The Quaker Condition

The Quaker Condition:
The Sociology of a Liberal Religion

Edited by

Pink Dandelion and Peter Collins

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FOREWORD

This book explores many themes, but the most important is also one of the most basic: what is it to be a Quaker? In addressing this question, contributors also shed light on a more fundamental issue: what is religion, and what is it to be religious?

There is a long tradition of thought in the West which assumes that religion is primarily a matter of belief. The idea that being religious means 'believing twelve impossible things before breakfast' dies hard. We see its continuing force in the 'new atheism' of writers like Richard Dawkins, for whom religion is primarily a set of false propositions which must be replaced by the true belief of science. Its influence also continues to be felt in the academy, including in the Sociology of Religion. Two of the latter's most popular tools, the survey and the questionnaire-based interview, have a tendency to focus on matters of belief, and 'rationalist' approaches to religious secularisation focus on changing beliefs as the chief cause of religious decline.

This book shows that for Quakers, belief is relatively inconsequential. Different Quakers believe a whole host of very different things before breakfast, and the attempt to find some essence of Quakerism in a set of shared beliefs is doomed from the start. In searching for what it is which holds the group together and distinguishes it, a number of contributors point not to beliefs but to shared practices, including the central act of 'silent' worship, and a lifestyle based around 'plaining'. The idea that there is a distinctive Quaker *habitus* is aired, as is the finding that bonds of intimate community have a particular centrality for young Quakers. Such embodied social practices, it is suggested, help constitute the 'heterotopic' Quaker space.

The idea that religions offer a 'heterotopia' or, more simply, a social space in which it is possible to maintain a different form of social and individual existence than is possible outside it, is a vital insight. Taken together, the contributions to this book start to fill in the picture of what that existence involves. The overall impression is that it has a good deal to do with the maintenance of egalitarian relations of equal respect in which distinctions which might be important outside the group are downplayed or eliminated. Relatedly, it has to do with the creation of a peaceable community in which forms of domination are shunned in favour of

collectivism. For Quakers, their heterotopia is a space which *goes beyond* everyday existence in terms of its truth and goodness, and which serves to resource and orient members when they re-enter non-utopian spheres of existence.

This gives us a useful clue about the nature of religion more generally. To define it solely in terms of beliefs – or even practices – concerning supernatural beings clearly will not do. Religion has more to do with creating alternative social worlds which transcend existing social worlds. As such, religions make it possible to live a different life than would otherwise be possible – and they may serve as force-frames for social change. Even the most Durkheimian sort of religion which throws a sacred canopy over existing social structures must have *some* element of transcendence, some sense that more is possible or desirable than has yet been achieved.

By developing this understanding of religion, *A Quaker Condition* shows that part of the task of the sociologist of religion is to identify what is distinctive about a particular heterotopia. It instructs us that this usually has less to do with belief than with what can be called an ethos, ordering, orientation or condition. Important though beliefs and practices are, they do not exhaust a religious order. Every dimension of religion points to, and helps establish, its distinctive heterotopia – whether rituals, doctrines, ethical injunctions, stories, emotions, use of space, distinctive social relations, symbols and symbolic objects, or dress and comportment – and the combinations will be different in different religions. (It is because each element of a religion participates in and contributes to its distinctive ontology that it is possible to remark of even, say, a hat or a car that it is 'very Quaker' or 'not very Quaker'.)

The Sociology of Religion is currently in an exciting phase, because it is broadening the way it thinks about religion. This book contributes to this task by drawing attention to many previously neglected dimensions of religion, and showing how they work together to create a distinctive alternate ordering.

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INTRODUCTION

PINK DANDELION AND PETER COLLINS

This book focuses primarily on what we have termed the 'Quaker Condition'. It looks sociologically at the condition of present-day British Quakerism. 'Condition' is also a Quaker term for a personal or collective spiritual state and the title plays on this insider use of the term - the early Friends, as Quakers are also called, used the term 'condition' to refer to their inward spiritual state: for George Fox, 'Christ Jesus' spoke to his 'condition' (Nickalls 1952, 11) Finally, 'condition' can be understood as the conditional, the condition regarding what makes a social dynamic a Quaker one.

This original and innovative collection contributes to several different, though obviously connected, fields within the study of religion. It operates on five levels. In the first place, the volume is the first to represent, substantially, the contribution of social science to the study of Quakerism and should therefore provide useful comparative material for those whose focus is on other faith groups. Second , the book focuses largely on British Quakerism and so enriches the pool of resources relating to the sociology of British religion and British culture more generally. Third , there are very few sociological volumes dedicated to the analysis of a single faith group (Barker 1984, Beckford 1978, Wallis 1976, Walliss 2002). Fourth, the book represents an in-depth study of a liberal faith group, when liberal religion is the focus of much scholarly debate at present particularly with reference to the secularisation thesis. The study of British Quakerism is especially fascinating in this regard, given how the group can be described almost as hyper- or ultra-liberal, prefiguring many of the developments which may overtake currently more conservative groups. Fifth, the volume has a unique trajectory which is of great interest to all those concerned with the methodology of the social sciences. In this case, the authors met twice early on in the project in order to identify and discuss, in considerable depth, issues which are salient to the sociology of Quakerism. Abstracts were then written and circulated around the group. Our aim was to write with each of the other papers in mind in order to produce a meaningful dialogue, rarely captured in edited volumes. That dialogue

(which involved lengthy consideration of obvious connections and compelling juxtapositions) was furthered by a third meeting of contributors where draft papers were presented and discussed at some length. Following that meeting, final drafts were collated and an introduction to the project written by Peter Collins and Pink Dandelion. This culminates in a book far more interwoven and layered than a typical 'edited collection.'

Quakerism in Britain

Quakerism began as a movement in Britain in the early 1650s and the Quakers were the most successful sect of republican rule. The first Quakers saw themselves as co-agents with God and confidently predicted the unfolding endtimes (Dandelion 2005). They were radical in a number of ways. They believed in the universal possibility of an inward, immediate, transformative, and ongoing encounter with God and gave this form of revelation higher authority than Scripture. Quaker worship reflected the need they felt to move away from outward forms towards the inward and was based in silence. Everyone, importantly for the time including women, was spiritually equal and anyone might 'minister' as part of worship, if led to by God. Whilst worship has got shorter by about half an hour a century, this has remained the basis for Quaker worship in Britain for over 350 years.

Out of their experience of *encounter* with God and divine revelation emerged a series of 'peculiarities' performed in everyday life. Most visible was plain dress, the adoption of plain clothing without embellishment, conveyed to most of us today through a porridge packet. Quakers also adopted 'plain speech', using only 'thee' and 'thou' to everyone instead of the deferential form 'you' to social superiors. They levelled all of society down before God. They refused to take their hats off to anyone except when in prayer, that is before God, and eschewed small talk for fear of its carnality and worldliness (Bauman 1973).

Over the centuries, British Quakerism adapted to new social and theological contexts. In the 1660s, Quakers talked less of the endtimes and in the eighteenth century focused more on 'peculiarity'. With the second and third generations, many waiting for their personal transformation experience, what had been consequences for an earlier generation became rules. Dress, speech, lifestyle all became codified and enforced. The rule of endogamy (only marrying other Members) was a particular cause of disownment and the loss of thousands of Members (Marietta 1984). During the mid-nineteenth century, British Quakerism became

predominantly evangelical, saw itself for the first time as *part* of the true (Christian) church rather than the true church itself and relaxed its rules about marriage, dress, and speech. Numbers again rose. Lowering the 'hedge' however, also allowed modern ideas about religion into the Society[1] and by 1900, Quakerism had been re-visioned by its younger adherents as part of liberal Christianity. It was also redesigned as again distinctively Quaker: Experience was primary. Liberal Friends did not want to return to the earlier days and they envisioned a Quakerism relevant to the age, open to new ideas, and one which held to the idea of progressive revelation, that God necessarily revealed more over time. This is the basis of the Quakerism explored in this book. It is a Quakerism built upon the rational basis of liberal religion, permissive and fluid about doctrine, but still clearly identified as Quaker, through its use of traditional worship forms and insider language.

The Sociology of British Quakerism

Quaker studies as an organised field of academic study is a phenomenon of the last ten to fifteen years. Much of the work is within Quaker studies is historical (eg Kennedy 2001, Moore 2000), and in literary studies (Gill 2005, Hinds 1996, Hobby 1989, Peters 2005) contributing in a significant way to the study of the seventeenth century and in particular to gendered readings of the seventeenth century context and the onset or modernity (Trevett 2000, Mack 1992, Tarter 2001). Quaker studies too is sometimes theological or theo-historical (Bailey 1992, Davie 1997, Gwyn 1995, Spencer 2007). What this volume represents however is the important growth of the sociological within this area of academic study. In particular it reflects a significant focus on the sociology of British Quakerism, born partly out of the location of academic centres specialising in Quaker studies in two British universities (Birmingham and Sunderland). Nevertheless, the findings presented here offer both an indication of the condition of Liberal Quakerism elsewhere in the world, and set a research agenda for those studying Quakerism outside of Britain.

Three doctoral theses presented in the 1990s underpin this new interest in the sociological and anthropological aspects of Quakerism, those of Dandelion (1993), Collins (1994), and Plüss (1995). Working largely unbeknownst to each other, all three worked on areas of Quaker identity. Pink Dandelion explored patterns of believing in Britain Yearly Meeting.[2] He found that belief was both diverse (he argues British Quakers are best described as post-Christian) and marginal. Belief was not central to the creation of Quaker identity. Rather, the way in which

Quakers were Quakers, such as the way they worship, creates coherence within the group and maintains unity and identity. Dandelion calls this twin operation of a 'liberal belief culture' and a conservative and conformist 'behavioural creed' a 'Quaker double-culture'. Conservatism around form counterbalances the permissiveness around belief.

Peter Collins carried out an ethnographic study of a single Quaker Meeting. Although he subjected various aspects of the Meeting to anthropological analysis (the uses of gossip and scandal, ritual, the relationship between 'insider' and 'outsiders' he became increasingly interested in the means by which the continued existence of the Meeting was sustained. After a number of less than successful attempts to model the Meeting in various ways he eventually came to see the significance of stories and story-telling. He concluded that it was through the spinning of narrative threads that the Meeting maintained both its existence and its identity. These narratives, he argued, were of three orders: the individual, the vernacular and the canonical, reflecting the existence of various horizons of legitimacy. In later papers (1996b, 2001), Collins developed the concept of plaining – the active process which, he believes, is central to the generation of Quaker identity. Plaining, in Collins' terms, is both critical aesthetic *and* ethic.

Caroline Plüss looked in particular at theological debate within the group, advanced by two interest groups[3] within the wider body, between a view of Quakerism as necessarily Christian and a view that Quakerism was essentially 'universalist', ie that it could accommodate many different faith perspectives. She explored how unity was maintained within a group that claims to seek God's will without any paid clergy or fixed hierarchy and coined the term 'collective epistemology' to reflect how corporate insight was given greater authority over individual viewpoints. Indeed, her work shows how the idea that God's will is found in unity amongst the group both creates an ideal of agreement and casts disagreement into a lower or even secular epistemological basis. In other words, if the Meeting is not in agreement, nobody can claim the ultimate authority of having found God's will. Unity is thus generated by a deference to unity itself.

Since these theses, and the publication of Dandelion's in book form in 1996, these authors and others have worked further to explore the consequences of some of their findings. Dandelion has worked with Roger Homan on two methodological papers on the difficulty of asking Quakers survey questions about theological topics as their hesitation about theological language translates into a pedantry about theological terms used for such surveys (Dandelion and Homan 1995; Homan and Dandelion 1997). He has also conducted work on patterns of resignation

within British Quakerism (2002). Dandelion has also produced socio-theological/historical work looking at the sociological trajectories over time of the modification of theological ideas about the endtimes (2005). One book chapter concluded that Quaker theology has become ahistorical and atemporal and driven by ethics, rather than theology (2001). This is not a theme he has taken up elsewhere although it is one which emerges in this volume (see chapters by Chambers, Scully and Best).

With specific reference to ethics, Scully first developed the model of the collage approach to making moral evaluations based on empirical work among British Quakers. She further developed this line of inquiry in a chapter on the 'secular ethics' of Liberal Quakers, which related Quaker practices of discernment to discourse ethics, concluding that Liberal Quakerism uses collective procedures of decision making that are recognisable within the formats of contemporary secular ethics (Scully 2007).

Peter Collins has continued to explore several of the themes first developed in his thesis. Apart from publishing a number of papers developing his understanding of the narrative character of the Quaker Meeting and on Quaker plainstyle, he has continued to write on ritual and symbolic aspects of Quaker worship, and on the potential value of Bourdieu's work in understanding the Quaker habitus. With Simon Coleman (a fellow anthropologist) he has been engaged in an ongoing comparative study involving Quakers and Charismatic Christians (Coleman and Collins 2000, 2006).

Collins and Dandelion also worked together on a book chapter (2006) picking up on Joy Hendry's insights on the Japanese practice of 'wrapping' (1995). Hendry, in her anthropological work in Japan noted how the everyday is wrapped, often serially, depending on its status and value. However, gifts for the Gods are unwrapped. Collins and Dandelion demonstrated how the most 'open' church rites, such as the 'free ministry' of Quaker Meeting, were, in contra-distinction to the Japanese practice, heavily wrapped. Quaker silence and the vocal 'ministry' which arises out of it, seemingly an open liturgy, is constrained and bound by a whole series of rules particularly about how often and in what way silence can be disturbed.

Plüss has recently looked at patterns of socialisation within non-doctrinal groups, using British Quakerism as a case study (2007). She shows how cognition is not a significant factor in socialisation but that affective and experiential components serve to strengthen novices' identification with institutional practice. However, most of her work now lies outside Quaker studies.

Gay Pilgrim has had two chapters published on her use of heterotopia as a sociological determinate and means of creating identity within Quakerism. Pilgrim uses this impulse to create an out-of-place juxtaposition as a key way of understanding early Friends' counter-cultural behaviour and the way they turned the everyday into a religious opportunity, eg a courtroom into a pulpit (similar to Collins' idea of 'playing the vis-à-vis' – 1994). Pilgrim argues that as Quaker insights have become more and more co-opted by mainstream ideology, the Quaker heterotopic impulse has become turned inward. The kinds of groups that Caroline Plüss investigated can be seen to represents the outcome of this internalised desire to create difference and juxtaposition. Circumventing 'collective epistemology' and the idealisation of unity, Pilgrim argues that Quakerism consists of sub-cultures that now operate by different personal and theological motivations. Thus, the generation of unity through the idealisation of unity is, Pilgrim argues, no longer a value shared by all British Quakers.

Statistical work by Bill Chadkirk, Charles Stroud and Pink Dandelion, has looked at both rates of decline of membership and how British Quakerism may disappear by 2032 at present rates. Work by Mark Cary and Anita Weber (2007), and Mark Cary and Pink Dandelion (2007), has taken survey results and, through latent class analysis, has attempted to see to what extent different composite Quaker identities emerge. Within their British sample, based on the rigorous but alas, unpublished work of Rosie Rutherford (2003), Cary and Dandelion found three kinds of Quakers: they termed these 1) 'Christian Quakers' (27%), who hold a traditional Christian theology 2) 'secularised Quakers' (37%), who do not consider themselves atheists, but whose conception of God is not personal, and 3) 'Inner Light Quakers' (36%), who emphasise the inner light and 'that of God in everyone.' Little else has been published to date within the sociology of Quakerism.

Contents

The book is divided into four main sections of three chapters each: Identity; Belief and Values; Meeting Culture; Diverse Forms. However, as we have already indicated, the chapters can also be understood as a part of a complex and ongoing dialogue. We return to the dynamics between the chapters and the issues they raise at the end of this introduction.

A. Identity

This section is comprised of the theories, already outlined above, of Dandelion, Collins, and Pilgrim, whilst including their more recent insights.

In his 'The Creation of Coherence', Dandelion revisits the work mentioned above on the pattern of Quaker believing in Britain Yearly Meeting and the two phenomena he identified, that of post-Christianity but also that of the marginalisation of belief and the centrality of form. Under the 'mask' of the 'culture of silence' (the devaluation of language, the value of silence, and the consequent rules governing the breaking of silence with speech, or the 'wrapping' of rite), British Quakerism shifted its popular theology from a Quaker-Christian one to a post-Christian one. At the same time, the caution given words and the philosophical caution towards theology as a sufficient description of experience, had led to a marginalisation of theology and a permissive attitude to believing, a 'liberal belief culture.' Rather the group is held together by a conformist and conservative 'behavioural creed'. Adherence to form provides unity, undermined only by the possibility of the heterodoxy becoming so diverse as to undermine the basic tenets of part of the behavioural creed. Dandelion here identifies a further boundary function in the recent prescription of seeking, an attitude of 'absolute perhaps' towards theology whereby rationally, from outside the religious enterprise, Quakers know they can only be uncertain about their interpretation of experience within the religious quest. Quakers are thus less permissive than they first appear in terms of believing although the content remains individuated.

Peter Collins argues in his chapter, 'The Problem of Quaker identity' that the issue of Quaker identity is problematic in two senses. On the one hand it would appear to be a problem, a practical problem one might say, for Quakers themselves. Indeed, Quakers seem often to see the problem as a solution or in any case as a cause for celebration. It is a celebration with distinctly post-modern overtones in that a creedless Quakerism allows considerable scope for variation in belief and practice. With its explicit avoval of the importance of individuality, Quakerism would seem to be a religion for today. Quaker identity is, furthermore, sociologically problematic. Given that the Religious Society of Friends has sustained its identity for 350 years, how has this been possible? How can a voluntary organisation, like the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) sustain a coherent identity without charter or creed - without an overt, unifying ideology? One possible answer, suggested by Dandelion, is the existence of a behavioural creed. In other words, Quakers are Quakers by virtue of *doing* rather than *believing* the same thing. Although an interesting

hypothesis, it does not entirely convince. Empirical research (including that carried out by Dandelion himself) indicates that although Quakers (during Meeting for Worship) appear to be doing the same thing, they are not and are often aware that this is the case. The central problem remains, then: how is Quaker identity sustained? Collins' response to this question draws on three concepts: *narrative, plaining* and *habitus*.

In 'British Quakerism as Heterotopic', Gay Pilgrim suggests that Foucault's concept of heterotopia, as developed by Kevin Hetherington (1996), names a continuing thread which links the first Quakers (who emerged in the mid-17th century) with those in Britain today. The diversity of belief amongst Friends today no longer supports the original religious basis for their utopian vision which resulted in their heterotopic stance, and which provided early Friends with their identity and unity. The chapter goes on to argue that, instead of an overarching belief, it is the sense of being 'other' and living out an 'alternate ordering' that is one of the key ways in which 21st century Friends obtain a sense of identity and unity.

B. Belief and Values

This section looks at the theological suppositions of sociologists of Quakerism, and offers two approaches to the examination of Quaker values and moral-decision-making.

In the 1990s, work by Dandelion suggested British Quakerism could only be accurately described as post-Christian. This was based in part on a large-scale survey of 32 Quaker Meetings. In 2003, Rosie Rutherford carried out longitudinal research using some of the same questions as Dandelion but adding new ones. Kate Mellor, in her chapter, 'The Question of Christianity', outlines the key findings on patterns of believing within a group in which explicit corporate theology is marginalised whilst personally extremely important. Mellor challenges the findings of Dandelion and Rutherford and raises methodological questions as well as ones about regionalism within British Quakerism. The chapter concludes with a discussion on how Quakers define Christianity and how Christian they can claim to be.

There has been little research into the workings of the testimonies in the model of Quaker double-culture advanced by Dandelion. Within this paradigm, Quakers hold a liberal outlook in matters of belief and doctrine, but are conservative in matters of form. The testimonies have elements of both. Helena Chambers' chapter, 'Quakers, Drugs, and Gambling: testimony as values that bind' is based on research which examined

Friends' attitudes and behaviours in relation to the testimonies on gambling and substance use. Previous research into other religions and denominations has suggested that the stronger the prohibition against a particular behaviour, the less it is likely to occur in adherents – particularly if they are strongly engaged. However, there are different views about whether this is the result of increased conformity alone, or whether those who undertake these behaviours within a strongly proscriptive sect are more likely to leave the group because of high levels of cognitive dissonance. The results of Chambers' study validate the importance of the level of prohibition: the strength of the testimony on gambling is reflected in high abstinence rates amongst the Quakers in the study, while the use of substances shows a broader spectrum of behaviour, reflecting the less stringent standard of 'moderation.' However, the study also discovered that behavioural non-adherence to testimony was not explicable solely by disengagement or deviance models - and that behavioural adherence was similarly nuanced. The findings led to the development of a new paradigm that is located within the over-arching model of Quaker double-culture. Chambers suggests that three major elements combine to enable Quakerism to offer a hybrid pattern in which abstinence from gambling and low use of substances are fostered, but behaviours outside these denominational norms can be accommodated without a weakening of the religious standard embodied in these testimonies. The three elements are, first, the Quaker liberal belief culture (with its emphasis on the importance of the individual spiritual path rather than doctrine or outward behavioural adherence). Secondly, key Quaker values (particularly 'that of God in everyone' and 'as long as thou canst'), which enable a valuing of, and a non-judgemental approach to all regardless of behaviour. Finally, an approach to moral reasoning that Jackie Leach Scully has defined as 'collage' (flexible, context-led moral reasoning, with a tendency towards virtue ethics that emphasise the intention of the individual). It is suggested that this combination results in a sense of inclusivity that enables Quakers of all behaviours regarding substance use and gambling to remain engaged without unacceptable levels of cognitive dissonance – and, often (including in the case of younger Friends), to modify their behaviour over time. The form and content of the testimonies, however, positively reinforce the Quaker religious standard amongst the majority, and 'recruit' adherents with a similar outlook.

The current British Quaker condition is distinguished by, among other things, the authority given to personal experience of the Light, and a preference for defining oneself as a Quaker in terms of acts and behaviour rather than statements of belief. This is, however, in accordance with a

model that sees behaviour as the outward expression of an inner orientation to God, so what Friends do becomes their testimony of faith. This connects ethical behaviour with religious identity in an extraordinarily direct way. Other Christian denominations of course see ethical behaviour as an important element of the Christian life, but the theological organisation is such that the moral life can be considered distinct from a person's belief. This is simply not the case for any Friend making the claim to be a 'good Quaker' in any sense of the term. In Jackie Leach Scully's chapter, 'Virtuous Friends: the Quaker approach to moral identity', Scully draws on the 'collage' model of Quaker approaches to ethical evaluation which she first outlined in *Quaker Approaches to Moral Issues in Genetics* (2002), and compares this with contemporary theories of development and identity in moral psychology, to consider how Quakers use their ethical procedures and practices to define themselves as Friends, to themselves and other Quakers as well as the world outside the Society.

C. Meeting Culture

This section looks at how Quakers face challenges arising out of the tension between the ideal and real not only in their Meetings but also in their everyday lives. In 'Congregational Culture and Variations in Gospel Order', Derrick Whitehouse suggests that the Quaker term 'gospel order' can also be used by sociologists of Quakerism to refer to the aspirational ideal of local Quaker Meetings. His study of nineteen local Meetings revealed huge variation in how far this ideal is manifest. Variations in congregational culture can be usefully analysed around three primary elements: the *worship life of the group*, the *degree of community realised within the group*, and its *social witness*.Whitehouse goes on to argue that the existence of these braided and inter-related elements is dependent on four further supporting elements: *functional participation, cultural architects, management style* and *resource availability* plus an overarching directional element, the *transforming trend*. Descriptive values are assigned, as 'functional styles', to each of the eight elements listed above, which when applied to a Quaker congregation articulate a unique 'cultural profile' that points towards the cultural character and quality of 'gospel order' in a specific Meeting.

Susan Robson's chapter looks at the dissonance of conflict within Quaker Meetings, whose testimony against war, and latterly for peace, has led to a self-image of a peaceable community. As she suggests in her chapter, 'Grasping the Nettle: Conflict and the Quaker Condition',

conflicts that arise between Friends within Meeting are unexpected, even shocking: harmony is privileged above justice. In the community narrative, commitment to 'mend the world' is undoubted, but Robson argues from her interview data, that Friends respond to conflict within their own community with aversion. The result is that disputes between Friends remain largely unarticulated while the 'theory in use' is 'don't ask, don't tell, don't even think about it'. Quaker identity *as ideal* is cherished and challenges to it provide the rationale for intractable conflict sagas. The hesitation Robson sees as implicit in Dandelion's idea of the 'absolute perhaps' is visible in unwillingness to appear authoritative about tackling conflict. A different account is reported from Ireland Yearly Meeting where Quakers appear to be able to grasp the nettle of conflict and remain friends.

In, 'The Temporal Collage: how British Quakers make choices about time', Judy Frith introduces the concept of the 'temporal collage' as a descriptive tool for the compiled, interwoven elements of an individual's time that accommodates the complexities and paradoxes brought about by choice. It is pertinent to understand how British Quakers make choices about time when the Society is suffering (as indeed are many British churches) a decline in membership and a resulting reduction in the number of volunteers. This is critical since Friends have no paid clergy it relies heavily on time given voluntarily as service. The paper draws upon Scully's (2002, 212 and this volume) use of 'collage' to describe how Friends make ethical choices as there are similarities in the ways in which Friends make choices about time. For instance, individual collages are creatively compiled, but need not share a common language, and the outcome of choice is not always predictable. In her Quaker case study, the collage is built in three layers. The first is a foundation layer, taken here to be Friends' spirituality, because despite spending the greater part of their lives in the secular world, Friends who took part in the interviews and group work consistently declined to distinguish any part of their life as free from the spiritual. The second layer is built with the practical aspects of life including work, relationships, service and volunteering. Finally, there is an overlaying mesh of time spent in the networked Quaker community where the time Friends give builds the Society's social capital and where individuals develop their spiritual life, friendships and learning. Time is taken to be polychronic rather than linear in order to accommodate the varied qualities given in Friends' descriptions. Linear time is the time of clocks, calendars, and diaries, with specific beginnings and ends, but polychronic time is heterogeneous. By describing time as polychronic, its paradoxes, cycles, juxtapositions and interconnections and linear aspects

can all be included in the collage and thus include the contradictions about time that individual's face.

D. Diverse Forms

This section looks at three examples of groups that exist within the larger national body of British Quakers but who operate alternative expressions of form and belief. All three operate as communities within the broader community with a clear sense of strong self-identity. They rest part of this identity on a 'culture of contribution' rather than the 'culture of silence' posited by Dandelion in his study of the larger group and, as such, their study points to a new and rich research agenda.

Giselle Vincett in 'Quagans in Contemporary British Quakerism' draws upon semi- structured interviews with four Quaker women, all of whom also identify as pagan. All the women were long-term Quakers (though none were raised in the tradition) and all emphasised that their paganism was in no way a rejection of Quakerism. Vincett introduces the term *Quagan* to refer to individuals who fuse Quakerism with neo-paganism. For these individuals Quakerism is not necessarily Christian, but is based upon '*how* you are, rather than what you believe'. Quakerism for these women, argues Vincett, becomes a way of life, a spirituality rooted in praxis, where praxis includes: ritual (both Quaker and pagan); spiritual experience; and forms of relating to others and the world (social and eco- justice actions, pastoral work, writing). Quakerism is supplemented with images, ritual and new forms of the divine. As one participant told Vincett, '…now I know ways to work with symbols, ritual, even micro-ritual… I have a bigger range than I did when I worked solely with the Friends'. This chapter examines how and where a pagan worldview may merge with Quaker praxis, and where the two spiritualities merge with difficulty.

Simon Best's research into the spiritual beliefs and religious practices of adolescent Quakers reveals that there is great variety of belief and the group does not have a unified theology but rather has a permissive attitude towards believing. However the popular theology can most accurately be described as non-Christian. For Best, adolescent Quakerism represents a 'Community of Intimacy', a collective grouping which places emphasis on inter-personal networks secured by friendships and the difference and separateness of the group both from other Quakers and from other young people. He uses the term 'Community of Intimacy' refers to both the visible community, as expressed in the separate space occupied by adolescent Quakers during 'Quaker-time' (the time Quakers are publicly

Quaker, for example at Quaker events) and to the variable, networked community of friendships between adolescents that exists beyond and between 'Quaker-time' gatherings. The 'Community of Intimacy' is central in terms of forming Quaker identity, provides the group with unity and is strictly bounded in terms of behaviour. Best explains that individuals' involvement in, and belonging to, the 'Community of Intimacy' is secured through networks of friendships and relationships based upon participation in a range of Quaker activities. Increased involvement and participation in events means that individuals are likely to be more closely integrated into the 'Community of Intimacy', to affiliate themselves with an exclusively adolescent Quaker group, and to identify their closest friendships as being with other adolescent Quakers. Best argues that these networks simultaneously separate adolescent Quakers and mark them as different. Communal worship with other adolescents, whether programmed or unprogrammed, imbues individuals with a heightened and passionate sense of their participation in the collective and is a significant factor in the formation and maintenance of the 'Community of Intimacy'.

Helen Meads argues that the 'Experiment with Light' initiative represents a radical spiritual wing of British Quakerism. Experiment with Light is based on the steps which led Seventeenth Century Quakers to their 'convincement' or encounter with God and the resulting dramatic changes in their lives. Experimenters do not, however, specifically seek 'convincement', because they do not want to assume that God will come when called. The Experiment is usually undertaken in 'Light groups' based in Quaker Meetings, although some Experimenters do practise individually. It consists of a forty minute meditation, consisting of six steps interspersed with periods of silence. Usually, but not always, the meditation is followed by silence for individual personal reflection. Finally, participants share what has come up for them. Experiment with Light represents the radical spiritual wing of British Quakerism and as such is not thriving. It is radical in that its aim is to lead participants (Experimenters) to 'Truth' and 'right relationship with God'. Meads found that Experimenters' experience in following the programme was often uncomfortable. Experimenters share intimate details of their lives and experience and this binds them together closely into local Communities of Intimacy (following Best), but not necessarily into their Meeting's formal structure. The dissemination of Experiment with Light has not been approved by any formally constituted business Meeting within Britain Yearly Meeting and often Light groups are established without using local Meetings' business process. Meads believes that the programme is not

thriving partly because it is not supported by central administration and partly because of the antipathy of many participants towards formalizing its organisation. Furthermore, there is no structured accountability inherent in the programme, so that it does not properly comply with British Quakers' behavioural creed whose implicit behavioural conservatism opposes its radicality. The result, according to Meads, is a programme that is neither legitimated nor supported by the wider community of British Quakers.

Ongoing Debates

These chapters do not present a unified view of some unified and homogeneous whole. As stated above, the authors have met on three occasions and all presented their papers at the 2007 Quaker Studies Research Association conference. This enabled us to see both unity and diversity in what we have written. We have made the important dimensions of agreement and disagreement explicit in each chapter. The process of reading and writing, talking and listening has proved to be a thoroughly rewarding experience for all concerned.

For example, the first three chapters on the creation of Quaker identity fall into two camps initially, those (Collins and Pilgrim) who find sociological continuity running across time and into the present forms of British Quakerism, (whether it be the impulse to plain, to generate narratives or to create heterotopia), and Dandelion who represents modern British Quakerism as significantly discrete in terms of the tradition and operating its own sociological dynamics. At the end of her chapter, Pilgrim begins to conclude that perhaps her own theory is best used as an historical tool and that the presentday situation may indeed be deviant in relation to what has passed before.

The second main debate arising out of the scholarship presented here is the use of Dandelion's idea of 'double-culture', the liberal approach to believing and the conservative and conformist attitude towards form. This was originally used to define ways in which faith transmission differed in different aspects of Quakerism but has proved useful in analysing patterns of leadership and authority within 'Quaker-time', attitudes to the testimony, patterns of resignation (2002), and in the way the group adapts over time easily in terms of belief and slowly in terms of form (2005). Authors here, notably Chambers and Scully, use this model to take their work on locating values within Quaker faith transmission, further, whilst Best claims the double-culture does not fit the data from his study of adolescent Quakers. For his Quakers, a triple-culture, formed by ritual (the

culture of contribution), the networked community and narrative and behaviour, better describes the elements of transmission.

Several of the papers in this collection suggest that narrative plays a significant role in the construction of Quaker identities. Collins has argued consistently since 1994 that it is the stories that Friends tell, particularly in and around Meeting, that bind them together. Best's innovative research among Quaker adolescents tends to support this claim, as does the work of Helen Meads and Giselle Vincett. All of the 'diverse forms' strongly emphasise a shared narrative within their communities. Susan Robson's work is based on the narratives of conflict avoidance and Judy Frith's work on Quakers and time articulates the close relationship between choices over time and narrative about time.

Kate Mellor raises significant questions about the validity of statistics used to demonstrate the theological direction of Quakerism which itself underpins the robustness of theoretical tools such as 'the double-culture' or heterotopia. Her survey work points to wider questions about sampling, survey design, and survey reliability. The gulf between her figures for Quakers who call themselves Christian and particularly those of the contemporaneous survey of Rutherford requires further investigation, preferably before the next longitudinal survey in the Dandelion/ Rutherford series in 2012. It also calls into focus what the meaning of 'Christian' is for those who have answered the surveys.

Helen Meads' work offers insights into why groups may appear to challenge the status quo and in what ways dissonance is minimalised (See also Kline 2002 and Plüss 1995) and heightened. This could be usefully applied to other groupings within British Quakerism. In particular, if they are not physically and psychologically separated from the rest of Quakerism, as Best suggests of his adolescent sample, how much more likely is conflict? And following Robson, what is then done about that? Is conflict avoidance an alternative version of Dandelion's 'culture of silence' (Dandelion 1996, Chapter Six)?

Liberal Religion

Quakers, as stated above, are fascinating sociologically. They are doctrinally diffuse and denominational in such aspects, whilst sectarian in the way they place demands on participants (see Dandelion and Frith's chapters) and in the way, if Dandelion is correct, they demand (whatever) beliefs to be held by participants in a certain way. They are in some ways unusually liberal, in others clearly part of traditional, modern organised religion. This dichotomy connects with existing scholarship in two ways.

As an especially Liberal group (Dandelion has called them liberal-Liberal – see 2004a), Quakers fall within the sociological predictions surrounding liberal religious groups. Steve Bruce, for example, has predicted the end of Methodism by 2031 and Anglicanism in Britain by 2058 at present rates of decline (Bruce 2003, 61). As above, Chadkirk (2005), and Stroud and Dandelion (2005) have given British Quakerism a terminal date of 2032. Paul Burton has challenged these figures claiming decline is regional and urban (2006). In the wider sociology of religion, Garnett *et al* have challenged the generational accounts that have claimed that something dramatic has taken place within the history of secularisation within the last forty years (Brown, 2001; Bruce and Glendinning 2003; Voas and Crockett 2005). For Garnett *et al*, they are more interested in chains of transmission, the cultivation of fresh religious language, and less linear patterns of inter-generational change (2007, 12). Simon Best's work is especially pertinent here concentrating as it does on the creation by adolescent Quakers of a form of spirituality constructed along very different lines from the 'parent' organisation. Quagans (Vincett) and Experimenters (Meads) also offer diverse expressions that may point to future forms of Quakerism that stem decline. As a seedbed for new forms of expression, the group without any fixed hierarchy and without permissiveness around belief, may also find new recruits from those attracted to the 'holistic milieu' identified by Heelas and Woodhead in their 'Kendal study' (Heelas *et al* 2005). They positioned their Quaker sample as a congregation of 'experiential humanity', on the edge of religion, with its transcendent reference point (as they defined religion) and the holistic milieu, with its subjective reference point. In Pilgrim's terms, syncretists are emphasising the subjective value of attendance. Faced with similar membership figures (about 15,000) in 1859, British Quakers abolished endogamy. There is no equivalent structural solution this time but new forms may be one solution to prolong longevity.

Another possibility is that Quakers appear more 'serious' to those who enquire. Studies of affiliation and switching (Kelley 1972; Bibby and Brinkerhoff 1973, 1983, Perrin and Mauss 1991) show that seriousness is a compelling factor to those joining or switching. Their new spiritual home appears more serious about what it does than its old one. For the agnostics attracted to Quakerism, an organised framework for the possibility of religious doubt appears more serious than wholly domestic uncertainty. Heron has showed that 47% of newcomers to Quakerism come from no immediately prior religious affiliation (1992, 13). However, following Dandelion, if orthocredence was adopted as an explicit element of Quaker identity, the Liberal group would present as less permissive and more

serious and may attract those switching from other churches. Within Bruce's analysis it is diffuse belief transmission which aids numerical decline (Bruce 2003). Dandelion has challenged Bruce elsewhere about how groups which appear liberal, such as the Quakers, may indeed be implicitly sectarian (given in this case the behavioural creed and the 'absolute perhaps' (2004b). If each denomination made its implicit seriousness explicit, Liberal religious groups might at least slow their rate of decline.

It is an equally fascinating question to ask how many other radical sects internalised a heterotopic impulse as they denominationalised. Can 'plaining' be identified as central to identity-generation in other radical sects such as the Strict and Particular Baptists? Does Robson's theory of conflict aversion apply equally to Mennonites and Brethren, the other historic peace churches?

What remains to be done? Perhaps there needs now to be a more explicit engagement of sociologists of Quakerism with some of the larger themes which have emerged in the broader sociology of religion during the last two decades. For example, although Collins has published papers on the historical context of Quaker plainstyle and plaining, and Walvin's The *Quakers: money and morals* (1997) touches on the subject, there has been very little work done on the relationship between Quakerism and modernity. Apart from the logging of decline in numbers mentioned above, there has been little systematic work carried out on Quakerism and its place within the 'secularization thesis' represented recently by Grace Davie (1994), Steve Bruce (1999, 2003) and others. While several attempts have been made to interpret the significance of the silence that best characterises Quaker worship (Bauman 1983, Bell and Collins 1998, Dandelion 2005), less has been written about the stillness of participants. Again, Collins' engagement with the work of Bourdieu (1977 in particular) is perhaps the only attempt to interpret Quaker practice (and especially worship) with reference to theories of embodiment. Finally, and although this is implicit in several of the papers in this volume, there has yet to emerge a systematic treatment of contemporary Quakerism as a near relative of some New Religious Movements. After all, Quakerism seems to emphasize individuality, a very loosely knit theology and a collection of testimonies that cover several NRM bases including environmentalism, healing and pacifism. Our feeling is, then, that future work in the social scientific study of Quakerism might engage more energetically with theories, themes and methodologies prevalent in the broader area of the sociology of religion.

Wider Sociological Perspectives

Having suggested, above, that sociologists of Quakerism should perhaps pay greater attention to the developments taking place in the discipline as a whole, we would claim that there are concepts and perspectives presented here which might also be taken up by others in the sub-discipline. Whitehouse's model, drawn partly on the work of Ammerman (1997) and Becker (1999), contributes to the growing field of congregational studies (Guest *et al* 2004) and perhaps also to organization theory. Chambers' work is necessarily useful for anyone looking at religious affiliation and drugs and gambling in demonstrating some of the ways in which psychological processes are linked with group functioning but presents findings of interest to wider sociology. Scully's and Frith's collage models can be applied beyond the sociology of religion. Scully's model of a moral collage may well work in other segments of the populations whilst her virtue ethics model needs to be tested in other religious groups. The study of values and notions of virtue needs to be expanded within Quaker studies, the sociology of religion, and more widely still. Returning to Garnett *et al*, they list 'Virtue' as the third organising element of religious life in contemporary times (Garnett *et al* 2007, 13).

In summary, this volume marks a significant point in the history of the sociology of Quakerism. This is the first book of its kind and is intended to be the beginning, rather than the final word. It adds considerably to the study of Quakerism but also to the study of Liberal religion per se. This volume devoted, as it is, to a single faith group raises many more research questions than it answers in relation not only to Quaker studies but also for those studying other faith groups as well as those engaged with the sociology of religion more generally. Furthermore, the book itself, as an interwoven collection, offers colleagues a more collaborative model of working and one we would recommend. Finally, we feel certain that many of the ideas in this volume have a significant currency in sociology generally, particularly the moral collage and temporal collage. In these, we have analytical tools useful for studying the population at large.

Notes

[1] After 1793, Quakers in Britain became formally known as The Religious Society of Friends.

[2] 'Britain Yearly Meeting' is the term for the national organisation of Quakers in Britain and also for its annual meeting. See the Glossary for a list of Quaker terms.

[3] These were the 'New Foundation Fellowship' and the 'Quaker Universalist Group', both membership organisations existing within the Yearly Meeting.