task of this Meeting was to exercise control over Friends' writings.

If any Friend wished to publish a work, he or she was required to submit it to the Morning Meeting for approval. The Meeting would either approve it and arrange for its printing and distribution or disallow it. Even if a work was approved for printing, the Meeting would often insist upon certain alterations first. By controlling Friends' publications, the Morning Meeting was also controlling Friends' belief and behaviour since only writings which reflected the opinions of this Meeting could now be published by an approved Quaker printer. If a Friend published something without the approval of this Meeting, he or she would not only be blamed for doing so but would also be personally responsi- ble and financially liable for the printing and distribution of their work.

The idea of Friends submitting their writings for approval was not a complete innovation. This had been done voluntarily in the past. However, from the 1670s onwards, this became compulsory. William Rogers reacted angrily by writing *The Sixth Part of the Christian-Quaker against the Morning Meeting*, attacking its members for pretending 'to be invested with spiritual power to correct or suppress' Friends' writings.[24]

It is clear that the Wilkinson-Story faction resented the imposed authority of London Friends. However, the greatest source of contention was the introduc-

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18   Bristol Friend, William Rogers, was by far the most prolific writer for the Wilkinson-Story party. This may have been partly due to the fact that he was a wealthy merchant and was therefore better able than most to pay his printing costs.

19   *The Spirit of the Hat* (London, 1673), p.11. This pamphlet has been attributed to William Mucklow, who wrote a paper of similar content, *Liberty of Conscience Asserted Against Imposition* (London, 1673/4). The publication of *The Spirit of the Hat* represented a re-awakening of the Hat Controversy and may be seen as a precursor to the Wilkinson-Story Controversy.

20   Jeffery Bullock, *A Testimony Against the 66 Judges* (n.d.), p.2. Jeffery Bullock was a Wilkinson-Story supporter from Sudbury, Suffolk. He was disowned by Haverhill Meeting in 1676 but he repented of his attacks on Friends and Truth in 1686 and was readmitted to Quaker membership.

21   William Rogers, *The Christian Quaker Distinguished from the Apostate and Innovator* (London, 1680), part 1, [title page].

22   'The Memorials of the Quarterly Meeting of the People of God Caled Quakers in Countie of Wilts,' Wiltshire Record Office (WRO), MS, fo.2; 'A Booke for the Recording the proceedings of the Monthly Mens Meetings of us the People of God called Quakers in the Town of Reading,' Berkshire Record Office (BRO), transcript, p.1.

23   In 1678, 29 Friends of this Meeting repented of signing papers which had justified their practice of meeting in secret during persecution and supported the separation. Their paper of self- condemnation was recorded in one of the two Kendal Monthly and Quarterly Meeting minute books of that time. Kendal Record Office (KRO), MS WDFC/F/1(12), [from the front of the book, fos. 9v-10v].

24   W[illiam] R[ogers], *The Sixth Part of the Christian-Quaker* (London, 1681), p.4.

tion of women's business meetings. From the 1670s, Fox ordered Friends wishing to marry to submit their intention to the women's Monthly Meeting as well as to the men's.[25] The marriage could not go ahead unless it had the approval of both meetings. For many Friends, this was going too far. Male Friends had to submit themselves to the scrutiny and judgement of the women if they wished to marry. This was too radical an innovation for seventeenth century male sensibilities, and this was the main focus of Wilkinson's and Story's attacks.

It is worth noting that the Wilkinson-Story Controversy rarely affected areas where the women's meetings were not given the power to judge couples' fitness to marry. Buckinghamshire is a good example. In the south of the county, the women's Monthly Meeting was involved in approving marriages. Although the women first sought to establish a Monthly Meeting here in 1671, it was not until 1675 that they started to hold regular business meetings and they did not become involved in considering couples' clearness to marry until 1677. This delay was due to 'great opposition' to the women's meeting being concerned with outward business.[26] Once the women's Monthly Meeting became involved in assessing couples' clearness to marriage, this opposition quickly developed into schism. The leading figures within the Wilkinson-Story faction in South Buckinghamshire were John Raunce and his son-in-law, Charles Harris. They stirred up trouble by encouraging couples to refuse to lay their intentions to marry before the women's Monthly Meeting.[27] However, in North Buckinghamshire, the women did not hold proper business meetings until the beginning of 1700 and there was no schism amongst Friends in that area.[28]

Like Perrot, the Wilkinson-Story group believed that they were defending

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25 It appears that the women's meeting in London may have been involved in approving marriages during the early 1660s as this was one of the things Harwood objected to in 1663: Harwood, *To All People that Profess the Eternal Truth*, p.7.

26 Minute book of Upperside Women's Monthly Meeting 1677-1737, Aylesbury Record Office (ARO), MS, fos.3-4. Influential local Friends, Isaac and Mary Penington, were initially wary of the establishment of women's business meetings in south Buckinghamshire. Isaac at first 'saw nothing of the Lord in it', whilst Mary was unsure whether such meetings were as necessary in rural areas as they were in cities and feared causing conflict within the men's meeting. However, both Isaac and Mary soon came to see the value of women's business meetings. Mary began to participate in the women's monthly business meeting when its members were 'but few in number and very feeble' and both she and Isaac were writing in defence of women's business by the late 1670s: LSF, John Penington MS, Vol. 4, fos. 157, 159. It would therefore be wrong to assume that Isaac and Mary Penington were amongst those men and women whose 'great opposition' hindered the establishment of the women's Monthly Meeting in south Buckinghamshire.

27 The most notorious example of this was the case of Timothy Child and Mary Sexton who, in 1682 undoubtedly at the instigation of Harris, Raunce and others, refused to submit their intention to marry before the women's Monthly Meeting: Beatrice Saxon Snell, transcript, The Minute Book of the Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends for the Upperside of Buckinghamshire, 1669-1690 (Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, 1937), pp.103-132. The case was referred to the Quarterly Meeting, where angry scenes ensued, with the opposing parties seizing the minute book and recording opposite testimonies therein: Minute book of Buckinghamshire Quarterly Meeting 1678-1761, ARO, MS, fos.63-69.

28 The concept of women's business Meetings had become generally accepted among Friends by the time that the women in north Buckinghamshire sought to establish a business Meeting in

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the traditional Quaker belief in the light against those who sought to impose their authority over the consciences of others. Again, they accused leading Friends of being apostates and innovators and, again, leading Friends accused them of the same thing.[29] However, it is interesting to note that the Wilkinson-Story proponents were not attacking the same innovations as were Perrot and his supporters. They now accepted male Friends' tradition of removing their hats for prayer. The Wilkinson-Story party in Reading were appalled when their opponents kept their hats on when they prayed as a symbol of disunity.[30] William Rogers argued that Perrot's practice of keeping the hat on during prayer had been an innovation which had been rightly judged and condemned.[31]

Perhaps it was a matter of scale. The practice of removing hats now seemed a trivial issue compared to organisational institutions which sought to control all aspects of Quaker belief and practice. Certainly the scale of discontent was greater and longer-lasting than the Hat Controversy. Although both Wilkinson and Story appear to have died during the early 1680s, some separatist Meetings continued well into the 1690s.

The Society of Friends had adopted the organisational structure which it needed to hold itself together as a religious denomination. However, this was imposed unity and those who longed for the spirituality and diversity of the early years could have no part of it. So it was that there were still pockets of Wilkinson-Story separatists around when the Keithian controversy began in the early 1690s.

THE KEITHIAN CONTROVERSY

The Keithian controversy centred upon George Keith, a well-educated and respected Scottish Friend who emigrated to America in 1684/5 and settled in Philadelphia in 1689.[32] This controversy was significantly different from the two earlier controversies. Contention centred on faith rather than organisational structure. There was still conflict between the traditional authority of the light within and the imposition of human authority. However, this time it was the dissidents who were seeking to impose greater restraints upon the freedom of the light, and leading Friends who were defending that freedom.

January 1700. Consequently, they experienced no difficulty in gaining the consent of the men's Monthly Meeting: 'Women's Meeting Hogshaw-House and Biddlesdon 1678-1762', ARO, MS, [from the back of the book, fo.4].

29 Rogers, *The Christian Quaker*, [title page]; Attr. George Whitehead, The Accuser of our Brethren Cast Down in Righteous Judgment (London, 1681), [advertisement, p.1].

30 'The Minute Book of Reading Monthly Meeting (Curtis Party) 1668-1716,' BRO, transcribed by Nina Saxon Snell, p.84.

31 Rogers, *The Christian Quaker*, [1st pagination] p.9.

32 For a detailed biography of George Keith, see Ethyn Williams Kirby, *George Keith (1638-1716)* (New York and London: The American Historical Association, 1942). Many of the documents relating to the Keithian controversy in Pennsylvania are reproduced in J. William Frost, *The Keithian Controversy in Early Pennsylvania* (Norwood, Pennsylvania: Norwood Editions, 1980).

The introduction of the system of business meetings and control of Quaker writings had brought a general unity of belief and practice to the Society of Friends. However, the central religious experience of being a Friend was still a personal, spiritual one. During worship, Friends spoke as they were directly moved by the Spirit and they looked to this light within for guidance, rather than to the Bible. Contrary to the accusations levelled at them by their opponents, the vast majority of Friends did not in fact reject the Bible. Indeed, Geoffrey Nuttall has pointed out that it was actually early Friends' devotion to the Bible which led them to emulate the Old Testament prophets with their 'signs' and to insist that the same spirit which was in the prophets and the writers of the Scriptures was in themselves.[33] However, Friends regarded the Holy Spirit as the touchstone by which everything else should be tried, including the Bible itself.[34]

Because Friends believed the authority of the Scriptures to be secondary to that of the light within and because their daily lives were immediately guided by that light, there was a tendency among Friends to undervalue the Bible. By the 1690s, this was probably particularly true of second and third generation Friends who, unlike members of other denominations, had not been brought up being bombarded with biblical passages during worship. Presumably they were familiar with the life and sufferings of the historical Jesus but the central experience of the inner light was of greater immediacy to them.

By about 1690, George Keith, in Philadelphia, became alarmed at Friends' neglect of the physical Christ, his death and resurrection. He feared that Friends were in danger of rejecting the humanity of Christ. Keith sought to overcome this problem in two ways. Firstly, he began preaching about the necessity for salvation of the Christ without as well as the Christ within. This confused some Friends who thought that he was trying to preach two Christs. Secondly, Keith started urging Friends to introduce certain reforms which would ensure that the historical Jesus was not neglected. His proposed reforms included introducing a written Quaker creed and insisting that no-one could become a member of the Society of Friends unless he or she made a public declaration of faith.[35]

Keith was a charismatic and persuasive preacher and gained many supporters. However, many more disagreed with him, including the Philadelphia Quaker magistrates. Quakerism was a traditionally non-credal denomination. It went against Friends' ancient belief in the free-working of the light to force

33   Geoffrey Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946), p.26.

34   Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit*, p.28.

35   Keith set down his suggestions for Church government and discipline in the manuscript 'Gospel Order and Discipline in Men's and Women's Meetings,' transcribed in *Journal of the Friends' Historical Society* (JFHS), 1913, Vol. X, pp.70-76. Without the approval of the main body of Friends, Rhode Island Friends adopted Keith's written creed. This was printed by William Bradford, a supporter of Keith and the owner of the only printing press in Pennsylvania: *The Christian Faith of the People of God... Quakers in Rhode-Island... Vindicated* (Philadelphia, 1692), pp.[2]-8.

Friends' consciences to the point of making a declaration of the specifics of their beliefs. Keith had a very high opinion of himself and saw the rejection of his reforms as evidence that Friends had something to hide; that they would not accept a written creed because they were guilty of holding heretical beliefs. The result was an acrimonious division with schisms in many meetings in Pennsylvania and nearby, fuelled by personal antipathy and an uncompromising attitude all round.[36]

Keith published his accusations of doctrinal errors and, in December 1692, his Quaker magistrate opponents put him and some of his associates on trial for defaming them.[37] Although he was found guilty, Keith's £5 fine was never levied. However, relations continued to deteriorate and in 1694 both sides travelled over to the London Yearly Meeting to seek redress. Their decision to do this shows the general acceptance of the authority of the London Yearly Meeting by that time.

By now, Friends were enjoying the protection of the 1689 Toleration Act. Keith's publication of Quaker doctrinal errors was dangerous because it indicated that Friends were heretics who should not be included in the Toleration Act. The Yearly Meeting was also more upset by Keith's published account of his trial than by the fact that Friends had put other Friends on trial. As the minutes explain:

> the book of the printed trial...where Quakers are represented to persecute Quakers has done great hurt...and occasioned great reproach upon the said people in this nation; whereby many of our enemies insult over us, as if we were a people swayed by a persecuting spirit, saying we know what the Quakers would do if they had power in their hands...[38]

The result was that the Yearly Meeting blamed Keith, more than his opponents, for the division in Pennsylvania and refused to accept his innovation of introducing a written creed. Keith saw this as evidence that leading English Friends were also guilty of holding heretical beliefs. He now devoted himself to trawling through Friends' early works to find examples of erroneous doctrines, such as denial of the Trinity or of a physical second coming. Not only did he publish numerous volumes of supposedly heretical statements, but from 1696 he also held public meetings to expose these errors.[39]

Keith never stopped hounding Friends. He tried to gain support from the

36   The Keithian account of the division in Pennsylvania was published mainly in *George Keith, Some Reasons and Causes of the Late Separation* ([Philadelphia], 1692) and *George Keith and Thomas Budd, The Plea of the Innocent* (Philadelphia, 1692). These were reprinted in England as, respectively, *A Farther Account of the Great Divisions* (London, 1693) and *George Keith and Thomas Budd, An Account of the Great Divisions Amongst the Quakers in Pensilvania* (London, 1692). Keith's opponents' account was published in Samuel Jennings, *The State of the Case* (London, 1694).

37   Keith was at least partly responsible for publishing an account of these trials: *New-England's Spirit of Persecution*, ([Philadelphia], 1693). This was reprinted in England as *The Tryals of Peter Boss, George Keith, Thomas Budd and William Bradford* (London, 1693).

38   London Yearly Meeting Minutes, LSF, MS, Vol. 2, fo.56.

Wilkinson-Story following. He met with the Harp Lane group in London for a while and succeeded in splitting the Wilkinson-Story group in Reading.[40] He set up his own separatist meeting at Turners' Hall, London, in 1696 but in 1699 he started working for the Church of England in the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. In 1700, Keith received the Lord's Supper and was ordained as a Church of England deacon. Some Friends did follow Keith into Anglicanism but these were mostly people who had fallen out with the main body of Friends in the past.[41] Travelling in America with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Keith even failed to convince many of his erstwhile supporters in Pennsylvania to join the Church of England. Keith ended his days as rector of the parish of Edburton, Sussex, where he died in 1716.

London Yearly Meeting disowned Keith in 1695 and Friends ensured that each of Keith's angry pamphlets received at least one equally virulent reply from them.[42] These replies tended to demonstrate how Keith had allegedly misrepresented Friends and abandoned his former principles. They were published with the approval of the Morning Meeting and distributed via the system of business meetings. These meetings were now regarded as 'ancient' institutions and this time they served their purpose in promoting unity rather than furthering division. Friends did issue explanations of their faith for the information of the general public, but they never issued a written creed.[43] They would not force the consciences of individual Friends over the specifics of belief. This was an innovation which would never be accepted.

CONCLUSION

During the post-Restoration period, Friends came to realise that the end of the world was not imminent and they started to look towards the long-term survival of Quakerism. Traditional Quaker enthusiasm threatened this survival because the excessive behaviour of individuals brought persecution upon all Friends. Persecution could incapacitate Quaker leaders, demoralise members and deter potential recruits. To overcome the dangers of persecution, leading Friends saw the need to show the world that Friends were not dangerous radicals with heretical beliefs.

To survive as a religious institution, Friends also needed to be united in their principles and practice. Traditional belief in the freedom of the light to guide the individual could lead to a diversity of Quaker practice and, hence, to division. Fox and other leading Friends were not prepared to abandon their traditional beliefs or to force Friends' consciences to the extent that Keith would have done. However, they were prepared to introduce certain controls over the individual to maintain unity.

The purpose of introducing the system of business meetings and controls over Friends' writings was twofold: first, it was implemented in order to curb the excesses of enthusiastic individuals so that Friends would not be persecuted into extinction; secondly, the changes were introduced in order to unite Friends throughout the Quaker world so that the Society of Friends would survive as a religious institution. The inclusion of Friends in the Toleration of 1689 demonstrates the success of these innovations. However, the decline in Quaker numbers thereafter and its retreat into quietism shows that Quakerism had lost the popular appeal of the early years.[44] As Braithwaite explains:

> The Quaker Church, effectively organised as a state within the State, was now mainly concerned with preserving its own quiet way of life; and, driven in on itself by storms of persecution and by the growth of a narrowing discipline, was no longer aflame with a mission to the world.[45]

This transition of Quakerism from disorderly sect to ordered denomination was marked by bitter divisions between the innovators who wished to ensure the Society's future survival and the defenders of Quaker tradition. By the end of the seventeenth century, Quakerism had adopted the new institutions which

39   Five such meetings were held at Turners' Hall between June 1696 and June 1701. Keith published accounts of these meetings and details of the erroneous doctrines he exposed on each occasion: *George Keith, An Exact Narrative of the Proceedings at Turners-Hall* (London, 1696); *George Keith, A Second Narrative* (London, 1697); *George Keith, A Third Narrative* (London, 1698); *George Keith, George Keith's Fourth Narrative* (London, 1700); George Keith, *George Keith's Fifth Narrative* (London, 1701).

40   William Pain et al., *A Letter to Thomas Curtis…and Other Friends…Who Meet in Sun-Lane, Reading* (London, 1697), p.1.

41   Keith claimed that over 120 English Friends followed him into the Church of England but these were mostly Wilkinson-Story separatists or, as he put it, 'the truest Quakers to their professed principle of the Light Within, against George Fox's innovations, and new orders': George Keith, *A Plain Discovery of Many Falshoods* (London, 1701), p.37. John Field claimed that no more than four or five Friends who had been in unity with the main body of Friends when Keith came to England, followed him into the Church of England: John Field, *The Weakness of George Keith's Reasons for Renouncing Quakerism* (London, 1700), p.19.

42   The *Dictionary of National Biography* erroneously gives the date of Keith's disownment as 1694. The most prolific writers against Keith were Thomas Ellwood, John Penington and John Whiting. George Whitehead busied himself with replying to other anti-Quaker writers, such as Charles Leslie and Francis Bugg, who, like Pennyman and Harwood during the Hat controversy, saw the Keithian controversy as an opportunity for them to increase their own attacks upon Friends.

43   An example of an explanation of Quaker belief published at this time was, George Whitehead, *The Christian Doctrine and Society of the People Called Quakers* (London, 1693).

44   One of the historians who has recently identified a numerical decline at the end of the seventeenth century is Adrian Davies in his work on Friends in Essex: Adrian Davies, *The Quakers in English Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.162-163. Nicholas Morgan gives a good résumé of historians who have attributed the post-Toleration numerical and spiritual decline of Quakerism either to the introduction of the system of organisation and discipline or to the control of the Quaker press. His list includes Braithwaite, Barbour, Hill, Reay and O'Malley. Morgan does not believe that the assertions of these historians hold true for Lancashire, the area on which his own study is centred. However, he does not dispute the fact that there was a general decline: Nicholas Morgan, *Lancashire Quakers and the Establishment 1660-1730* (Halifax: Ryburn Publishing, 1993), pp.247-253.

45   William Braithwaite, *The Second Period of Quakerism*, 2nd edn. (York: William Sessions, 1979), p.179.

it needed to achieve longevity but it had lost much of the old enthusiasm which it needed to thrive.

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