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Theological Counsel in the Early Quaker Movement

by EUAN DAVID McARTHUR
University of St Andrews
E-mail:edm9@st-andrew.ac.uk

Early Quakers have not typically been noted for their espousal of political counsel. This article proposes that its cohort powerfully made the case for the 'counsel of God' in politics. This counsel was, perhaps paradoxically, both intensively inward, deriving from the light of God within, and universalistic and external, given that counsel could emanate from any individual. This was distinct from most contemporary applications of conciliar rhetoric, although some conceptual and practical similarities are considered. This article explores, finally, the diversity of seventeenth-century conceptions of theological and political counsel alongside that of the Quakers, suggesting further directions for research.

Political counsel is at present a rich field for medieval and early modern studies. Recent works have shown its employment in a variety of discourses and forums. This article examines Quaker practices and conceptions of 'counsel' from the Interregnum to the early Restoration. These applications have not previously been considered. Counsel has increasingly been recognised in a variety of practical contexts, from personal interactions with kings and magistrates to the consultation of institutions such as parliament.[1] Different conceptual understandings have also been proposed. One distinction, influentially detected by John Guy, was between 'feudal-baronial' and 'classical-humanist' ideas of counsel. The former encompassed advice between the king and his noble or parliamentary councils, and the latter counsels of a ruler's intimates, steeped in ancient learning.[2] Others have shown its use in the

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[1] Jacqueline Rose, 'The problem of political counsel in medieval and early modern England and Scotland', in Jacqueline Rose (ed.), *The politics of counsel in England and Scotland, 1286–1707*, Oxford 2016, 1–44.

[2] John Guy, 'The rhetoric of counsel in early modern England', in Dale Hoak (ed.), *Tudor political culture*, Cambridge 1995, 292–310.

context of *raison d'état* and Christian perspectives, further signalling its flexibility.[3]

Early Friends utilised conciliar rhetoric in a distinct theological and sociological manner. Their primary innovation was to exhort political leaders and subjects to turn to God, rather than an earthly counsellor, institution or form of worldly knowledge. Superficially, this bore resemblance to what has been called 'ecclesiastical' or religious counsel during this period, which also affixed counsel to Christian instruction. There were none the less fundamental differences. Advocates of religious counsel usually recommended consulting a body of divines. High Church advocates, such as William Sancroft, placed responsibility on ecclesiastical elites.[4] Those recommending 'prophetic' counsel, notably John Knox, looked to 'godly' persons beyond the established Church, but still, ultimately, to extraordinary individuals chosen by God.[5] Quakers, by contrast, persuaded individuals to look to that of God in everyone, emphasising the 'light' of Christ in each person's conscience. This 'light' allowed individuals to communicate with God in them, and of and to God in others. Political authorities were to be counselled through an immediate divine agency. It also, somewhat curiously, extended the prospects of counselling to the wider population. Because this agency inhered in everyone, its 'counsel' did not privilege any social group or institution. This marked a significant sociological extension of advising.

Quaker political practice cohered with other forms of 'counsel', despite this divergence, in focusing upon persuading rulers. Previous histories of Quakerism have not considered this aspect of its politics. Typically, narratives contrast a militant 1650s Quaker movement to a quietist one following the Restoration.[6] The Quakers' resort to public appeals, rather than discreet counsels or institutional councils, might alone place them outside a conciliar mode. Dovetailing with this, historians of counsel have usually regarded its invocation and practice as diminishing at the Interregnum.[7]

[3] Joanne Paul, *Counsel and command in early modern English thought*, Cambridge 2020.

[4] Jacqueline Rose, 'Kingship and counsel in early modern England', *HJ* liv (2011), 47–71.

[5] A. N. McLaren, *Political culture in the reign of Elizabeth I: queen and Commonwealth, 1558–1585*, Cambridge 1996, ch. ii.

[6] Christopher Hill, *The experience of defeat: Milton and some contemporaries*, London 1984, ch. v; Barry Reay, *The Quakers and the English Revolution*, London 1985, 121. Though representing a somewhat older viewpoint, Hill and Reay's position lingers in the recent secondary literature considered below, and summaries such as John Miller, '"A suffering people": English Quakers and their neighbours *c.*1650–*c.*1700', *Past & Present* clxxxviii (Aug. 2005), 87: 'A mixture of disappointed providentialism and pragmatic realism drove Fox [in the early 1660s] to the conclusion that the Lamb's War was no longer the way forward.'

[7] Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, 'Rethinking the public sphere in early modern England', *Journal of British Studies* xlv (2006), 270–92.

Quakerism's rise might cohere with the growing strength of 'adversarial' politics,[8] questions of 'command' over 'counsel'[9] and the politics of the public sphere.[10] This study argues that Quaker political discourse and practice articulated a form of 'counsel' across Commonwealth, Protectorate and early Restoration polities. This accommodated a variety of political positions, but was only fitfully aligned with militant postures. Section I will address this question, showing that Quaker politics aligned with other conciliar forms in focusing upon advice-giving. Counsel, albeit by a divine agent, was commended over 'command'. Section II will consider the novelty of Quaker 'counsel' against secular and socially restricted forms of advice. Section III, finally, builds upon these findings, contrasting Quaker 'counsel' with other definitions of theological counsel in the seventeenth century.

I

This section examines early Quaker practices of advising rulers. The movement shared these with many forbears advocating 'counsel'. Like them, Quakers attempted to influence magistrates' conduct and morality. Today, Quaker scholars typically cast the early movement as a militant one, set upon constitutional agitation in the 1650s. This thesis requires challenging. Proponents have typically pointed to three phenomena: the Quakers' pre-history in army and political groups,[11] early leaders' openness to armed force, and propaganda for the 'Good Old Cause'.[12] Each could support the case that Quakers tended towards 'command', but each is found wanting. After examining these it is argued that an advice-giving approach is general to the period. The question of defining this as 'counsel' is suspended until section II, where we explore how the Quakers conceived political action.

There is no definitive association, firstly, between early Quakers and radical army or political groups preceding them. The movement

[8] Guy, 'The rhetoric of counsel', 292–3, 309. [9] Paul, *Counsel and command*.

[10] Jacqueline Rose, 'Councils, counsel and the seventeenth-century composite state', in Rose, *The politics of counsel*, 249–70.

[11] Hill, *The experience of defeat*, 130–1, 240–1; Kate Peters, 'The Quakers and the politics of the army in 1659', *Past & Present* ccxxxi (May 2016), 97–128; Reay, *The Quakers*, 18–19.

[12] On these latter two see Douglas Gwyn, *The covenant crucified: Quakers and early capitalism*, London 2000, ch. xiv; Rosemary Moore, *The light in their consciences: the early Quakers in Britain, 1646–1666*, 2nd edn, University Park, PA 2020, ch. xiii, and 'The early development of Quakerism', in Rosemary Moore and Richard C. Allen (eds), *The Quakers, 1656–1723: the evolution of an alternative community*, University Park, PA 2018, 14, 20–1; and Reay, *The Quakers*.

comprised some current and former soldiers, with historians able to identify a hundred of the latter with certitude.[13] It had 40,000–60,000 adherents by 1660, however, going far beyond these confines.[14] Scholars have established little correlation between Quaker conversion and occupation, too,[15] diminishing the notion that it re-channelled political interests in a subconscious manner. Followers were primarily drawn from areas with histories of radical dissent,[16] and early missions targeted Independent, Presbyterian and Baptist congregations.[17] There is little evidence, therefore, to suggest that the Quakers represented a transitional form of political radicalism, rather than an unorthodox Christian movement.

The case for an actively militaristic Quakerism is also thin. A small minority remained soldiers during the 1650s, but this was highly unusual. The movement's leaders repeatedly eschewed 'carnal' weapons and military employment. This extended from lukewarm, theological types, such as George Fox and James Nayler,[18] to those most active in the political crises of 1659, such as Edward Burrough and Richard Hubberthorne.[19] Nevertheless, historians have accentuated texts purportedly illustrating military inclinations. Barry Reay, for example, has interpretated a call from Burrough to the 1659 Rump to 'establish Righteousnesse' to signify support for arms. The same tract, however, opens by affirming that 'our Kingdome is not of this world … our Weapons which have defended us are not carnall but spirituall'. It concludes by pleading for rulers to turn to 'god in your owne hearts', a commonplace political stratagem.[20]

Those making the case for a militaristic Quakerism have argued that the 'Peace Testimony' of 1661 represented a novel turn. This document, signed by a central *corps* of Quakers, affirmed their rejection of war and

[13] Richard T. Vann, *The social development of early Quakerism, 1655–1755*, Boston, MA 1969, 14.

[14] Reay, *The Quakers*, 11, 28–9.

[15] Adrian Davies, *The Quakers in English society, 1655–1725*, Oxford 2000, 150, 155; Vann, *Social development*, esp. ch. iii.

[16] Davies, *The Quakers*, ch. x and pp. 159–60; Barry Reay, 'Quakerism and society', in J. F. McGregor and Barry Reay (eds), *Radical religion in the English Revolution*, Oxford 1984, 142–5.

[17] Vann, *Social development*, 12–13, 19–27.

[18] George Fox, *To the parliament of the comon-Wealth of England*, London 1659 (Wing F.1958), 16–20; James Nayler, *The lambs warre*, London 1657 (Wing N.290), 4.

[19] Edward Burrough, *A declaration from the people called Quakers, to the present distracted nation of England*, London 1659 (Wing B.5990), 8–9, 14, and 'The epistle', in George Fox, *The great mistery of the great whore*, London 1659 (Wing F.1832), 9, 20, 23; Richard Hubberthorne, *The good old cause briefly demonstrated*, London 1659 (Wing H.3223A), 1–2; Richard Hubberthorne and Edward Burrough, *An answer to a declaration put forth by the general consent of the people called Anabaptists*, London 1659 (Wing H.3218), 24. See also Meredith Baldwin Weddle, *Walking in the way of peace: Quaker pacifism in the seventeenth century*, Oxford 2001, 40–4, 56.

[20] Barry Reay, 'The Quakers and 1659: two newly discovered broadsides by Edward Burrough', *Journal of the Friends' Historical Society* liv (1977), 106–11.

submission to government. Given earlier exhortations against arms, however, it seems rather to have confirmed an established strategy. Undoubtedly a stronger statement of intent, it emerged, pragmatically, at a time when the restored monarchy was on high alert against 'fanatics' generally, and particularly following a Fifth Monarchist uprising. More Quakers seem to have been soldiers in the 1650s, but this was reflective of a highly militarised society, rather than an essential trait. The military activity of some Quakers beyond 1661, too, can only attest to the fact that Quakers never formed an undifferentiated block. A widespread position against militarism held.

More persuasive arguments for a radical Quakerism, alien to regular conciliar politics, rely upon evidence of leaders' political manoeuvres and messages. This is particularly true of the later 1650s, when appeals to the army and Rump regarding the 'Good Old Cause' were made. Yet this did not indicate a radical core. Burrough, who was perhaps the most active political agitator, largely confined himself to commending specific policies in 1659. His pamphlets did not support Quakers or parliament taking up arms, or republicanism or parliamentarism *per se*, instead focusing upon relief from persecution.[21] He briefly appealed to the Cause in November, but identified it with liberty generally, and disdained those placing faith in 'an *Old Parliament*; and some for a *New*; and some for a *Protector*'.[22] Fox has also been argued to have adopted radical policies, particularly in *Fifty nine particulars laid down for the regulating of things* (1659), which detailed injustices during the Rump's recall.[23] He made few constitutional postures, however, and this remained an appeal to constituted powers.

Burrough and Fox aside, George Bishop, Isaac Penington and Richard Hubberthorne made more prominent appeals to the Good Old Cause. Such individuals were not entirely representative. Hubberthorne and Bishop were former soldiers, with the latter serving the Commonwealth and Protectorate into the mid-1650s. Penington converted later that decade, and was the son of an Independent MP, a Rumper who was charged with high treason at the Restoration. For him and Bishop, an attachment to the Commonwealth perhaps lingered. More pertinently, their texts sought to undermine the association of religious principles with secular causes or institutions. Their pamphlets identified the Cause with God's wishes and liberty of conscience,[24] chiming with mainstream Quakerism, rather than commending a non-negotiable constitutional programme. In May, Hubberthorne argued that any 'Good Old Cause' must

[21] Edward Burrough, *A message to all kings and rulers*, London 1659 (Wing B.6014).
[22] Idem, *[To the whole] English army*, London 1659 (Wing B.6041).
[23] H. Larry Ingle, 'From mysticism to radicalism: recent historiography of Quaker beginnings', *Friends Historical Association* lxxvi (Fall 1987), 79–94.
[24] Hubberthorne, *The good old cause*, 9–12.

be subservient to, or identified with, the light within. He chided the so-called 'free Nation, or Common-wealth' for failing to heed this.[25] His other pamphlets maintained this message, and he tellingly signed *A word of wisdom and counsel to the officers and souldiers of the army* (October 1659) from 'one who makes war with the Sword of his mouth'.[26]

Bishop's *Mene tekel* similarly granted the Good Old Cause no independent worth, arguing that 'our Trust alon[e] is in the name of the Lord'.[27] Penington's address to the Rump also identified the Good Old Cause with God's 'Cause and Interest'. Parliament had abandoned this, and should instead have 'waited in his Council'. He advised those 'faithful to the good old cause' to 'fix not your hopes on the Army, or on the Parliament', looking rather to '[God's] council'.[28] These figures appear to have shortly abandoned invocations of the Good Old Cause, revealing its tactical application. But their principles endured: Penington pleaded with the military committee in November for submission to God, not 'any form of Government'.[29] Advocacy, rather than constitutional endorsement, remained primary. This proved a common ground with the politics of counsel even if, as section II will show, it proceeded from dissimilar epistemological foundations.

The Quakers' theological emphases have, in some quarters, led to the argument that they were a 'passive' or apolitical force.[30] This underestimates their political activity, perhaps through a constitutionalist (even revolutionary) bar as to what this entails, and a disregard for religiously inspired movements. Recent work has comprehensively undermined the notion that the Quakers were politically disengaged, although in turn overestimated the extent to which the Quakers were essentially aligned with popular mobilisation or Commonwealth principles.[31] In fact, a conciliar approach spanned this period. This sprang from widely held principles of submission to constituted powers. The movement's earliest writings affirmed obedience to 'magistracy' in the abstract.[32] This was tested broadly, and quickly: most Quakers affirmed their allegiance to the military

[25] Idem, *The real cause of the nations bondage and slavery*, London 1659 (Wing H.3228), title.

[26] Idem, *A word of wisdom and counsel to the officers and souldiers of the army*, London 1659 (Wing H.3242).

[27] George Bishop, *Mene tekel*, London 1659 (Wing B.3000), 49.

[28] Isaac Penington, *To the Parliament, the army, and all the wel-affected in the nation, who have been faithful to the good old cause*, London 1659 (Wing P.1215), 1–4.

[29] Idem, *Some considerations proposed to this distracted nation of England*, London 1659 (Wing P.1191).

[30] Glenn Burgess, 'Radicalism in the English Revolution', in Glenn Burgess and Matthew Festenstein (eds), *English radicalism, 1550–1850*, Cambridge 2009, esp. pp. 79–80.

[31] Peters, 'The Quakers'.

[32] Edward Burrough, *Truth defended*, London 1654 (Wing B.6049), 14; George Fox and James Nayler, *Saul's errand to Damascus*, London 1653 (Wing F.1894), 17–18.

government of 1659[33] and to Charles II. Hubberthorne, among others, met Charles in June 1660, and he, Burrough, Penington and Bishop publicly avowed their obedience.[34] Bishop gave this principle theoretical ballast in an extensive defence of passive obedience, squaring Quaker allegiance to the 'power' of God with whatever 'suffering' the magistrate placed on them.[35] Rather than withdrawing, or expressing incommensurable opposition to monarchy, efforts were renewed to placate a sceptical government and dissuade Quaker rebellion.

Instructing individuals was the dominant political tactic once obedience was assumed. The earliest political works of Fox, Nayler and Burrough focused upon mending rulers' morality and theology; magistrates' 'understanding' was critical.[36] Substantially, they exhorted rulers to do good and remain humble, appealing to rulers' conscience. *To thee Oliver Cromwell* (1655), by Fox and Nayler, was typical in focusing upon instruction. The Protector was advised to 'punish sin without exception' and attune himself to God's will.[37] Elsewhere, Fox warned the army that being out of the 'counsel of God' led to ignorance, moral impropriety and misgovernment.[38] Burrough admonished soldiers for 'fall[ing] from your first integrity' in the mid-1650s,[39] foreshadowing the thunderous criticisms of the army and parliament in 1659 and 1660. Overall, Friends directed themselves to those in power: Quaker pamphlets shifted from advising parliament and the army to the king over 1659–60. They treated a subject's moral orientation as politically paramount, and prioritised persuading constituted powers.

Drastic benefits were touted to following God's lead. Cromwell, parliamentarians and Charles II were informed that aligning one's policy with the 'kingdom of God' was the best and only assurance of success.[40] Fox,

[33] Burrough, *A declaration*; Margaret Fell, *To the General Councel, and officers of the English army*, London 1659 (Wing F.638C); Isaac Penington, *To the army*, London 1659 (Wing P.1213).

[34] George Bishop, *To thee Charls Stuart King of England*, Bristol 1660 (Wing B.3010); Edward Burrough, *A presentation of wholesome informations, unto the king of England*, London 1660 (Wing B.6017); Richard Hubberthorne, *An account of severall things that passed between His Sacred Majesty and Richard Hubberthorne*, London 1660 (Wing A.222A); Isaac Penington, *Three queries propounded to the king and Parliament*, London 1662 (Wing P.1208).

[35] George Bishop, *A little treatise concerning sufferings*, London 1664 (Wing B.2997A).

[36] George Fox, *This is to all officers and souldiers of the armies in England, Scotland, and Ireland; and to all magistrates, and them in authority*, London 1657 (Wing F.1935), 2.

[37] George Fox and James Nayler, *To thee Oliver Cromwell*, London 1655 (Wing F.1962), 1–2, 5–8.

[38] Fox, *This is to all officers*, 6.

[39] Edward Burrough, *For the souldiers, and all the officers of England, Scotland and Ireland*, London 1654 (Wing B.6003).

[40] George Bishop, *The warnings of the Lord*, London 1660 (Wing B.3017), passim; Edward Burrough, *Good counsel and advice, rejected by disobedient men*, London 1659

Nayler and Burrough argued that respecting others' consciences would 'take away the occasion of War'.[41] It was also believed that a leader's faith would be sufficient to enact good policy. Burrough pressed Cromwell particularly on this.[42] He conceptualised the use of instruction with especial clarity in *A message for instruction, to all the rulers, judges and magistrates* (1658). This contended that 'good reason' and the 'fear of God' were effective guides, while explaining that this led to respecting individual conscience and 'punishing and suppressing of Evil-doers'.[43] Heeding this was the means to ensure good government. Burrough's *Good counsel and advice* of 1659 provided a further, extensive defence of God's 'counsel', while also claiming to issue it. A dialectic of advising rulers while commending such a method, considered further below, was common to this period.

Leaders occasionally affirmed their obedience to specific figures. Some did so for Cromwell, the Commonwealth and the Protectorate.[44] Appeals were also made to these recipients' interests. Fox argued during the 1650s, though rarely, that military victories could be expected by following God's will, and that Quakers made particularly good soldiers.[45] Such stances might be argued to reveal a radical essence. They were incidental, however, in the context of obedience to all magistrates. Neither Cromwell, the army, nor parliament were ever encouraged to subvert the political establishment, whatever its present state. Some criticisms were levelled at the old regime: Fox, Hubberthorne and others made occasional associations during the 1650s between monarchy, tyranny and popery.[46] These were unusual, however, and again calculated to impress those in power.

Quakers made occasional intimations towards resistance. Nayler suggested in 1656 that 'God is to be obeyed' when magistrates were contrary to him;[47] Burrough contended that magistrates 'have no Power by any Law' to compel behaviours.[48] They never suggested, however, that this would go

(Wing B.6006), 10; George Fox, *A message from the Lord to the Parliament of England*, London 1654 (Wing F.1863), 9; Isaac Penington, *The consideration of a position concerning the Book of common-prayer*, London 1660 (Wing P.1161), 25–30.

[41] George Fox and James Nayler, *Several papers*, London 1654 (Wing F.1904), 7; Burrough, *Good counsel*, 18–20.

[42] Burrough, *Good counsel*, 22–9.

[43] Idem, *A message for instruction to all the rulers, judges, and magistrates*, London 1658 (Wing B.6013), 5, 11–12, 22–3, 28.

[44] George Fox and James Nayler, *Several petitions answered*, London 1653 (Wing N.316A), 61–4; Fox, *A message from the Lord*.

[45] George Fox, *The journal of George Fox*, ed. Norman Penney, Cambridge 1911, i. 81, and *To the councill of officers of the armie*, London 1659 (Wing F.1955), 5.

[46] Idem, *A word from the Lord unto all the faithlesse generation*, London 1654 (Wing F.1992), 15; Francis Howgill, *One warning more unto England*, London 1660 (Wing H.3176), 6; Hubberthorne and Burrough, *An answer*, 4.

[47] James Nayler, *Love to the lost*, London 1656 (Wing N.295), 24–5.

[48] Burrough, *A message for instruction*, 28.

beyond the usual acts of Quaker opposition – such as refusing hat honour or disrupting church services – to active resistance. Ultimately, all governments were castigated for being subjectively unrighteous rather than institutionally wrong. Burrough and Penington, somewhat bravely, urged Charles II and 'Cavaliers' towards humility upon the Restoration.[49] Such arguments echoed those levelled towards parliament and the army previously, however, which Burrough continued to pronounce to the new regime.[50] Correct instruction, even in harsh terms, continued to order their approach and rulers of all stripes were warned that the consequence of not listening to God would be most likely their downfall.

None the less, agitation against constituted powers was consistently dissuaded. The Quakers did not warn rulers of their own dissension. Leaders condemned royalists under the Protectorate,[51] but also those resisting the military committee[52] and restored monarchy.[53] Those Quakers wishing to garner support against Charles II, such as Edward Billing, were shunned.[54] Parties eschewing a conciliar approach were also rejected. Burrough and Fox criticised the Fifth Monarchists and Levellers for concerning themselves with governmental forms rather than turning to the 'light' within.[55] Any preferential statements towards regimes or individuals were counterbalanced, therefore, by consistent rejections of political radicalism or constitutionalism. This standing 'aloof' was not merely 'tactical',[56] however, and had a principled ground.

The 'Quakers' were not an identical mass; some propounded comprehensive designs. Edward Billings's *A mite of affection* (1659) put forth thirty-one 'proposals' regarding property, law reforms and extending voting rights and parliamentary powers.[57] By contrast, another Friend, George Fox the Younger, enjoined wider social conformity and hierarchy in his works of 1659–61.[58] But both were outliers. The majority avoided questions of political fundamentals except to deny alternatives within a current order: obedience was avowed and advice-giving practised

[49] Isaac Penington, *Some few queries and presentations proposed for the Cavaliers*, London 1660 (Wing P.1194).

[50] Edward Burrough, *A visitation and presentation of love unto the king*, London 1660 (Wing B.6054).

[51] Idem, *A trumpet of the Lord*, London 1656 (Wing B.6048A), 9–10; Fox, *A word from the Lord*, 15.

[52] Burrough, *A declaration*, 1–2, 8; Howgill, *One warning more*, 16.

[53] George Fox, *A declaration from the harmless and innocent people of God, called Quakers*, London 1660 (Wing F.1787); Isaac Penington, *Somewhat spoken to a weighty question*, London 1661 (Wing P.1206), 14–15.

[54] Moore, *Light in their consciences*, 183.

[55] Burrough, *Good counsel*, 18–19; Fox, *A word from the Lord*, 13–15.

[56] Cf. Peters, 'The Quakers', 122–3.

[57] Edward Billing, *A mite of affection*, London 1659 (Wing B.2902).

[58] George Fox the Younger, *A collection of the several books and writings*, London 1662 (Wing F.1996).

consistently. The movement focused upon persuading elites, in a manner resembling older forms of counsel.

II

Quaker theology grounded this approach, and paved the way to a novel language of political counsel. The most distinctive early Quaker doctrine was of the 'light' of Christ. This inhered in all persons and could variously reveal, condemn and empower them. It made possible universal and immediate sanctification. This spiritual 'light' was distinguished from natural reason, but made significant transformation contingent upon a person's capacity for recognising this. It allowed God to communicate with man, who could heed his words and even express the 'voice of the Lord' if sufficiently attuned.[59] God's presence was rendered an immediate, 'living'[60] presence, superior to but equally present as the counsel of human individuals. The means to effect good government were, as shown, adequate recognition of his Word.

The political pamphlets of Fox, Burrough and Nayler, amongst others, were undergirded with advice to heed the light within. Fox frequently instructed magistrates along these lines. He wrote 'to the light in you all' when addressing parliamentarians in 1654, advising them to consult this above all else.[61] A 1656 pamphlet implored them to hear 'the witnesse of God in you',[62] while army officers in 1658 were advised to heed 'God in your consciences'.[63] Burrough and Nayler insisted that magistrates do the same.[64] Nayler advised rulers in 1660 to 'Come down to that of God in your consciences',[65] and regretted that parliamentarians had not done so.[66] The political tracts of 1659 maintained this line. In May Hubberthorne disdained motivation by the 'Good Old Cause', 'Religion' or even 'Liberty of Conscience'; what mattered was taking 'diligent heed to that light which would lead you'.[67] The possibility for change was tied to responding to God within.

[59] George Fox (with James Nayler), *Several letters written to the saints*, London 1654 (Wing D.1272), 15–16; Francis Howgill, *The visitation of the rebellious nation of Ireland*, London 1656 (Wing H.3188), 10.

[60] Fox, *Journal*, i. 86.

[61] Idem, *A message from the Lord*, 1–2.

[62] Idem, *This for each Parliament-man*, London 1656 (Wing F.1933), 2–5.

[63] Idem, *This is to all officers*, 2.

[64] Burrough, *A message for instruction*, 2; James Nayler, *A lamentacion (by one of Englands prophets)*, York 1654 (Wing N.292), 10.

[65] James Nayler, *Behold you rulers*, London 1658/60 (Wing N.265), 1–2.

[66] Idem, *To those who were in authority*, London 1660 (Wing N.321A).

[67] Hubberthorne, *The good old cause*, 1–4.

Arguments for divine counsel followed partly from experiences of advice-giving. But they also flowed from this profoundly different understanding of God's relationship with man, even if this led to practical homologies. 'Counsel' now referred to the voice of God within each individual. It was distinguishable from counsels tied to a human subsection of society, whether feudal-baronial, classical-humanist or religious. 'Counsel' emanated, instead, from the light within, becoming available internally, immediately and universally. A form of communication still occurred, but in divine rather than social terms.

Quaker appeals for magistrates to seek God's 'counsel' spanned this period. These, like the practices of advising rulers, have not previously been analysed. They had deep roots, however, with encouragements towards divine counsel appearing in a wide range of works, including pastoral works. Nayler exhorted readers generally to 'with the light take counsell';[68] Richard Farnsworth advised individuals to 'stand in the Counsel of the Lord, and mind that which is of God in you';[69] and William Dewsbury recommended that 'Every one diligently hearken to the counsel of the Lord the Light that witnesses for God in the conscience'.[70] Fox made the consequences of not heeding it clear: 'if you go out of the counsel of the Lord … then hastinesse of mind gets up'.[71] Burrough discerned 'destruction' following from stepping outside God's counsel.[72] He urged others to the 'following of [God's] Counsell … which will show you evill deeds'.[73] Nayler averred similarly: 'in your Conscience [you] will witnesse [God], if you take counsel at it'. Those not heeding the light within would 'reject the Counsel of the Lord'.[74] He portrayed this in particularly intimate terms, with God as a 'Counseller, who is with you at all times'.[75] These exhortations continued into the early Restoration,[76] showing their robustness.

Such arguments suffused political practice. Fox spearheaded this, initially, during the Commonwealth and Protectorate. He began a letter to Cromwell in 1654 with, 'Deare Friend, Be still, & in the Councill of God stand, and that will give thee wisdome.' Continuing, he argued that in favouring God, the Protector would see 'peace enjoyed & counsell and Instruction from the Lord God given'.[77] He told Cromwell later to 'heare Gods voice that hee might stande in his

[68] James Nayler, *A salutation to the seed of God*, London 1655 (Wing N.310), 26.
[69] Richard Farnsworth, *The generall-good to all people*, London 1653 (Wing F.483), 6.
[70] William Dewsbury, *The mighty day of the Lord*, London 1656 (Wing D.1271), 4.
[71] George Fox, *Newes coming up out of the north*, London 1654 (Wing F.1867), 21–2.
[72] Burrough, *A trumpet*, 10–11.
[73] Idem, *The testimony of the Lord concerning London*, London 1657 (Wing B.6033), 9–10.
[74] Nayler, *Love to the lost*, 5, 33.
[75] Idem, *A salutation*, 16.
[76] See William Ames, *Good counsell and advice to all the Friends of truth*, London 1661 (Wing A.3006); William Bayly, *Jacob is become a flame*, London 1662 (Wing B.1530), 4–5, 9–11, 14–15.
[77] Fox, *Journal*, i. 163–4.

counsell & obey it'.[78] Fox's earliest pamphlet to parliament and army officers urged that by keeping 'ye eare open gods Counsell is heard'.[79] Parliamentarians were elsewhere urged 'stand in the counsel of God, and to receive the Law from God, which is perfect, according to that of God in every mans conscience'.[80] Fox advised the same to the army 'councill' in 1657;[81] another tract to soldiers and magistrates advised them to 'stand all in Gods Counsel … whereby with it you may answer that of God in every man'.[82] Magistrates generally were advised to 'stand in his Councell, [not] making Laws and Acts and Bonds in that nature that acteth contrary to this light in the Conscience'.[83] Nayler, too, warned magistrates not to 'take counsell at your selves'.[84] His *To those who were in authority* (1660) thundered against being out of God's 'counsell'; following 'fleshly Counsel' was responsible for their woes.[85] God's voice was thus granted political primacy.

Burrough frequently upheld this line. Echoing Fox, he told 'rulers' in 1656 that 'If you stand in his counsel, and walk in uprightness before him in the Light of Christ Jesus then will he appear to be mighty in his counsel with you.'[86] His largest political work, entitled *Good counsel and advice rejected by disobedient men* (1659), collected letters to Oliver and Richard Cromwell. This claimed to show the consequences befalling those who 'despised the Lords warnings, and would [have] none of his Counsel'.[87] The 'Counsel of the Lord' opposed the 'counsels of treacherous men'; Oliver was exhorted 'not to follow the Councel of thy own heart'.[88] Such appeals were common in Burrough's writings during the 1650s, including to the army government in 1659.[89]

Such exhortations were widespread. Francis Howgill, a frequent collaborator with Burrough, meditated that following 'wise mens Counsels', thereby 'neglecting the Counsel of the Almighty', had run England into troubles,[90] and that 'mans wisdom … darkens the counsell of God'.[91] Magistrates, among others, were advised that 'if you own the light it will manifest the will and counsell of the Lord'.[92] Dorset Quaker Dorothy White told members of the Cavalier Parliament to 'hearken to the Counsel of God which is known within'.[93] Margaret Fell, also writing

[78] Ibid. 168. [79] Ibid. 83. [80] Idem, *A message from the Lord*, 1.
[81] Idem, *To the councill of officers*, 8. [82] Idem, *This is to all officers*, 4.
[83] Idem, *A declaration against all profession*, London 1655 (F.1784), 13–14.
[84] Nayler, *A salutation*, 36. [85] Idem, *To those who were in authority*.
[86] Edward Burrough, *The crying sinnes reproved*, London 1656 (Wing B.5988), 12.
[87] Idem, *Good counsel*, 'To the Reader'. [88] Ibid. 3–4, 14, 28.
[89] Burrough, *A declaration*, 2–5, and *[To the whole] English army*.
[90] Howgill, *One warning more*, 12.
[91] Idem, *The invisible things of God brought to light*, London 1659 (Wing H.3169), 196.
[92] Idem, *The visitation*, 2, 6, 17.
[93] Dorothy White, *Friends, you that are of the Parliament, hear the word of the Lord*, London 1662 (Wing W.1749), 6.

after the Restoration, regretted army members' having 'often rejected the council of the Lord, and counted the Light a mean and a contemptible thing'.[94] The association between God's counsel and the light within was thus commonplace.

The Quaker articulation of counsel stood at odds with previous modes. It supposed a divine, rather than inter-personal, exchange. Secular wisdom was criticised, rather than celebrated as in humanist counsels. Such criticism of 'fleshly Counsel' was sometimes explicit. Fox punningly advised parliamentarians, for example, 'coming together to sit in Council' to instead stand 'in Gods Council'.[95] Burrough, assuming the voice of God, urged Cromwell's Council of State to 'walk in my counsell'.[96] Howgill addressed political 'Counsellours' similarly,[97] and rued that all 'Kings, Princes, Protectors, Parliaments, and Councels' were being seduced from God's voice.[98] Others drew comparable juxtapositions between God's counsel and conciliar individuals and institutions. Nayler witheringly declared that national Churches were 'all out of the counsel of God, agreed on by Councels of men'.[99] Farnsworth urged parliament against the 'counsell of men', and towards the 'mighty Counsellor'.[100] Following the Restoration, William Brend, echoing Howgill, declared against all 'Counsels' and 'Commands' of statesmen in favour of the 'Counsel of the Heavenly Host'.[101] Such contrasts were brief, but indicate the difference between divine and worldly counsels, while acknowledging their equivalence as modes of communication.

Such texts clamoured for the 'counsel of God'. They also made substantial presentation of it, typically by arguing against persecutions. A secondary conceptual innovation followed from this. Within Quaker thought, forms of advocacy were denominated 'counsel' which we now associate with the public sphere, rather than intimate or conciliar advising. This chafed at social, in addition to ontological, definitions of counsel. God's counsel was intensive, but a consequence of the light inhering in every person was an additionally extensive conception. It was on these grounds that such 'public' advice-giving could be labelled counsel. This should not be confused with overtures towards a 'socially inclusive' counsel by parliamentary theorists, such as Richard Hooker, which still supposed a constitutional form.[102] Quakers commended 'counsel' from anywhere, with God-in-man operating in an individualistic framework. Rulers were to consult their

[94] Margaret Fell, *This was given to Major Generall Harrison*, London 1660 (Wing F.638), 2. [95] Fox, *A message from the Lord*, 4. [96] Burrough, *A trumpet*, 3–4.
[97] Howgill, *The visitation*, 15–16.
[98] Idem, *Mistery Babylon*, London 1659 (Wing H.3173), 5, 11.
[99] Nayler, *Love to the lost*, 10. [100] Farnsworth, *The generall-good*, 11.
[101] William Brend, *A short declaration of the purpose and decree of the everlasting counsel of Gods heavenly host*, London 1662 (Wing B.4360), 3.
[102] McLaren, *Political culture*, 164–71.

conscience, but also the divine conscience in others. Socially restricted forms of counsel were thereby undercut.

The Quakers clearly identified their practical counselling with the 'counsel of God'. This paradoxically intensive and extensive counsel is best illustrated through those pamphlets which assumed God's voice. Therein, the 'counsel of God' is both recommended and presented. A 1653 tract of Fox's announced 'A warning of the Lord to all you that make lawes: I am moved of the Lord to speak to you', and presented exhortations written from the 'voyce of the Lord'. The 'counsel of God' was also advocated, providing a coincidence of advising and expressing this.[103] An address to parliamentarians the following year began advising to 'stand in the counsel of God', then urged them towards the light, and concluded that 'this is the word of God'.[104] This established an homology between the counsel of Fox, God and individuals' consciences. A 1656 address worked within the same parameters, repeatedly intoning that 'this is the word of the Lord God', avowing its presence in all and discouraging persecution of anyone that 'speakes the word of the Lord'.[105]

This tendency was consistent. Howgill and John Camm informed Cromwell, in a pamphlet entitled *This was the word of the Lord which John Camm, and Francis Howgill was moved to declare and write to Oliver Cromwell*, both of their being 'moved of the Lord', and coming to 'exhort thee to stand in the fear of the Lord, and in his Counsel: and to minde the light in thy conscience'.[106] Substantively, they advised Cromwell to end persecution of Quaker activities. While advocating God's counsel, therefore, they were also issuing it, 'moved by the Lord', in pamphlet form. Burrough channelled God's voice in criticising Cromwell, expressing displeasure 'because thou hast not been faithful to the end, in my Work'.[107] Bishop, in 1661, urged rulers to look 'in you' at what 'calleth upon you' to end persecutions, and concluded that 'It's the *Word* of the *Lord* to *you*, whether *you* will *hear* or *forbear*, through *His* Servant, George Bishop.'[108] Bishop continued to issue God's 'warnings' to Charles, parliament and other authorities. These texts suggested 'counsel' alongside offerings of it named as such, and thus slipped free of any social moorings.

Burrough's pamphlets illustrate this recommendation and assumption well. An early text, entitled *A warning from the Lord to the inhabitants of Underbarrow* (1654), dually assumed God's voice and presented the theoretical position that Quakers were those who 'abideth in [God's]

[103] Fox, *Newes coming up*, 22–5, 44.
[104] Idem, *A message from the Lord*, 1, 8.
[105] Idem, *This for each Parliament-man*, 5, 15–17.
[106] John Camm and Francis Howgill, *This was the word of the Lord*, London 1654 (Wing C.392), 1, 5.
[107] Burrough, *A trumpet*, 2.
[108] George Bishop, *Yet one warning more*, London 1661 (Wing B.3019), 3–6.

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Counsel'.[109] A 1657 address to London residents described Burrough meditating 'concerning what the counsell of the Lord is unto you all',[110] before presenting its contents. This was equally true of his 'political' tracts. *Good counsel and advice* saw Burrough disclaim any counsels presented as his own, but none the less offer them.[111] An October 1659 pamphlet to parliament, following this, offered 'Councel and Advice unto you, from a Friend that seeks after Truth', throughout identifying Burrough's words with the 'Councel of the Lord God'.[112] A Burrough-penned address, signed by several Quakers, to the military committee later that year, commended the 'counsell of the Lord' and advertised that 'this is our counsell'.[113] This elided distinctions between the two. This assumption of the 'voice of the Lord' while issuing advice to heed it became, therefore, a general thread.

Such an identity requires partial reconstruction, but even clearer coupling of God's counsel and public advocacy is evident. Farnsworth reflected in 1663 that Quakers had come to 'stand in the Counsel of the Lord, to hear the words from the Lord to speak them unto the people' and were 'directed by the Spirit of God (in them) to speak unto others on the behalf of the Lord'.[114] Humphrey Smyth spelled this out upon advising Charles II of the advantages of Quaker advocacy. They could express 'the Spirit of the Lord to counsel Him', thereby 'declar[ing] and shew[ing] unto the King, the Counsel of God concerning himself and his Kingdom'.[115] Others prefaced their political recommendations by declaring that 'The sure, firm, and everlasting decree and Counsel of the Heavens, is that.'[116] The theoretical consequences were twofold. Firstly, a counsel of God was recommended which transcended earthly boundaries. Secondly, and somewhat paradoxically, it re-emerged in a social context through the Quaker interlocutor, taking a universal form.

Elisions are evident between the ways in which 'counsel' was evoked. The light, God and Christ were summoned in a synonymous fashion, and God's 'counsel' could be soothing, expository, or imperative. The issuance of advice could take place from immediately within oneself or the voice of those better attuned to it, meaning that divine agency could take many forms. There remained a tension within Quaker eschatology as to what the triumph of the Lord's voice would entail. For its proponents, the changes expected were not mere revisions; a fundamental moral and

[109] Burrough, *A warning*, 26.
[110] Idem, *The testimony of the Lord*, 17.
[111] Idem, *Good counsel*, 'To the Reader'.
[112] Idem, *To the Parliament of the Common-wealth of England*, London 1659 (Wing B.6039), 1–2, 8.
[113] Idem, *A declaration*, 6–7.
[114] Richard Farnsworth, *The spirit of God speaking in the temple of God*, London 1663 (Wing F.504), 6, 11.
[115] Humphrey Smyth, *For the honour of the king*, London 1661 (Wing S.4059), 11–12.
[116] Brend, *A short declaration*, 2–3.

ontological turn was predicted and advised. But this could be manifested in numerous ways: early Quaker views of the apocalypse shifted, simultaneously, between arguing that the kingdom of the Lord had arrived in their persons and was still to be partly affected in practice.[117] Recourse to God's counsel amongst political leaders was an attempt to bridge these emphases. As such, a radical theological politics meant a relative indifference to constitutional forms as they emerged in the Interregnum and Restoration: any change, even one of apocalyptic import, was to begin from failing or succeeding to hearken towards the voice within. Though the movement increased its apocalyptic and prophetic rhetoric during periods of transition in 1653 and 1659, this amounted to a response to providential happenings rather than an endorsement of specific actors or oblique threat of force to others. Religious consent remained primary, both as a means and end.

III

Quaker invocations of 'counsel' were partly congruent with previous forms. Both the Friends of the 1650s and early 1660s and earlier advocates of counsel assumed or argued that counsel would be offered within given constitutional structures. The turn to direct communication with God and a 'counsel' articulated by an amorphous social constituency, however, rendered the Quakers' concept novel. This section will consider, firstly, the provenance of this break. It will look, following this, at the distinctiveness of the Quakers' 'counsel of God'. This distinctiveness is maintained, but an array of invocations are found to exist during the seventeenth century.

Friends did not offer accounts for their use of conciliar rhetoric. The causes of their adoption were likely multifarious. 'Counsel' language was a powerful political currency, with the Civil War witnessing a proliferation of its usage. Both royalists and parliamentarians extended its meanings, with the latter pushing for its right to counsel.[118] This stemmed from Charles I's perceived failure to take counsel appropriately. The Quakers, following this, were unsatisfied with monarchical and Interregnum rulers, and their counsellors and councils alike. Setting God, whose 'counsell stands for ever',[119] against fleshly selves, early Quaker ideas presented an ontologically and socially different form of counsel. This rejected not only secular counsels, but also Christian political alternatives, from a 'revolution of the saints' to ecclesiastical advice.

[117] Hugh Barbour, 'The "Lamb's War" and the origins of the Quaker peace testimony', in Harvey L. Dyck (ed.), *The pacifist impulse in historical perspective*, Toronto 1996, 150; Moore, *Light in their consciences*, esp. p. 70.

[118] Paul, *Counsel and command*, ch. vii.

[119] Edward Burrough, *A standard lifted up*, London 1658 (Wing B.6030), 2–3.

Others disillusioned with secular 'counsel' also degraded the concept during this period. Milton's 'Paradise Lost', for example, exclusively used the term with reference to man's fall and the councils of Satan.[120] Milton did not become a Quaker, but similarly dismissed 'counsel' as usually conceived. He was not alone. John Guy and Joanne Paul have shown that, in a variety of contexts leading into the Interregnum, disenchantment with 'counsel' led to abandonment of the concept. The Quakers, by contrast, reformulated it. Conciliar rhetoric had been 'reinterpreted for political ends' in Tudor and early Stuart politics,[121] typically to favour different social constituents or forms of knowledge. The early Quakers retained the name, invoking 'apparently shared values' again,[122] but now set it against all 'Councels of men'. Rather than appropriating it in a new social context, it found place within a theological schema.

These political circumstances coincided with certain intellectual tendencies. A divine counsel followed, in part, from Quaker theology. Given God's closeness, 'counsel' may have been an natural political or linguistic resort, apart from any historical betrayal or secular borrowings. The movement's reliance upon Scripture might also alert us to biblical references to counsel. The Geneva and King James translations used 'counsel' to describe God's word, apostolic directions, and human advice in a variety of political contexts.[123] Some Quakers cited these: Fell opened *A letter sent to the king* (1666) quoting Proverbs xix.21: 'Many are the devises of Man, but the counsel of the Lord will stand';[124] Farnsworth, Bishop and Fox also offered references.[125] This formed a necessary backdrop to their usage.

'Counsel' was invoked by a diverse range of seventeenth-century religious thinkers. The Quakers' distinctiveness can be appreciated through comparison with their ideas, which also claimed to communicate or represent the voice of God. No clear influences emerge, but numerous ways in which the 'counsel of God' migrated into political practice are traceable, moving beyond older 'prophetic' and ecclesiastical forms. Mystical religionists, such as John Everard, claimed a unity of being with God, but rarely to hear him. Others hinted at meaningful communication, although typically regarded this as an extraordinary or future occurrence. Religious 'Seekers' of the 1640s such as William Erbery and William

[120] Colin Burrow, 'How not to do it: poets and counsel, Thomas Wyatt to Geoffrey Hill', in Colin Kidd and Jacqueline Rose (eds), *Political advice: past, present and future*, London 2021, 66–9.

[121] Guy, 'The rhetoric of counsel', 293, 299.

[122] Rose, 'The problem of political counsel', 20.

[123] Luke vii.30; xxiii.50–1; John xviii.14.

[124] Margaret Fell, *A letter sent to the king*, London 1666 (Wing F.633).

[125] Bishop, *A little treatise*, 17; Richard Farnsworth, *An Easter-reckoning*, London 1653 (Wing F.480), 17; Fox, *Journal*, i. 236.

Walwyn avowed that God's people were 'waiting for the Lord himself to come and reveal himself to them', affirming immediacy but placing it in the future.[126] A pre-Quaker pamphlet of Penington's from 1650 defined the 'counsels of God' as 'great, mysterious, and secret', but hinted as knowing them if in 'the light of God'.[127] Meanwhile, the 'Ranter' Joseph Salmon suggested that God had imparted knowledge to him, but conceded that readers 'might have come to more maturity in divinity then my selfe'.[128] These thinkers tended to theorise divine communication in a circumscribed fashion, and rarely suggested it as a plausible political alternative.

Some contemporaries invoked God's counsel in political terms, but then in a time- or person-bound form. Gerrard Winstanley's *The mysterie of God* (1649) presented itself as the 'councell of God, revealed to his servants'. Continuing, however, he wrote of 'what I have to say' about God and the world, rather than recommending or claiming to represent his continuing counsel.[129] Others presented God's counsel as exclusive, rather than something governors or the public could ordinarily utilise. The Fifth Monarchist Anna Trapnel claimed that 'the Lord indeed counselled me'.[130] She drew upon his 'voice' to advise 'the governors, Army, churches, ministry, universities and the whole nation' but regarded this as 'by an inspiration extraordinary'.[131] Another prophet, Arise Evans, claimed to have received such powers in a political context. He declared himself 'A voice from heaven' in addressing the Commonwealth, while Cromwell was informed 'That your *Petitioner*, having the knowledge of Gods secret Counsel manifested to him', could infallibly guide him.[132] The emphasis, again, lay on his personal capacity. Evans's and Trapnel's 'counsels' were certainly divine, but not suitable to general recommendation. By contrast, the Quakers' 'counsel' was, and their occasional espousal of 'true' prophecy[133] did not imply exclusivity.

Calvinists conceived of theological 'counsels' variously. These were, perhaps less surprisingly, distinct from the Quaker form. The separatist church member Katherine Chidley declared in 1645 that the 'Saints of God being separated from Idolatry … have ever enjoyed commission

[126] William Erbery, *Nor truth, nor error*, London 1647 (Wing E.3234), 2; William Walwyn, *A whisper in the eare of Mr. Thomas Edwards*, London 1646 (Wing W.694), 6–7.
[127] Isaac Penington, *A voyce out of the thick darkness*, London 1650 (Wing P.1217), 'About darkening the counsel of God', 30.
[128] Joseph Salmon, *Anti-christ in man*, London 1647 (Wing S.413), 'To all those who desire'.
[129] Gerrard Winstanley, *The mysterie of God*, London 1649 (Wing W.3048), title, 60.
[130] Anna Trapnel, *Anna Trapnel's report and plea*, London 1654 (Wing T.2033), 47.
[131] Idem, *The cry of a stone*, London 1654 (Wing T.2031), title.
[132] Arise Evans, *A voice from heaven to the Common-wealth*, London 1653 (Wing E.3470), and *To his excellencie the Lord Generall Cromwell*, London 1653 (Wing E.3464).
[133] Fox, *A word from the Lord*, 6.

from Christ'. Chidley advised that the government 'submit to God for direction and counsell', but identified this with the 'counsell of Gods true Prophets', expounding a prophetic counsel.[134] More regularly, the 'counsel of God' referred to even more restricted phenomena. This included consulting Scripture, with God's counsel reduced to this rather than a 'living' Word.[135] Robert Bolton, a Puritan minister, advised listeners in a 1629 sermon to seek 'counsell out of GODs Booke', and referred to passages providing it.[136] Bolton elsewhere advised that, in unfamiliar circumstances, one's 'spirituall wisedome' and conscience were 'counsellors ever at hand'.[137] This is a passing metaphor, though, rather than the theological reality it was for early Quakers. Bolton cautioned living in worldliness, which 'contradicts the counsell and commands of GODS Spirit',[138] but again with reference to Scripture. The Presbyterian John Tombes opined on the extraordinary nature of God's counsel. In an anti-Quaker pamphlet of 1660, he argued that 'The light of knowledge of God and his counsel … the Lord Christ communicates, as by special Commission delegated by his Father.'[139] Here, Christ appears to be the bearer of 'counsel', the revelation of 'light' an historical occurrence.[140] Elsewhere, Tombes detected the 'counsel of Gods will' through scriptural exegesis.[141] 'Counsel' was, in either case, restricted to an authoritative and final form.

Orthodox references to the 'counsel of God' also related to his power over man, nature and history, or his hidden designs.[142] Its inaccessibility as a communicative medium was stressed. James VI & I played upon this in a 1610 speech to parliament. Comparing God to the king, James meditated upon 'the very highest mysteries of the Godhead, and the most inscrutable Councels in the Trinitie'. He went on to regret 'Men not being contented with the knowledge of so much of the Will of God, as it hath pleased him to reveal; but they must needs sit with him in his privie Closet, and become privie of his most inscrutable Councels.'[143] The

[134] Katherine Chidley, *Good counsell, to the petitioners for Presbyterian government*, London 1645 (Wing C.3831).

[135] Henry Haggar, *The foundation of the font discovered*, London 1653 (Wing H.186), 6–7, 40–4; Ralph Robinson, *Safe conduct*, London 1655 (Wing R.1711), 9–12.

[136] Robert Bolton, *Two sermons preached at Northampton*, London 1635 (*RSTC* 3256), 53, 58.

[137] Idem, *Some generall directions for a comfortable walking with God*, London 1626 (*RSTC* 3251), 117–18.

[138] Idem, *Mr. Boltons last and learned worke*, London 1632 (*RSTC* 3242), 190.

[139] John Tombes, *True old light exalted above pretended new light*, London 1660 (Wing T.1824), 19, 60–2.

[140] Ibid. 51.

[141] Idem, *Anti-pædobaptism*, London 1657 (Wing T.1800), 158.

[142] John Moore, *Protection proclaimed*, London 1655 (Wing M.2562), 1, 4; John Owen, *A vision of unchangeable free mercy*, London 1646 (Wing O.825), 7, 10–1.

[143] Quoted in Glenn Burgess, *The politics of the ancient constitution: an introduction to English political thought, 1603–1642*, London 1992, 154–5.

Puritan Thomas Scott concurred, arguing in 1623 that God's 'counsell or secret will … is too deepe for any of us'.[144] The view of God's counsel as a 'secret' continued into the 1650s,[145] including among those opposed to the Quakers.[146] The wider picture was one in which theological 'counsels' were identified with a distant deity.

Richard Baxter exemplified such a position. One 1655 work, *The arrogancy of reason*, advised readers to 'think not that you should comprehend the mysterious counsels and ways of God' and rather 'meditate on Scripture's difficulties'.[147] Baxter was criticising Quakers at this time, and his disdain for individuals thinking themselves 'fit Judges of his ways … and the several paths of his unsearchable counsels' suggests their ideas.[148] Baxter averred that he knew God would 'guide me with thy Counsel', but not to knowing its content.[149] He wrote of 'conversing with God',[150] but in a similarly metaphorical manner to Bolton. He also advised following the 'counsel of the *all knowing God*'. This was conceived of as 'Infinite wisdom', however, which would lead others 'submissively to his spirit, word and Ministers' rather a form of direct communication.[151] The difference remained fundamental: theological 'counsel' was defined as knowledge and partial revelation, rather than an active force.

'Counsel' in this rendering was ordinarily hidden. Most regarded it as historically expressed through Christ, though some, such as Winstanley, Trapnel and Evans argued for their prophetic status. This was distinguishable from the voice within each person theorised by the Quakers. Other contemporaries evoked more commonplace 'religious' counsel too, including Scott.[152] Bolton spoke of the 'grave counsels of all truely learned, and godly Divines'.[153] Baxter averred 'it is no small part of a Ministers duty, to Counsel men'.[154] Counsel was an exclusive, elite practice on this measure. Divine counsel remained a partial, inconstant beneficence of God, while religious counsel remained confined to qualified ministers or prophets. The Quaker claim was thus distinct. Some attacked them precisely for this: General Baptist Matthew Caffyn urged that the 'counsel

[144] Thomas Scott, *The high-waies of God and the king*, Netherlands 1623 (*RSTC* 22079), 6.

[145] John Caryl, *An exposition with practical observations*, London 1653 (Wing C.777), 25.

[146] Ellis Bradshaw, *A compendious answer to a book called* A brief survay of the judgement *of Mr. John Goodwin*, London 1652 (Wing B.4139A), 13–14, 23, 30.

[147] Richard Baxter, *The arrogancy of reason against divine revelations*, London 1655 (Wing B.1192), 46.

[148] Ibid. 44, 50–1, 58.

[149] Idem, *A petition for peace with the reformation of the liturgy*, London 1661 (Wing B.1343A), 44.

[150] Idem, *The divine life*, London 1664 (Wing B.1254), 370.

[151] Ibid. 59–62.

[152] Thomas Scott, *Vox regis*, Utrecht 1624 (*RSTC* 22105), 28–31.

[153] Bolton, *Two sermons*, 88, 93.

[154] Richard Baxter, *How to do good to many*, London 1682 (Wing B.1283), 6.

of God' appeared in Scripture and Jesus only. It was what Christ had 'commanded … yet saith the Quaker, the Light in every man is the ONLY Teacher'.[155] For the Quakers, 'counsel' was God's continuing and active, rather than intermittent, presence. It was free to take or leave, rather than being an irresistible force, and was not a privilege of the godly. God's counsel remained, on these terms, untied by constitutional forms, human counsels or religious hierarchies.

IV

Early Quaker practices and ideas of counsel raise several issues for historians. Their advocacy during the 1650s and early 1660s requires us to qualify, firstly, how we theorise Quaker politics. Defining the movement as militant or apolitical no longer appears sustainable. Instead, they pursued a mode of politics which was 'radical' in its theology and flexible or indifferent in constitutional commitment. Recent literature has shown that, rather than lapsing into quietism, Quaker political participation proved resilient beyond this period.[156] Any continuity is ripe for further exploration. The theoretical novelty of Quaker 'counsel' is also remarkable, and alerts us to the need for research into the diverse ways in which theological and religious counsel were explored during the early modern period.

Broader conceptual queries might also be raised. Theories of counsel have typically supposed that it has a particular situation, whether in discreet counsellors or discrete corporate bodies. The politics of counsel and the public sphere have, on these grounds, been divided.[157] Quaker politics has been defined as contributing to the latter,[158] but their sociological expansion of the concept raises new possibilities. It may be argued that the Quakers misconceived 'counsel' in rendering it potentially universal. More generously, their contribution might be seen to mediate, intellectually if not actually, between conciliar and 'public' politics. Both suggestions would, however, fail to take them at their word, or acknowledge the similarities between their conciliar ideas and practices and others'.

[155] Matthew Caffyn, *The deceived and deceiving Quakers discovered*, London 1656 (Wing C.206), 7, 10–11, 56–7.

[156] Richard L. Greaves, 'Shattered expectations? George Fox, the Quakers, and the Restoration state, 1660–1685', *Albion* xxiv (Summer 1992), 237–59; George Southcombe, 'The Quakers and politics, 1660–1689', in Moore and Allen, *The Quakers, 1656–1723*, 170–190; Weddle, *Walking in the way*.

[157] Paul, *Counsel and command*, 173–4; Jacqueline Rose, 'Sir Edward Hyde and the problem of counsel in mid-seventeenth-century royalist thought', in Rose, *The politics of counsel*, 251–2.

[158] Kate Peters, *Print culture and the Early Quakers*, Cambridge 2005, esp. pp. 210, 232.

Conceptual questions might be raised in response: what are the grounds on which practices of advice, substantially similar in content and motivation, qualify to become 'counsel'? When does a quantitative or practical difference become a qualitative one regarding forms of advice? These cannot be resolved here, but present tantalising prospects. If conventional boundaries cannot hold, our theories of counsel may require further expansion. Notions of 'common counsel' and 'socially inclusive' counsel have been detected in medieval and Elizabethan England.[159] The public sphere has, also, increasingly been appreciated in early Stuart England and further back.[160] The Quakers seem to transcend these models, blurring the boundaries between 'private' and public counsel, ethics and interest, and individual reformation and mass participation. They provide, therefore, a blueprint for theoretical revision.

The Quaker example also supports the idea that the practice and rhetoric of 'counsel' survived the onset of the Civil War.[161] Though relatively 'historic' in this context, it may caution us to remember that advising constituted powers continues into modernity, however it is conceived. Additionally, Quaker recommendation of the 'counsel of God' hints perhaps at a perennial problem for political theorists. The 'constant recourse to counsel'[162] – the tallying up which or how much counsel/council – still begs the question of guaranteeing the right counsel. This continues to trouble modernity, despite a wide range of constitutional and conciliar fixes. The Quakers' call to conscience may be regarded as pragmatic, therefore, against a contemporary and historic idealistic approach beholden to questions of institutional design and explanation, and of abdicating questions of responsibility (or what we might call ideology, culture etc.) on the assumption of their irrelevancy or externality. On this basis, the Quakers' 'counsel' is of continuing historiographical and normative significance.

[159] Judith Ferster, *Fictions of advice: the literature and politics of counsel in late medieval England*, University Park, PA 1996, 16–20; Natalie Mears, 'Counsel, public debate, and queenship: John Stubbs's *The discoverie of a gaping gulf, 1579*', *HJ* xliv (2001), 629–50.

[160] Ferster, *Fictions of advice*, 179–81; Lake and Pincus, 'Rethinking the public sphere'.

[161] See Kidd and Rose, *Political advice*.

[162] Rose, 'The problem of political counsel', 2.