



## Quaker Response to Gender Inequality in Institutional Christianity

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### Abstract

Gender equality remains a central concern in contemporary cultural, political, and academic debates. Numerous scholars and international organizations contend that patriarchal traditions constitute the primary source of gender inequality, often drawing legitimacy from religious teachings. Conversely, other perspectives argue that religion can support or accommodate egalitarian principles. This article examines the Quaker movement's approach to gender equality in order to shed light on broader processes of religious reinterpretation. The study focuses on whether the Quakers adopted egalitarian practices in both spiritual and social domains, and on the foundations upon which such practices were based. Findings indicate that during its first two centuries, Quakerism developed an egalitarian orientation rooted in the doctrine of the "Inner Light." However, in modern contexts, the movement's distinctively transformative influence appears to have diminished significantly.

**Keywords:** Quakerism, Inner Light, Gender, Spiritual Equality, Feminism.

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## Kurumsal Hıristiyanlıkta Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitsizliğine Kuveykır Tepkisi

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### Öz

Toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği, günümüzde kültürel, siyasal ve akademik tartışmaların odak noktalarından biri olmaya sürdüremektedir. Birçok araştırmacı ve uluslararası kuruluş, ataerkil kültürün cinsiyet eşitsizliğinin temel nedeni olduğunu ve bunun dinsel öğretilerden beslendiğini ileri sürmektedir. Ancak, dinin cinsiyet eşitliğini desteklediğine veya uyum sağladığına yönelik görüşler de mevcuttur. Bu makale, Kuveykırılığın cinsiyet eşitliğine yaklaşımını inceleyerek, dinin yeniden yorumlanması süreçlerini anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, Kuveykırılıkların manevi ve toplumsal yaşamda eşitlikçi tutum sergileyip sergilemediği ve bu tutumu hangi öğelere dayandırdığı sorularına odaklanmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, Kuveykırılıkların ilk iki yüzyılda “İçsel Işık” öğretisine dayalı eşitlikçi bir yaklaşım geliştirdiği, ancak günümüz koşullarında bu hareketin farklılaştırıcı etkisinin azaldığı tespit edilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kuveykırılık, İçsel Işık, Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Ruhsal/Manevî Eşitlik, Feminizm.

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## Introduction

Gender equality continues to be a leading topic of cultural, political, and popular debate and activism in the 21st century. The United Nations defines gender equality as the principle that men and women should have “the same rights, responsibilities, and opportunities” and emphasizes the elimination of discrimination that sabotage women’s participation in public and private life (Article 1).<sup>3</sup> Connell, on the other hand, emphasizes structural inequality in the emergence of gender inequalities and argues that gender equality requires challenging “patriarchal gains”—systemic advantages granted to men in workplaces, families, and politics.<sup>4</sup>

Religion is considered the most important source of support for patriarchal culture. Gender equality advocacy often takes a critical stance on religion, drawing on religious texts and historical practices. The dominant discourse on the relationship between religion and gender equality, an inherently complex and controversial issue, argues that religion has historically reinforced patriarchal structures and that religious doctrines are inherently at odds with gender equality. In this context, Nussbaum, for example, criticizes religions such as Hinduism and Christianity for the “symbolic devaluation of women” in sacred texts that legitimize the exclusion of women from roles such as priesthood.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Inayatullah and Kynsilehto argue that interpretations of Islamic texts (e.g., Quran 4/An-Nisa: 34) are used to legitimize male authority over women.<sup>6</sup> Mahmood also highlights that conservative Islamic movements impose norms of chastity that restrict women’s public participation.<sup>7</sup>

Against this dominant narrative, arguments that religion supports or accommodates gender equality are also prominent. In this context, some scholars have attempted to reinterpret religious texts through egalitarian lenses. For example, Vuola examines how Latin American Catholic feminists reinterpreted the role of Mary to advocate for female leadership<sup>8</sup>, while Wadud rereads Islamic sacred texts to emphasize gender equality.<sup>9</sup>

Efforts to reinterpret religion do not occur in a vacuum; they occur by prioritizing certain elements under specific social and historical conditions and in response to emerging needs. Quakerism, with its exceptional position in terms of gender equality, offers an excellent basis for understanding the processes of reinterpretation of religion and religious texts.

The Religious Society of Friends, commonly known as Quakers, emerged in England during a period of religious upheaval and political turmoil in the mid-17th century. Founded in the 1640s by George Fox (1624–1691), Quakers began as a radical grassroots

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations. *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*. 1979. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>, Access: 05.04.2025.

<sup>4</sup> Connell, Raewyn W. *Gender and Power* (Stanford University Press. 1987), 140: For similar views, see. Nussbaum, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Nussbaum, Martha. C. *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 202.

<sup>6</sup> Inayatullah, S., & Kynsilehto, A. *Religion, Gender, And Politics*. In P. Nynäs, M. Lassander, & T. Utraiainen (Eds.), *Religion and Politics: Continuities, Entanglements, and Discontinuities* (83–100). Transaction Publishers. 2011), 89.

<sup>7</sup> Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and The Feminist Subject* (Princeton University Press. 2005), 158.

<sup>8</sup> Vuola, Elina. *Liberation Theology and Gender*. SCM Press. (2019), 112.

<sup>9</sup> Wadud, Amina. *Qur'an And Woman* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

Christian movement that rejected the rigid hierarchy, ritualism, and dogma associated with the established Church of England/Anglican Church. The Church of England, which protested and rejected papal authority in the 16th century, retained much of the Catholic church's organization and ceremonial forms. Over the next century, English Protestantism split into two factions: Anglicans (those who supported the Church of England as established) and Puritans (those who sought greater reform). Many reformers sought to purge their religion of all traces of Catholic Christianity and any vestiges of Catholicism that had been absorbed into Anglicanism. Quakers were also a religious and social movement that arose among those who sought greater reform/purity. The movement challenged both the entire social class, status, and hierarchies inherited from Christianity's Catholic and Anglican heritage, as well as Catholicism's "clergy-laity" class distinction. Quakerism also challenged the formal practices of Anglican and Puritan Protestantism, which privileged men in religious service and excluded women from religious and socio-political participation. In the 17th century, the class that controlled society's religious and political administration consisted of people of various faiths, from those who believed that "women have no souls" to those who believed they were "nothing but geese." However, the leaders of the Protestant Reformation proclaimed a theoretical universal "priesthood" in which each individual interpreted God's Word based on a direct relationship with God. While the principle of the "priesthood of all believers" encompassed both men and women, in practice, most Protestants revered a male priest as an ordained, formally trained priest. This period was a time of servitude and the persistence of a social hierarchy of mastery. This was a time when free women were considered to be in the "priesthood of all believers" and a servant/concubine woman from the slave class was not even considered.

Historically, Christians believed that women were prohibited by divine revelation from holding positions of authority within the church. This was a time when the clergy-laïque distinction was prevalent in both the political and administrative spheres and the religious sphere. Laïque/ordinary people were required to address and treat those with official religious and political-administrative status (priests, priests, judges, magistrates, kings, etc.) with respect as their superiors. Common people were considered obligated to address these individuals or their superiors as "you" and to remove their hats when meeting them. Addressing them as "thou" and not removing their hats in their presence was punishable by prosecution.<sup>10</sup> For these reasons, the early Quakers were forced to submit to brutal treatment in order to "bear witness" against unjust laws by appealing to the consciences of the people, a method relied upon by later generations of activists.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Quakers addressed individuals of all social classes with the familiar forms "thou" and "thee," and reserved the honorific of respect only to God. They refused to use complimentary titles such as "Your Excellency" and "Your Majesty," and they did not bestow "worldly" honors on people by bowing or removing their hats. Rebecca Larson, *Daughters of Light, Quaker Women Preaching and Prophesying in the Colonies and Abroad, 1700-1775*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), p. 25; Cecil Sharman, *George Fox and The Quakers*, (London, Quaker Home Service, 1991), Introduction, p. xiv.

<sup>11</sup> When George Fox tells an English judge, "Tremble at the Word of the Lord!" the judge dismissively calls Fox a "Quaker." Originally a derogatory term, this adjective soon became the movement's label. Larson, *Daughters of Light*, pp. 18-19; Regarding the original term of "Quaker", William C. Braithwaite, in his book *The Beginnings of Quakerism* (p. 57), also states that Robert Barclay's *Apology* states that "the name 'Quaker' comes from the action of the Friends tremble under the power of the work of the Holy Spirit." Larson, p. 342, footnote 11. It can also be said that this term was adopted by the Quakers based on the expression "tremble at His Word" in the Bible, Old Testament, Isaiah, Chapter 66, 5th verse. This verse refers to being worthy of the praise of the Lord.

During this period, the Quakers persistently challenged traditions through their words and actions, challenging the official religio-political establishment and their commitment to returning to the true religion of Early Christianity (the apostles). As early as 1646, the movement's founder, George Fox, based his statement from the Bible, "My soul glorifies God"<sup>12</sup>, declared that the soul has no gender. This declaration became a tenet of the Quaker movement, which rejected church hierarchy and increased the religious and social authority of the laity (ordinary people), particularly affecting the role of women. As "servants of God," women preached, traveled for religious service, and published their thoughts. This suggests that the Quakers held a spiritually egalitarian stance and could therefore lead to an affinity between Quakerism and feminism. However, these ideas require further examination.

This article examines Quakerism's unique position on gender equality, seeking to understand the tools and methods used to reinterpret religion. The fundamental question sought in this article is how egalitarian Quakerism is in both spiritual and secular life, and what elements of the movement contribute to this outcome. The article also examines the beliefs and practices of Institutional Christianity within the context of gender equality, first, the pre-Quaker context, and then, how Quakerism has responded to these practices.

### 1. Gender Inequality in Institutional Christianity

The idea of gender equality is a popularly accepted idea today. Feminism has certainly played a significant role in this. While it has its own theoretical differences, the feminist movement, particularly since the 19th century, has generally problematized the subordinate position of women within the family and in social, economic, cultural, and political life, and has fought for women to have equal rights and opportunities with men.<sup>13</sup>

However, the data suggest that the Quaker Movement pioneered the idea of gender equality from a much earlier period. As with many other issues, the Quaker Movement's "Inner Light" doctrines appear to have been central to its perspective on women. Driven by a mystical awareness of "God's Inner Light within each individual," the Quaker Movement grounded human equality, the foundation of human rights.<sup>14</sup> Their "Inner Light" beliefs led them to reject traditional practices related to social status and to create a culture that saw women in greater numbers and in more prominent roles than other movements of the time.<sup>15</sup>

Like many religious movements, Quakerism emerged as a movement that questioned the status quo and challenged dominant authorities. In this context, Quakerism also "opposed the powerful gender ideology embedded in Western thought." Examining this gender ideology will help clarify what this challenge was.

In fact, Christianity, in its early years, held an egalitarian stance in human relations. It

<sup>12</sup> Luke 1/46.

<sup>13</sup> Hillary Leonard, "The Inner Light: A Comparison of George Fox's and Margaret Fell's Views on Women's Equality", edited by Christopher V. Davis and Nancy Bottoms Gardner-Webb Review, *Journal of Undergraduate Scholarship*, (North Carolina: Printed by Publications Unltd., Raleigh, 2012), 112; Naomi Rebecca Pullin, *Female Friends and the Transatlantic Quaker Community: 'The Whole Family and Household of Faith'*, (University of Warwick, Department of History. Ph.D. Thesis, 2014), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Leonard, "The Inner Light: A Comparison of George Fox's and Margaret Fell's Views on Women's Equality", 2.

<sup>15</sup> Pullin, *Female Friends and the Transatlantic Quaker Community: 'The Whole Family and Household of Faith'*, 4.

could be added that this stance extended to all aspects of family life. Indeed, it is known that Jesus Christ spoke to and preached to women just as he spoke to men. However, it is observed that Christianity took on a very different character from Paul onward. It is undoubtedly true that the way early Church leaders read and interpreted the Bible was a determining factor in the formation of gender ideology. Indeed, according to the readings of Genesis in particular, woman was created from man's rib to meet man's needs. Similarly, according to these readings, Eve's role in the Fall (Expulsion from Paradise) indicates that women are both physically and mentally weaker than men. Thus, in early Christianity, "Woman was seen as incapable of resisting the devil's temptations and as the prime temptation for men. A woman's teaching (preaching) would alienate man from God. Consequently, woman had to be placed in a position that prevented her from undermining man's relationship with God. She also had to be protected from his weaknesses and frailties. After the Fall, man was made the mediator of woman's relationship with her Creator."<sup>16</sup>

Paul's stance was crucial in the creation of this gender ideology. In fact, Paul himself seemingly held an egalitarian stance among people: *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. You are all one in Christ Jesus"*<sup>17</sup> Paul's statement regarding slaves, women, and Jews, like Jesus's "Sermon on the Mount," promised the fundamental equality of all true believers. However, Paul weakened this tendency by telling women to submit themselves to their husbands. While Paul calls for both men and women to share their marital rights equally<sup>18</sup> he does not permit divorce (even if the woman is mistreated by her husband).<sup>19</sup>

It appears that Paul, while interpreting and spreading the new religion, proceeded with a positive attitude toward all existing inequalities. This included the inequalities between men and women, which had persisted since Roman culture and were also embraced in the Old Testament. While Christianity, unlike Judaism, considered women part of the religious community, the new religion shaped by Paul accepted women as members but fixed them in the positions to which they were called at the time of their calling, and did not hesitate to draw on the Old Testament to legitimize this position: *"A man must not cover his head, for he is in the image of God, reflecting the glory of God, and a woman reflecting the glory of man. For man was not created from woman, but woman from man. Man was not created for woman, but woman for man. Therefore, (...) a woman must cover her head to show that she is subordinate."*<sup>20</sup> Thus, a new religious legitimacy was provided for existing inequalities.

The requirement that women "cover their heads," when presented as a sign of "being under command," is accompanied by the requirement that women "remain silent in church": *"I do not permit women to teach and dominate men; women should listen in silence"*<sup>21</sup> Paul also emphasized: *"In your assemblies, women are to remain silent, as in all the congregations of the saints. They are not to speak, but to be submissive, as the law also states. If they want to know anything, they are to ask their husbands at home, for it is shameful for a woman*

<sup>16</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 20.

<sup>17</sup> Galatians 3/28.

<sup>18</sup> 1 Corinthians 7/3-4.

<sup>19</sup> 2 Corinthians 7/27. Donald G. Tannenbaum, *Düşünce Tarihi, Filozoflar ve Fikirleri*, çev. Özgüç Orhan (Ankara: BB101 Publications, 10th edition, 2017), 97.

<sup>20</sup> 1 Corinthians 11/7-10.

<sup>21</sup> 1 Timothy 2/12.

to speak in the assembly"<sup>22</sup> Paul adds: "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."<sup>23</sup> "O Wives! Submit to your own husbands, just as you submit to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything."<sup>24</sup>

All these commandments are principles that subordinate women, who are placed under authority. Paul explicitly expresses this subordination without resorting to indirect means: "Let the woman learn in silence and complete submission. I do not allow the woman to teach or dominate the man; she should listen in silence. For Adam was created first, then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman who was deceived became a sinner."<sup>25</sup>

Augustine's views on women also reflect the conflicting views of the Jews and Paul in the Bible. Women are condemned to be subservient to men because of Eve's sin. A hierarchy exists among humans in the nature of the world. The foundation of justice for all societies is the relationship between God and humanity. This hierarchy includes the family, the church, and the state. In the household, women obey their husbands, children obey their parents, and servants and slaves obey their masters. Augustine viewed failure to fulfill these responsibilities or rebellion as an injustice against the human state and disobedience to God.<sup>26</sup>

Like Augustine, Thomas Aquinas acknowledged the spiritual equality of men and women, but in worldly matters, women have an inferior purpose, condemning them to subordination.<sup>27</sup> The family is the foundation upon which authority (both religious and secular), both church and state, is built. Thomas embraces Augustine's views on the traditional family, consisting of husband, wife, children, and slaves. Men rule their families with justice. Men's superior reasoning capacity legitimizes their dominance, while women's inferior reasoning capacity is used to justify the maintenance of the status quo.<sup>28</sup>

As can be seen in the approaches of the early (Paul), middle (Augustine) and late (Aquinas) church fathers of the institutional understanding of Catholic Christianity, the authority used to determine family relations varies. While Jesus's authority was directly God's, Paul appealed to his own relationship with Jesus Christ and sometimes to the Old Testament. In both cases, institutional Christianity strengthens the authority of men over women.

On the other hand, Protestantism is known to have developed objections to many of the prevailing Catholic beliefs and practices. For example, Protestants were highly critical of the religious system of male celibacy and the system of "apostolic succession," which were based on the assumption of the inheritance of Christ's authority. Consequently, most abandoned the system of "apostolic succession" and priestly celibacy, an infallible Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchy established by the Catholic Church through which religious authority was transmitted in an uninterrupted historical chain. Despite this,

<sup>22</sup> 1 Corinthians 14/34-36.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Corinthians 11/3.

<sup>24</sup> Ephesians 5/22-24.

<sup>25</sup> 1 Timothy 2/11-14.

<sup>26</sup> Tannenbaum, *Düşünce Tarihi, Filozoflar ve Fikirleri*, 109.

<sup>27</sup> Tannenbaum, *Düşünce Tarihi, Filozoflar ve Fikirleri*, 176.

<sup>28</sup> Tannenbaum, *Düşünce Tarihi, Filozoflar ve Fikirleri*, 128.

most Protestants "maintained the exclusion of women from the ministry of the sacrament as a principle based on Scripture."<sup>29</sup>

## 2. Quaker Response to Gender Inequality

Quakerism appears to have developed objections to many of the characteristics described above, based on the inequality between men and women, on both religious and practical levels. These objections manifest primarily in the spiritual realm. The fundamental belief that equates women with men in spiritual matters is the principle of "Inner Light." We can now examine this principle and other objections arising from it under five headings.

### 2.1. "Inner Light" and Spiritual Equality

Until the birth of Quakerism, people, whether Catholic or Protestant, expected divine righteousness to be revealed to them by an external authority. In Catholicism, this external authority was the Church, and in Protestantism, the Holy Bible itself. However, George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, subordinated even the authority of Scripture with his concept of the "Inner Light" and promoted Christ, who directly contacted the individual through this "Inner Light," as the teaching authority. In other words, according to Fox's teaching, each individual now possessed this Inner Teacher, and therefore, Christ himself was the true Light illuminating every person who came into the world. According to him, before the historical Christ departed the world, he promised: "The Helper, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of all that I have said to you"<sup>30</sup> "The Spirit of Truth will guide you into all truth"<sup>31</sup> Thus, "with the Light coming from Christ to all, male and female, by the power of the Spirit, woman has the same capacity as man to hear the Word of God"<sup>32</sup> Unlike most Protestants, who believe that direct revelation by the Holy Spirit ended with the apostles and therefore consider the Scriptures to be the ultimate authority on theological truth, Quakers viewed the Scriptures not as the source itself, but as a statement of that source. Furthermore, according to them, God's direct speech has never ceased in any age. The apostles were the ones whose revelations were recorded in Scripture; each particular tradition of revelation was unique, and there could be no such thing as final revelation. Guided by the indwelling Light (the inner Word) within man, every human being could receive revelation and deepen his understanding of the early revelations.<sup>33</sup>

The Quakers appear to have developed a compelling counter-argument to the doctrine of Original Sin, the primary basis upon which institutional Christianity subordinates women. According to this, women's subordination to men was an unnatural relationship that emerged with the Fall. The treatises written by other Quakers, such as George Fox and his wife Margaret Fell, Richard Farnsworth, and Edward Burrough, addressed the idea that the hierarchy between the sexes was the work of Satan, designed to separate them from God. According to them, before Original Sin, men and women were equal partners in God's image, equal in righteousness, integrity, and holiness. After the Fall, men became rulers over their wives. However, with Christ's restoration of these

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<sup>29</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 20.

<sup>30</sup> John 14/26.

<sup>31</sup> John 16/13.

<sup>32</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 17; Leonard, "The Inner Light: A Comparison of George Fox's and Margaret Fell's Views on Women's Equality", 113-114.

<sup>33</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 19.

relationships in the image of God, men and women became equal partners once again. "In the world dominated by the Fall, the patriarchal order naturally remained unchanged. But in the world dominated by Light, there was no distinction between men and women."<sup>34</sup>

Despite Fox's egalitarian views, Leonard asks an important question: Did George Fox believe in the equality of women in both the spiritual and physical realms of existence? According to Leonard, "Fox's focus was primarily on the power of the Inner Light. Perhaps because of his focus on this, he neglected to adequately advocate for equality for all psychosomatic expressions of personality"<sup>35</sup> Like Leonard, Hamm argues that despite spiritual equality, Quakers "did not achieve full equality" in terms of familial and social roles, with male Quakers still holding more power, especially in economic spheres.<sup>36</sup>

In this context, Leonard argues that there is a significant difference between Fox and his wife, Fell. According to him, from Fox's perspective, women are instrumental in demonstrating the power of the Inner Light. However, from Fell's perspective, women possess an authority derived from their gender itself. Leonard says: "*Contrary to Fox's tendency to believe that women are merely instruments for the display of power, Margaret Fell argues, though partially confirmed by the work of the Inner Light, that full equality stems from women's genuine gendered existence. Because of the equality in the created order, lost with the Fall (fall/expulsion from heaven) and now restored through Christ, women have inherent authority to prophesy (preach). Fell also demonstrates her belief in inherent authority through her participation in organizing separate women's meetings. This ability to act with authority outside the direct sphere of influence of the Inner Light has enabled women to possess power in their gendered state. This ontological equality guarantees natural authority equal to that of humans in both the spiritual and earthly realms. Rather than deferring their femininity and speaking as channels of a genderless spirit, women themselves are the basis of authority.*"<sup>37</sup>

Leonard interprets Fox's response to Puritan objections, "Paul did not forbid God from speaking through a woman," to suggest that while he viewed women as spiritually equal to men, he viewed them as different from men in terms of authority in the face of functional inequalities.<sup>38</sup> Despite these nuances in perspective, the Quakers, recognizing that the Inner Light existed not only in men but also in women, children, slaves, and even individuals from non-Christian communities, naturally believed that women would also be enlightened by this Light and adopted an egalitarian stance. Indeed, the Quakers' emphasis on at least spiritual equality "gave women unique opportunities within the organizational structure of the early movement as writers, preachers, innovators, and organizers"<sup>39</sup>

## 2.2. Women Preaching in Quakerism

Quakerism's practical attitudes toward gender equality are evident primarily in religious services. Indeed, from its earliest years, Quaker women are known to have played

<sup>34</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 20-23; Leonard, "The Inner Light: A Comparison of George Fox's and Margaret Fell's Views on Women's Equality", 108.

<sup>35</sup> Leonard, "The Inner Light: A Comparison of George Fox's and Margaret Fell's Views on Women's Equality", 112-113.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas D. Hamm, *The Quakers in America*, (New York, Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 1. edit., 2003), 185.

<sup>37</sup> Leonard, "The Inner Light: A Comparison of George Fox's and Margaret Fell's Views on Women's Equality", 113.

<sup>38</sup> Leonard, "The Inner Light: A Comparison of George Fox's and Margaret Fell's Views on Women's Equality", 108.

<sup>39</sup> Pullin, *Female Friends and the Transatlantic Quaker Community: 'The Whole Family and Household of Faith'*, 8.

significant roles in the development of this religious movement. Quakers also pioneered the idea of a marriage based on equality rather than the authority of a husband.<sup>40</sup> Quaker women are known to have been active as traveling preachers both in their homeland and across the ocean from the 17th century onward.<sup>41</sup> During their travels, itinerant Quaker women would deliver religious speeches both in Meeting Houses and in front of government and municipal buildings, which were typically reserved for men to give public speeches.<sup>42</sup>

While other Protestant denominations during this period, such as the Puritans, viewed participation in the preaching system as a male-privileged activity and forced women to submit to the authority of the male preaching system, the Quakers exceptionally and unconventionally encouraged both the preaching and the prophetic activities of women. They believed that, regardless of gender, "everyone is individually capable and chosen to respond to God's great calling through a God-given gift." This belief, therefore, laid the foundation for "women and men to function as persons of equal religious authority within the Quaker preaching system."<sup>43</sup>

The itinerant missionary model for evangelization in the 18th century was not unique to the Quakers. In this respect, there was a particular similarity between the Methodists and the Quakers. However, the Methodists, believing that starting a family could interfere with the continuous and unpaid ministry of evangelization, established a missionary system based on celibacy. The Quakers, however, "found a balance between the necessity of family and the acceptance of the individual's needs in undertaking God's work"<sup>44</sup> This balance could be maintained through financial support for both male and female preachers.

Quakers, like Baptists and Methodists, maintained that preaching and active church service were open to some women. Among Baptists, this was limited to unmarried women and widows. Methodists also considered celibacy essential. In other words, among Baptists and Methodists, it was not considered possible for women to maintain traditional domestic relationships and simultaneously engage in spiritual ministry. For the first time, Quakers offered a model that would make the two possible and integrated. Thus, "one of the most distinctive aspects of early Quakerism was not so much the radical role of women as preachers as its recognition that such work should be integrated with the traditional elements of daily life within the home and family."<sup>45</sup>

This Quaker participatory approach to women's ministry clearly challenged the core practices of institutional Christianity.<sup>46</sup> Seventeenth-century Anglican priests interpreted the statement of Joel 2:28 as meaning "in that day your sons and your daughters will prophesy," arguing that God's daughters could not accompany God's sons in prophesying

<sup>40</sup> Glenna Matthews, *American Women's History: A Student Companion, Quakers mad.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 250.

<sup>41</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 4; Pullin, *Female Friends and the Transatlantic Quaker Community: 'The Whole Family and Household of Faith'*, 4-5.

<sup>42</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 11.

<sup>43</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 184.

<sup>44</sup> Pullin, *Female Friends and the Transatlantic Quaker Community: 'The Whole Family and Household of Faith'*, 318.

<sup>45</sup> Pullin, *Female Friends and the Transatlantic Quaker Community: 'The Whole Family and Household of Faith'*, 320-322.

<sup>46</sup> Joel 2/28.

because God had excluded them.<sup>47</sup>

Quaker women preachers are particularly prominent in 18th-century American history as respected religious leaders. For example, Catharina Payton, who advised Quaker members of the Pennsylvania Assembly to abandon their political positions during the French and Indian War; Anna Moore, who received a general's leave to preach to British troops in New York in 1758; Susanna Hatton, who preached to the Delaware Indians during government negotiations in 1761; and Rachel Wilson, who visited Patrick Henry in the Virginia Assembly to support his campaign for religious toleration.<sup>48</sup>

It is known that Quaker women not only preached but also conducted significant publications and travel. "Unlike Puritan women, who were expected to remain silent before the clergy's interpretations of Scripture, Quaker women interpreted Scripture in their sermons and published writings" (Larson, 1999). According to Larson's findings, most of the works printed and published in 17th-century England were written by Quaker women. Of the approximately 300 women who published and preached during the Interregnum (1649–1660), 220 were Quakers.<sup>49</sup>

The Quaker women's travels were also quite contrary to the dominant religious understandings of the pre-19th century. Larson's (1999) observation on this matter is striking:

Travel was primarily a male affair; for example, a Puritan woman who spent five months away from home was labeled a "slut." However, intercolonial travel was typical for many Quaker women. Esther Palmer, for example, embarked on a proselytizing voyage to New England in 1706, crossed to Pennsylvania for the same purpose in 1707, returned to New England again in 1709, and then crossed the Atlantic to preach in the British Isles in 1710.<sup>50</sup>

Quaker women preachers, who considered service to the Bible the most important work of their lives, were free to act independently of their husbands and children. It is known that many Quakers transcended racial and national boundaries, striving to spread their faith worldwide. For example, Mary Fisher and Anne Austin introduced Quakerism to New England. Mary Fisher even went to the Ottoman Empire and attempted to convert the Turkish Sultan. Elizabeth Harris carried the Quaker message to the southern colonies. Among these women, several Quaker women, like Mary Dyer, were executed for preaching in colonies where they were not welcome.<sup>51</sup>

As noted above, Leonard expresses doubt that the early Quakers' sensitivity to gender equality was limited to the spiritual realm. Similar doubts are raised regarding Quaker women's preaching, evangelistic travel, and outreach activities. For example, some authors, such as Trubowitz<sup>52</sup> and Brailsford<sup>53</sup> argue that Quaker women actually engaged in religious preaching and travel to meet their non-religious needs. According to them, Quaker women were women who left unhappy marriages and escaped the duties of wife

<sup>47</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 14.

<sup>48</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 5.

<sup>49</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 26.

<sup>50</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 10.

<sup>51</sup> Matthews, *American Women's History: A Student Companion*, Quakers article, 250.

<sup>52</sup> Rachel Trubowitz, *Female Preachers and Male Wives: Gender and Authority in Civil War England*, ed. James Holstun (London: Pamphlet Wars: Prose in the English Revolution, 1992), 114-118.

<sup>53</sup> Mabel Richmond Brailsford, *Quaker Women, 1650–1690* (London, 1915), 223-225.

and motherhood, seeking personal and intellectual independence. While such claims may be partially true for some women, it is inappropriate to generalize. Considering that some of the Quaker women mentioned above were executed, Trubowitz and Brailsford's assessments seem unreasonable. No one, male or female, would want to undergo a process that would result in death to meet their needs unless it was a requirement of a truly strong belief.

### 2.3. Women's Participation in Quaker Meetings

Quaker women were also quite active in Quaker Meetings. George Fox established a system of meetings for business (related to working life) that drew widespread participation from members. Meetings were organized in a pyramidal pattern of increasing authority and regional jurisdiction. In addition to a meeting for worship, a preparatory meeting was held, sending representatives to the monthly business meeting. Most of the duties related to member oversight (shepherding) were performed at the monthly meeting level.

George Fox's belief that members of the Society of Friends (Quakers) should watch over their own sex can be said to have paved the way for the Women's Meetings. Margaret Fell, who married George Fox in 1669 after becoming a widow, also encouraged the formation of these women's meetings.

Whether Fox's belief was to keep men and women separate because he viewed them differently or to want women to have authority in decision-making process is open to different readings and interpretations. Despite this ambiguity, it seems reasonable to assume that Fox's inclination toward women was not intended to hinder their authority, as Leonard suggests. However, it is known that other members were less than enthusiastic about the idea of holding separate meetings for women. They argued that separate meetings for women could "disrupt the unity of the Spirit's inner guidance." In any case, separate meetings for women "undoubtedly provided a favorable environment for the development of women's authority, even if they did question the unity of the Spirit's action."<sup>54</sup>

Women's meetings often provided women with opportunities to be more active in the public sphere and demonstrate their charismatic authority. Subject to geographical differences, the Women's Meetings were primarily responsible for monitoring the behavior of the movement's female members.<sup>55</sup> Quaker women, who typically cared for themselves and their families and cared for their children's education, had the authority to examine the prospective couple's circumstances before a marriage could take place and approve them at the women's meetings. The women's meeting would examine and clarify the couple's circumstances, including parental consent and the presence of children from previous marriages, and then report back to the men's meetings. To fulfill these and similar duties, the women's meetings also needed to maintain their own financial reserves. Each monthly meeting of the women's Quakers, like their male counterparts, had a treasurer to keep the accounts and a scribe to record the minutes. Of course, these tasks required literacy. Therefore, it can be argued that women's participation in meetings related to preaching and church affairs among the Quakers had a positive effect on

<sup>54</sup> Leonard, *"The Inner Light: A Comparison of George Fox's and Margaret Fell's Views on Women's Equality"*, 112.

<sup>55</sup> Pullin, *Female Friends and the Transatlantic Quaker Community: 'The Whole Family and Household of Faith'*, 9-10.

promoting female literacy.<sup>56</sup>

#### 2.4. Social Responsibility Initiatives of Quaker Women and Feminism

Quakers in general, and Quaker women in particular, appeared to be very involved in social issues, undertaking various social responsibility initiatives and participating in volunteer activities. Among the many examples are Betsy Fry's establishment of night shelters for the homeless, Coast Guard libraries, poor relief societies, the Sisters of Nursing ("Fry Nurses") to modernize British nursing, and Florence Nightingale's influence on the curriculum.

Quaker women also campaigned for criminal justice reform. For example, Margery Fry (1874–1958) became the first education adviser at Holloway Prison, a women's detention facility in London. Another Quaker, Eric Baker (1920–1976), was awarded the 1977 Nobel Peace Prize for his work promoting the humane treatment of "prisoners of conscience." Baker helped found and lead the human rights group Amnesty International. Quaker Lucretia Mott, known today for her advocacy of women's rights, is also recognized as a tireless peace campaigner.<sup>57</sup>

The Quaker Movement has experienced various divisions from the 17th century to the present. It can be assumed that these divisions also affected Quaker women. It is understood that Quaker women (and men) were hesitant, especially in the face of feminist discourse and demands. According to Hamm's findings, although there were exceptions, radical feminism and the early women's rights movement generally appealed to Hicksite women more than to orthodox Quaker women. In this context, it is known that Lucretia Mott (1793–1880) from Philadelphia played a central role in the first women's rights meeting held in Seneca Falls, New York, USA in 1848; three of the five organizers there were Hicksite<sup>58</sup> Quaker women. Similarly, "Hicksite women were founders of the women's rights movement in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana. Another Hicksite Quaker woman, Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906), was central to the movement from the 1860s until her death, perhaps secondarily because of the influence of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Hicksite Quakers helped found the Woman's Medical College in Philadelphia in 1850. Hicksite women also played a vital role in the founding of Swarthmore College in 1864 and in establishing a coeducational school for girls and boys, unlike many other Eastern colleges."<sup>59</sup>

Unlike Hicksite Quaker women, Gurneyite Quaker women tended to focus on humanitarian reform, as did other Protestant women. Gurneyite Quaker women generally focused on activities such as prohibiting the production and sale of alcoholic beverages, advocating for prison reform after the Civil War, and education.<sup>60</sup>

In the 20th century and onwards, Quaker women can generally be said to have aligned

<sup>56</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 32.

<sup>57</sup> Alice Almond Shrock, "To Act in The Spirit "Not of Judgment, But of Mercy" Activist Elizabeth Fry Pioneered Prison Reform", inside the *Christian History, The Surprising Quakers, Heralds of Peace in a World of Conflict*, (Worcester, UK: Christian History Institute, 2016), 32-35.

<sup>58</sup> Quaker branches following the Great Separation of 1827: Evangelical Friends, Conservative Friends, Liberal Friends, Hicksites Friends, Gurneyites Friends, Wilburites Friends. See David M. Murray-Rust. "Quakers in Brief" or "Quakerism Made Easy" (An over-view of the Quaker movement from 1650 to 1990). (Merseyside, UK: Birkenhead Meeting, 1995), chapter 5.

<sup>59</sup> Hamm, *The Quakers in America*, 186.

<sup>60</sup> Hamm, *The Quakers in America*, 187.

themselves with feminist ideas and demands. Indeed, several prominent Quaker women are frequently cited in the literature. For example, Alice Paul (1885–1977), a Hicksite Quaker from New Jersey, was a central figure in the campaign for the Nineteenth Amendment, granting women the right to vote, and author of the original Equal Rights Amendment. Similarly, Emily Greene Balch (1867–1961), a Quaker, was one of the founders of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1946 for her work for international disarmament and reconciliation. Many other Quaker women work for peace and social change through groups such as the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and the Reconciliation Society.<sup>61</sup>

Based on these data, it seems possible to establish a connection between Quaker women's participation and feminism. Indeed, some authors, such as Sarah Apetrei<sup>62</sup> believe that women's participation in 17th-century Quakerism cannot be described as 'real feminism', but they nevertheless argue that religious ideas, and therefore women's piety, played a central role in the evolution of feminist discourses. However, whether feminism was a direct source of motivation for Quaker women is debatable. Especially regarding early Quaker women, it is more plausible to assume that the main factor motivating these women to activism was their strong devotion to their religion and their sensitivity to what their beliefs demanded; this long predates feminist ideology. As Pullin<sup>63</sup> cites Jean R. Soderlund, "If Quaker women were asked, they would not be able to separate their roles in society from their responsibilities as wives, mothers, and sisters." Some available data, such as the fact that women missionaries constituted only a small minority of the female Quaker population at any given time and received permission to write and preach on behalf of their communities only in exceptional circumstances, suggest that "it is certainly misleading to consider the emergence of women as preachers as an early manifestation of feminism."<sup>64</sup>

## 2.5. Quaker Woman and the Family

The roles of Quaker women reshaped family norms, just as they did religious and social norms. Their spiritual/religious guidance had a profound impact on family structure and childrearing, redefining the role of motherhood as not only a biological but also a spiritual and social responsibility.

Quaker women fulfilled their familial duties while simultaneously assuming the role of preacher/proselytizer. Their communities provided them with the flexibility and spiritual guidance they needed to balance both religious duties and family responsibilities. In the Quaker community, unlike a Catholic nun, a Quaker woman dedicated to obeying God's will was not expected to withdraw from the world and remain celibate. Rather, women expressed themselves within their biological sex and family roles through the "Inner Light" (God's guidance) in fulfilling their missionary duties, rather than rejecting them.<sup>65</sup>

In the Quaker community, women's missionary duties often led them to delay marriage or marry later. Concerns that marriage might divert them from their religious duties often

<sup>61</sup> Hamm, *The Quakers in America*, 188.

<sup>62</sup> Sarah Apetrei, *Women, Feminism and Religion in Early Enlightenment England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 29-30.

<sup>63</sup> Pullin, *Female Friends and the Transatlantic Quaker Community: 'The Whole Family and Household of Faith'*, 6.

<sup>64</sup> Pullin, *Female Friends and the Transatlantic Quaker Community: 'The Whole Family and Household of Faith'*, 6-8.

<sup>65</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 134.

led women to experience internal hesitations when deciding to start a family. However, women who viewed marriage as a "divine calling" were careful to choose a mate who aligned with God's will. Choosing a spouse involved not only material security but also a woman's search for a partner with spiritual harmony and shared values. The community encouraged women to prioritize spiritual values when choosing their mates. Marriage decisions were carefully considered based on an inner calling, sometimes waiting years before marriage.<sup>66</sup>

After this general information, we can take a closer look at the family lives of Quaker women under the subheadings of marriage decisions, motherhood and other family roles, and their increasing authority.

### 2.5.1. Marital Obligations

In the Quaker community, marriage decisions were shaped by shared beliefs and values within the community, allowing women to continue their ministry and their married life together. Marriage was considered not only a biological union but also a spiritual one. George Fox's marriage to Margaret Fell at age 55 was considered an example of the spiritual aspect of marriage. This marriage emphasized spiritual harmony and support within the community rather than traditional factors such as age and fertility.<sup>67</sup>

Quaker marriage ceremonies emphasize gender equality; the bride and groom make the same vows, making them equally dedicated to God. However, according to Quaker belief, a woman's devotion to God takes precedence over her devotion to her husband. If a woman is "inspired" by God, she has the right to fulfill her duty even if her husband prevents her from doing so. This belief allowed women to prioritize their commitments to religious services over their marital obligations.<sup>68</sup>

Quakers recognized that a woman fulfilling God's will would leave her home for religious travel. When women were away from home on a "divine call to duty," husbands were required to support their wives spiritually. Quakers renounced worldly ties and gratifications, keeping devotion to God as their primary concern. When women were away for religious service, their husbands were required to assume their domestic responsibilities.<sup>69</sup>

### 2.5.2. Quaker Women's Increased Domestic Authority and Property Rights

The Quaker women's spiritual authority also enhanced their authority within the family. According to Quaker belief, a woman, with God's guidance, could have a greater say in family property and other domestic decisions. Prominent Quaker figures such as George Fox fostered a climate of increased legal autonomy by supporting women's right to own property. Despite the prevailing legal stipulation that a married woman (*feme covert*) could not own property, being subsumed within her husband's legal identity, Quaker women's roles effectively neutralized these laws. While women with the status of "feme sole" (single woman) within the Quaker community had greater legal rights, it is noteworthy that married women could also overcome legal restrictions through their religious authority. Consequently, Quakers encouraged women to prioritize their

<sup>66</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 136-137.

<sup>67</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 138-139, 143.

<sup>68</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 143.

<sup>69</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 144-148.

religious duties over marriage and traditional family roles, thereby expanding their scope for spiritual leadership and property ownership.<sup>70</sup>

### 2.5.3. Motherhood/Parenthood

Just as Quaker women's marital roles were shaped by their religious beliefs, so too were their maternal roles. The Quaker community encouraged women to play an equal role in religious service and emphasized that the roles of motherhood and marriage were reshaped according to God's will.<sup>71</sup> In terms of marriage and motherhood, Quaker women generally focused on spiritual service rather than childbearing. Their marriages were arranged for religious duty and the spiritual support of each other rather than for childbearing. They tended to postpone marriage or have fewer children, and they sought to maintain their missionary travels and religious duties without conflicting with motherhood.<sup>72</sup>

In the context of pregnancy and missionary travel, Quaker women missionaries were able to continue traveling even during pregnancy. However, they were careful to rest during pregnancy but remained committed to fulfilling their religious duties.<sup>73</sup> In Quaker society, the responsibility of raising children was viewed as a collective responsibility of the community rather than an individual or family. In the absence of ministering mothers, the community assumed the responsibility of caring for children as a collective responsibility. The father, grandmother, servants, and even community members played important roles in this process. Quakers supported each other in the family's spiritual upbringing. Furthermore, parents were jointly responsible for their children's religious education. Quaker parents had the responsibility of raising their children under the guidance of the "Inner Light." Both mothers and fathers played equal roles in religious education, with the mother's spiritual authority being combined with religious leadership within the home.<sup>74</sup>

In the context of religious ideals and the harmony of family life, Quaker women preachers embraced the principle of offering their marital and maternal roles to God not only physically but also spiritually. Quakers value a balance between religious service and family life and prioritize children's proper religious education. Therefore, the Quakers' approach to children differs from the later "child-centered" approach. While children's religious development is emphasized, this process is based on discipline and dedication rather than emotional attachment.<sup>75</sup>

### Conclusion

The roles assumed by Quaker women in religious and social life represent a significant turning point not only within their own denominational context but also within the general understanding of Christianity in the 17th and 18th centuries. In this respect, the Quaker movement's challenge to gender-based hierarchies can be considered an early example of theological reform developed against the patriarchal religious discourse of the period. Women's access to religious authority was not merely an individual practice

<sup>70</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 149-155.

<sup>71</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 164-166.

<sup>72</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 156-157.

<sup>73</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 156-157.

<sup>74</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 159-163.

<sup>75</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 170-171.

of faith but also a form of action that contributed to the transformation of social structure. This can be explained by the fact that Quaker women based their religious service on the principle of "direct devotion to God." As Pullin notes, their belief in the "Inner Light" led them to reject old traditions surrounding social status and to create a culture in which women were seen in greater numbers and in more prominent roles than in other movements of the period.<sup>76</sup>

Quakers challenged the established strong-gender ideology embedded in Western thought. Pauline Christianity, which shaped this gender ideology, urged women to submit to their husbands, asserting that women were physically as well as intellectually weaker than men and that a woman's preaching would alienate a person from God. While Protestants objected to many of the prevailing Catholic beliefs and practices, many also maintained the exclusion of women from preaching as a principle. However, Quakers challenged this gender ideology, which had persisted since Roman times.

Unlike Protestants, Quakers viewed the Scriptures not as a source but as a statement of that source, believing that God's direct speech never ceased in any age. Accordingly, each person could receive revelation and deepen their understanding of early revelations through the guidance of the Inner Light residing within them. Quakers' emphasis on spiritual equality, at least, gave women crucial roles within the early movement's organizational structure as writers, preachers, innovators, and organizers. Quakers "pioneered the idea of a marriage based on equality, not on the authority of a husband." Quakers women had been active as itinerant preachers both in their homeland and across the ocean since the 17th century. While it was not considered possible among Baptists and Methodists for women to simultaneously maintain traditional households and engage in spiritual ministry, Quakers for the first time offered a model that would make the two possible and integrated.

The redefinition of issues such as marriage, motherhood, and social responsibility within the context of Divine Will (Inner Light) demonstrates that women constructed their identities not solely based on biological or social roles but as spiritual agents. This understanding enabled Quaker women to actively participate in the public sphere, from which Protestant women of the period were largely excluded. In particular, the principles of "mutual spiritual support" and "equal devotion to God" in marriage ensured the recognition of women as independent religious agents. In this respect, the Quaker marriage model can be interpreted not only as the formal expression of a religious ceremony but also as a silent but profound form of resistance to the gender norms of the time.

From the perspective of motherhood and parenting, Quaker women's understanding of raising their children under the guidance of the "Inner Light" heralds a much more participatory and collective pedagogical model than traditional religious education. The solidarity among community members led to the perception of childrearing not only as a family responsibility but also as a form of communal worship. In this context, Quaker motherhood, beyond biological care, distinguishes itself from other religious traditions of the period by its functions of spiritual guidance and community-based education.

Quaker women's involvement in property rights and family decision-making processes

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<sup>76</sup> Pullin, *Female Friends and the Transatlantic Quaker Community: 'The Whole Family and Household of Faith'*, 4.

is a practical reflection of the community's doctrine of the "Inner Light." The idea that women could establish a direct relationship with God and that this relationship could empower them to direct their actions paved the way for the legal and social realm of religious equality. This demonstrates that, unlike their Christian contemporaries, Quaker women developed a de facto sphere of autonomy beyond legally defined boundaries. Thus, the Quaker faith produced a discourse that championed the theological legitimacy of female agency as well as individual freedom of conscience.

Quaker women preachers were sometimes subjected to persecution, sometimes leading to execution, but they were particularly respected religious leaders in 18th-century American history. Quaker women are known not only to preach but also to have published extensively and traveled extensively. They were also highly active in Quaker meetings, taking a significant interest in social issues, running various social responsibility initiatives, and participating in volunteer activities. Quaker women are known to have established night shelters for the homeless, Coast Guard libraries, poor relief organizations, and nursing homes, campaigned for criminal justice reform, and advocated for women's rights.

Quaker women (and men) appear to have been particularly ambivalent toward feminist discourse and demands. While there were exceptions, it could be argued that radical feminism and the early women's rights movement appealed more to Hicksite women than to Orthodox Quaker women, and that Gurneyite Quaker women, like other Protestant women, focused on humanitarian reform. However, based on Quaker women's roles as preachers, travelers, writers, and organizers in general, it seems possible to establish a connection between Quaker women's participation and feminism. However, the extent to which feminism served as a direct source of motivation for Quaker women is debatable. Specifically, regarding early Quaker women, it seems more plausible to assume that the primary factor motivating these women to activism was their strong commitment to their religion and their sensitivity to the demands of their beliefs, rather than feminist ideology. On the other hand, it is also possible to argue that Quaker beliefs and practices offered support for feminism.

While the historical experiences of Quaker women are difficult to directly connect with modern feminist movements, the ways they put their religious beliefs into action bear resonances with feminist consciousness. The notion that women could receive direct revelation from God, were spiritually equal to men, and had the right to fulfill their religious duties paved the way for the discourses of women's liberation that emerged in subsequent centuries. In this sense, the Quaker women's struggle should be understood not through the conceptual tools of modern feminism, but as a practice of equality developed through the liberation of religious conscience.

Given their historical experiences and the differences in their understanding of authority within the family, it's fair to ask whether Quaker women were different. Some Quakers would certainly argue that the women of their own community were different. It's reasonable to assume that Quaker women were distinct from other religious sects and the broader society for at least the first two centuries. However, with the emergence and expansion of women's and children's rights movements in the 19th and 20th centuries, and with the rise of the wider society, Quaker women and their families became less distinct as society began to accept the equality ideas long shared by Quakers.

In conclusion, the findings regarding the religious, social, and familial roles of Quaker women not only describe a historical phenomenon but also offer a broader intellectual framework that questions the relationship between religious authority, gender roles, and social equality. This framework allows for a rethinking of the "faith, conscience, and equality" triad in both 17th-century England and modern gender debates. Thus, the experiences of Quaker women constitute a powerful historical example of the possibility of a theologically grounded social transformation.

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