

Excerpts from various YM disciplines on the subject of SPIRIT-LED VOCAL MINISTRY

THE EARLY DISCIPLINES of American YM's (those written before the 1827 schism) have a great deal in common in structure and language. The issue of spirit-led ministry is addressed in sections specifically addressed to the meeting's ministers & elders, as these are considered the members with special responsibility for this area of meeting life.

Philadelphia YM: "Ministers and elders watch over one another for good, to help those who are exercised in the ministry in the right line, discouraging forward spirits that run into words without life and power, advising against affectation in tones and gestures."

Each of these early American disciplines had special queries that were to be answered by the committee of ministers and elders, such as these:

Baltimore YM & New England YM: "Are ministers, in the exercise of their gifts, careful to wait for divine ability and thereby preserved from being burthensome?" ["Divine ability" is a term frequently used to refer to the specific calling from God to speak during meeting.]

NYYM [Do ministers & elders] "discourage forward persons whose communications do not proceed from the right authority?" [Are ministers] "careful to minister in the ability which truth gives?"

Later, perhaps in response to the concerns generated by the Hicksite-Orthodox split, the emphasis seems to shift from divine ability or leading to asking whether ministry is "sound in word and doctrine".

I particularly like this version from **Virginia YM's** 1814 discipline: [Ministers and elders should exhort the meeting's ministers to] "earnestly seek the mind of the spirit of truth to open the mysteries thereof, that abiding in a simple and patient submission to the divine will, and keeping down to its opening of love and life in themselves, they may witness a gradual growth in their gifts, and be preserved from extending their declarations further than the power of truth shall be experienced to accompany them."

Here are three fine excerpts from **MODERN DISCIPLINES**:

Pacific YM (1985) and **North Pacific** (1993) include the query: "Is the vocal ministry exercised under the divine leading of the Holy Spirit without pre-arrangement and in the simplicity and sincerity of truth?"

NYYM (1998) asks: "Are we careful that our ministry is under the leading of the Holy Spirit?" Direction is also offered: "Friends are advised to observe our Christian testimony for a faithful ministry of the gospel under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Members are reminded that all have a responsibility in ministry."

A very similar query was among the queries adopted jointly for use by the Hicksite and Orthodox YM's of **Philadelphia** in 1948 but was dropped from the 1997 revision. This same query was strengthened in the last completed **New England's** discipline. **Britain YM** does not appear to address the issue directly in its discipline.

Although **Ohio YM** still has committees of ministers & elders, its 1992 discipline no longer has specific queries for ministers & elders. Ohio's general queries do not really address the quality of vocal ministry directly. The following instruction is provided, however, in the section on Meeting for Worship: "Though the nearness to God may result in spoken ministry or vocal prayer, the distinctive excellence of heavenly favor consists in the direct communication with the Heavenly Father by the inward revelation of the Spirit of Christ." The same message is reinforced later: "Vocal service in such a meeting, whether prayer or exhortation or teaching, should be uttered under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit." (collected by Peter Blood-Patterson, September 2000)