

**AN EXPLORATION OF COHERENCE, COHESION AND CONFUSION IN  
THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (Quakers) IN BRITAIN**

by

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## ABSTRACT

In spite of initial enthusiastic commitment, members, even after several years' membership, choose to leave The Society. Participation in The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, (The Society), had declined by 31% between 1990 and 2021. To account for that state of affairs I explored those features that might account for a decline in participation. This research suggests The Society's numerical decline and the breakdown of its distinctive theology and ecclesiology are related. A lack of cultural and structural integration within The Society was exacerbated by decisions taken within The Society leading to internal secularisation. Internal secularisation has compromised The Society's distinctive theology and governance (ecclesiology).

The research began as a qualitative research project to identify and theorise about different ways of being Quaker and the attractions of Quakerism. Interviews with 12 members, previously unknown to the researcher, were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The outcome of that analysis was five themed tables in which the interviewees' reflections on their experiences of Quakers and Quakerism were organised. An examination of those tables identified commonalities and differences between interviewees' spiritual and religious experiences and their positive and negative comments on their experience of Quakerism.

Further primary source material for discussing The Society's numerical decline were identified. They included interview data from a study on members' disaffiliation from The Society, statistical data from British Quaker surveys, Quaker studies research and documents produced from within The Society e.g.

dissertations from the Centre for Research in Quaker Studies, governing documents of The Society's charities and *Quaker faith & practice: the book of Christian discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain (QF&P)*.

The research was effected by the creation and application of a critical realist based conceptual framework and model illustrating variables involved in social interactions in a religious denomination. That framework drew on the work of Georg Simmel and Margaret S. Archer. I claim that it may be used for researching the state of other religious denominations and voluntary organisations and is an original contribution to the sociology of religion.

The framework was applied in critical dialogue with Pink Dandelion's theories of a Quaker 'double culture' and of 'internal secularisation'. The analysis led to a clarification of the responses The Society might make to its continuing numerical decline. They involved revisiting the governing documents of The Society's charities and the fundamental elements of being a Quaker as specified in *QF&P*.

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I thank the 16 Friends who kindly gave their time generously in our interviews. The 4 whom I interviewed for the pilot helped me with their constructive feedback. The generosity of the self-disclosure of the 12 whose real names are replaced by fictitious ones in this text, was humbling.

I have appreciated the grant of a David Adshead award which supported my research in the now sadly closed Woodbrooke Quaker Studies Centre Library. Thanks also are due to the University of Birmingham for conference funding and for its library and IT services.

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It is sad that my parents and brother are no longer here to witness the completion of my formal education. My parents' made material sacrifices in their belief in education as the foundation of a decent life for my brother Elliot and myself. Without their support when they were alive I would not have been able to enjoy what are now the best times of my life.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Outline of Chapter 1

1.2 sets the scene and explains the research aim and title.

1.3 outlines the content of each chapter of the thesis.

1.4 is an introduction to the theology and organisation of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain.

1.5 The literature review.

1.6 Chapter summary.

### 1.2 Setting the scene

This research began in 2015. My underlying intention was to identify, account for and compare the attractions of the *Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain*<sup>1</sup> as identified through a number of interviews. I, as a Quaker myself,<sup>2</sup> also wanted to discover the impact on the interviewees that Quakerism had had on the content of their religious faith. I wondered how their membership of The Society had influenced their lives over time. The research question, “*How does your experience of*

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<sup>1</sup> ‘The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain’ is the official name for Quakers in Britain as defined in The Society’s governing document (Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), 2014). The terms Friend(s) and Quaker(s) are synonymous and refer to members of the Religious Society of Friends. I use the term ‘The Society’ as an abbreviation of the full name. When the full name is used it is to emphasise or re-emphasise the religious nature of The Society. This study is limited to Quakers in Britain. Quakers are a worldwide denomination with different theological emphases and different ecclesiological traditions in different countries and within different countries (Dandelion, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> I have been a member of the Religious Society of Friends since 1967. I offer a personal reflection on my research process and consider how my insidership, and insidership in general, might affect this research and its conclusions at Chapter 2.7

*membership in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) make a difference to your life, faith and practice?”*, was established with that in mind.

Contributing to my intention was Ben Pink Dandelion’s 2014 Swarthmore Lecture<sup>3</sup>

*Open for transformation: being Quaker*. Dandelion had written:

The experience of encounter [with the Divine] transforms our sense of the world around us so that we feel interconnected, see all as equal before God , and see that there is that of God in everyone<sup>4</sup>.

I hoped this was true. I knew there were times when I interpreted what I was experiencing was God’s love and guidance. I believed that there was that of God in everyone, to be sensed in their presence or through conscious paying attention to particular others. Dandelion also wrote:

We have become collectively confused about the heart of our Quaker way, unable to articulate it clearly to newcomers, and unable to know what is and what is not a part of it<sup>5</sup>.

Would those I hope to interview be confused about the Quaker way? I did not think that the ‘we’ Dandelion wrote about was applicable to all Quakers.

I hoped to explain the attractions and effects of being a Quaker based on encountering the interviewees in depth interviews. By processing the interview data I would be able to contribute insights, theoretically supported, into The Society’s attractions and the capacity of the Quaker way to transform members’ lives.

Twelve Friends responded to an invitation to be interviewed and twelve in-depth face-to-face interviews were completed in 2015. The richness and variety of their interviews provided the initial base for the research. For example, some

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<sup>3</sup> The Swarthmore Lecture is an annual lecture, established in 1907 ‘ on some subject relating to the message and work of The Society of Friends’ [v]. I discuss the stated purpose of the lecture, as well as Dandelion’s lecture, further in Chapter 4.

<sup>4</sup> Dandelion (2014. p.3).

<sup>5</sup> Dandelion (2014. p.5).

interviewees<sup>6</sup> had been associated with The Society for many years before becoming members; others had become members within three years after their first Meeting for Worship<sup>7</sup>. That was a matter for explanation.

In 2012 there had been hopes within The Society for its resurgence. Paul Parker, the Recording Clerk<sup>8</sup>, thought The Society was about to go 'Whoosh!'<sup>9</sup>. By 2020 it was clear that that was not happening. Participation in The Society's activities declined by 31% between 1990 and 2021<sup>10</sup>. Records show<sup>11</sup> in 2021 that its adult membership fell in 1990 from about 17,800 to 11,700 and the number of attenders from about 8,800 to 6,500<sup>12</sup>. That decline called for attention and explanation as much as any explanatory account for what constituted The Society's attractiveness.

Two texts of particular importance then fed into my research. The first was a monograph by Pink Dandelion<sup>13</sup>: *The cultivation of conformity: towards a general theory of internal secularisation*<sup>14</sup>. Dandelion explored processes of internal secularisation within The Society as a study example to support his general theory of internal secularisation. The other was Penelope Cummins' doctoral dissertation *The*

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<sup>6</sup> Recruitment of interviewees is discussed in Chapter 2. A table of interviewees is provided in Ch 3. Figure 3.1.

<sup>7</sup> Meeting for Worship is discussed in this chapter at 1.4.

<sup>8</sup> The senior staff member of The Society, This role is discussed in 1.4.

<sup>9</sup> *Going 'whoosh' at Woodbrooke, 2012* (2012); Barnett, (2012); Cummins, (2020. p.279).

<sup>10</sup> Participants in The Society are its members and attenders. A distinction is made between them. 'Listed attenders' agree to be registered on a list with a Local Meeting but are not members of The Society. Normally, that is because they have decided not to apply for membership. Some who request membership may have been asked to delay applying until they have become more acculturated, to The Society i.e. accommodated themselves to the formal and informal modes of social interactions of Quaker events and learnt the meaning and use of Quaker concepts. Non-listed attenders are those who are new to a Quaker Meeting or are occasional attenders who have not been listed. Unlike listed attenders, non-listed attenders are not included in the count of numbers associated with The Society (*Quaker faith & practice* 11.38). *Quaker faith & practice* may be abbreviated as *QF&P*.

<sup>11</sup> Britain Yearly Meeting... (2022).

<sup>12</sup> Specifically, in 2021 its adult membership fell from 17,765 in 1990 to 11,737; the number of attenders had declined from 8758 in 1990 to 6479 (Britain Yearly Meeting. Patterns of membership including the 2021 tabular statement, 2022). The tabular statement is a census produced each year by Britain Yearly Meeting, the name given to the central organisation of The Society.

<sup>13</sup> Pink Dandelion is the name Dandelion uses for his academic publications; Ben Pink Dandelion is the name he uses for published work intended for Quakers generally and a wider readership.

<sup>14</sup> Dandelion (2019). This text was published some four years after I began my research.

*impact of secularisation on British Quaker ecclesiology*<sup>15</sup>. She identified the Charities Acts of 1993 and 2006 as leading to a small group of trustees taking responsibility for decisions that previously would have been taken by much larger groups in formal Meetings for Worship within The Society.

The impact of these texts was to broaden and reformulate the aim of my research.

My aim became:

To explore and explain how internal secularisation was affecting distinctive features of the theological character and governance of The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain.

Distinctive features included those which had been identified as the attractions of The Society from the analysis of the interviews and other sources. I recognised a contrast between the enthusiasm of my interviewees and the facts of membership decline. I became more aware of reservations the interviewees expressed about the Society alongside their enthusiasm for Quakerism. I wondered about the connection between internal secularisation, declining membership and members' disaffiliation.

### **The research title**

As a result of reformulating and broadening the aim of my research and subsequent research findings, I changed the proposed title from *A comparative study of the religious beliefs and faith of Friends (Quakers) by conviction*<sup>16</sup> to *An exploration of coherence, cohesion and confusion in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain*.

Coherence relates to the diverse theology of members accepted within The Society.

An initial attraction of The Society was its inclusiveness. A consequence of its

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<sup>15</sup> Cummins.(2020).

<sup>16</sup> 'Quaker by conviction' is the traditional phrase given to those who choose to become Quakers and join The Society (*Quaker faith & practice (QF&P)*, 2013. 11.01).



inclusiveness is theological diversity. That puts strains on its capacity to proclaim a clear theological message. The absence of a requirement to make a formal statement of faith or attest to a creed, or for undergoing any formal course of introduction to The Society's theology and practices<sup>17</sup> strained The Society's cohesion. Cohesion relates to the persistence and strength of the relationship of individuals to and within The Society. Between 2016 and 2021, 481 members, about 90 per year, chose to leave The Society<sup>18</sup>. Since Dandelion's journal article<sup>19</sup> on disaffiliation from The Society, no other research seems to have been undertaken on disaffiliation from The Society. I discuss that article in Chapter 5 of this thesis in the light of concepts derived from the work of Georg Simmel relating to the persistence of an association or society.

A contingency external to The Society affecting cohesion in The Society was the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2020 a government-imposed lockdown closed Meeting Houses until 2022<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Dandelion, 2019. p.121, 154.

<sup>18</sup> Britain Yearly Meeting...(2022).

<sup>19</sup> Dandelion (2002).

<sup>20</sup> Government introduced restrictions to people meeting outside of essential work from March 2020 to February 2022. Restrictions resulted in the closure of Meeting Houses and the meetings of Friends (COVID-19 pandemic in the United Kingdom, 2023. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19\\_pandemic\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic_in_the_United_Kingdom) Accessed: 04/02/2023). That stimulated videoconferencing within The Society. The choice of physical meeting or remote conferencing became options when restrictions were lifted. Videoconferencing and face-to-face meetings can be combined in 'blended meetings'.

That prompted the use of videoconferencing within The Society. It is not yet clear how this change affects The Society's internal cohesion<sup>21</sup>.

### **The fundamental elements of being a Quaker**

There is a statement of the fundamental elements of being a Quaker in relation to membership of The Society in *Quaker faith & practice*:

Membership is for those who feel at home and in the right place within the Quaker community. Membership is also a way of saying to the meeting, and to the world, that you accept at least the fundamental elements of being a Quaker: the understanding of divine guidance, the manner of corporate worship and the ordering of the meeting's business, the practical expression of inward convictions and the equality of all before God. Participation in the process that leads to admission into the community of the meeting is an affirmation of what the meeting stands for and of your willingness to contribute to its life.<sup>22</sup>

I shall show in Chapters 3 and 4 that this statement of fundamental elements of being a Quaker has been compromised in practice and that that is one of the reasons for confusion within The Society<sup>23</sup>. The compromise will be shown also to be

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<sup>21</sup> Videoconferencing affects the nature of person-to-person and group communications. It has reduced in-person face-to-face meetings.. The Society has been encouraged to use Zoom software for videoconferencing enabling videoconference-based Meetings for Worship during the lockdown (Comfort, C., 2020. How are Quakers meeting? A summer snapshot from around Britain. <https://www.quaker.org.uk/blog/how-are-quakers-meeting-a-summer-postcard-from-around-britain> Accessed: 04/02/2023). Zoom has continued to be used for the convenience of many including those who otherwise could not have met because of illness or mobility problems. It also saves time travelling and travelling expenses. Google Scholar reports research on the effects of Zoom on interpersonal communication. Zoom seems to effect women negatively more than men (Fauville, G., Luo, M., Muller Queiroz, A.C., Bailenson, J.N. and Hancock, J., 2021). That is a finding which The Society could consider in the interests of fairness and inclusivity. I have not incorporated into this thesis a discussion on research in Britain on how zoom affects cohesion but see: Hutchings, T., 2021. Community: stillness on the hillside: Worship online with British Quakers. In *Digital Religion* (pp. 186-195). Routledge; and Dandelion, P. and Grant, R. (2021) 'When two or three are gathered' in a Zoom Room: The Theology of Online Unprogrammed Quaker Worship. *Quaker Studies*, 26 (2). pp. 279-290.

<sup>22</sup> *Quaker faith & practice*, 2013. 11.01

<sup>23</sup> The statement of membership criteria made in the previous equivalent text to *QF&P: Christian faith and practice in the experience of The Society of Friends (1966)* was more Christocentric as its title indicates. Its section on 'The spiritual basis of membership' [paras. 365-375] includes the statement: 'unity is essential upon the spiritual and practical nature of Christianity'. The change of title and subtitle of the current edition to *Quaker faith & practice: the book of Christian discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain* indicates The Society's ambivalence about its Christian tradition.

a symptom of internal secularisation. Internal secularisation was something that The Society's membership could address as something to be supported or resisted.

Members were not immune from the forces of secularisation in the wider society and the overall decline of traditional religious beliefs and church attendance in the British population. Secularisation is noted in the literature review below and discussed further in Chapter 4 in relation to surveys.

Whilst I was conducting and transcribing the interview tapes and having decided the material would be analysed and organised on the basis of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as a research methodology, I was also coming to conclusions about how I would apply the second part of IPA's double hermeneutic. Whilst the first part of IPA's hermeneutic is concerned with identifying the different themes, normally discovered through interviews related to a research project with a chosen research population e.g. in my project relating to interviewees' reflections on their experience of Quakers and Quakerism, the second part of the hermeneutic is about making sense of the significance of those themes for that population. Although IPA was developed within the discipline of phenomenological psychology, IPA may be adapted and applied from the perspective of cognate disciplines<sup>24</sup>. That took me into further considerations of my research design and the need to decide about the perspective to be taken, which is discussed in Chapter 2.

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<sup>24</sup> Smith, Flowers and Larkin. (2009. p.1).

### 1.3 Chapter outlines

#### Chapter 2: Research Design and Methodology

Chapter 2 explains my choices in designing the research. Critical realism was the ontological framework to which I was drawn to underpin the research design<sup>25,26</sup>. Margaret Archer's critical realist based reflexive and social theories appealed as a means of taking stock of the state of the Religious Society of Friends. Her jointly authored work with a sociologist and a philosopher on transcendence demonstrated that a sociological approach to religion did not need to assume atheism<sup>27</sup>.

The methodology chosen was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences<sup>28</sup>. I had previously used IPA for my MA in Pastoral Theology dissertation *The experience of spiritual journeying among the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)*<sup>29</sup>. In this research I was exploring the relationship of the individual to The Society, The Society's attractions and the reasons for its declining membership. A sociological rather than theological framework was my preferred perspective. The work of Georg Simmel on the individual and society and on religion and society, and Margaret S. Archer's theoretical work on reflexivity and societal and organisational change were complimentary. They led me to create a conceptual framework for undertaking the second part of IPA's double hermeneutic, described in chapter 2.

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<sup>25</sup> I have a social science MSc from the London School of Economics in Analysis, design and management of information systems (1981) in which the management of change in organisations and the sociology of organisations were fundamental components of my programme. I also have an MA in Pastoral Theology from Heythrop College, University of London (2012).

<sup>26</sup> Blaikie (2007); Danermark et al. (2002).

<sup>27</sup> Archer, Collier, and Porpora. (2004). Andrew Collier is a professor philosophy and Douglas V. Porpora is a professor of sociology [vi].

<sup>28</sup> Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009. p.1).

<sup>29</sup> 2012. Heythrop College, University of London.

### Chapter 3: The Interviews: findings and themes for preliminary analysis

This chapter discusses the themes collated from the interview findings within five master tables following IPA procedures and formats.

Master Table A: Faith and Religious Practice Pre-First Meeting for worship

Master Table B: From Going to Meeting for the First Time to Becoming a Member

Master Table C: Theology and Belief

Master Table D: Faith in Practice Pre- and Post- Membership

Master Table E: Reflections on Quakers and Quakerism

Figure 1.1 The Master Table Themes

Once each Master Table was established, their developmental relationship informed their sequencing. Thus organised they provided for a narrative of interviewees' developing experience of Quakerism.

The organisation of Master Tables and the description of the empirical data they reveal constitute the first element of a double hermeneutic that structures an IPA analysis<sup>30</sup>. The second element is an examination of the Master Tables, which follows in Chapter 4.

Appendices 2 and 3 present Master Tables in full. Appendix 4 contains two tables correlating the topics or themes raised in interviews with the different interviewees.<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009. p.3

<sup>31</sup> All tables can be made available on request. Transcripts can be made available to examiners.

#### **Chapter 4: An analytical review**

This chapter forms the second element of IPA's double hermeneutic. This involves the researcher's making sense of the interviewees' account of their experience<sup>32</sup>. In this research that meant making sense of the themes identified from the interviewees' accounts of their experience of Quakers and Quakerism from a conceptual framework derived from the work of Simmel and Archer.

It was in exploring responses to the issues raised by the Master Tables, that the conceptual framework was related to Dandelion's work on the sociology of Quakers along with other primary source material and other relevant research e.g. The work of Penelope Cummins on how charity law was affecting the Society's governance<sup>33</sup>. The concepts of coherence, cohesion and confusion then emerged as analytical and evaluative criteria for discussing The Society's current condition.

#### **Chapter 5: Association and disassociation from the Religious Society of Friends.**

Simmel asked fundamental questions: 'Why do groups persist?' and 'How is society possible?'<sup>34</sup> These questions were relevant for my research into the state of The Religious Society of Friends. Simmel also referred to 19<sup>th</sup> century Quaker society<sup>35</sup>. His concepts of religiosity, sociation and exchange led me to a reinterpretation of work by Dandelion on dissociation from The Society.

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<sup>32</sup> Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009. p.3

<sup>33</sup> Cummins (2019; 2020).

<sup>34</sup> Simmel (1898; 1910).

<sup>35</sup> Simmel (1950. p.35; 1971, p.258).

## **Chapter 6: Applying the integrated model to Quakers and the Religious Society of Friends**

This chapter applies the model to discuss reflexivity in relation to Quakers and how The Society's structures and cultural system are currently affecting social interactions.

Individuals' reflexive characteristics are shown to be significant for The Society's cultural system and for nomination to roles – especially the role of clerk.

Applying Archerian social theory demonstrates a lack of integration in The Society's structures and cultural system. A lack of integration can precipitate change when it affects a society's cohesion through its social interactions and changing mode of governance. The research shows this is happening now, building on the work of Cummins discussed in Chapter 4.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusions**

This chapter summarises the previous chapters and discusses their findings. The analysis points to confusion in The Society caused by a lack of coherence in its theology and a lack of cohesion within the membership. Declining numbers of participants is suggested as one symptom of a confused theology and lack of cohesion in the membership. Difficulties in filling roles for the governance of The Society at local, area and national levels is another. A reassessment of what The Society wants to stand for and how it should be governed is called for as a means of restoring theological coherence and societal cohesion.

### **1.4 The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain**

This section presents an introduction to the background and contemporary culture and structures of The Society. Its purpose is to present a description of Quaker

thought, its official organisational structures and its institutional procedures as a context with which to relate the current state of The Society as assessed in this thesis. It is organised into subsections:

The theological basis of Quakerism, The Quaker testimonies, The diversity of British Quakers, Quaker worship, The Local, Area and National Organization of The Society, Quaker roles and Quaker nominations.

### **The theological basis of Quakerism**

Quakers emerged within a Christian culture in Britain in the mid-17th century<sup>36,37</sup>. They rejected the liturgies and ecclesiology of other established and non-conformist Christian churches<sup>38</sup>, e.g. the need for a doctrinal base or confession of faith (creed), the need for a separate clergy to lead them, the need for a formally structured liturgy and they rejected the need for sacraments<sup>39</sup>. They believed that the Scriptures 'are only a declaration of the fountain and not the fountain itself'.<sup>40</sup>:

Quakers relied on what they interpreted as their immediate experience of the Spirit of Christ as the fountain. That experience inspired vocal ministry and faith in action.

George Fox<sup>41</sup>, a founder of what became the Religious Society of Friends, testified that 'I heard a voice which said, "There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to

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<sup>36</sup> Moore (2013, p.13).

<sup>37</sup> Rosemary Moore is an independent scholar attached to the Centre for Research in Quaker Studies at Woodbrooke (<https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/people/rosemary-moore/> Accessed 14/02/2023).

<sup>38</sup> An accessible introduction to and translation of the 17<sup>th</sup> century theologian Robert Barclay's theology and ecclesiology of Quakers.

<sup>39</sup> Barclay (1991).

<sup>40</sup> Robert Barclay (1678) in *Quaker faith & practice* (2013, p.27-28).

<sup>41</sup> Dandelion (2005)



thy condition', and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy" <sup>42,43</sup>. 'Fox often wrote that Christ has come to teach his people himself. From this teaching comes Quaker faith and practice'<sup>44</sup>. The current edition of *Quaker faith & practice* retains many quotations from George Fox and other 17<sup>th</sup> century Quakers illustrative of a theology that is part of the Quaker canon<sup>45</sup>.

Most contemporary Liberal Friends, including the majority of Quakers in Britain, do not take note of Fox's qualification that the Scriptures confirmed 'the pure openings of the Light'<sup>46</sup> and that revelation is confirmed by Scripture<sup>47</sup>. Dandelion describes how 'For Liberal Friends, experience is primary and sufficient ... not tied to any text or tradition'<sup>48</sup>. That may downplay the fact that many contemporary Friends have had significant experience of the scriptures in their schooling and from participating as members of traditional Christian churches, as my interviewees have done before encountering Quakers.

### **The Quaker testimonies**

The experience of Friends was that the Light led them into an understanding of the Christian life and the way it was to be lived. We express the principles they

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<sup>42</sup> Claire Disbrey (1989, 1994), a philosopher of religion, provides a discussion on how George Fox came to interpret his religious experience in the way he did and its relationship to the foundation of the Quaker movement. She critiqued the ideas of William James and Alasdair MacIntyre who both chose Fox as an example in their study of religious experience and offered a more nuanced alternative theory of innovation in religion. Fox's interpretation grew out of his prior Christian convictions and knowledge of the Bible as translated into English – part of the cultural system of 17<sup>th</sup> century Britain into which he was born. Disbrey's theory of innovation in religion is discussed further in the literature review below in this chapter (within 1.5.2).

<sup>43</sup> *QF&P* (2013. 19.02).

<sup>44</sup> *QF&P* (2013. 19.19 [Preamble]).

<sup>45</sup> *Quaker faith & practice* describes the range of Quaker theology via extracts from Quaker texts, offers 'Advices & queries' for Quakers to reflect upon and respond to in its first chapter, which is also separately published as a booklet, and describes Quaker governance (ecclesiology) and procedures. As such it is The Society's primary source of normative authority for British Quakers' theology and organizational practice. It is revised and updated periodically. Peter Collins describes it as 'the iconic canonic text' of Quakerism. The use of the term 'canonical' with reference to *Quaker faith & practice* is discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>46</sup> *QF&P* (2013. 19.04)

<sup>47</sup> Dandelion (2007. p.21).

<sup>48</sup> Dandelion (2007. p.186).

discovered in terms such as Truth, Equality, Simplicity, and Peace. However, these are not abstract qualities, but vital principles of life<sup>49</sup>.

A different formulation of these testimonies is presented on the *Quakers in Britain* website: Equality and justice; Peace; Truth and integrity; Simplicity and sustainability<sup>50</sup>. The discrepancy between the *Quaker faith & practice* version and Britain Yearly Meeting's version arises because there is no standard formulation of the Quaker testimonies<sup>51</sup>.

The Quaker Testimonies were specifically identified by some of my interviewees as statements that awakened their interest in Friends. The Peace Testimony is probably the best known testimony of Quakerism. Many of my interviewees knew of it before their encounter with Friends. It was articulated by Quakers in Britain in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as a testimony against war and as a pledge of loyalty to the Crown.<sup>52,53</sup> Its formulation gradually changed from a testimony against war into the testimony for peace. The rise in numbers of those participating in Quaker worship in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been attributed to the influence of the Peace Testimony on those who came to adulthood between the two World Wars<sup>54</sup> and due to a heightened fear of nuclear Armageddon mid-20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>55</sup>. The testimony, however, has also been one which many associating with Quakers, including some of my interviewees, found difficult to support. It has inhibited applications for membership, according to James Chadkirk<sup>56</sup>. In fact, it is not obligatory for a Quaker to be a pacifist. Some embrace

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<sup>49</sup> *QF&P* 19.33 (<https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/19/> Accessed 23/10/2023)

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.quaker.org.uk/about-quakers/our-values> (Accessed 22/06/2022).

<sup>51</sup> The statements are made by different authorities. The Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends authorises the content and publication of *QF&P*. Britain Yearly Meeting, the charity, authorises the content of, and is responsible for the *Quakers in Britain* website

<sup>52</sup> Valentine notes that many Quakers fought in Cromwell's army expecting 'through Holy War that the Peaceable Kingdom would come' (2013. p.364).

<sup>53</sup> Valentine (2013).

<sup>54</sup> Chadkirk (2015. p.65)

<sup>55</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.91).

<sup>56</sup> Chadkirk (2015. p.56-57).

pacifism 'as a divine leading'<sup>57</sup> others concentrate on peacemaking and are not necessarily pacifists<sup>58</sup>.

From an ethical point of view the testimonies may be detached from theology and appreciated by Quaker and non-Quaker alike. When that happens, the spiritual underpinning of the Quaker testimonies, as presented in *QF&P* 'the Light [that] led them [i.e. Friends]' is removed<sup>59</sup>. The BYM version of the testimonies makes no reference to their origin other than that 'the search for truth can lead us to new expressions of values as well as confirming existing ones<sup>60</sup>. They are expressions of values, not testimonies, arising from the search for truth, which itself is a value.

### **The diversity of British Quakers**

Participants in Quaker Meetings may be identified by characteristics of their beliefs and by their degree of engagement with The Society. On the basis of my interviews I can identify four groups of Quakers: those with traditional Christian beliefs, Quakers who self-identify as Christian with beliefs unlikely to encompass Christian doctrines such as the Virgin birth and the Resurrection of the body<sup>61</sup>, a third group deny being Christian but are theistic with some holding traditional Christian beliefs, and a fourth group of non-theists who believe that religion is a human creation but who may have a strong Christian background<sup>62</sup>. Non-theists are unlikely to believe in the

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<sup>57</sup> Valentine (2013. p.364).

<sup>58</sup> Valentine (2013. p.375).

<sup>59</sup> *QF&P* 19.33.

<sup>60</sup> There is no mention of the source of those values on BYM's website *Quakers in Britain* (<https://www.quaker.org.uk/faith/our-values> Accessed 29/03/2024).

<sup>61</sup> Hampton (2014) and Dandelion (2014) distinguish between three groups: traditional Christian Quakers, liberal Quakers and non-theists.

<sup>62</sup> Nontheist Quakers. <https://nontheist-quakers.org.uk/> (Accessed 13/02/2023)

transcendent Divinity of the Christian tradition whose will may be discerned and from whom guidance may be received<sup>63</sup>.

Many of my interviewees incline to universalism in that they accept the validity for others of several paths to God in addition to Christian e.g. Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim. Their universalism does not imply a primary religious identification as universalists: eight self-identify as Christian, three acknowledge God or a higher power, and one identifies as a non-theist.

In addition to members, there are attenders whose beliefs may correlate with any religious disposition or none. Attenders, whether registered or unrecorded<sup>64</sup>, may attend regularly, contribute financially and give service willingly when invited to do so<sup>65</sup>.

Individuals within each of the above groups vary in their degree of commitment and participation with The Society. Members formally accepted into The Society are expected to attend Meeting for Worship regularly, contribute financially and be prepared to give service to The Society according to their circumstances and gifts; but not all do so. Some ask to end their membership. Some lose touch with The Society. If members are not contactable, their names are likely to be delisted<sup>66</sup>.

Many attenders are as committed as committed members; others come for a time and then disappear from a Local Meeting.

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<sup>63</sup> Dandelion writes of 'some of these' 'modern liberal Quakers without a God or without a God with a will' (2019. p.127).

<sup>64</sup> See footnote 4 of this chapter.

<sup>65</sup> QF&P (10.25).

<sup>66</sup> Quakers keep official lists of their members and recorded attenders at Local and Area levels. *QF&P* Chapter 10 describes 'belonging to a Quaker Meeting' and Chapter 11 describes 'membership'.

## Quaker worship

British Quakers<sup>67</sup> today hold a Meeting for Worship normally every Sunday for one hour, but small Meetings may do so less frequently. Worship is described as follows:

Worship is our response to an awareness of God. We can worship alone, but when we join with others in expectant waiting we may discover a deeper sense of God's presence. We seek a gathered stillness in our meetings for worship so that all may feel the power of God's love drawing us together and leading us.

In worship we enter with reverence into communion with God and respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Come to meeting for worship with heart and mind prepared. Yield yourself and all your outward concerns to God's guidance so that you may find 'the evil weakening in you and the good raised up'<sup>68</sup>.

Meetings are normally unprogrammed. In Quaker Meetings, anyone may be moved by the Spirit to offer vocal ministry. Usually this is spoken. Unusually in British Meetings it might be sung and Meeting participants might join in. Ministry is generally emotionally restrained: 'displays of emotion are rare'<sup>69</sup>. In Britain, Ministry is listened to in attentive silence, without the vocal participation and exuberance of a congregation that one might experience in Friends' Meetings in other countries<sup>70</sup>. Local Meetings may experiment with their form e.g. by being semi-programmed and by holding semi-programmed all-age worship<sup>71</sup>.

Elders are specifically responsible for the right ordering<sup>72</sup> of Meetings and the spiritual health of Quaker Meetings. Quaker roles are discussed below.

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<sup>67</sup>The majority of Quakers worldwide since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century are Christocentric and employ a more structured and programmed liturgy often by a minister whom the congregation appoints (Dandelion, 2007. p.80; p.242). British Quakers are a small minority within worldwide Quakers.

<sup>68</sup> QF&P (2013.1.02.8-9).

<sup>69</sup> Dandelion (2005, p.99).

<sup>70</sup> Kershner (2018, p. 298); Mombo (2019, p.201).

<sup>71</sup> Children normally meet separately for activities led by an adult. They may initially join the Meeting at the beginning and return shortly before or after the adult Meeting for Worship ends. All-age Meetings involve children for the whole period of the Meeting and are .

<sup>72</sup> Right ordering – the correct manner of doing things, in keeping with Quaker tradition and practice (Ealing Quaker Meeting. Jargon buster. <https://www.ealingquakers.org.uk/about/jargon-buster>. Accessed 17/02/2023. Elders are not the equivalent of ministers.

The Society's business affairs are also conducted in the form of Meetings for Worship. They may be called Meeting for church affairs, Meeting for Worship for business or abbreviated to 'business meetings'<sup>73</sup>:

They carry the same expectation that God's guidance can be discerned if we are truly listening together and to each other, and are not blinkered by preconceived opinions. It is this belief that God's will can be recognised through the discipline of silent waiting which distinguishes our decision-making process from the secular idea of consensus. We have a common purpose in seeking God's will through waiting and listening, believing that every activity of life should be subject to divine guidance.<sup>74</sup>

Decisions taken in business meetings are voteless and the result of a process of collective discernment of what is the right decision. It is hoped unity around a decision, understood as an indication of a sufficient understanding of God's will, will arise out of listening to each other's ministry and that God's guidance may be eventually clearly discerned. Ideally, the clerk (Quaker roles are discussed in the next section) produces a minute articulating that guidance as a decision all can unite around.

The unity we seek depends on the willingness of us all to seek the truth in each other's utterances; on our being open to persuasion; and in the last resort on a willingness to recognise and accept the sense of the meeting as recorded in the minute, knowing that our dissenting views have been heard and considered. We do not vote in our meetings, because we believe that this would emphasise the divisions between differing views and inhibit the process of seeking to know the will of God<sup>75</sup>.

If unity does not arise, then the matter would normally be reconsidered at a later occasion, probably with more background work having been done and information distributed in advance of the Meeting<sup>76</sup>. Michael J. Sheeran's case study is based on

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<sup>73</sup> QF&P (2013. Ch.3)

<sup>74</sup> QF&P (2013. 3.02).

<sup>75</sup> QF&P (2013. 3.06).

<sup>76</sup> Also see Sheeran (1996).

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting whose worship style is similar to British unprogrammed Meeting practice.

Some Meetings for Worship are held at other times and for different periods of time during the week for those who want them, especially those who cannot attend Sunday worship. Extra Meetings provide more opportunities for worship. They may be blended or not (see footnote 11 above).

The term 'Quaker Meeting' may be used to refer to an act of Quaker worship and also to a group of Quakers and attenders who form a community. As a community they may provide for other Quaker activities. Meetings for Worship and other Quaker activities may be held in purpose built Quaker Meeting Houses, hired church halls, community buildings, and in private homes.

A difficulty in contemporary Quaker worship arises because, as Dandelion writes, for those 'Quakers without a God or without a God with a will', the idea that unity arises from seeking and discerning God's will becomes an anachronistic formula<sup>77</sup>. It is because there are individuals attracted to The Society for reasons other than a belief in a God whose will may be discerned, let alone a God who might be worshipped in a Meeting for Worship, that that, I argue, gives rise to the challenge of upholding a coherent Quaker theology and creating a cohesive Quaker community.

### **Local and Area Meetings and the Centrally Managed Work of Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM)**

This and the next section explains how The Society is structured and provides opportunities for service in all aspects and all levels of The Society<sup>78-79</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.127).

<sup>78</sup> Quaker roles e.g. clerks, treasurers, and nominations committees are discussed below.

<sup>79</sup> QF&P (Ch. 4).

## The Local Meeting

The fundamental unit of association and for worship in The Society is the Local Meeting<sup>80</sup>. It holds a Meeting for Worship, normally weekly on Sundays. It has delegated power from the Area Meeting, to which it is subordinate, to raise and spend money. It appoints its own clerk and treasurer and other roles as required on the basis of recommendations from its Nominations Committee (see below at **Quaker roles and Quaker nominations**). Local Meetings hold a Meeting for Worship for Business<sup>81</sup> every one or two months to manage its church affairs, coordinated in advance of their Area Meeting to facilitate timely communication with it. They will vary in their capacity for development depending on factors such as the age, character and Quaker experience of its participants, their location and accessibility. Normally they will engage in outreach and inreach activities, such as public talks, book stalls and more private book groups. They will also engage, more or less, with their Area Meeting and Britain Yearly Meeting.

The British Yearly Meeting criteria for describing Local Meeting size<sup>82</sup> is:

- Small:        0 – 9 Members
- Medium:     10 – 30 Members
- Large:        Above 31 Members

'The median size of a Quaker local meeting is declining, now 21 individuals, while in 2009 it was 24'<sup>83</sup>.

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<sup>80</sup> QF&P (4.32-4.38).

<sup>81</sup> Sometimes called a Meeting for church affairs and abbreviated to Meeting for business.

<sup>82</sup> Email from Gary Mitchell Data Officer Communication & Services, Britain Yearly Meeting 28th November 2019. Britain Yearly Meeting is the name given to the national charity which organises the centrally managed work of The Society.

<sup>83</sup> Elliott (2022) <https://www.quaker.org.uk/blog/the-changing-shape-of-quaker-meetings>. (Accessed 15/12/2022).



## The Area Meeting

The Area Meeting constitutes the basic unit of organisation for church affairs of The Society. It is the administrative unit to which Local Meetings are accountable and from which a Local Meeting's corporate agency<sup>84</sup> is derived<sup>85</sup>. Area Meetings hold the register of members and it is at an Area Meeting for Worship that decisions are made about an application for membership<sup>86</sup>. Traditionally that decision is made after considering a report by two Visitors who have been tasked with meeting an applicant and exploring an applicant's understanding of Quakerism and their reason for applying for membership of The Society<sup>87</sup>

The Area Meeting appoints its own clerk, treasurer and trustees, and appoints significant roles carried out at Local Meetings (e.g. for Eldership and Oversight, Premises Committees) and to some national committees such as Meeting for Sufferings (see below). Area Meetings meet every one or two or more months to deal with their church affairs as a Meeting for Worship for business.

Area Meetings are normally registered as charities. All charities have their own trustees and if registered must create a Governing Document. The governing document is a legal document that must comply with charity law. It sets out the charity's purposes, rules and structures<sup>88</sup>. In relation to Friends, it defines the appointment, responsibilities and powers of trustees in relation to the Area Meeting

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<sup>84</sup> The concept of corporate agency is described in detail in Chapter 2 in relation to Archer's social theory.

<sup>85</sup> *QF&P* (Ch.4).

<sup>86</sup> *QF&P* (Ch.11) discusses membership. *QF&P* 11.04 states that 'An individual, of any age, becomes a member of their area meeting, and through it of Britain Yearly Meeting, by a simple process agreed and adopted by the area meeting. Variety and flexibility in procedures are needed to reflect individual and local circumstances. Each area meeting will develop one or more of such procedures' (<https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/11/> Accessed: 5/11/2022).

<sup>87</sup> *QF&P* 11.11 describes the traditional process in detail.

<sup>88</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-write-your-charitys-governing-document> Accessed 15/02/2023.

and its Local Meetings. Trustees of registered charities are personally responsible to the Charity Commission for the lawful conduct of the charity.

The Religious Society of Friends is listed as an ‘excepted’ charity<sup>89</sup>. Its Area Meetings have some choice as to what kind of charity registration to opt for. Excepted charities do not have to register with the Charity Commission if their income is below a particular threshold, currently £100,000 a year, but must still comply with charity law<sup>90</sup>. An Area Meeting may choose to be a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and register with the Charity Commission as a CIO. The advantage of CIO registration is that personal liability is removed from trustees should there be a claim by individuals/companies against the Area Meeting or its constituent Local Meetings<sup>91</sup>.

A model governing document for Area Meetings issued by BYM, the charity, states ‘The business and activities of the area meeting shall at all times be conducted in accordance with the provisions of the current edition of the Book of Christian Discipline’ i.e. *Quaker faith & practice*<sup>92</sup>.

Area Meetings may adapt the model text but changes must be listed and justified<sup>93</sup>.

The consequence of charity law affects how authority is exercised in The Society by

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<sup>89</sup> (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/excepted-charities/excepted-charities--2> Accessed 15/02/2023)

<sup>90</sup> ‘Excepted’ means they don’t have to register or submit annual returns. Apart from that, the Charity Commission regulates them just like registered charities and can use any of its powers if it needs to’ . <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/excepted-charities/excepted-charities--2> Accessed 15/02/2023. Excepted charities include churches and chapels of some Christian denominations (and funds connected with them). <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-register-your-charity-cc21b> Accessed 31/1/2023. What registered charities must report annually is on a sliding scale (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prepare-a-charity-annual-return> Accessed 31/1/2023).

<sup>91</sup> Mervyn Dobbin (2020) of Luton and Leighton Meeting provides an account of how and why Luton and Leighton Area Meeting transferred their charity registration to Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) Status <https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/cio-transferring-lutonl-mervyn-dobbin-march2020> Accessed 15/02/2023.

<sup>92</sup> Accessible from the section on charitable registration within the Quakers in Britain website (<https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/quaker-roles/trustees> Accessed 31/05/2022).

<sup>93</sup> *Charitable registration* (<https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/quaker-roles/trustees> Accessed 9/06/2023).

trustees. The significance of this is discussed initially with reference to decisions affecting the centrally managed work of The Society in Chapter 4 and, from the perspective of Archer's social theory, in Chapter 7.

### **Authority and the centrally managed work of Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM), the charity.**

Any member<sup>94</sup> may participate in their Local and Area Meetings and in the annual national gathering of Friends. The name of that gathering is now known officially as Yearly Meeting in Session [Yearly Meeting]. From 1994 the name Britain Yearly Meeting replaced London Yearly Meeting as the name for the national organisation. The name 'Britain Yearly Meeting' was subsequently redefined in the Governing Document in 2006. That document makes a distinction between 'the church', which is the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, and 'the charity', which is called 'Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)<sup>95</sup>.

Britain Yearly Meeting now officially 'refers to the centrally held and managed policy, property, employment and work of the charity'. It is a registered charity<sup>96</sup> (abbreviated as 'BYM' in this thesis with that meaning). The governing document prescribes that 15 to 20 Friends be appointed by Yearly Meeting in session as trustees. initially for three years which may be extended to six and exceptionally for

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<sup>94</sup> A General Meeting at Skipton in 1660 became the first representative gathering of the Quakers nationwide. A permanently organised central body was not established until 1678, then called London Yearly Meeting (Punshon, 1986. p.90). Formal membership of The Society as such was established in the 18th century (Dandelion, 2007. p.236). Lists were kept of those recognised as Quakers by their Local Meetings.

<sup>95</sup> [Britain Yearly Meeting] (Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), 2014. Governing Document. <https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/bym-governing-document> Accessed 04/06/2022).

<sup>96</sup> Its income is over £100,000. The figure of £9,979,000 is recorded by the Charity Commission (<https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/results/page/1/delta/20/keywords/1127633> Accessed 16/02/2023).

nine years. Trustees must first be nominated by the Central Nominations Committee of Yearly Meeting and then approved by Yearly Meeting in session.<sup>97</sup>

Trustees appoint the salaried senior management team, known as Management Meeting<sup>98</sup> who are normally, but not necessarily<sup>99</sup>, Quakers themselves<sup>99</sup> e.g. The Society's treasurer. Management Meeting is led by the Recording Clerk, defined as chief executive officer<sup>100</sup>, and a Deputy Recording Clerk, who, to date, have been Quakers. The Recording Clerk has a national and international role in representing and promoting The Society. Additional full- and part-time paid staff are employed and line-managed by staff who are department heads.

The Society's centrally managed work has been dependent on participants in The Society nominated and appointed to, and then freely offering service on standing and other committees concerned with the centrally managed work.

These standing committees are accountable to Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees for formulating and presenting policy for their areas of work in accordance with the long-term framework approved by Meeting for Sufferings (7.02). They determine priorities for, monitor, and evaluate the work within their areas of responsibility. Each committee is also responsible for:

establishing functional committees and working groups as required and reviewing their work (8.04). Standing committees are responsible for appointing

<sup>97</sup> QF&P 6.17 (<https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/6/> Accessed 23/10/2023)

<sup>98</sup> QF&P 8.17-8.20 <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/passage/8-17/> Accessed 16/02/2023; trustees terms of reference, 2021 <https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/bym-trustees-tor-2021> Accessed 17/04/2023).

<sup>99</sup> The governing document does not specify that trustees must be Quakers.

<sup>100</sup> The description 'chief executive officer' does not appear in the printed or online versions of *QF&P*. Quoting from an internal document:

'The Recording Clerk is Leader of the staff team and Management Meeting; the Recording Clerk is the chief executive officer employed by Britain Yearly Meeting. The Recording Clerk: ensures that BYM's centrally managed work is planned and carried out efficiently and effectively; acts as secretary to Yearly Meeting, the Trustee body and Meeting for Sufferings, and supports their development of vision and strategy; maintains an overview of the membership and life of Quaker communities throughout Britain, facilitating advice, support and good church government; and represents BYM to others and promotes good relations' (*BYM Trustees Scheme of delegation.2021*. Available from the Recording Clerk's office.. The online version of *QF&P* (3.28 and 8.21) indicates that the Recording Clerk and the senior management team are collectively responsible for the work of BYM, They are accountable to trustees, who employ them.

all such subsidiary bodies, determining their respective terms of reference and membership within the overall guidance on nominations<sup>101</sup>;

establishing an effective nominations committee, working closely with the Central Nominations Committee (6.21) as appropriate;

keeping Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees (and through them, Meeting for Sufferings) informed about significant matters arising from its area of responsibility;

considering any matters that Meeting for Sufferings or Trustees refer to it for urgent attention and action<sup>102</sup>.

Terms of reference for all committees may be obtained on application to the Recording Clerk<sup>103</sup>.

One or more staff members are made responsible by senior staff for servicing committees and for other operational matters to do with centrally managed work. The staff who work with and service these committees are accountable to their line manager and not the committee's clerk or members<sup>104</sup>.

Trustees are trustees of the charity. The charity consists of paid staff. Central committee members offering unpaid service and Yearly Meeting in session consist of members of the church. The making of a distinction between the church and the charity is discussed critically in Chapter 4. What is not contested is the governing document's definition that 'the object of Britain Yearly Meeting is the furtherance of the general religious and charitable purposes of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain and beyond'.

'Meeting for Sufferings is the standing representative body of Yearly Meeting in session entrusted with the care of the business of Britain Yearly Meeting through the

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<sup>101</sup> See QF&P 3.23–3.25 & 7.07.

<sup>102</sup> See QF&P 8.23.

<sup>103</sup> QF&P (8.07 <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/passage/8-07/> Accessed 17/02/2023).

<sup>104</sup> QF&P (8.02; 8.23 <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/8/> Accessed 03/06/2022).

year'<sup>105</sup>. It is not a central committee of the charity but directly reports to Yearly Meeting and not to BYM trustees. In that sense it represents the church. Meeting for Sufferings is made up of Quakers nominated by Area Meetings but also includes, ex officio, the BYM trustees and Management Meeting<sup>106</sup>. Currently the relationship between this body and trustees is being examined<sup>107</sup>.

BYM has four standing committees, accountable to Yearly Meeting through Trustees. They are appointed by Meeting for Sufferings with terms of reference agreed by Trustees. They are Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee, Quaker Life Central Committee, Quaker World Relations Committee, Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations. 'Their role is to set priorities and monitor and evaluate Quaker work'<sup>108</sup>. That role if their areas of decision-making are contested by BYM trustees or they contest trustees' discernment, could bring them into conflict with BYM trustees and senior staff because of contradictions in the online text of *QF&P*: 'Trustees approve annually an operational plan and budget for the forthcoming year.'<sup>109,110,111</sup>.

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<sup>105</sup> Meeting for Sufferings is the standing representative body entrusted with the general care of matters affecting Britain Yearly Meeting, the church, and, in the intervals between Yearly Meetings, the making of decisions and the issuing of statements in the name of Britain Yearly Meeting. Within our church government it exercises discernment on priorities and receives regular interim reports for information and consultation on the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees' work. It has a part to play in developing a visionary and prophetic role for the whole yearly meeting and in fostering communication throughout the yearly meeting. (QF&P 7.02 <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/7/> Accessed 3/06/2023).

<sup>106</sup> See QF&P 7.05 for a full list of its membership. Management Meeting consists of senior staff members including the Recording Clerk and Deputy Recording Clerk).

<sup>107</sup> (<https://www.quaker.org.uk/blog/reviewing-yearly-meeting-gathering-and-meeting-for-sufferings> Accessed 23/06/2022). Chapter 7 discusses developments resulting from decisions taken at the 2023 Yearly Meeting.

<sup>108</sup> QF&P (8.07. <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/passage/8-07/> Accessed 16/02/2023). But see the contradiction and possible confusion caused by 8.17).

<sup>109</sup> 'Trustees approve annually an operational plan and budget for the forthcoming year'. <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/passage/8-17/> Accessed 23/20/2023

<sup>110</sup> The committees and their subcommittees are grouped on the Quakers in Britain website under names indicative of their purpose as Quaker Governance, Quaker Connections, Quaker Life and Quaker Peace and Social Witness (<https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/give-time/britain-yearly-meeting-committees> Accessed 23/06/2022).

<sup>111</sup> QF&P (<https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/our-structures> Accessed 23/06/2022)

In addition, Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees may appoint standing committees which are accountable to Trustees and Yearly Meeting may appoint standing committees which are accountable to Yearly Meeting in session. Meeting for Sufferings does not have committees which are accountable to it, but it may appoint working groups<sup>112,113</sup>.

There is no disagreement about the legal responsibilities of BYM and Area Meeting trustees for ensuring that decisions taken within The Society are lawful.

### **Quaker roles, Quaker nominations<sup>114</sup> and Quaker committees**

Quaker service is recognised as a form of ministry<sup>115</sup>. Appointments to roles and committees other than those of paid staff, and including trustees for Area Meetings, are made by Local, Area, Regional or National Meetings for Worship for business on the recommendation of Nomination Committees specifically associated with the appointing Meeting for Worship. Members of Nominating Committees themselves are appointed by the groups they serve. Their role is to nominate a person whom they see as having the gifts and the potential to grow into a role even if they do not have pre-existing experience that would have prepared them for the role. *Quaker faith & practice* itself quotes from Corinthians:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good<sup>116</sup>.

And adds:

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<sup>112</sup> QF&P (8.05).

<sup>113</sup> <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/8/> Accessed 20/06/2023.

<sup>114</sup> The information in this section is based on Chapters 3, 4, 8, 12-14 of *Quaker faith & practice*.

<sup>115</sup> QF&P (2013. 10.05).

<sup>116</sup> I Cor 12:4-7.

It is a responsibility of a Christian community to enable its members to discover what their gifts are and to develop and exercise them to the glory of God<sup>117</sup>.

It should be added that a Nominations Committee recommendation is not necessarily accepted by the Meeting that makes the appointment, but there would need to be good grounds for not accepting the nomination.

'Most appointments should be for either one or three years. It is generally undesirable for someone to hold an appointment for more than six years continuously although there may be exceptions'<sup>118</sup>. Paid staff such as the Recording Clerk and senior staff are exceptions. Once confirmed in their appointment they are permanent appointments.

The necessary roles for a Local Meeting are for a clerk and a treasurer, nominated by a Local Nominations Committee and appointed by the Local Meeting for Worship for Business. The importance of clerking in The Society is discussed in Chapter 7 of this thesis<sup>119</sup>. Treasurers may be supported by a part-time paid or unpaid bookkeeper and a finance committee. Individuals are also appointed by Area Meetings on the nomination of Area Nomination Committees to the roles of Area Meeting clerk and treasurer and to other Area Meeting roles. These include representation on central committees of BYM and to 'eldership', for spiritual care responsibilities and to 'oversight', for pastoral care responsibilities<sup>120</sup>. Those

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<sup>117</sup> QF&P (3.22. <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/3/> Accessed 03/06/2022. QF&P 3.23-3.25 go on to offer further guidance for Nominations Committees).

<sup>118</sup> QF&P (3.23 <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/passage/3-23/> Accessed 03/06/2022) See also *Principles and testimonies. Why do we do nominations the way we do.* <https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/nominations-principles-and-testimonies> pdf. Accessed 13/02/2023.

<sup>119</sup> The section on Clerkship in *Quaker faith & practice* begins at 3.12 and on Eldership and Oversight at 12.05. Material on Treasurership can be found in Chapters 13 and 14.

<sup>120</sup> The term 'Overseer' was the term long-used for those with pastoral responsibilities and when this thesis started. In 2020 the term's association with slavery was thought to make it inappropriate and a search for an alternative began. No final agreement has been established (as of 31/1/2023). My Local Meeting's preferred replacement is Member of the Oversight Team; another term used in The Society is Pastoral Care Team.



appointed to eldership and oversight normally are appointed from and serve the Local Meeting to which they belong. They are formally responsible to the Area Meeting and should have connections with the eldership and oversight teams attached to other Local Meetings for mutual support<sup>121</sup>.

## **1.5 Literature review**

The review is in two parts. The first part introduces texts describing Quakers and Quakerism and scholarly work on the sociology of the Religious Society of Friends. The second part discusses texts relevant to this thesis, mainly within the sociology of religion.

Further detailed discussion of some texts appears in the analytical review of Chapter 4 in which the findings of Chapter 3 are discussed.

Texts that contributed to my research design and the broader conceptual framework developed for interpreting the interview results are discussed in Chapter 2: Research Design, Methodology and Method.

### **1.5.1 Describing the Religious Society of Friends**

Pink Dandelion's *An introduction to Quakerism*<sup>122</sup> is a comprehensive scholarly narrative of the development of Quakerism from its beginnings in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the first decade of the twenty-first century. It describes the varieties of contemporary worldwide Quakerism. Dandelion identifies the British Religious Society of Friends' variety as liberal or 'liberal-Liberal' with 'God an option'<sup>123</sup>. God is not an option with the majority of Friends organisations worldwide, a majority of which is explicitly

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<sup>121</sup> QF&P (12.06).

<sup>122</sup> Dandelion (2007)

<sup>123</sup> Dandelion (2007. p.134)

Christian<sup>124</sup>. Not all British Quakers are liberal-Liberal. Within British Quakerism the diversity of belief ranges from Christian to non-theist as represented by the interview data in Chapter 3 and the British Quaker Survey data discussed in Chapter 4.

Dandelion notes also that there 'There are Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist Quakers' i.e. Quakers with dual religious allegiances<sup>125</sup>. There is also a Quaker group *Friends with Jewish connections*<sup>126</sup>. Further discussion of British Quakerism is incorporated in the Analytical Review of Chapter 4.

For a short scholarly introduction to the Society, Dandelion produced *The Quakers: a very short introduction*<sup>127</sup>. For the general reader he wrote *Celebrating the Quaker way*<sup>128</sup> and *Living the Quaker way*<sup>129</sup>. Useful introductions for the general reader by a Quaker theologian are Rex Ambler's *The Quaker way: a rediscovery*<sup>130</sup> and by a convinced Friend<sup>131</sup>, Geoffrey Durham, who wrote *Being a Quaker: a guide for newcomers*<sup>132</sup> and *What do Quakers believe*<sup>133</sup>?

In understanding The Society sociologically for this thesis, the starting point was Pink Dandelion's *A sociological analysis of the theology of Quakers*<sup>134</sup>. In that and subsequent texts<sup>135</sup>, Dandelion presents a theory of a Quaker 'double culture' to explain how the Society coheres. In his most recent work *The Cultivation of Conformity: Towards a General Theory of Internal Secularisation*, he defines the

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<sup>124</sup> Dandelion (2007. p.152).

<sup>125</sup> Dandelion (2007. p.134).

<sup>126</sup> <https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/quaker-groups/friends-with-jewish-connections>

Accessed 6/03/2024.

<sup>127</sup> Dandelion (2008)

<sup>128</sup> Dandelion (2010)

<sup>129</sup> Dandelion (2012)

<sup>130</sup> Ambler (2013)..

<sup>131</sup> A convinced Friend is one who applied for membership and became a Friend as an adult.

<sup>132</sup> Durham (2015. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed with minor revisions).

<sup>133</sup> Durham (2019)..

<sup>134</sup> Dandelion (1996).

<sup>135</sup> E.g. 2005, 2007.

double culture as ‘a permissive approach to belief content and a conformist and conservative behavioural creed’<sup>136</sup>. Caroline Plüss’s work on non-doctrinal religion<sup>137</sup> complements Dandelion’s description of a ‘behavioural creed’. They both argue that the function of the behavioural creed was to enable The Society to cohere given its non-doctrinal and non-creedal theology. Their work is further discussed in the analytical review in Chapter 4 in the light of the interview findings in Chapter 3. Dandelion’s *The cultivation of conformity* supplements his earlier work and uses the example of The Society to illustrate his general theory of internal secularisation<sup>138</sup>. That too is critically examined in Chapter 4.

Dandelion’s monographs and journal articles<sup>139</sup>, jointly with Peter Collins<sup>140</sup>, and jointly edited collections with the American scholar, Stephen W. Angell e.g. *The Oxford handbook of Quaker studies*, *The Cambridge companion to Quakerism*<sup>141</sup>, his editorship of the journal *Quaker Studies* and his supervision of successful PhD and MPhil theses available online<sup>142</sup>, have provided a solid base for Quaker studies.

Peter Collins made a distinction between canonical, vernacular and prototypical Quakerism in his ethnographic study of a Quaker meeting<sup>143</sup>. These distinction are discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis. They help to make sense of the faith not only of the interviewees as reported in Chapter 3, but the theology of all who come to their own religious beliefs, understandings and practices irrespective of the canonical

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<sup>136</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.122)

<sup>137</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.122) Relevant periodical articles based on Plüss’s unpublished Oxford University D.Phil. thesis of 1995, *A sociological analysis of the modern Quaker movement* have been published (Plüss’s. 1998; 2007).

<sup>138</sup> Dandelion (2019).

<sup>139</sup> Dandelion (e.g. 2004b, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2014b, 2019)

<sup>140</sup> Dandelion and Collins (2008, 2014)

<sup>141</sup> Dandelion and Angell (2013 and 2018)

<sup>142</sup> University of Birmingham. *UBIRA theses* <https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/>; Accessed 24/11/2023.

<sup>143</sup> Collins (1994. p.15. Now available at: <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2059208115>).

theology and practices of their religious denomination e.g. as presented in creeds, prayer books and, for Quakers, in *Quaker faith & practice*.

Collins has also been concerned with describing Quaker identity and has, with Dandelion, argued that Quakerism is a liquid religion<sup>144</sup>. That latter argument is derived from the paradigm of liquid modernity, a trope of modern sociology<sup>145</sup>. Dandelion has also made use of concepts from fluid mechanics in his *Cultivation of conformity*<sup>146</sup> based on Thomas Tweed's theory of religion<sup>147</sup>. The critical realist perspective of this research, presented in Chapter 2, follows Margaret S. Archer in rejecting metaphors such as liquidity and turbulence because they comprehensively displace and replace 'the determinate (not deterministic) influences of social structure and cultural systems'<sup>148</sup> in explaining the state of a religious organisation and the social interactions within it. Those and similar metaphors e.g. speed and acceleration, disguise the human interests and processes involved in effecting, affecting and resisting organisational change<sup>149</sup>. Dandelion's explanation refers to will-less particles in laminated flows disturbed by turbulence<sup>150</sup>, which provides a birds-eye view of a metaphorically constructed scene. It omits people. Collins writes in his review of Dandelion's *The cultivation of conformity*, that 'Individuals have impacted hugely on the development of Quakerism'<sup>151</sup>. Fluid mechanics as an

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<sup>144</sup> Collins and Dandelion (2014). One questions whether Quakerism is a religion. The religion of early Quakers was Christian. The name of the organisation contemporary Friends belong to is the Religious Society of Friends. It is a creedless society, not specifically Christian, but still formally a religious organisation which asserts 'the understanding of God's guidance' as a fundamental element of being a Quaker (*QF&P 11.01*).

<sup>145</sup> 'This article presents a consideration of the ways in which current Quaker belief and practice exemplify the condition identified by Zygmunt Bauman as liquid modernity'.(Collins and Dandelion, 2014. p.287).

<sup>146</sup> Dandelion (2019. p 100)

<sup>147</sup> Tweed (2006)

<sup>148</sup> Archer (2014. p.1).

<sup>149</sup> Archer ( 2014. p.4)

<sup>150</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.101)

<sup>151</sup> Collins (2020. p.256)

explanatory metaphor is singularly devoid of human agency and, Collins writes, 'seems odd'<sup>152</sup>.

The material introduced below, the doctoral dissertations of Douglas Kline, Susan Robson and Helen Meads, discusses how The Society's members deal with conflicts within The Society. In that respect, Dandelion's 'conformist and conservative behavioural creed'<sup>153</sup> appears as a conflict management or conflict aversion strategy. It is not a conflict resolution strategy. Conflict is often avoided by leaving a Meeting for another and often withdrawing from The Society altogether as Dandelion's research on dissociation from The Society<sup>154</sup> shows. That 2002 article seems to be the most recent, if not only, scholarly research on why members leave The Society. It is discussed critically in Chapter 5 in the light of Simmel's theory of sociation and exchange.

Douglas Kline<sup>155</sup>, within an ethnographic frame, asks "How do Friends manage dispute when it occurs in their own meeting houses"<sup>156</sup>? He defines 'conflict as a culturally informed context where particular behaviours are promoted when divergence of interests are perceived'<sup>157</sup>. They are promoted via Meetings for Worship. He refers to Dandelion's behavioural creed<sup>158</sup> as providing a culture for dealing with conflict. Kline pointed out that some conflicts in Local Meetings are not often resolved when they are not addressed in business meetings<sup>159</sup>. In one case, Elders were asked by the Meeting for Worship for business to solve a problem

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<sup>152</sup> Collins (2020. p.256)

<sup>153</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.122)

<sup>154</sup> Dandelion (2002)

<sup>155</sup> Kline (2002),

<sup>156</sup> Kline (2002, p.1)

<sup>157</sup> Kline (2002, p.1).

<sup>158</sup> Kline (2002. p.44)

<sup>159</sup> Kline (2002, p.243)

concerning latecomers to Meeting<sup>160</sup>. Their implemented solution, not initially considered within a Meeting for Worship for business, resulted in controversy and upset and some participants of the Meeting leaving. In contrast, Kline reported a conflict within The Society as a whole which was addressed directly by Meetings for Worship for business. The conflict was to do with a request for support and training for non-Quakers and individual Quakers who were together planning a protest against nuclear submarines. The protest could involve damage to property and thus deliberate lawbreaking. After a recommendation from a select committee divided a national level committee as to whether support should be given, the Quaker business method was used in Local, Area and national Meetings of Worship for business to address the issue. An acceptable compromise solution was found<sup>161</sup>.

I suggest that that was at least partly because a solution emerged after the widest possible involvement in discerning what to do within Meetings for Worship at all levels of The Society. Kline points to 'Withdrawal and inaction ... from conflict where the disputants resist addressing the issues'<sup>162</sup>. An implication is that where issues, whether local or national, are faced squarely using the Quaker business method their resolution may eventually be found<sup>163</sup>. Kline continues:

The Quaker business method is the primary implementation of the problem solving strategy, where integrated solutions are sought using a ritualised process... The business method effectively achieves integrated solutions, but the important aspect to the process is that the participant needs to believe in its efficacy<sup>164</sup>.

Accepting, if not believing, in the efficacy of the Quaker business method ought to be established at the point of entry to The Society. Accepting 'The ordering of the

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<sup>160</sup> Kline (2002. p.281)

<sup>161</sup> Kline (2002. p.134; p.137; p.310)

<sup>162</sup> Kline (2002, p.291)

<sup>163</sup> Kline (2002.p.311)

<sup>164</sup> Kline (2002. p.311)

meeting's business' is one of 'the fundamental elements of being a Quaker' that an applicant for membership should accept<sup>165</sup>. Cohesion in The Society is threatened when members do not believe in the Quaker business method's efficacy. Cohesion can be enhanced at all levels of The Society when those involved in discerning how a problem creating conflict may be resolved if those involved in the conflict use the Quaker business method creatively and properly<sup>166</sup>.

Susan Robson<sup>167</sup>, explored conflict at the local level, like Kline, through an ethnographic frame. She came to a similar conclusion in her *An exploration of conflict handling among Quakers*:

Quakers do have conflict among themselves... when it happens they are uncomfortable and embarrassed because it disturbs their self-image; they avert their minds from it, even before avoiding it<sup>168</sup>.

Aversion rather than resolution is the preferred practice in use. Robson continues:

If conflict does occur it usually turns into identity conflict, about the proper Quaker way of solving a problem. The 'proper Quaker' way in conflict is treated as a question for the collectivity. The shared identity is more important than the recognition of the individual<sup>169</sup>.

Individuals, in other words, need to be prepared to accept collective decisions provided they are properly arrived at. Robson claims the proper Quaker way is through a process of collective discernment whose aim is to achieve unity about God's guidance for a problem. An individual who is disaffected may well remain disaffected with the apparent unity of a collective discernment as minuted by the clerk. They then have the choice of accepting or rejecting the wisdom of the group. Robson noted that in her research 'there were few accounts of overt tensions about

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<sup>165</sup> QF&P (11.01)

<sup>166</sup> QF&P (Chapter 3)

<sup>167</sup> Robson (2005)

<sup>168</sup> Robson (2005, p.141).

<sup>169</sup> Robson (2005, p.141).

differing religious beliefs, though great diversity of belief was acknowledged to the point of pride<sup>170</sup>. Where there were arguments they were to do with 'practical matters, where it was necessary to come to one decision and then implement it'<sup>171</sup> .

The existence of conflict challenges the Quaker group image of a calm community. This questioning challenge was rarely seen by the contributors as an aid to creativity or innovation, but as an embarrassing sign of failure and a cause for shame<sup>172</sup>.

It was in these practical matters that social interactions became fraught and people would leave their Meeting for another and even leave the Society without further discussion<sup>173</sup>. Robson wrote in her abstract that her

'study finds a dominant community narrative telling how the Quaker task is to 'mend the world' and live in a 'peaceable kingdom'. This is achieved by ignoring conflict within the organization, defensively following the maxim 'don't ask, don't tell, don't even think about it'<sup>174</sup>.

Chapter 4 of Robson's thesis describes theories of conflict and conflict resolution<sup>175</sup>.

They may offer a way of approaching conflict as an opportunity for creativity rather than management, aversion and avoidance. Robson's work confronts the paradox of a religious society committed to peace which is sometimes unable to resolve its own internal conflicts creatively. The Society currently (as of 2022) offers no internal courses on conflict resolution for Local Meetings although it has produced a text<sup>176</sup>.

Gay Pilgrim in her work on British Quakerism draws on the concept of 'heterotopic space' derived from Foucault's concept of heterotopia i.e. space that is disturbing,

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<sup>170</sup> Robson (2005, p.142).

<sup>171</sup> Robson (2005, p.142).

<sup>172</sup> Robson (2005, p.143).

<sup>173</sup> Robson (2005, p.94, 135)

<sup>174</sup> Robson (2005 [i]).

<sup>175</sup> Robson used the first stages of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to analyse her interviews (2005,p.86). My use of IPA is discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>176</sup> Conflict in Meetings: volume 4 of the Eldership and Oversight handbooks. (2005). 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Quaker Books. Also available on line as a PDF file.



shocking and unsettling<sup>177</sup>. A Quaker Meeting was conceived as such a space for non-conformists. It was such a space when Quakers were persecuted in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and may still be a space for non-conformists given the distinctive features of Quaker theology and ecclesiology so different from the established and other nonconformist churches. The Society has a proclivity for non-violent demonstration against specific government policies<sup>178</sup>.

More generally Pilgrim makes a distinction between the views of three kinds of contemporary Quaker, relevant because they affect who should be allowed into the heterotopic Quaker space. They are 'the Exclusivists, the Inclusivists and the Syncretists'<sup>179</sup>.

The Exclusivists are a discrete, 'very small group', who find the lack of an explicit Christian religious enterprise in the mainstream of Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) unacceptable.... They are emphatically Christocentric<sup>180</sup>.

The Inclusivists, 'the core of Britain Yearly Meeting, consist of those who hold to the mainstream traditions and adhere to the 'behavioural creed' (Dandelion 1996). They are loosely Christian, who might not consider Jesus divine but value his teachings<sup>181</sup>.

The Syncretists 'are much more amorphous ... concerned about their personal spiritual quest, rather than corporate theological certainties. ... They often pursue non-Quaker religious and quasi-religious activities, as well as attending the Quaker Meeting for Worship'<sup>182</sup>. Pilgrim asserts 'They are attracted by Friends' heterotopic stance and the utopic space it offers, rather than an explicit religious enterprise<sup>183</sup>.

These labels can be juxtaposed with how each might assert the fundamental elements of being a Quaker<sup>184</sup>. Exclusivists, including Christocentric Quakers 'a very

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<sup>177</sup> Pilgrim (2008. p.53).

<sup>178</sup> e.g., Quaker Faith & Practice (2013. 24.27); Quaker support for Extinction Rebellion <https://www.quaker.org.uk/news-and-events/news/climate-protests-offered-quaker-support>

<sup>179</sup> Pilgrim (2008. p.62).

<sup>180</sup> Pilgrim (2008. p.62).

<sup>181</sup> Pilgrim (2008. p.63).

<sup>182</sup> Pilgrim (2003).

<sup>183</sup> Pilgrim (2008. p.63).

<sup>184</sup> QF&P (2013. 11.01).

small group', would want to assert the importance of discerning God's guidance and probably say 'Not yet ready for membership', to those who do not yet believe in that possibility. Inclusivists include Friends who self-identify as Christian and also those who might say they were 'spiritual but not religious'. They broadly agree with the fundamental elements of being a Quaker and would probably say 'No!' to dogmatic Christian evangelicals joining The Society in order to preserve their space from fundamentalists whose certain beliefs would be too challenging and tiresome to deal with. The Syncretists may be characterised as working at their idiosyncratic linking of religious ideas. They would say 'Yes!' to any applicant whose individualistic approach to religion was similar to theirs and, like Inclusivists, 'No!' only to fundamentalists. They may be willing to amend existing membership criteria, especially a need for 'the understanding of God's guidance' and even replace voteless discernment in favour of majority voting for efficiency's sake. Exclusivists and Syncretists might well find themselves in conflict in Area Meetings should they insist on their point of view in relation to Inclusivists.

Pilgrim does not argue a case for protecting the heterotopic space which Inclusivists might compromise by waiving the need to assert the fundamental elements of being a Quaker that *QF&P* 11.01 prescribes for membership of The Society.

Helen Meads, referring to Pilgrim's work and after reviewing the Foucauldian concept of heterotopia, emphasises heterotopia's disruptive feature as an alternative space in her thesis on the Experiment with Light<sup>185</sup>.

Experiment with Light is a structured meditation based on that understanding of Light developed by Rex Ambler. Its purpose is to develop an individual's capacity for

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<sup>185</sup> Meads (2011)

transformation within a religious context<sup>186</sup>. In the work of George Fox 'The Light' refers to the Light from or of God or Christ as received in the interior space of human consciousness. Ambler quotes Fox: 'That which may be known of God is made manifest within you, which God hath showed you'<sup>187</sup>. Meads notes that doing the experiment is a religious event different from Meeting for Worship (MfW):

The form of the Experiment deviates from Friends' usual form of MfW and social or discussion meetings in that it has a specific led form (the meditation) and specific time for sharing when deep personal experiences are exchanged, which does not occur after MfW<sup>188</sup>.

Meads points to Quaker studies research that indicates Quakers' difficulties with conflict when a local innovation threatens its normal functioning:

I show how the Experiment disrupts British Quakers' ways of doing things, specifically their culture of silence (Dandelion 1996), aversion to acknowledging conflict (Robson 2005), behaving non-reflexively (Robson 2005), undergoing a liminoid rather than liminal religious experience (Pilgrim 2003b) and 'empty co-option' (Best 2008b)<sup>189</sup>.

Meads claims in her abstract at the beginning of the thesis that

This is the first academic study of British Quakers to focus on religious experience. It demonstrates how Experimenters' religious experience and transformation supports them in changing the wider group's behaviour<sup>190</sup>.

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<sup>186</sup> Experiment with Light has a secular equivalent called Focusing. Focusing is a secular psychotherapeutic practice developed by Eugene Gendlin, a philosopher and a psychotherapist. Nancy Saunders (2008) reports that Focusing 'grew, in part, out of Gendlin's experience of sitting in Meeting for Worship at Pendle Hill when he was a young man' and quotes Gendlin confirming this (p.37). Focusing shares with Experiment with Light a stepped process of sensing what the body seems to be telling the focuser/experimenter. The two practices seem to have been developed independently. See also Meads (2011. p.12), Rice (2020). An earlier version of Saunders' account appeared in *Friends Journal*, January, 2003.

<sup>187</sup> Ambler (2007. p.28) The meditation is Ambler's reconstruction of a 17th century meditation developed by early Friends (Ambler, 2002; Lampen, 2008). Ambler presents it as a six-part guided meditation. It promotes attending to an issue or problem that may emerge into an individual's consciousness as part of the meditation. Its aim is to open a way for the issue/problem's better understanding and resolution.

<sup>188</sup> Meads (2011. p.304).

<sup>189</sup> Meads (2011. p.135 ).

<sup>190</sup> Meads (2011. p [ij]).

Meads shows how Light groups formed to do the Experiment developed a greater degree of spiritual depth and group intimacy in a 'heterotopic space' beyond that which they found in their own Meetings for Worship. There is an intention that individuals doing the practice will change the wider group's behaviour. Mead describes how that has had the consequence of creating conflict within a Meeting. Meads identifies 'cracks' in the behavioural creed as a result. She maintained that:

the consequences of the breakdown in the behavioural creed are serious, particularly where there are already signs that parts of the behavioural creed (for example, conflict aversion and not being reflexive directly contradict BYM's spiritual practice of considering one may be mistaken (QFP 1995: 1.02.17) and testimony to Truth (QFP 1995: 20.43-20.47). Quakers are a group whose espoused theory is to seek Truth, yet they continue to operate Festinger's 'cognitive dissonance', simultaneously believing or behaving in mutually exclusive ways (Festinger, et al. 2008 [1956]), operating a different theory-in-use (for example, the pretence that internal conflict does not exist). Such behaviour may potentially lead to breakdown (as schizophrenia results from dissociation of thoughts, feelings and behaviour)<sup>191</sup>.

This thesis supports Meads' argument. The behavioural creed does not in itself resolve conflicts e.g. arising when innovations in practice are advocated by an individual or a group and obstructed by another individual or group. Rather it is a means of conflict management depending on people's compliance, rather than of conflict resolution.

Judy Frith's research<sup>192</sup>, within a sociological frame, was 'about busyness and the choices about the time that busyness demands of individuals'. Her work pointed to the role giving service to The Society had in both enriching the quality of life of those who found time to give service and in contributing locally and nationally to the building and maintenance of the Society's and the wider community's social capital:

Groups of Quakers meet either frequently or occasionally, in large or small numbers and throughout the country ... Repeated engagement in this

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<sup>191</sup> Meads (2011. p.317)

<sup>192</sup> Frith (2009. p.1)

nationally networked Quaker community built firm friendships and deepened commitment to the Society<sup>193</sup>.

That commitment contributes to The Society's cohesion and seems stronger than the dissatisfaction expressed by some she interviewed with their experience of the Society in their own Local Meeting. She writes, having referred to Dandelion's 2002 article on disaffiliation from The Society:

By far the majority of interviewees interviewed for the purpose of this thesis who echo dissent on issues of belief or form remain committed (often considerably so) to the meeting and or networks with which they are involved<sup>194</sup>.

In other words, in her research cohort, differences about belief and the way of being Quaker were not so deeply felt to counter the desire to remain associated with a Quaker Meeting or Quaker network. Frith continues:

Most periods of absence or non-involvement relate to struggles, distractions or busyness in other areas of life ... but once work and family were settled, these Friends return and are serving the Society once again<sup>195</sup>.

Frith describes the time for Quaker service as one that is part of a 'temporal collage [that] does not confine itself to a single aspect of life, but encompasses all the textures that build a Quaker life, particularly the foundational spiritual fabric'<sup>196</sup>.

Temporal collage-building for Quakers was affected by the covid epidemic as everyone in the UK was affected. Volunteering in the UK has not fully recovered since then<sup>197</sup>. That has aggravated what Frith observed as the:

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<sup>193</sup> Frith (2009. p.1)

<sup>194</sup> Frith (2009. p.191).

<sup>195</sup> Frith (2009. p.192). There have been difficulties in filling Quaker roles in Meetings and on Committees. The problem has been addressed by BYM and is discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis with reference to the Simpler Meetings and the Vibrancy projects. The discussion on time for Quaker service relates to the broader issue of time for volunteering. That broader issue is discussed with reference to recent research in the second part of this literature review.

<sup>196</sup> Frith (2009. p.257).

<sup>197</sup> The National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) reported that 'the proportion of the UK population who had volunteered at least once a month in 2021/22 was 16%. This was down from about 23% in 2019/20, reflecting the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

increasing and ever changing legal demands, for example those pertaining to health and safety and child protection. Where government policy is cascaded into the voluntary sector additional demands are made on those who give time<sup>198</sup>

Firth's research showed what Quakers seek from their volunteering and service outside and inside The Society. She summarised that in an acronym, 'BIFLECT, as Quakers seek balance, incentives, friendship and community, laughs, experience, choice and variety and time limited service'<sup>199</sup>. The complexity of the requirements for complying with government finance, health and safety, and safeguarding, requirements and Charity Commission guidelines, may well reduce the motivation of Friends to accept service in those areas and require professional input. They are central to the operation of Local and Area Meetings and charities in general. If Friends are unable to offer service in those areas, Local and Area Meetings will have to find other ways of securing compliance, perhaps through contracts with professionals with whom nominated Friends would be willing to liaise. The requirements of Charity Law contributes to internal secularisation through leading to the payment for and professionalization of roles that were traditional opportunities for giving service but become too complex for non-professionals to undertake without professional input<sup>200</sup>.

Mark Read's thesis, *Quakers in the contemporary workplace*<sup>201</sup>, is of interest for several reasons. His interview findings are similar to those presented in Chapter 3 of this thesis. Firstly, his interviewees, as mine, came to Quakers because of their

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<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/key-findings-from-time-well-spent-2023/>  
Accessed 07/03/2024.

<sup>198</sup> Frith (2009 paraphrasing from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's publication: *Findings*. Social Policy Research 119, June 1997. No longer accessible online.

<sup>199</sup> Frith (2009. p.251)

<sup>200</sup> This is a major issue for The Society discussed further in Chapter 4. The impact of Charity Law on Quaker governance is the subject of Penelope Cummins's thesis (2020) discussed there.

<sup>201</sup> Read (2017)

dissatisfaction with mainstream Christianity. They had ‘an appreciation of Christianity prior to affiliation’<sup>202</sup>. Secondly, their religious ‘horizons are felt to be already matched to those espoused by the collective and are not required by the collective to change them’<sup>203</sup>. In other words their own beliefs and the way they held them were sufficiently congruent with the Quaker ways they encountered in their Meetings. Thirdly, like my interviewees, they shared a concern to improve the world through their work<sup>204</sup>.

What Read identified was a Quakerism which seemed to put no extra demands or obligations on his respondents’ faith and practice but supported their attempts to find meaning in their lives. In terms of faith, Read argued that

The idea that there is ‘that of God’ in everybody is depicted by the research participants as a way of managing discord and conflicted emotional responses in the workaday. It is cast as an empathetic and pragmatic disposition towards others<sup>205</sup>.

Read reports that ‘The interviewees tend to see conversion to the church theologically as more or less without boundaries’<sup>206</sup>. If that is so that more or less ignores the boundary which acceptance into membership is presumed applicants accept: *QF&P* 11.01.

In relation to how Quakers practice in the world of work, Read writes:

The research participants affiliates see managers as co-collaborators whose real intention is to improve the world. Although the cohort might disagree with how this betterment can be realised, affiliates regard themselves fundamentally as cooperating alongside all workers to this utopian end<sup>207</sup>.

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<sup>202</sup> Read (2017. p.95).

<sup>203</sup> Read (2017. p.94).

<sup>204</sup> Read (2017. p.190)

<sup>205</sup> Read (2017. p.211)

<sup>206</sup> Read (2017. p.115)

<sup>207</sup> Read (2017. p.284)

The problem with this utopian end is that Read's Quakers minimize the reality of conflicting interests just as most Quakers minimize and avoid conflict in their own Meetings. Read writes that:

It is apparent that these Quakers in practice accept the organisationally defined terms upon which they pursue their utopian intentions in the workaday... [although] the research participants frame the work setting as at least potentially disharmonious. However, the interviewees do not overtly challenge organisational authority but claim to partake harmoniously in workaday processes to advance their aims<sup>208</sup>.

The picture that emerges from Read's (and Dandelion's) research is of a Quakerism in practice which puts few theological demands on its members. The British Quaker John Punshon, notes in his *Portrait in grey*<sup>209</sup> how Karl Barth's theology 'never caught the imagination of Friends'. Barth became disillusioned with liberal theology because of the horror of the First World War. He questioned

the assimilation of the results and processes of modern science to the Christian faith, the sufficiency of psychology and mysticism as accounts of religious experience, the welcoming acceptance of secular culture<sup>210</sup>.

Rather, Barth reasserted 'the sovereignty and the otherness of God as the basis for our relations with him'<sup>211</sup>. More attention to Barth's theology might have alerted Quakers to a too easy familiarity with the Divine.

Just one of Read's interviewees was discomforted by the liberal Quaker tradition:

Jack framed the contemporary Quaker church setting as an arena where social inequalities were undeclared but were manifested in church practices. ... Jack depicted the liberal tradition as a middle-class orthodoxy. This orthodoxy was covertly privileged within the Quaker church, a disposition which contradicted Quaker espoused heterodoxy and testament to equality. Jack had now begun

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<sup>208</sup> Read (2017. p.260)

<sup>209</sup> John Punshon's *Portrait in grey* (1986) is a short history of the Quakers within mainly Britain and the USA. He was influenced by Karl Barth's theology. Punshon's spiritual journey was towards a Christocentric Quakerism as necessary for the future of Quakerism. (Anderson, P.N., 2017. *The Formative Spirituality of John Punshon (1935-2017)*).

<sup>210</sup> Punshon (1986. p.248)

<sup>211</sup> Punshon (1986. P.248)



to question the integrity of the Quaker tradition which had originally framed his conversion<sup>212</sup>

Here is a case where enthusiasm as a result of initial engagement with Quakerism was leading to a questioning of Quakerism as a result of his experience of the Quaker tradition through his encounter with a specific vernacular Quakerism.

Two texts that discuss and question the Quaker theological diversity that is attractive to many newcomers are by Kathleen M. Slack and Martin Davie. Slack, in her Swarthmore Lecture *Constancy and change in the Society of Friends*, reflected on the challenge of how open or closed the Society should be to new members<sup>213</sup>. She wrote that the relevant question was not about how open or closed the Society should be but

How far and to what extent can it offer membership to those of differing beliefs or convictions without so compromising itself that it would be unable to maintain its cohesion and unity . The strain which an open society imposes upon its members is the second fact that is too easily overlooked.<sup>214</sup>

The boundary between Quaker and not-Quaker, which the assertion of the fundamental elements of being a Quaker as criteria for membership establishes, is a key issue affecting cohesion in the Society. Slack goes on to argue that:

Were Friends to become a body any number of whom claimed to be in no way Christian or failed to share any of the historic testimonies of the Society, it would be so weakened that it would be no longer able to maintain any corporate life. It is extremely easy to underestimate the tensions and conflicts that can, indeed, do result from strongly held differences of belief in one body<sup>215</sup>.

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<sup>212</sup> Read (2017. p.143).

<sup>213</sup> Slack (1967. p.52)

<sup>214</sup> Slack (1967. p.54)

<sup>215</sup> Slack (1967. p.55)

In 2022 it may be argued that Slack's 1967 warning of the consequences for the Society of trying to contain strongly held differences of theological belief and, for that matter, ecclesiological practice, has been ignored.

Martin Davie, in his *British Quaker theology since 1895*, believed that 'from the beginning of the 1960's British Quaker theology ceased to be dominated by Liberal Quakerism [i.e. in its Christian character] and as a result it has become highly diverse'.<sup>216</sup> Davie suggests the extreme diversity of religious belief of its members accommodated by the Society is an issue which British Quakers might want to consider. He questioned whether it was 'a sign of healthy open-minded pluralism, or simply of theological confusion?'<sup>217</sup> Martin Davie's work is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 in relation to the interview findings of Chapter 3.

The American historian (not a Quaker) Thomas C. Kennedy's *British Quakerism 1860-1920: the transformation of a religious community*<sup>218</sup> plotted the development of Christian liberal thinking in The Society during that period. Kennedy then commented on late 20th century Quakerism, writing that it attracted those who 'envision Quakerism as an agency for social change or a forum for radical idealism rather than a community of faithful Christians'<sup>219</sup>. He thought The Society's Christian tradition was being diluted by those whose primary interest was social change. Whilst many Quakers do not identify as Christian, we will see in Chapter 3 that many interviewees considered themselves Quaker and Christian and were also concerned with their Quaker community and with social reform.

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<sup>216</sup> Davie (1997. p.268).

<sup>217</sup> Davie (1997. p.275)

<sup>218</sup> Kennedy (2001)

<sup>219</sup> Kennedy (2001. p.427).

Diana Sandy is a birthright Friend<sup>220</sup> but not an academic researcher<sup>221</sup>. Her book, *Whatever happened to the Quaking?*<sup>222</sup>, is a collection of essays and letters to *the Friend*<sup>223</sup>. Sandy thought the spiritual character of the Society had been undermined by admissions criteria that were too relaxed and by The Society's structural reforms. Sandy believes:

that one can only be a *quaker* (sic.) by conviction, whatever one's background. Quaking in the presence of the Holy Spirit involves a commitment, a discipline – a discipleship – to the reality of that presence in order that it can shape our lives'<sup>224</sup>.

It is the conviction in the reality of the Holy Spirit's presence and discipleship to the reality of that presence that makes a Quaker. Acceptance into the Society should involve a commitment to that reality. Her view is that in the 1970's:

The Society of Friends in Britain lost its anchor and began to drift wildly ... We became home to refugees from almost every church, every faith group, every political persuasion and every pressure group. We became home to atheists, agnostics, humanists, anarchists, feminists, various rights' activists as well as the peace activists and pacifists<sup>225</sup>.

Sandy believes 'these trends stem from the changes to the structure which were determined in 1965 and came into effect in 1970'. They conflicted with the then theological and ecclesiological traditions of the Society<sup>226</sup>. She argues that the management of the Society now conforms to 'the Civil Service model'<sup>227</sup> which conflicts with the theological and ecclesiological traditions of the Society. The widespread and interconnected involvement of its members in what Sandy

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<sup>220</sup> A birthright Friend is one whose parents were Friends and who remains a member of the Society.

<sup>221</sup> Sandys.(2017. p.2, 6)

<sup>222</sup> Sandy (2017)

<sup>223</sup> *the Friend* is the weekly periodical of the Society containing news, letters and articles. It is a registered charity separate from Britain Yearly Meeting.

<sup>224</sup> Sandys (2017. p.7)

<sup>225</sup> Sandys (2017. p.57.)

<sup>226</sup> Sandys (2017. p.58)

<sup>227</sup> Sandys (2017. p.84)

characterised as a cobweb structure<sup>228</sup> has been reduced as a result of centralisation<sup>229</sup>.

One recalls Kline's assessment of the importance of the Quaker business method in conflict management and Frith's comment that 'Repeated engagement in this nationally networked Quaker community built firm friendships and deepened commitment to the Society'<sup>230</sup>. Using the Quaker business method and Involvement in and commitment with others to the national work contributed to the cohesion of The Society practically as much as the double culture contributed to conflict management if not conflict resolution.

Statistics pertaining to membership and participation in the Society have been published annually from 1935 by Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (formerly London Yearly Meeting until 1995) in its *Tabular statement*. J.W.C. Chadkirk based his research *Patterns of membership and participation among British Quakers, 1823-2012*<sup>231</sup> on an analysis of tabular statements and on other Quaker statistical collections. After a period of attachment, for some, disillusionment sets in. Attenders choose not to become members and simply stop attending. Those who have gone through the process of becoming members resign their membership or stop coming and are removed from the count. That the decline in numbers overall exceeds the number of new attenders and new members is revealed in the latest Society's *tabular statement*<sup>232</sup>. Chadkirk's work is discussed further in Chapter 4.

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<sup>228</sup> Sandy, 2017. p.74)

<sup>229</sup> Sandy hopes her work will be useful when someone produces a history of British 'Quakerism' in the 20th century' (2017. p.1). There is no specific monograph on the History of Quakerism in Britain the 20th century but there are chapters in Pink Dandelion's *An introduction to Quakerism* (2007).

<sup>230</sup> Frith (2009. p.1).

<sup>231</sup> Chadkirk (2015)

<sup>232</sup> Britain Yearly Meeting (2022)

Statistical representations of the faith and practice of Quakers were provided by national Quaker questionnaire-based surveys undertaken in 1990, 2003 and 2013. The first of these surveys was reported on by Dandelion<sup>233</sup>, the second by Carey, Dandelion and Rutherford<sup>234</sup>, and the third by Hampton<sup>235</sup> and by Dandelion<sup>236</sup>. An area survey was conducted by Kate Mellor<sup>237</sup>. These are discussed in Chapter 4<sup>238</sup>. Problems of construction and interpretation with questionnaires and statistical surveys of religion are discussed in Chapter 4. They were highlighted by Dandelion<sup>239</sup> and Erika Willander<sup>240</sup> whose work is also discussed in Chapter 4.

As a comment on the decline in participation in The Society, as of 2023, the place of religion in British society has been shown to have become more fluid. The Church of England website reports an increase in regular worshippers and average weekly attendance<sup>241</sup> after years of decline, although it has not yet reached pre-covid levels. The Lausanne Organisation, a Christian evangelical association, reports that 'Pentecostal churches in the UK have exploded in the last 20 years, from 2,500 congregations in 2000 to 4,200 by 2020'. Pentecostals share with Quakers an emphasis on experiential religion, but their Bible-centred, Christocentric, expressive liturgy and social background is in contrast to that of contemporary British Quakerism<sup>242</sup> It is unlikely that British Quakers would ever become Bible-centred

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<sup>233</sup> Dandelion (1996)

<sup>234</sup> Carey, Dandelion and Rutherford (2009)

<sup>235</sup> Hampton (2014)

<sup>236</sup> Dandelion (2014b)

<sup>237</sup> Mellor (2010)

<sup>238</sup> Suffice it to state here that the Quaker demographic is predominantly middle class, white and university educated.

<sup>239</sup> Dandelion (2014b)

<sup>240</sup> Erika Willander (2014)

<sup>241</sup> <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/church-attendance-rises-second-year-running> Accessed 8/03/2024.

<sup>242</sup> 'The Pentecostal sector, however, is not limited to large denominations like the RCCG (Redeemed Church of God) with just over 72,000 in attendance, Elim Pentecostal (just under 72,000), and the Assemblies of God (48,000), the three largest, followed by Hillsong (perhaps 17,000), but includes literally hundreds of either totally independent one-off invariably black churches, or very small groups

because Quakerism decenters the Bible in favour of the authority of an individual's spiritual experience as discussed above in 1.4. On the other hand, participants in Quaker Meetings may rediscover the value of Bible study and the relevance of the Bible and the value of spiritual exercises like Experiment with Light in relation to their questions about the meaning of their lives and how to live them. The possibility of a Quaker theological revival is not to contradict the present statistical evidence of Quaker decline and continuing secularization throughout the world presented by e.g. Steve Bruce and David Voas<sup>243</sup>, nor their argument that modernization is a cause of secularization.

A 2018 Quaker survey was completed by Francesca Montemaggi, not a Quaker, who produced a report on *The spirituality of new Quakers*<sup>244</sup>. New Quakers were defined as members and attenders who had been participating with Friends for less than three years<sup>245</sup>. Her report was based on a questionnaire-based survey with a selective follow-up of respondents with telephone or Skype interviews. Her findings about their faith and practice are similar to the results of my in-depth interviews<sup>246</sup> with members who, in contrast with new Quakers, had been participating with Friends for at least nine years. Montemaggi's respondents were from Christian backgrounds but had 'often disaffiliated [from other religious denominations] before attending Quaker meetings'<sup>247</sup>. Like my interviewees, they had had some contact with individual Quakers before their first Meeting; and having gone to a Quaker

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(denominations?) of three or four churches.' <https://lausanne.org/content/lga/2021-09/christianity-in-the-uk> Accessed 8/03/2024. See also Davies (2019) for 'a story of British Pentecostalism'.

<sup>243</sup> Bruce and Voas (2023. p.3 of 13).

<sup>244</sup> Montemaggi. (2018b. <https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/changing-face-of-faith-gb-qccir-report-2018-pt2.pdf> Accessed 05/07/2022).

<sup>245</sup> Montemaggi (2018b. p.3)

<sup>246</sup> My interviews were conducted in 2015, but conclusions from them were not published until this research.

<sup>247</sup> Montemaggi (2018b. p.4)

meeting, they found they could express their spirituality, or religiosity in their Meetings without adherence to a set of beliefs<sup>248</sup>. That was a significant attraction of their Meeting.

Montemaggi reported that 'New Quakers' feel 'at home' because they feel accepted for who they are as individuals. She goes on to write that 'Quaker liberalism means that many people who have suffered (and still may suffer) marginalisation in other contexts, such as LGBT and disabled people, feel they can be themselves'<sup>249</sup>. In my research one interviewee expressed their relief and their joy at being accepted as a gay person by their meeting.

Montemaggi refers to spirituality, social activism and community as factors that are attractive to her respondents:

Quaker spirituality combines contemplative practice with social activism. However, Quaker activism takes place in external organisations and everyday life rather than within the Quaker community. Quakers are not party political, but seem to have a consistent and uniform ethical-political identity<sup>250</sup>.

Montemaggi then also noted the contrast between those Quakers who 'value the Christian roots of Quakerism' and those who 'are uncomfortable with Christian language and associate Christianity with a rigid theology'<sup>251</sup>.

Montemaggi's report is part 2 of a three part report entitled *The changing face of faith in Britain: How should Quakers respond?*<sup>252</sup>.. Part 1 of the report, also by

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<sup>248</sup> Montemaggi (p.4)

<sup>249</sup> Montemaggi (p.4)

<sup>250</sup> Montemaggi (p.4).

<sup>251</sup> Montemaggi (p.4).

<sup>252</sup> Part 3 of the report is by Ben Pink Dandelion entitled *Charting Quaker ecumenical and interfaith involvement*. That subject is not explored as part of this thesis. This three part study was commissioned by the Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations (QCIIIR) from the Centre for Research in Quaker Studies (CRQS) at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre whose director is Ben Pink Dandelion.

Montemaggi, comprises an overview and commentary on religion in Britain today<sup>253</sup>. Entitled *The changing face of faith in Britain* this offers a thorough review of secularisation theories in order to contextualize The Society's position in relation to secularisation. Montemaggi discusses Wayne Roof's ideas:

Roof identifies in the 'baby boomers' a generation with a culture significantly different from that of the pre-boomers. They distrust authorities and seek self-fulfilment; they value experience over intellectual statements of belief and represent a new way in which individuals engage with religious organisations. The emphasis on spiritual seeking also reflects both the changed place of religious institutions in contemporary society and the rise of individualism [and then quotes Roof]:

'Personal autonomy has a double face, one that reflects the dislocations of institutional religious identities in the contemporary world, and a second that mirrors a deeply personal search for meaningful faith and spirituality' (Roof, 2003: p. 146)<sup>254</sup>.

Such a characterisation is in accord with the accounts of the contemporary Quaker researchers<sup>255</sup> and the interviewees discussed in my thesis as well as Montemaggi's respondents. Montemaggi<sup>256</sup> relates her review to Quakers specifically<sup>257</sup>.

Montemaggi has also produced a periodical article *A quiet faith: Quakers in post-Christian Britain* based on her research with Quakers<sup>258</sup>.

Penelope Cummins's research<sup>259</sup> focuses on how secular charity law has affected The Society in its response to the changing requirements of state regulation of charities. She argues that that has led trustees of Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM), the charity, with its senior staff, to allow themselves increasing discretionary power in

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<sup>253</sup> Montemaggi (p.4) <https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/changing-face-of-faith-gb-qccir-report-2018-pt1.pdf> Accessed 06/07/2022)

<sup>254</sup> Montemaggi (2018c. p.11)

<sup>255</sup> E.g. Dandelion (2019.); Cummins (2020).

<sup>256</sup> Montemaggi (2018c. p.17)

<sup>257</sup> Part 3 of the report is by Ben Pink Dandelion entitled *Charting Quaker ecumenical and interfaith involvement*, a subject which is not explored as part of this thesis.

<sup>258</sup> Montemaggi (2018a)

<sup>259</sup> Cummins (2019, 2020)



decision-making resulting in disempowering traditional decision-making bodies within the Society. Cummins' work is discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis. It led to my discussion of governing documents in Chapters 4 and 7 and their role in internal secularisation within The Society.

### **1.5.2 Further theoretical material informing my analysis**

Inger Furseth and Pål Repstad's<sup>260</sup> approach to the study of the sociology of religion in their '*An introduction to the sociology of religion*' was to treat religion as a social phenomenon to be studied as any other social phenomenon. They begin with discussing the classical writers exploring the phenomenon. Their discussion of the work of Georg Simmel (1858-1918) led me to the distinction between an individual's religiosity and the form through which that might be expressed. That distinction became fundamental to this research when analyzing and reflecting on the interview data and is discussed in Chapter 4. Simmel's contribution to this thesis's research design is discussed in Chapter 2. His work on the relationship of an individual to a society and why a society persists is discussed in Chapter 5.

Furseth and Repstad's referred to Horst Helle's collection of Simmel's writings on religion and Helle's introduction to them<sup>261</sup>. Helle related them to Simmel's analysis of early industrialism and the development of the metropolis. Paraphrasing Simmel's essay *Metropolis and Mental Life*<sup>262</sup>, Helle wrote:

Isolated individual urban subjects cope with overexposure to a horrendous objective reality through a "blasé outlook", indifference, and even aversion.....Hope in culture – in art and religion as well as scholarship – remains'<sup>263</sup>.

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<sup>260</sup> Furseth and Repstad (2006)

<sup>261</sup> Helle (1997)

<sup>262</sup> Simmel (1971. p.324)

<sup>263</sup> Helle (1997. xii)

Culture, art, religion and scholarship helped individuals to negotiate the challenges of modern urban life. The seekers who find the Religious Society of Friends discussed in Chapter 3 and the participants in The Society who left it discussed in Chapter 5 arrived with hope that associating with The Society would be a social and religious base for hope that would enrich their lives.

My thesis should be read within a sociological frame concerned with the interaction between individuals and the religious denomination with which they have chosen to associate. It is an exploration of the lived religion of those who became involved specifically with Quakers. Kim Knibbe and Helena Kupari have provided a critical overview of 'Lived religion' and 'Everyday religion' as those concepts have come to be treated in the mainline sociology of religion literature<sup>264</sup>. The concepts focus on 'how religion is encountered and experienced — how it comes into play — in different environments: public and private, official and informal, sacred, secular, and religiously 'neutral'<sup>265</sup>.

Knibbe and Kupari quote Leonard Norman Primiano's<sup>266</sup> definition of vernacular religion as "religion as it is lived: as human beings encounter, understand, interpret, and practice it"<sup>267</sup>. That definition puts a focus on an individual's practice of religion and away from discussing religion in terms of the numbers affiliated to and espousing a named religion and a denomination's normative theology and liturgical practices.

A collection of essays *Religion on the edge* edited by Courtney Bender and others, also extends the content and boundaries of the sociology of religion by 'de-centering

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<sup>264</sup> Knibbe and Kupari (2020).

<sup>265</sup> Knibbe and Kupari (2020. p.159)

<sup>266</sup> Leonard Norman Primiano (1995)

<sup>267</sup> Knibbe and Kupari (2020. p.163)

'taken-for-granted categories' within the discipline (2013. p.1). For example, Michal Pagis notices that:

Religious practice happens in places and contexts where the body connects between one person and another, or between a person and the material world around him or her<sup>268</sup>.

Pagis proposes

exploring 'the microsocial aspects of religion...putting aside , temporarily, the symbolic systems of religious doctrines and instead concentrate on behavior and experience'<sup>269</sup>.

In other words, interactions with others in particular spaces affects persons' beliefs and practices as well as a denomination's doctrines. In fact, one's initial introduction to religion is often with the family and through family practices<sup>270</sup>. An individual's religiosity or spirituality can be conceptualised as one that is in process through their lifespan. At any time, their religious life is never finalised. Their interactions with others contributes to the development of their own and other's faith and practice and even of the doctrines and practices of the denomination to which they choose to attach<sup>271 272</sup>.

Knibbe and Kupari themselves state that:

lived religion is an approach that is suitable for inquiring into what people do that they identify as religious, spiritual or generally as going beyond common-sense understandings of the world.... All religious phenomena—e.g. practices, rituals, beliefs, norms, values, doctrines, objects, institutions—can be studied as lived religion<sup>273</sup>.

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<sup>268</sup> Pagis (2013. p.96)

<sup>269</sup> Pagis (2013. p.96)

<sup>270</sup> Vermeer (2014) reviews research into religion and family life.

<sup>271</sup> Pagis (2013. p.96)

<sup>272</sup> A current issue is The Society's and other religious denominations' position on assisted dying. See <https://www.quaker.org.uk/news-and-events/news/quakers-to-discuss-assisted-dying> Accessed 13/12/2021).

<sup>273</sup> Knibbe and Kupari (2020. p.166-167)

A proponent of a 'lived religion' approach to the study of religion is Meredith B. McGuire. McGuire points in her textbook *Religion: the social context*, to the numerous studies that 'have documented widespread religious eclecticism'<sup>274</sup>. I suggest, following Collins, that it is an individual's eclectic synthesis of religious ideas and practices which constitutes an individual's prototypical religion. Whatever religious faith and beliefs are outwardly professed, they are embodied uniquely in a person's lived life. Knibbe and Kupari note that in McGuire's *Lived religion: faith and practice in everyday life*<sup>275</sup> :

McGuire (2008, 216: n. 9, 234: n. 2) explicitly connects the concept of lived religion to philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body—the idea of the 'lived body' as the vehicle through which people engage with the world; this enables scholars to recognize how religious practice and experience are connected with human embodiment.

Each body uniquely embodies a synthesis of ideas and practices to do with finding an orientation to the world and a practice of living in it. As discussed in a footnote above, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy was also drawn upon by Eugene Gendlin in developing the practice of Focusing, a secular equivalent of the Quaker Experiment with Light.

McGuire distinguishes 'four narratives in the sociology of religion: 'secularization, reorganization, individualization and supply-side market analysis'<sup>276</sup>. All four narratives are relevant when considering the individuals who interact with The Religious Society of Friends in Britain.

Firstly, individuals and religious institutions have to find their place and their way within the predominantly secular environment of Britain. Secularisation itself may be

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<sup>274</sup> McGuire (2002. p.293)

<sup>275</sup> McGuire is also a Quaker (2002. xvi).

<sup>276</sup> McGuire (2002. p.285). Supply-side economics also includes 'rational choice theory' which is discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

a more powerful force in undermining affiliation to Quaker and other religious institutions than anything the Society might do to strengthen its theological stance and effectiveness in reversing its numerical decline. Science, empiricism and utilitarian thinking that accompany modernism and modernization have been inhibiting most people's capacity to interpret the meaning of their lives through religious forms and religious narratives since the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>277</sup>.

Secondly, re. reorganization, the hope that reorganization may help to reverse the Religious Society of Friends' fortunes is evident in its current leadership's hopes that reorganization would lead to participants spending more time on spiritual matters rather than committee work to do with the Society's centrally managed projects or local administration<sup>278</sup>. That viewpoint is contested by others in the Society and is discussed in Chapter 4. The Society traditionally has emphasised that 'the spirit of God' is 'at work in the ordinary activities and experience of your daily life'<sup>279</sup> There is no strict distinction to be made between spiritual work and secular work. The spiritual and secular work of Quakers are canonically and, for some, actually and intrinsically linked as leadings from God. *Quaker faith & practice* as a text is a text that illustrates that viewpoint:

The arrangement of the text within this book is intended to show the interdependence of our faith and our practice. Therefore matters of church government no longer stand alone, but are integrated with other material in order to encourage deeper understanding of the nature of our organisation as an expression of community, of the right ordering of our affairs and of the religious foundations on which our structures are built <sup>280</sup>.

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<sup>277</sup> Secularisation is discussed at various points in this research, but mainly in Chapter 4 where Steve Bruce and David Voas's work is commented upon (Bruce, 2011; Bruce and Voas, 2023)

<sup>278</sup> (<https://www.quaker.org.uk/blog/our-faith-our-community-a-reality-check-for-2020>  
Accessed 17/08/2021)

<sup>279</sup> QF&P. (2013. 1.02.7)

<sup>280</sup> QF&P (2013. p.13)

Those religious foundations are challenged by changes introduced by charity law. How those changes are responded to affects The Society's ecclesiology and governance.

Thirdly, re. individualization, individualization 'involves a fundamental shift in the locus of religion from institutions to individuals'<sup>281</sup>. Statistics show that official religion in Britain, as represented by the mainstream churches and most denominational churches, has become less important in the lives of most of the British population e.g. the report by Milan Dinic working for YouGov<sup>282</sup>. The Office for National Statistics' *'Exploring religion in England and Wales: February 2020'* showed that the numbers attending religious services in all groups were in decline. Even those who identified as Christian were less likely than average regularly to attend a religious service or meeting (29%)<sup>283</sup>. What McGuire observes is that 'Official and unofficial religiosity are thus out of synch, with the latter growing in importance'<sup>284</sup>. McGuire observes in relation to religion in the USA that there is a growing lack of 'synching' between religious institutions and the religiosity of the general public.

The fourth narrative in the sociology of religion is a supply-side market analysis of religion. It offers a "general theory" [beginning] with the idea that churches do not exist in social isolation; instead, they compete for "customers" in religious "markets"<sup>285</sup>. McGuire argues this theory implies 'Just redesign your religion so that it will be more popular and church members will flow through your door'<sup>286</sup>. The

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<sup>281</sup> McGuire (2002. p.292).

<sup>282</sup> Dinic (<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/lifestyle/articles-reports/2020/12/29/how-religious-are-british-people> Accessed 25/07/2022).

<sup>283</sup>

(<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/articles/exploringreligioninenglandandwales/february2020> Accessed 9/08/2022).

<sup>284</sup> McGuire (2002. p.292).

<sup>285</sup> McGuire ( 2002. p.295).

<sup>286</sup> McGuire (2002. p.299).

theory's reductive view of religion as something easily redesignable for those who might constitute its market may be rejected not only for its jejune simplicity but also because of its unprovability. It does not distinguish religions from the religious institutions through which a religion is promoted and the complexity of relating to the requirements of putative religious 'customers' searching for a religion and religious institution to satisfy their religiosity.

Grace Davie<sup>287</sup>, has published two editions of *Religion in Britain*<sup>288</sup> in which she has investigated 'the complexities of religion in twenty-first century Britain'<sup>289</sup>. In the first edition, Davie identified 'believing without belonging' as characterising the approach to religion by many who believed but were reluctant to join a religious institution. That work was a contribution to the secularisation debate where surveys measuring numbers attending religious institutions and the beliefs of believers pointed to a decline in religion. Her text qualified those findings by indicating there were many more who said they believed but were not attached to institutions and rarely engaged in public religious services. In relation to Quakers, there have been members who have not attended Meeting for many years and there are listed, unlisted and listed attenders of Local Meetings for Worship, some of whom explicitly do not want full membership<sup>290</sup>. Earlier in the chapter it was also pointed out that members of the Society included Christian, universalist and non-theist members all with different beliefs in Christian concepts. There are also within Anglicanism degrees of belief in Christian concepts<sup>291</sup>. That reality points to degrees of believing and degrees of

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<sup>287</sup> Emeritus Professor of the University of Exeter. <https://sociology.exeter.ac.uk/staff/davie/> Accessed 14/10/2023

<sup>288</sup> Davie (2007; 2015)

<sup>289</sup> Davie (2015. p.3)

<sup>290</sup> This is a finding discussed earlier in this chapter and reported by my interviewees .

<sup>291</sup> The Anglican Media Center writes that 'Anglicans are very diverse, with significant differences in belief and practice between the different wings of the Church. The three main groupings are Anglo-Catholics, evangelicals and liberals' and different parishes may contain churches that represent those

belonging, a reality that itself requires further explanation. That explanation is offered with reference to Simmel's religious theory in Chapter 4 and his exchange and sociation theory in Chapter 5.

In the second edition of her book, Davie identified 'vicarious religion' as characterising an approach where religion is 'performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand, but appear to approve of what the minority is doing'<sup>292</sup>. The fact for Quakers, however, is that numbers choosing to attend Quaker Meetings, both attenders and members, as shown earlier in this chapter, are in decline. It is rare that those who have not been connected with Quakers have asked for a Quaker marriage or funeral service and it is therefore rare that Quakerism provides a medium for vicarious religion.

Those who do participate in Quaker Meetings would be considered Davie's 'religiously active individuals'<sup>293</sup>. Davie writes that

In the current period the actively religious are disproportionately drawn to two kinds of religious organization: charismatic evangelical churches on the one hand and cathedrals or city-centre churches on the other. The former epitomizes firm commitments, strong fellowship and conservative teaching, balanced by the warmth of a charismatic experience. The latter allows a much more individual (even anonymous) expression of religious commitment: in 'cathedral-type' churches the appeal is often associated with the beauty of the building, the quality of the music and the traditional nature of the liturgy. The important point to grasp is that in both cases there is a noticeable *experiential* element, albeit very differently expressed. Conversely, rather more liberal forms of Protestantism, noticeably fashionable in the 1960s, have not fulfilled their promise. There are, of course, important exceptions to this rule<sup>294</sup> but by and large the purely cerebral has less appeal in the twenty-first century than many people thought would be the case<sup>295</sup>.

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wings (<https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/factsheets/christianity-in-britain-factsheet/#:~:text=Anglicans%20are%20very%20diverse%2C%20with,Roman%20Catholic%20traditions%20and%20style>). Accessed 21/10/2023.

<sup>292</sup> Davie (2007 [the book's subtitle]; 2015. p.6).

<sup>293</sup> Davie (2015. p.7)

<sup>294</sup> Unspecified here.

<sup>295</sup> Davie (2015. p.8)



The binary distinction Davie makes here does not apply to The Society. As we have seen, the Quaker story emphasises that of God in everyone, a God who can speak to each person's condition, a God that can be heard within an individual's being and an understanding of ministry in Meetings for Worship that authentic ministry is prompted by the Spirit. Quakers are, however, generally liberal when it comes to social ethics, being advocates, for example, of same sex marriage and equality in loving relationships. It is a denomination that emphasises the experiential element of faith, which is, as the quotation above from Davie states, 'The important point to grasp' about 'the actively religious'.

Davie does mention Quakers in her 2015 text but only with reference to religion in York, where Quakers produced chocolates as an alternative to alcohol, and the Quaker Seebom Rowntree reported on the city's miserable social conditions<sup>296</sup>. Her observations about 'more liberal forms of Protestantism not fulfilling their promise of countering declining congregations and about 'the cerebral' not having appeal, however, do seem to apply to contemporary British Quakerism. Its membership, predominantly middle class and well-educated, continues to decline in spite of its canonical and radical assertion of the possibility of an unmediated relationship with God, and of its canonical and radical assertion of the possibility of discerning God's guidance, and of its theology of ministry.

Claire Disbrey has produced an 'institutional theory' of innovation in religion<sup>297</sup>.

Disbrey sees innovation in religion as arising from existing religious institutions. She defines institutions as a result of:

activities or practices that have acquired special significance and authority within a particular community ... they are socially established (rather than,

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<sup>296</sup> Davie (2015. p.106)

<sup>297</sup> Disbrey (1994).

natural), repeated, symbolic (i.e. ritual) activities that are shared (rather than being private)<sup>298</sup>.

Describing and defining religious institutions in that way avoids reifying them. It emphasises they form and continue as a result of shared symbolic activities continuing through time. But at some time people:

may come to find them inadequate or irrelevant for all sorts of reasons probably best described as changes in their historical situation ... changes [then] put pressure on people to abandon or change institutions which no longer seem to be necessary or satisfactory'. At the same time the internal authority of rule-following activities, and the power of the people who have an interest in their continued existence, produce resistance to change<sup>299</sup>.

In the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, the activities of the established Church of England were no longer satisfying many in its parishes.

Disbrey continues:

Sometimes, however, in situations of tensions like these, an individual innovator comes up with a radical idea – a proposal for a major change in a particular religious institution, or for the introduction of a completely new one. If the proposal seems appropriate to, and is accepted by, a sufficient number of people, a new religious tradition is formed<sup>300</sup>.

That description fits well with how the Quaker movement developed and became the Religious Society of Friends. Fox and others became disenchanted with the ways of the established church. Disbrey, following MacIntyre, agrees that Fox's understanding of his religious experience necessarily grew out of his prior knowledge of the concepts and language of the printed English Bible and the Anglican church. That does not itself negate the transforming power of the interior experiencing that Fox interpreted as a voice telling him that Christ could speak to his condition. Disbrey following MacIntyre, agrees that James' treatment of religious experience

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<sup>298</sup> Disbrey (1994. p.224).

<sup>299</sup> Disbrey (1994. p.227).

<sup>300</sup> Disbrey (1994. p.228).

was simplistic, as if accounts of a religious experience were unconditioned by the learnt language and concepts of a particular culture. But the power of a person's interior experiencing can only be conveyed through the language and culture in which it occurs.

Fox's experience inspired his preaching and his letters. They were a major contributory factor in bringing like-minded people whom he encountered on his travels together. But what he had to say about human beings' relationship with God was said against the turmoil of English religious culture, politics and society in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century which affected the whole country. Fox makes almost no mention of that in his journals <sup>301</sup>. He emphasised the experience of the relationship all may have with God<sup>302</sup> on the basis of his understanding of his own experiencing. The fact that there were sufficient others who were ready to accept his theological position was the necessary factor in the formation of a new religious tradition. Together they developed a form of worship i.e. the Quaker Meeting for Worship, that was, as Disbrey argues, 'a new source of authority in religion based on the democratic ideas emerging in the current political milieu'<sup>303</sup>. As a result of his writings and what other contemporaries wrote about his preaching and his personality, history has often named him the founder of the Quaker movement<sup>304</sup>.

We shall see in Chapter 2 how Disbrey's ideas resonate with Simmel's concept of society as an event consisting of an ongoing dynamic association of individuals persisting as a result of some unifying purpose or purposes. Simmel additionally

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<sup>301</sup> (1994, p.34)

<sup>302</sup> *QF&P* 26.42

<sup>303</sup> Disbrey (1989, p.219)

<sup>304</sup> Disbrey (1989, p.61). Dandelion (2007, p.13)

sees all religions and religious activities as a product of human religiosity whilst remaining agnostic about Divine inspiration as their source.

Disbrey's ideas also resonate with Archer's explanations of how organisational change occurs - through a sequence of social interactions that lead either to the reinforcement or change in the existing structures of an organisation. Both are justified by drawing upon ideas accessible within its cultural system.

### **1.5.3 Dandelion's Swarthmore lecture: Open to transformation**

I want to conclude this critical literature review of some of the texts that have been important to this thesis with some observations on Ben Pink Dandelion's 2014 Swarthmore lecture *Open for transformation: being Quaker* (2014) referred to above when discussing Pink Dandelion's work. It is not intended as an academic text. It is a text by a convinced Quaker for other Quakers and attenders.

Dandelion's starting points are 'the reality of spiritual experience' and 'faithfulness to the experience itself'. He then asserts that 'If we as Quakers in Britain want our Quaker approach to faith to be vibrant, cohesive, coherent and socially useful, we need to be clear about what we are and what we are not (2014. p.1). Dandelion continues 'We interpret our experience in different ways and construct different doctrinal distillations, which we place over the core insights of our shared and underlying theological narrative' (2014. p.11). Dandelion assumes that there is a shared and underlying theological narrative but that is questionable. Dandelion is implicitly aware that many who have become members do not share it. He quotes 'the fundamental elements of being a Quaker' and comments that 'We should use the clarity of spiritual insight into what membership means, accepted in 1994, with greater authority' (2014. p.59-60). He continues:

We seem to have lost this sense of asking applicants for membership to be clear about what it is they are becoming part of. Whilst our book of discipline is very clear about what we are committing to when we come into membership, we have not held to it in our practice.....

However, with 87% of us starting attending as adults, we cannot assume any prior understanding at all (2014. p.60).

Dandelion himself says that at the point of joining 'I could not subscribe to the fundamental elements listed above in *Quaker faith & practice* 11.01' (2014. p.61). It was a year later that Dandelion had 'my own conviction experience' (2014. p.60). He goes on 'Different understandings of our processes sap our spiritual life' (2014. p.61). Those different understandings are the understandings of different identifiable ideational groups with the Society as this thesis will show. Dandelion's identification of a 'behavioural creed' and a 'double culture' referred to at the beginning of this literature review as the 'social glue' (2007. p.138) and the means for creating cohesion is threatened and he is aware of that. He argues that:

in some ways, the maintenance of our behavioural creed, and the core insights underlying it, is crucial to our wellbeing, and where that behavioural creed is threatened by theological diversity we need the help of our book of discipline to relocate clarity and affirm assertion (2014. p.77).

Although the help of the book of discipline is necessary, a book *per se* cannot embody and affirm the primacy of transformative spiritual experience and the value of expectant listening and waiting (2014. p.79). Books state, but people embody, affirm and exemplify. Human beings may experience transformation and affirm values. They then may choose to associate because of benefits they receive through associating. It is because of the conflict averse nature of so many Friends that the actual assertion of the book's discipline and the affirmation of values have been avoided. That is how there have developed within the Society different ideational groups who do not share the underlying theological narrative that the book of

discipline presents. Dandelion says ‘We are in danger of becoming a pressure group rather than a group of people led to transform the world out of , and through , our own experience of transformation (2014. p.55). Many Quakers will agree with Dandelion when he writes that:

The process of giving way to the Light takes us into a place of intimacy with God, and impels us to challenge the injustices humanity besets itself with. We are transformed in our spiritual experience to act collectively as coagents with God of transformation in the world. We are transformed in order to transform (2014. p.3).

At the end of his text, Dandelion writes:

Refreshing our faith is about process, not task! When we sink into the silence and stillness, we are transformed by our encounter with God and our discernment of God’s leadings. We are transformed by using our gifts and living our ministry (2014. p.93).

Quakers in membership and attenders who do not believe that God’s guidance is there to be discerned and received or if they have not experienced the kind of spiritual experience they recognise as transforming, may be sceptical of those claims. That is one of the reasons why internal secularisation proceeds. Conflict aversion and management is an easier response to members’ and attenders’ scepticism than an assertion of theological boundaries that resist internal secularisation.

## **1.6 Summary of Chapter 1**

Chapter 1 set the scene and introduced the aim of the research and the research question. The research question used to focus the investigation was “How does your experience of membership in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) make a difference to your life, faith and practice?”. Rich responses were obtained from twelve interviewees. Their comments formed the basis for an analysis of the features of The Society that attracted and those that repelled. The facts of the declining

participation in The Society were presented. The chapter continued by indicating the content of the different chapters, including the use of IPA and the way this methodology has framed the thesis structure. The chapter then presented an introduction to the theology and organisation of The Society and concluded with a critical literature review.

## **CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODOLOGY AND METHOD**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I explain the ontological assumptions guiding my research design, which are based on critical realism, and then my methodology. I also present and explain a conceptual model for the organisational analysis of religious associations derived from Simmel's sociology of religion and society, Archer's critical realist ontology, her reflexive and social theories and her defence of transcendence as a subject for sociological enquiry. The model informed the analysis of the empirical results generated by the application of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis methodology in Chapter 3. The analysis of that empirical data will be supplemented by the analysis of primary source material to do with the evidence of internal secularisation, The Society's changing governance practices and the reasons for disaffiliation from The Society in Chapters 4 and 5.

The sections that constitute the content of this chapter are:

- 2.2 Critical Realism and the research design.
- 2.3 The influence of Georg Simmel (1858-1918).
- 2.4 David L. Harvey's model of agency and community as a bridge between the work of Georg Simmel and Margaret Archer.
- 2.5 Margaret S. Archer's (1943-2023) reflexive and social theories: a basis for organizational analysis.
- 2.6 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as methodology and method.
  - 2.61 Recruitment of interviewees, ethical considerations and the pilot interviews.
  - 2.62 The interview schedule and process.



- 2.63 Conducting the initial interview analysis.
- 2.64 Creating the Master Tables.
- 2.65 The double hermeneutic.
- 2.7 'Researcher distance', the insider/outside factor in research and personal reflection.
- 2.8 Chapter summary.

## **2.2 Critical realism and the research design**

The strategy I adopted partly corresponds to what Norman Blaikie describes as an 'abductive research strategy'. For that strategy:

The starting point is the social world of the social actors being investigated. The aim is to discover their constructions of reality, their ways of conceptualizing and giving meaning to their social world, their tacit knowledge<sup>1</sup>.

The phrase 'their constructions of reality', however, raises the ontological question about the nature of reality. Is reality a construction based on the languages humans use, or does the term 'reality' refer to that which exists independently of our existence which human language aspires to refer to and humans try to understand and negotiate? James T. Borhek and Richard F. Curtis in their *A sociology of belief* argue that 'Reality is not constructed, as Madison Avenue would have it; reality is encountered and then modified'<sup>2</sup>. Borhek and Curtis' observation resonates with Roy Bhaskar's philosophy of critical realism, whom they do not reference, and echo George Simmel's ideas about society, whom they do.

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<sup>1</sup> Blake (2007, p.10).

<sup>2</sup> Borhek & Curtis (1975, p.45).

## Critical Realism

Roy Bhaskar<sup>3</sup> developed 'critical realism' as a contribution to the philosophy of science. Bhaskar distinguishes three overlapping domains of reality: the domains of the real, the actual and the empirical (see Figure 2.1 below).

	Domain of Real	Domain of Actual	Domain of Empirical
Mechanisms	✓		
Events	✓	✓	
Experiences	✓	✓	✓

Figure 2.1 Three overlapping domains of reality<sup>4</sup>

The domain of the empirical consists of experiences which we have perceived; the domain of the actual consists of all that is happening, i.e. including that which we have and have not perceived and which may be relevant to our research; the domain of the real consists of the mechanisms that generate the events in the domain of the actual and thus also the interactive experiencing of events perceived and noted in the domain of the empirical<sup>5</sup>.

Bhaskar argues that:

The objects of experimental activity are not events and their conjunctions, but structures, generative mechanisms and the like (forming the real basis of causal laws), which are normally out of phase with the patterns of events which actually occur<sup>6</sup>.

Research should seek to explain the causes of what we experience/observe in the reality in which we exist. We should identify and describe the entities and processes we are observing, their attributes, and how they relate to each other and the attributes of those relationships and the context and environment in which they

<sup>3</sup> Bhaskar (1944-2014).

<sup>4</sup> Bhaskar (2008, p.56).

<sup>5</sup> Bhaskar (2008, p.13).

<sup>6</sup> Bhaskar (2014, p.98).

occur. We should then seek to explain the underlying mechanisms which explain the capacity of entities for different behaviours in different environments and the entities those environments may actually contain, which may be beyond those observed in the context of our real-time observations. In terms of a voluntary association of human beings which constitute a society, we should seek to understand the association's capacity for survival and growth and what might be causes for its decline. We should identify the qualities of the relationships which emerge in and are enabled by the association and between those participating within it i.e. between individuals and between individuals and the association as a whole, the activities that the association enables and rules that affect the association's participants behaviour. We should note the association's own external relationships with other associations such as other religious associations and especially legal entities such as the state and state organisations, and the qualities of those relationships, not least the powers of external associations to influence and control the behaviours of an association in the present and through time. Associations themselves are not static. Their participants , powers and influence, and the powers of legal entities to prescribe and proscribe their behaviours change through time. Associations may flourish or cease to exist.

There are different challenges to research in the natural and social sciences. In the closed systems environment of an experimental laboratory we can exercise control over the recognized/perceived, (obviously not the unrecognized/unperceived), variables and recognized contingencies in an experiment. In the open systems environment of human society we have little or no control over the empirical world we are observing. One may also observe that an object of research e.g. The Society's membership, has little control over the forces of secularisation affecting it

and the fact of the state's legislation that constrain its organisational behaviour, but The Society's membership has much more control over its responses to those forces in terms of how they may be resisted or accommodated.

Critical realists argue that:

There exists a reality that can be subjected to analysis. This is the intransitive object of science. The purpose of science is to come as 'close' to this reality as possible. It is our theories and notions of reality that constitute our knowledge of it; they make up our transitive object, that is, what connects us as cognitive subjects with the objective reality. The transitive dimension is socially determined and changeable.

This goes for all knowledge. What makes social science special, compared to natural science, is that social scientists seek knowledge about a socially produced reality, not just a socially defined one. This understanding is different from that of a naive realism – objectivism – holding that it is in principle possible to attain a correct and objective picture of reality. It also differs from perspectives which overemphasize the transitive side – constructivism and relativism – which argue that it is meaningless to claim that one statement about reality is more truthful than another statement, since all knowledge is socially defined<sup>7</sup>.

A socially produced reality is one that is in process and not fixed. It has a history, a present and a future affected by the decisions and acts of human beings unequal in their social powers to effect social futures.

The term 'intransitive reality' refers to what is real, independent of human perception; 'transitive reality' refers to that which human beings perceive and about which they conceptualise and discourse. The difference is between what there is in the world and what might be said about what there is. Constructionists propose that knowledge of the real world is constructed 'against the background of shared interpretations, practices and language'<sup>8</sup>. This is what Bhaskar calls the epistemic fallacy:

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<sup>7</sup> Danermark *et al.* (2002). This text is an introduction to critical realism with special reference to the social sciences. Danermark has collaborated with Bhaskar on critical realist research e.g. (Bhaskar and Danermark, 2006). Chapter 3 of Danermark *et al.*, (2002) considers the differences in researching the natural and social sciences in detail.

<sup>8</sup> Blaikie (2007, p.23).

'statements about being can be reduced to statements about knowledge'<sup>9</sup>. A distinction should be made between the study of what there is, ontology, and how human beings identify what there is, epistemology.

A consequence of the fact that 'social scientists seek knowledge about a socially produced reality, not just a socially defined one'<sup>10</sup> is that 'the study of social objects involves a 'double hermeneutic'. The social scientist's task is to 'interpret other people's interpretations', since other people's notions and understandings are an inseparable part of the object of study'<sup>11</sup>.

This research aimed initially at understanding the participants' interpretation of their spiritual and religious experience and their understanding of their experience of being a Quaker and of Quakerism. It is from an analysis of these interpretations in the interviews supplemented by further reading, especially but not only, in the sociology of Quakerism, that the research identified diverse factors involved in the social and organisational dynamics of contemporary British Quakerism.

The social structures, that are reproduced or transformed when members of society act in accordance with their concepts of reality, are real. They contain powers and mechanisms which operate independently of the intentions of the actions<sup>12</sup> here and now. In this capacity they constitute at every moment the intransitive object of social science, which scientific conceptualization, that is the transitive object of social science, is all about<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Bhaskar (2008, p.36).

<sup>10</sup> Danermark et al. (2002, p.200).

<sup>11</sup> Danermark et al. (2002, p.32). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis also involves a double hermeneutic. The double hermeneutic leaves the researcher the choice as to which discourse domain to use to approach IPA's initial analysis of interview data. That issue is discussed below in 2.6.

<sup>12</sup> i.e. independently of the actor's here and now actions and intentions. The point being made is that social structures contain powers and mechanisms in addition to those that are operating in the present. They may be triggered into action by the present actual, or triggered independently of the intentions of that actuality's purposes e.g. an organisation's security procedures may be activated as a result of an observer's comment about something they heard and, whether misinterpreted or not, then has unintended consequences for the organisation e.g. as a result of cancelling a booking for an event in which a controversial speaker is to appear. Explaining that phenomenon is the transitive object of social science.

<sup>13</sup> Danermark et al. (2002, p.35).

This research is concerned with conceptualizing those structures and mechanisms and how they have affected and continue to affect the experience of individual members of The Society and how participants in The Society affect those structures and mechanisms. As we will see, those structures and mechanisms support or undermine the coherence of contemporary Quaker theology; and they support or undermine the cohesion of The Society. Their impact on relationships between its participants affects the willingness of an individual to persist in participating in The Society positively or negatively.

### **Guidelines for critical realist social research**

Guidelines for critical realist social research are given by Danermark et al.<sup>14</sup>. There are six stages. Those stages are related to this research in Figure 2.2 below.

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<sup>14</sup> Danermark et al. (2002, p.109)

### **Six Stages of Critical Realist Research as Related to This Research**

**Stage 1** is a description of the situation we are trying to explain, which was in this research, discussed in Chapter 1: the paradox of the commitment and enthusiasm for Quakerism by my interviewees and the continuing decline in membership and participation in The Society.

**Stage 2**, analytical resolution, aims at ‘distinguishing the various components of the situation’. In this research, that was achieved, in addition to critical reading of relevant literature (some reviewed in Chapter 1), through interviewing 12 Quakers, my own 45+ years’ experience of being a Quaker, and using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), discussed in this chapter 2.6 – 2.10, applied to 12 interview transcripts. The IPA results are discussed in Chapter 3 supplemented by the analysis of additional primary source material introduced in subsequent chapters.

**Stage 3**, abduction/theoretical redescription, and **Stage 4**, retroduction, are methods of theorising and reasoning about the empirical findings. Abduction and retroduction are described in the next section of this chapter.

**Stage 5**, comparison between different theories and abstractions. The explanatory power of Simmelian concepts such as ‘destructive and regenerative forces’, religiosity<sup>15</sup>, and Archerian concepts such as ‘the myth of cultural integration’ and her theory of ‘morphogenesis’ were applied to the results of the IPA analysis and to examining the state of contemporary Quakerism in Britain. Two theories of Pink Dandelion were critically examined: that of a ‘double culture’ with regards its efficacy in achieving coherence and cohesion in The Society; and his theory of internal secularisation, especially as it applied to the current state of The Society (within Chapters 4 and 5 respectively).

**Stage 6**, concretization and contextualization, in this research consisted of relating the findings concerning the lived experience of twelve Quakers, other research literature, and other primary source documents to a discussion of the contemporary state of Quakers in Britain, as revealed using Simmelian and Archerian concepts and theories. Findings were identified that threw light on the Society’s dynamics (Chapters 3-6) and the challenges facing The Society concerning its future as a religious society that are within its power to respond to (Chapter 7: Conclusions).

Figure 2.2 Guidelines for critical realist social research (adapted from Danermark et al. 2002)

<sup>15</sup> Religiosity is defined and discussed in Chapter 4.3 Religiosity and religion

## The search for intransitive mechanisms: the meaning and use of abduction and retroduction

Danermark et al. claim that in the search for intransitive mechanisms ‘we must resort not only to induction and deduction, but above all to abduction and retroduction’<sup>16</sup>.

Danermark et al. define abduction as follows:

Abduction: To interpret and recontextualize individual phenomena within a conceptual framework or a set of ideas. To be able to understand something in a new way by observing and interpreting this something in a new conceptual framework<sup>17</sup>.

The foundation of abduction is chiefly creativity and the ability to form associations<sup>18</sup>.

Examples of abduction in this research drew on theories of social attachment discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, e.g. contemporary reviews of the literature on attachment theory and religion, the theory of social inclusion, Simmel’s theories on sociation and exchange.

Danermark et al. define retroduction as follows:

Retroduction: From a description and analysis of concrete phenomena to reconstruct the basic conditions for these phenomena to be what they are. By way of thought operations and counterfactual thinking to argue towards transfactual thinking<sup>19</sup>.

An example of retroduction would be reasoning that leads to a statement of the basic conditions as to what it is that makes a Quaker Meeting for Worship what a Quaker Meeting for Worship ‘should’ be e.g. as presented in *Quaker faith & practice*: a place in which Quakers try to relate to God individually and collectively<sup>20</sup>. An actual Quaker Meeting would be just one vernacular actualisation of what it could be. What a

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<sup>16</sup> Danermark et al. (2002, p.203).

<sup>17</sup> Danermark et al. (2002, p.81).

<sup>18</sup> Danermark et al. (2002, p.93).

<sup>19</sup> Danermark et al. (2002, p.81).

<sup>20</sup> *QF&P* 1.02.8-13; 11.01.



Meeting should be is pointed to by a characterization based on one or more statements about Meetings for Worship from *Quaker faith & practice*<sup>21</sup>.

Counterfactual thinking, however, is another kind of thinking that might help us to arrive at such a characterization. Counterfactual thinking helps us 'discern the necessary, constitutive properties of something by relating these properties to what is not constitutive (but rather an accidental circumstance)'<sup>22</sup>. This process may reveal contradictory viewpoints affecting what a Meeting for Worship may be in reality as distinct from normatively. What is said canonically about Meeting for Worship in *Quaker faith & practice* provides a reference point as to what it takes to hold a Quaker Meeting for Worship, and how a Meeting for Worship is meant to work compared with how actual participants, make use of Meeting for Worship. Some participants, for example self-identified nontheists, and newcomers, may not see themselves as doing worship although they are present at a Meeting for Worship. Through further inference and thought experiments<sup>23</sup>, the mechanism(s) that sustains or constitutes a Quaker Meeting's existence can be suggested. That conclusion would be an example of 'transfactual' thinking – defined as a form of retroduction that identifies a basic quality 'beyond what is immediately given' which is 'a condition for anything to be what it is'<sup>24</sup>. I created two thought experiments to illustrate how Friends might consider two challenging issues one of which was to do with innovation in Meeting for Worship and the unintended consequences of change and the other to do with the challenge of applying criteria for membership constructively to maintain a Meeting's cohesiveness (Appendix 5). These thought

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<sup>21</sup> *QF&P* 2.35-2.82. Also that most participants in a Meeting understood what were the fundamental elements of being a Quaker as presented in *QF&P* 11.01

<sup>22</sup> Danermark et al. (2002, p.101).

<sup>23</sup> Danermark et al. (2002, p.101).

<sup>24</sup> Danermark et al (2002, p.206).

experiments supplemented the arguments in succeeding chapters of this research to do with the problems of maintaining coherence and cohesion in *The Society*.

The analytical power of Bhaskar's concept of three overlapping domains of reality, the distinction made between intransitive/transitive dimensions of knowledge, and Danermark's guidelines for critical realist social research persuaded me of the validity and usefulness of critical realist ontology for this research. Critical realism points a researcher to searching for the underlying mechanisms and structures that account for the empirical reality that is observed and the 'causal power' of the phenomena within the research frame. It advocates abduction and retroduction as major theorizing and reasoning methods to be used to identify the underlying mechanisms and structures of those phenomena.

### **2.3 The Influence of Georg Simmel (1858-1918)**

Simmel has influenced this research in a number of ways. His writing on the nature of sociology, his definition of society and his writings on religion (introduced in Chapter 1, discussed below and discussed further in Chapters 4 and 5 in relation to empirical findings are relevant to understanding Quakers and their relationship to religion and to *The Society*<sup>25 26</sup>.

There are also connections between Simmel's approach to understanding society and critical realist concepts. These influences and connections are discussed below.

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<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth S. Goodstein's study of Simmel was published two years after my research had begun (2017). She argued that Simmel was primarily a philosopher who reflected on the individual in relation to society, metropolitan life, and on how 'society' should be studied at a time when sociology was being established as a discipline separate from philosophy. Goodstein is Professor of English and the Liberal Arts at Emory University (book cover note).

<sup>26</sup> Horst Jürgen Helle assembled a collection of Simmel's essays on religion with his introduction (Simmel. (1997a) Helle is professor of sociology and co-director of the Institute for Sociology at Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich (book cover note).

## Simmel on society

Simmel has a distinctive view as to how society should be conceptualized and on what a researcher into society should focus upon. He writes:

Society certainly is not a 'substance', nothing concrete, but an event: it is the function of receiving and effecting the fate and development of one individual by the other<sup>27</sup>.

If society is conceived as interaction among individuals, the description of the forms of this interaction is the task of the science of society in the strictest and most essential sense<sup>28</sup>.

There are two links to critical realism here. The first is the idea that society *emerges* from the process of individuals associating and develops a degree of complexity with features that emerge from that complexity. Society is not a substance or thing but an ongoing dynamic process of interaction affecting and affected by its members. An individual member contributes to, without determining, the association's behaviour as an emergent event. Secondly, Simmel's use of the term 'event' anticipates the use of the term in critical realism. In critical realism 'events' belong to the domain of the 'actual'. What is 'actual' consists of all that is happening in the domain of the actual, always more than what is observed in the empirical domain upon which the researcher has chosen to focus. What is observed is bounded by a researcher's understanding of what is relevant to their research purpose. That understanding may omit a relevant factor e.g. underlying reasons why the medical establishment persisted so long in arguing for a miasma theory of disease in spite of empirical findings presented by Ignaz Semmelweis in Vienna and Joseph Lister in London<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Simmel (1976, p.64).

<sup>28</sup> Simmel (1976, p.73).

<sup>29</sup> There are 'actual' factors not necessarily considered when doing empirical research in researching progress and obstacles to progress e.g. the organisational structures and cultural system of an association encourages particular kinds of responses to new ideas e.g. the willing testing or dismissal of new ideas. Semmelweis and Lister argued for, respectively, the washing of hands in a chlorine solution and antiseptic surgery in the treatment of patients. They came up against the hierarchical structure of medical associations and the medical profession in Vienna and London where those in

The form of an association or society that affects the behaviour of individuals in, and the development of an association or society, is what Simmel sees as 'the task of the science of society'.

Simmel writes:

I see society rather wherever a number of human beings come into reciprocity and form a transient or permanent unity. In each such unification the phenomenon emerges which also determines the life of the individuals, viz., that at every moment destructive forces attack the life both from within and from without, and, if these alone operated, the unity would soon be resolved into its elements or transformed into other combinations. But opposed to these destructive forces there are preservative influences which hold the individual parts together by maintaining reciprocity between them, from which comes cohesion of parts, and hence a unity of the whole<sup>30</sup>.

Society is seen as a phenomenon that emerges from the actions of individuals. It is preserved and maintained by preservative influences holding the parts together maintaining the bonds of reciprocity between individuals, hence its cohesion and unity and the forms of interaction enabled and sanctioned by the society's membership. Simmel here does not say that that interaction is also subject to law as he is referring to society as a 'whole', not, for example, to a business, professional or religious association.

This definition of society differentiates it from any notion of society as 'an integrated unity' as conceptualized by his contemporary Emile Durkheim<sup>31</sup>. The extract is also typical of Simmel's dualistic,<sup>32</sup> or dialectical<sup>33</sup> mode of analyzing social phenomena.

What comes into existence is a product of polarities and subject to polarities, in this case destructive and preservative forces. Reciprocity binds individuals into a unity and 'the

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authority obstructed the dissemination of new practices and ideas that would save lives in spite of the evidence to support them. In addition, their non-establishment backgrounds, Semmelweis a Hungarian born Jew and Lister a Quaker, may have also played a part in an existing establishment's dismissal of their findings.

<sup>30</sup> Simmel (1898, p.664). This extract is from the first of three papers discussing *The persistence of social groups* published in the *American journal of sociology* in 1898.

<sup>31</sup> Furseth and Repstad (2006, p.32)

<sup>32</sup> Simmel (1971, xxxiv)

<sup>33</sup> Schermer and Jary (2013, p.40)

phenomenon emerges which also determines the life of the individuals'<sup>34</sup>. Destructive and preservative forces and reciprocity are some of the real underlying mechanisms that generate the actuality of the observable world. Maintaining, restorative, and regenerative forces are all mechanisms that may contribute to a society's preservation but which could involve degrees of intervention and of change which could be supported and opposed by a society's membership. Simmel's approach to understanding society in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century predates that of a critical realist's<sup>35</sup>.

Peter Lawrence's introduction to his selection of Simmel's writings<sup>36</sup> argues that Simmel's starting point is that society exists when several individuals enter into interactions, motivated by drives, interests and purposes. A process of 'sociation' occurs which produces units. Any such unit is a supra-individual interactional entity<sup>37</sup> existing for the satisfaction of particular interests and purposes. It may be permanent or transient. Simmel's examples of social forms are 'the state'<sup>38</sup> and the family, the guild and the church and organizations based on common interests'<sup>39</sup>. Distinguishing form and content are basic to Simmel's analytical method<sup>40</sup>. A form's emergent structure and culture supports the purposes for which reciprocal relationships have developed and which participants choose, or are required, to conform to, in order to associate and maintain association for those purposes.

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<sup>34</sup> Simmel (1898, p.664).

<sup>35</sup> Archer's understanding is presented in this chapter at 2.5.3.

<sup>36</sup> Lawrence (1976, p.9-10).

<sup>37</sup> Simmel (1976, p.9-10).

<sup>38</sup> Simmel does not seem to see a qualitative difference between 'the state' as a form and other forms of association. perhaps because he did not consider in the definition he gave here the military and coercive origins of the society of imperial Germany which was formed during his lifetime. For a history of Germany since 1800 see Kitchen (2011). See also Chernilo (2007) re the concept of the nation state. A society is a phenomenon distinct from the state, The latter is a term used to refer to a political-legal entity, whose origins involve the coercive power of groups to impose geographical boundaries around other groups.

<sup>39</sup> Simmel (1976, p.62).

<sup>40</sup> Simmel (1976, p.73-74).

Emergence and structure are also core concepts within critical realism. Emergence holds that new objects come into existence formed by 'the powers and mechanisms of the underlying strata ... each with its own specific structures, forces, powers and mechanisms'<sup>41</sup>. 'The social constitutes its own stratum, and hence society has other properties and powers than the individuals constituting it'<sup>42</sup>. What Danermark et al. did not indicate is that those individuals constituting a group within a society may come into conflict within the larger association e.g. an Experiment with Light group in conflict with a Local Meeting to which they belong as discussed by Meads<sup>43</sup>.

Donald N. Levine, in his introduction to his selection of Simmel's writings argues 'that the logic of Simmel's enquiry is the same' whatever he is examining<sup>44</sup>. They are the principles of 'form', 'reciprocity', 'distance' and 'dualism'. In relation to this research see Figure 2.3 below:

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<sup>41</sup> Danermark et al. (2002, p.60).

<sup>42</sup> Danermark et al. (2002, p.64).

<sup>43</sup> Meads (2008). Discussed in the literature review of Chapter 1.

<sup>44</sup> Levine (1971, xxxi).

### **Simmel's Principles of Enquiry as Identified by Donald Levine and Applied to this Research<sup>45</sup>**

'Analysis of form' focuses on the extent to which the faith and practice needs (the religiosity<sup>46</sup>) of participants are satisfied by becoming a member of The Society, accepting its governance practices and the culture of 'being a Quaker'.

'Analysis of reciprocity' focuses on identifying the extent to which participants believe they are giving and receiving benefits as individuals and as Quakers and members of The Society.

'Analysis of distance' focuses on the extent to which participants feel closeness to other Quakers, to their Local Meeting, and to structures beyond the Local Meeting that determine The Society's governance e.g. their Area Meeting and Britain Yearly Meeting.

'Analysis of duality' focuses on identifying 'destructive forces' and 'preservative influences' on participants' Quakerism and their relationships within and outside of The Society i.e. their social interactions within and outside of The Society.

Figure 2.3 Simmel's Principles of Enquiry as Identified by Donald Levine and Applied to this Research

In another essay, Donald Levine lists the many forms of social interaction which Simmel has identified, including those fundamentally affected by their size e.g. small groups where members 'interact directly with one another and the larger group which 'liberates the individual from close control and scrutiny even as, through its formal arrangements, it confronts the individual with a distant and alien power'<sup>47</sup>. Small groups include religious sects<sup>48</sup>. The relationship of members to their Local and Area Meetings, Yearly Meeting in session and BYM is noted in Chapter 3. and further in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 in relation to The Society's level of integration.

### **Summary of the argument so far**

A critical realist research design for researching and evaluating the state of a religious organisation such as The Religious Society of Friends involves an empirical

<sup>45</sup> Levine (1971. pp. ix–lxv.)

<sup>46</sup> Religiosity is defined and discussed in Chapter 4 at 4.3.

<sup>47</sup> Levine (1965. p.16)

<sup>48</sup> Levine (1965. p.99)

study of those who participate in its activities e.g. members of The Society and attenders at Meetings, and a search for the relevant mechanisms that enable and support or undermine their interactions. Comment is then possible on the strength of the bonds that make the association what it is and sustain its functioning. I have focused initially on individuals who had made a specific commitment to be members because one aspect of the research was to discover how that level of commitment to Friends came about and contributes to The Society's functioning. This study does not, therefore, include the study of attenders, although such a study would clearly be helpful in understanding an attender's engagement with The Society, their contribution to its functioning and their thoughts about membership and becoming members.

#### **2.4 Agency and community: A critical realist paradigm**

The complementarity of Simmel and Bhaskar's critical realism is demonstrated in an article by David L. Harvey<sup>49</sup>. Simmel argues that the development of an individual's capacity and resources follows from their engagement with social circles beyond that given by birth<sup>50</sup>. That is an aspect of human agency i.e. choices in life. Harvey adds to and integrates Simmel's account of human agency 'as mutual self-cultivation and cultural production in a community context' with Bhaskar's transformation model of social activity (TMSA)<sup>51</sup>. Harvey offers 'a sociological reading of the TMSA, one that can serve as a starting point for those wishing to frame their social research in a critical realist or, if you would, a complex realist, vein'<sup>52</sup>. Harvey's integrated model is presented as **Figure 2.4** Bhaskar's transformation model of social activity using

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<sup>49</sup> Harvey (2002).

<sup>50</sup> Simmel (1976. p.95)

<sup>51</sup> Harvey (2002, p.184)

<sup>52</sup> Harvey (2002, p.189)



Simmel's account of human agency as mutual self-cultivation and cultural production in a community context (Figure 4 in his original article) <sup>53</sup>.

On the left side is represented the influence of society (T1) on the individual through the medium of socialization and social control. The central panels represents the individual engaging 'dialectically' as a member of a concrete community (an accessible cultural form) and thereby developing (cultivating) themselves. The right side represents individual agents, just by being there, contributing to and modifying the social reproduction of communities they belong to (T2).

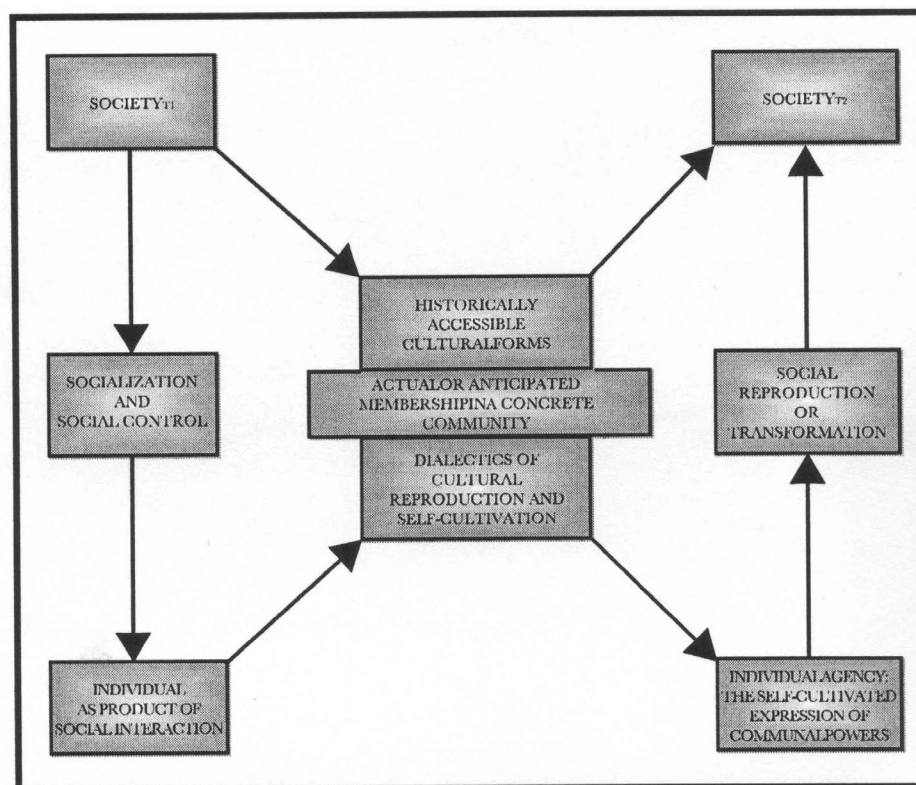


Figure 2.4 Bhaskar's transformation model of social activity using Simmel's account of human agency as mutual self-cultivation and cultural production in a community context <sup>54</sup>

The model represents some propositions:

<sup>53</sup> Harvey (2002, p.184).

<sup>54</sup> Harvey (2002, p.184)

- The expression of an individual's being in the world is not simply determined by an individual's socialization.
- Ongoing human interaction with the world invites a response, an expression of agency.
- 'The "dispositional self" interacts with the world, contributing to its transformation and reproduction and, in turn having its own possible paths of future self-realization irreversibly set by a running string of reproductive successes and failures<sup>55</sup>.
- Therefore in so far as humanity/individuals have a relative degree of freedom to choose participation and consequently self-cultivation in different social circles (e.g. family, friendship, work, religious and other associations) humans become influenced by and influence the social circles in which their own interaction with the world takes place.
- In turn human agency and actual interactions influence the world they inhabit via the social circles in which they exist.

Harvey acknowledges the influence of Margaret S. Archer on his model <sup>56</sup>. Archer notes that the timescales for individual change and transformation are different from the timescales for societal change<sup>57</sup>. Archer's work is considered in depth in the next section and applied to Quakers in Chapter 6.

In this research, self-cultivation in relation to a community context is partly or wholly represented by:

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<sup>55</sup> Harvey (2002, p.185).

<sup>56</sup> Harvey (2002, footnote 4, p.190).

<sup>57</sup> Archer (1995, p.76).

- expressing one's spiritual and religious energies through becoming and remaining an interacting member of The Society of Friends (Left side of the model);
- developing one's self by accepting its forms and modes of control and influencing it by contributing to its working, which is a responsibility of membership<sup>58</sup> and interacting with other Friends (Left hand side and central panels: dialectics of cultural reproduction and self-cultivation);
- and then through one's actions contributing to and modifying The Society's reproduction, its structure and mode of being in its formal meetings, e.g. its Meetings for Worship and Meetings for Worship for Business (Central and Right hand side of the model).

What the model leaves out is the fact of inequalities between individuals based on privileged social birthrights e.g. ethnic, class, and sexual markers, and the power invested in an individual by holding a legally defined role in society as a whole or a specific association such as a charity e.g. as judges or trustees respectively; and the model makes no reference to God, Christ or a transcendent Other. The Quaker way is traditionally based on the possibility of an unmediated 'spiritual intimacy, of direct intimate relationship between humanity and 'God and Christ'<sup>59</sup>. Quakers seek a real world, experientially based relationship with God which, trusting 'the promptings of

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<sup>58</sup> (*Quaker faith & practice : the book of Christian discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain*. 2013, 11.01) Section 11.01 explains the meaning and responsibilities of membership of The Society.

<sup>59</sup> Dandelion (2007. p.5).

love and truth in your hearts...as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life', opens them to be led by the Spirit<sup>60,61</sup>.

Research participants' own understanding of their actions and how they are prompted was therefore also a matter for analysis (Chapter 3) and theorization in subsequent chapters. The relevance of Simmel's sociology of religion to the empirical findings is demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5. Archer's general social theory and theory of human reflexivity, central to this research's conceptual model for the analysis of the state of The Society, is discussed below and applied in Chapter 6. I suggest this model is applicable for the analysis of other religious associations.

## **2.5 Margaret S. Archer's<sup>62</sup> social theory and theory of human reflexivity: a basis for organisational analysis**

Building on the previous section, this section of the chapter presents and discusses an integrated model linking two conceptual models from Margaret Archer's work<sup>63</sup>. Archer's reflexive theory address an individual's involuntary status at birth and her realist social theory addresses the power an individual can come to hold through their role in a society's or association's structure which Harvey's simplified model of change does not.

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<sup>60</sup> *Advices and Queries* (2010, 1.02). *Advices and Queries*, in the absence of any creed, is 'a reminder of the insights of The Society' and is published as a portable booklet. It also forms Chapter 1 of *Quaker faith and Practice* (2013). Friends are asked to consider 'how far the advices and queries affect us personally and where our own service lies'. (*Advices and Queries* 1.01)

<sup>61</sup> Durham (2011, p.39; Ambler (2013, p.82); Twelve Quakers and God (2002).

<sup>62</sup> Emeritus Professor of Sociology, University of Warwick and President of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, until her retirement on 27 March 2019. Professor Archer died in May 2023.

<sup>63</sup> Archer's social theory and theory of human reflexivity are systematically developed and organised within a sociological context in two trilogies of monographs (1995, 1996, 2000; 2003, 2007, 2012). The theories have been disseminated and further developed in journal articles and edited collections (e.g. 2004, 2006, 2014, 2020). The first trilogy to be published offered definitions of social structure, culture and agency and describes how they affect and are affected by social interactions. The second trilogy, on human reflexivity, offered an explanation of how individuals come to their way of engaging in social interactions in formal reflexive theory

Archer and Simmel both explored the impact of societal changes on individuals:

‘What each and every person has to determine is what they are going to do in these situations [of new situational contexts]’<sup>64</sup>. Similarly, Simmel’s essay *The metropolis and mental life* opens:

The deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his [sic.] existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture, and of the technique of life<sup>65</sup>.

Simmel explores how individuals attempt to resist social forces which threaten their autonomy and individuality. That resistance involves reflexivity and what Elizabeth Goodstein describes as ‘the ethical self-determination of the individual’, a particular emphasis in all Simmel’s work<sup>66</sup>. The final monography in Archer’s trilogy on realist social theory is titled *Being human: the problem of agency*<sup>67</sup>. Simmel and Archer are both concerned with how individuals retain an individual identity and capacity to act ‘in the face of overwhelming social forces...’ as in the quotation above.

An integrative model, introduced and then presented diagrammatically and explained more fully below, bridges and integrates Archer’s work on reflexivity and her work on structure, culture and agency (Figure 2.5).

The first part of the integrated model represents reflexivity and its role in social interaction. The second part represents social interactions, their constraints, enablements and outcomes. In discussing social interactions, Archer’s concept of the morphogenetic cycle is described showing how social interaction either leads to change or the reinforcement of the present societal state. The third part of the model

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<sup>64</sup> Archer (2012. p.1).

<sup>65</sup> Simmel (1950. p.409).

<sup>66</sup> Goodstein (2017. p.5).

<sup>67</sup> Archer (2000)

illustrates Archer's view as to how an organisation's structural arrangements, cultural system and relations with external organisations affect and are affected by social interactions.

Archer does not seek to represent a transcendent reality or the possibility of human-Divine interaction and communication in her reflexive and social theories but she has written on transcendence. I discuss transcendence as a part of the model, although not diagrammatically represented, following the explanation of the 'External Agents' place in the model (2.57).

The integrated model is used in Chapter 6 to frame the findings of my research in relation to Quakers and The Society. The model could, I claim, be used in researching and illustrating the state of other religious denominations or other societies, with or without, a belief in a transcendent reality that influences individual and social behaviour.

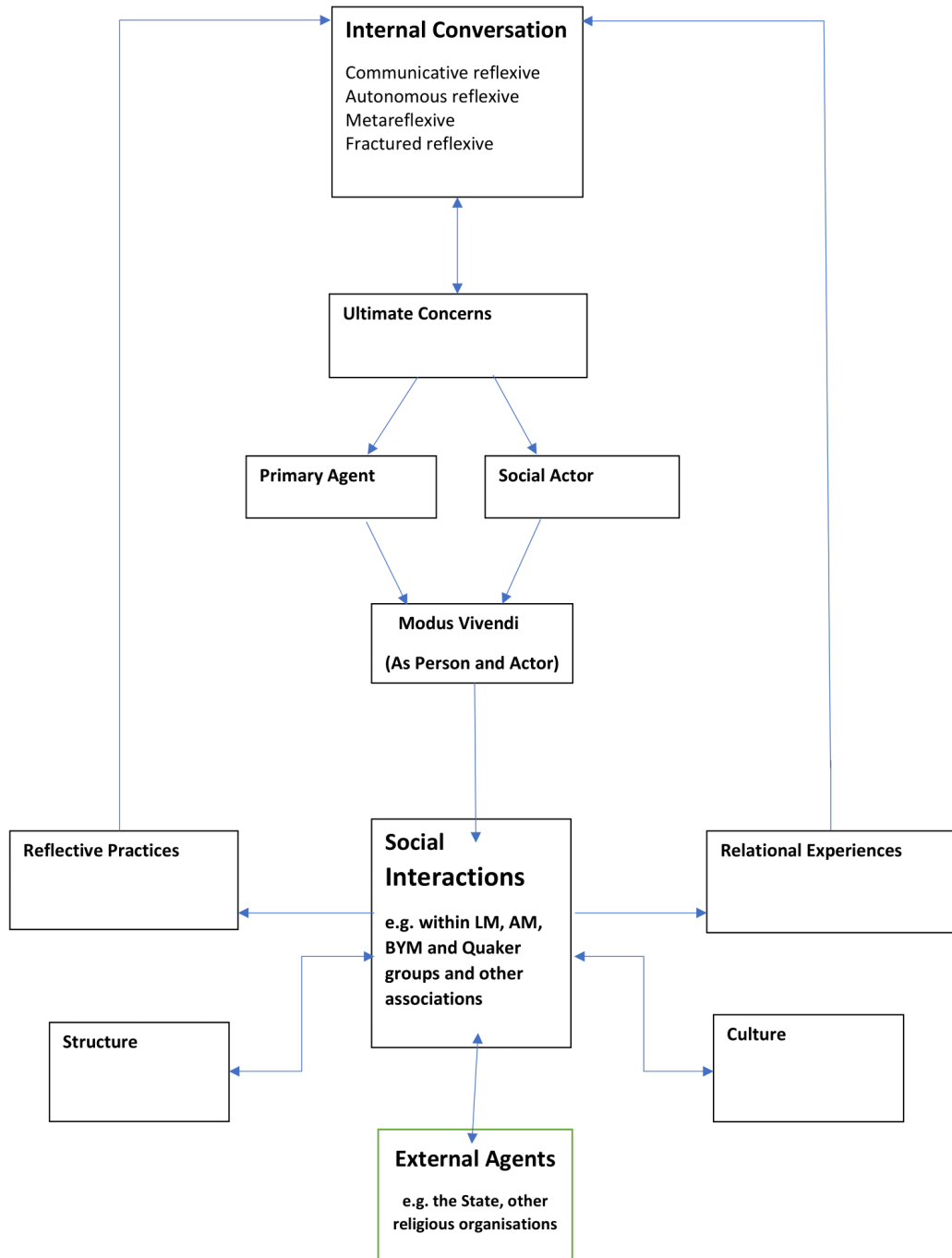


Figure 2.5 An integrative diagram of Margaret S. Archer's social theory and theory of human reflexivity

### 2.5.1 Archer's theory of reflexivity

Archer defines 'reflexivity' as

the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa'. Such deliberations are important since they form the basis upon which people determine their future courses of action – always fallibly and always under their own descriptions<sup>68</sup>.

Archer argues that 'reflexivity is the means by which we make our way through the world'<sup>69</sup>. The pace of change in the world 'makes it incumbent on everyone to exercise more and more reflexivity in increasingly greater tracts of their lives'<sup>70</sup>.

Archer argues that 'The common denominator of these changes, in relation to human concerns [has been] the systematic promotion of instrumental rationality over value rationality'<sup>71</sup>. The *Dictionary of social sciences* defines Instrumental action or means-end rationality as that in which 'actors choose from among possible courses of action in pursuit of their interests' differentiating it from 'value-oriented action, in which the performance is taken as an end in itself'<sup>72</sup>. According to Archer, the goal of instrumental rationality is 'increasing utility'<sup>73</sup>. Archer refers to the work of Gary Becker who argues that even family life and religious affiliation are to be understood in terms of instrumental rather than value commitments. For example, a faith commitment is made in order to enjoy a good after-life and experience current prosperity and security. Altruism, voluntary activity and free-giving, can be explained away as entered into in order to get a return from an action<sup>74</sup>. Archer rejects that argument as reductionist. She points to those who resist the promotion of

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<sup>68</sup> Archer (2007. p.4).

<sup>69</sup> Archer (2007, p.5).

<sup>70</sup> Archer (2007, p.5).

<sup>71</sup> Archer (2007, p.318).

<sup>72</sup> Action theory (2002).

<sup>73</sup> Archer (2007. p.322).

<sup>74</sup> Archer (2007. p.322).



instrumental rationality in their lives by their assertion of value commitments, i.e. the value of making a commitment to a course of action for its own values' sake<sup>75,76</sup>.

Figure 2.5 illustrates the linkage between Archer's model of human reflexivity and her realist social theory is through social interactions. Social interactions affect a society. A believer in a God that influences human lives would be the God able to impact any component of the model through the internal conversations of any of those who are engaging in them; and during the 'live' process of social interactions.

### **Explaining the model Part 1: From the internal conversation to social interactions**

#### **The internal conversation**

The internal conversation invokes the normal language of communication and the non-verbal language of deliberations in reflective self-talk<sup>77</sup>. The internal conversation 'is the modality through which reflexivity towards self, society and the relationship between them is exercised'<sup>78</sup>. Archer rebuts the 'negativity towards internal conversation', or 'self-talk', shown by certain social psychologists<sup>79</sup>:

*The subjective powers of reflexivity mediate the role that objective structural or cultural powers play in influencing social action and are thus indispensable to explaining social outcomes<sup>80</sup>.*

Individuals' choices are a necessary factor in explaining social outcomes. It is the subjective power of reflexivity in the interviewees that brought them to interpreting an experience as an experience to be of God, or Christ, or Spirit or a Higher Power. That, for them, was not simply a projection or wishful thinking. Archer speaks of

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<sup>75</sup> See Chapter 3; also Bregman (2021).

<sup>76</sup> Rutger Bregman marshals empirical evidence that counters the idea that *homo economicus* is an adequate characterisation of actual human behaviour (2021.p.2).

<sup>77</sup> Archer (2000. p.231).

<sup>78</sup> Archer (2003. p.9).

<sup>79</sup> Archer (2007, p.5).

<sup>80</sup> Archer (2007, p.5). Italics in the original.

'Discernment, Deliberation and Dedication' leading to 'prolonged internal conversations in which subjects critically explore and test their self-knowledge'<sup>81</sup>. Put generally, eleven interviewees claimed, through reflection, a relationship to a transcendent reality, understood in their own way, with which they interacted and experienced communication<sup>82</sup> and which affects their being and actions in the world.

An individual experiences life continuously, physiologically, but not necessarily reflexively. The internal conversation begins with a persistent 'I' with a memory of what has happened to themselves and what they believe they have made to happen<sup>83</sup>. The 'I' is an active processor. An active 'I' processes inputs to the internal conversation.

The two inputs to the internal conversation are reflexive practices and relational experiences. Reflexive practices are the cognitive responses to social interactions. Relational experiences are the affective responses to social interactions. Relational experiencing begin in the womb and continue throughout life. Reflexive practices develop with the cognitive ability to reflect on what one has been experiencing<sup>84</sup>. An individual may understand that they have had an experience of a transcendent God. The 'I' is impacted by interactions as they occur. Individuals subsequently may reflect explicitly, or muse and ponder implicitly, and iteratively, about the reactions and interactions they have experienced. The individual thereby develops a personal

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<sup>81</sup> Archer (2012. p.44)

<sup>82</sup> The proposition of the existence of a real mystical and transcendent dimension to everyday life is discussed in Chapter 4. That dimension would have the influence to affect everyday reality, an influence that comes from a power said to be transcendent and immanent in the world of human being.

<sup>83</sup> Archer (2003. p.125). This is the first of the three monographs of Archer's trilogy on reflexivity.

<sup>84</sup> In addition to Bowlby's work on attachment theory referred to in the literature review and Taves and Esprem on the distinction between experiencing and experience discussed below, specific texts on reflexive and relational experiences that have contributed to my understanding of the reflexive and relational outcomes of social interaction are Stern, D.N.(1973) and (2004); Rothschild, B. (2000).

identity and through their interactions with others develops a social identity. The 'I' can reflect on itself as 'Me' and where that 'Me', as a person participating in a society, has reached in their lives<sup>85</sup>. The 'I' can decide whether it is content with being part of their original social milieu, identifying easily with others as the 'We' of their original social milieu. They may want 'more' from, or to 'change'<sup>86</sup> that milieu. Then, 'The 'I' has the day-to-day task of determining what kind of 'You' will be projected forward into the future' because 'our daily waking confronts us with yesterday's ongoing concerns'<sup>87</sup>. That task throws the 'I' into reflection, even if only momentarily. Archer then focuses on the how one reflects.

Archer identifies four kinds of reflexivity arising from her interviews. They characterize predominant styles of reflection:

**Communicative Reflexivity:** Internal Conversations need to be confirmed and completed by others before they lead to action

**Autonomous Reflexivity:** Internal Conversations are self-contained, leading directly to action

**Meta-Reflexivity:** Internal Conversations critically evaluate previous inner dialogues and are critical about effective action in society

**Fractured Reflexivity:** Internal Conversations cannot lead to purposeful courses of action, but intensify personal distress and disorientation resulting in expressive action<sup>88</sup>.

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<sup>85</sup> Archer (2003. p.126).

<sup>86</sup> Archer (2003. p.127).

<sup>87</sup> Archer (2003, p.127)..

<sup>88</sup> Archer (2012. p.13). The reference is to the final text in Archer's trilogy on reflexivity.

Archer argues that the practitioners of communicative, autonomous and meta-reflexivity adopted 'generically different 'stances' towards society and its 'constraints and enablements'. Constraints and enablements are transmitted to us by shaping the situations (structural or cultural) in which we find ourselves, such that some courses of action would be impeded and others would be facilitated'<sup>89</sup>. Constraints limit and enablements facilitate choice of actions in a social situation. Structure and culture (discussed below) shape a situation.

According to Archer, communicative reflexives are evasive in relation to the constraints and enablements of society because their primary concerns are with family and friendship<sup>90</sup>. They are not so concerned with personal ambition, career success or 'rising' in society if that entailed leaving their family and personal relationships behind.

Autonomous reflexives, in contrast, are 'upward and outward bound' and 'strategic in relation to constraints and enablements'<sup>91</sup>. They originate 'from a diversity of socio-economic positions' but all are 'looking to broader social horizons'<sup>92</sup>. Referring to the twelve autonomous reflexives in her 2007 research sample Archer comments that 'These extremely active agents worked reflexively at dealing with the structural constraints and enablements that they activated in the course of and as a consequence of their doings'<sup>93</sup>. They resist the normative pressure of others. They are more intent on being their own man or woman in order to achieve personal goals<sup>94</sup>. Contemporary society, she argues, encourages that individualistic attitude.

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<sup>89</sup> Archer (2003. p.4).

<sup>90</sup> Archer (2003, p.349).

<sup>91</sup> Archer (2003. p.350).

<sup>92</sup> Archer (2003, p.228).

<sup>93</sup> Archer (2007, p.193).

<sup>94</sup> Archer (2007, pp.286-287). This is the second of Archer's trilogy of monographs on reflexivity.

Meta-reflexives are subversive in relation to constraints and enablements<sup>95</sup>. They have an ultimate concern that 'partakes of dedication to a vocational ideal. Their search was for a social context that both fosters its expression and also nurtures its growth'<sup>96</sup>. The institutional careers of metareflexives tended to be volatile 'because no organisational setting is ever deemed to be sufficiently commensurate with the cultural ideal' which, as individuals, they hold<sup>97</sup>. They are 'contextual critics'... They are not acting as instrumental rationalists seeking to become 'better off'<sup>98</sup>.

A person identified as a fractured reflexive has a difficulty, temporary or long-term, in sustaining their own capacity for purposeful action and maintaining an internal sense of wholeness. If they are unable to heal their fractured reflexivity, they have the most difficulty in making their way in the world.

These different forms of reflexivity are discussed with reference to my interviewees in Chapter 6.

### **Ultimate concerns**

From their internal conversation arises an individual's set of ultimate concerns<sup>99</sup>.

Ultimate concerns ... are not a means to anything beyond them, but are commitments which are constitutive of who we are and thus the basis of our personal identities. It is only in the light of our 'ultimate concerns' that our actions are ultimately intelligible. None of this caring can be impoverished by reducing it to an instrumental means ends relationship, which is presumed to leave us 'better off' relative to some indeterminate notion of future 'utility'<sup>100</sup>.

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<sup>95</sup> Archer (2003, p.350).

<sup>96</sup> Archer (2003, p.350).

<sup>97</sup> Archer (2003, p.350).

<sup>98</sup> Archer (2003, p.355).

<sup>99</sup> Archer (2000, p.4). Adapting Paul Tillich's concept of 'Ultimate concern'. See Tillich *The Courage to be* (1952, p.46-47) where an ultimate concern is related to taking one's spiritual life seriously and affirming it in the face of non-being.

<sup>100</sup> Archer (2000, Ch.7); Archer (2006, p.263). In this text, Archer's concept of Ultimate Concern is treated in depth with reference also to personal identity and religion.

Ultimate concerns are implicit or explicit in an individual's behaviour. One or more may be identified as 'ultimate', meaning of absolute value to be upheld which 'transcends instrumental rationality'. Instrumental rationality might be the chosen means to satisfy their ultimate concern e.g. achieving power over others. Archer is not saying that all human beings are consciously aware of their ultimate concerns but that ultimate concerns are commitments humans have. They are not rational or ethical means to an end but assertions of values interiorly held. They guide our actions. People's actions become understood when the ultimate concerns that have guided them become explicit to themselves and to others.

### **Primary agents, corporate agents and actors**

Archer writes:

Humanity enters society through the maternity ward doors and we immediately acquire the properties of Primary Agents through belonging to particular collectivities and sharing their privileges or lack of them – as males/females; blacks/whites; foreigners/indigenous; middle class/working class. In short, we are always born into a system of social stratification and it is crucial to my argument that 'privileges' and 'underprivilege' are regarded as properties that people acquire involuntaristically and not as roles that they occupy through choice<sup>101</sup>.

Agency is a term relating to a collectivity. An individual is initially involuntarily associated with several primary collectivities e.g. sexual, ethnic, class, nationality. Individuals acquire the privileges, entitlements and resources of the primary collectivities as a Primary Agent. Archer defines an individual, sociologically, as an Actor within a collectivity<sup>102</sup>. Agents other than the Primary Agent are collectivities known as Corporate Agents. An individual may or may not have the opportunity of becoming a participant (i.e. Actor) with different Corporate Agents e.g. trade unions

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<sup>101</sup> Archer (2000. p.277).

<sup>102</sup> Archer (2008. p.261). Individuals develop as persons through participating in the activities of a Corporate Agent i.e. a collectivity beyond their birth's Primary Agency.

and employer associations, clubs and religious organisations. They thereby, may or may not acquire the choices and resources available to an Actor associated with a Corporate Agent. Archer's recognition of the origin of social inequalities is a key feature of Archer's work. An adult individual's power to influence their lives is not simply due to their inherent capabilities, hence her distinction between the concepts of individual person, Actor and Agent.

Archer also identifies three naturalistic 'orders' of reality which any human has to navigate from birth to until death: Nature itself, the Practical and the Social. Nature refers to the care that needs to be taken with 'our physical well-being in the natural order' i.e. in the physical world and environment which we find or place ourselves in; the practical refers to our 'performative achievement in the practical order' i.e. with doing things in the world; and the social refers to how the person arrives at a sense of 'self-worth in the social order'<sup>103</sup>. Engaging with corporate agents, provides opportunities beyond our original placement in the world for developing and maintaining physical well-being, developing personal competencies, and then gaining a sense of self-worth in relation to others through exercising those practical competencies.

Engaging with Corporate Agents entails being permitted to enter a new social sphere (Simmel's social circle).

Actors derive their social identities from the way in which subjects personify the roles they choose to occupy. However, what array of roles is open to them, at any given time, strongly conditions who may become an Actor at that time, and thus who may acquire a social identity. Unlike agency, which is universal to members of society, not everyone can succeed in becoming an Actor – that is in finding a role(s) in which they feel they can invest themselves, such that the accompanying social identity is expressive of who they are'<sup>104</sup>.

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<sup>103</sup> Archer (2000. p.9; p.154).

<sup>104</sup> Archer (2003. p.118).

The array of roles open to an individual to occupy as an Actor may be limited. Privileges, entitlements and resources are unequally distributed at birth between collectivities. Different sexes, ethnicities and classes do not have the same privileges, entitlements and access to resources. That circumscribes the social identity they may acquire and their capacity to develop their intrinsic gifts.

A person who wishes to express and nourish their intrinsic religiosity<sup>105</sup> seeks a religious association in which they can ‘invest themselves’. There may be tests to pass to enter the association and rules, customs and a language to be learnt. Their personal spiritual development follows partly (e.g. through Sunday worship and private reading and prayer) or even wholly within that context (e.g. as a monk)<sup>106</sup>. Further capabilities might be stimulated or evolve should they offer service in an official role. Actors then develop their own style in inhabiting a role they occupy. They have the opportunity to become a more significant Actor in the association with opportunities and responsibilities added to their basic participation, depending on the attitude of others to their Primary Agency and the way they occupy their role.

### **Modus vivendi**

An individual develops a modus vivendi, a way of being, and a social identity as a person influenced by their primary agent status and as an actor within different Corporate Agents, or, to use Simmel’s terms, social spheres or circles<sup>107</sup>.

What we seek to do is reflexively defined by reference to the concerns that we wish to realise. Ultimately, that realisation means becoming who we want to be within the social order by personifying social roles in a manner expressive of our personal concerns. Through such a *modus vivendi* (italics in original) a

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<sup>105</sup> Religiosity is defined and discussed in Chapter 4.4.3 Religiosity and religion

<sup>106</sup> An individual’s spiritual identity and development is not necessarily confined to an attachment to a single religious association. There are Quakers who are also Anglicans, called Quanglicans (Thackray. 22 Dec. 2018.). There are others drawn to Roman Catholicism. See especially in Chapter 3 the experience of interviewees Susan and, Caroline, drawn to Anglicanism, and Trevor and Gillian, drawn to Roman Catholicism. See also Dandelion (2007. p.134).

<sup>107</sup> Simmel (1955. p.138; 1976. p.95).



subject's personal identity is aligned with her social identity. Arriving at this alignment is a dialectical process... It is rarely optimal, it is frequently revisable, but it is always reflexive in nature<sup>108</sup>.

In the collectivities in which individuals live their lives (e.g. families, the organisations where they work, voluntary organisations, and friendship groups) individuals take up roles. Individuals align their personal and social identities and their ultimate concerns by trying to integrate their sense of who they are with what they do in the associations and social circles to which they attach. When their *modus vivendi* in their social interactions becomes, reflexively via their internal conversations, unsatisfying, individuals may seek in some way to adjust their ultimate concerns or change, if they can, their situation i.e. argue for change, make compromises, tolerate discomfort or leave an association or social circle if they feel able to.

### 2.5.2 Social interactions<sup>109</sup>

Social interactions in different associations and other social settings contribute to the actuality of individuals' lives. Individuals bring their ultimate concerns through their *modus vivendi* into social interactions. Archer distinguishes two major factors affecting social interactions within corporate agents: corporate structures and corporate cultures<sup>110</sup>.

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<sup>108</sup> Archer (2007. p.88).

<sup>109</sup> The concepts 'Social interaction' and 'Socio-cultural Interaction' are discussed in Archer, 1995 Part 2 and Archer, 1996. Ch.7 respectively). In this research, the term 'social interaction' normally refers to both concepts, except when discussing the distinctive influences on social interaction of organisational structures or an organisation's cultural system.

<sup>110</sup> A fundamental feature of Archer's social theory is 'analytical dualism'. Organisational structures are distinguished from the social interactions they constrain and enable. Structures give rise to particular kinds of social interaction. Structures may be amended in time through social interaction. Analytical dualism also applies to culture. Archer identifies 'the myth of cultural integration' originating in the work of anthropologists. The myth confounds '*Logical consistency* that is the degree of internal compatibility between the components of culture (however these two terms are defined) with *Causal consensus* that is the degree of social uniformity produced by the imposition of culture (again however these two terms are defined by one set of people on another)' (Archer, 1995. Ch.6 esp.p.168-169; Archer, 1996. p.4). In other words, contradictory ideas about 'the good' may be available to a social group or society but social uniformity may be effected by the imposition of ideas as to what is 'the good' by a dominant group (whose dominance may or may not be questioned/challenged just as ideas may or may not be questioned/challenged).

A corporate structure, its dominant ideas and its policies are established and affected from within by its Actors and from without by interacting with External Agents. The actual power a person acquires in their lives is partly the result of their social interactions as Actors in those corporate and social agents<sup>111</sup> in which they have chosen to participate. An Actor is enabled and constrained by their role in the structures of an organisation and their stance in relation to the ideas that influence the Corporate Agent's policies i.e. that influence its future.

Within Corporate and Social Agents, interest groups develop informally and formally. They are based on individuals' differing material interests and ideational commitments<sup>112</sup>. Some stem from their roles in an organisation's structure, hierarchy and activities e.g. within The Society of Friends, paid and unpaid participants, members and attenders; committee chairs, staff serving committees; senior and junior, full- and part-time staff. Interest groupings also form within and outside an organisation in relation to an individual's sense of their e.g. sexuality, ethnicity, and status as employees (i.e. in Trade Unions) following reflections on their life situation. Persons normally have vested and ideational interests in their roles and position in society e.g. vested, when their living standards and quality of life depend on them; and ideational in relation to e.g. ideas that support their role, ideas about how organisational structures and processes are and ought to be executed, and ideas about ethics and theology<sup>113</sup> i.e. about how the world is and how it should be.

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<sup>111</sup> The term corporate agent connotes work organisations rather than clubs. Social agent (and social sphere) connotes voluntary associations such as a Local Quaker Meeting and golf clubs. Charities occupy a middle ground as legal entities whose participants include paid staff and those giving unpaid service (or volunteers).

<sup>112</sup> Archer (1995. Ch.7 p.195).

<sup>113</sup> Archer (1995. p.203; 217).

### 2.5.3 Explaining the model Part 2: Social interactions and change.

Social interaction is the site where the forces for change or stasis operate in the present through individuals and their dispositions. Archer does not believe social theory should attempt predictions about the outcome of ongoing social interactions<sup>114</sup>. Applying a social theory reveals areas of disfunction and conflict which may or may not be attended to by those concerned – with Intended and unintended consequences. Unforeseen external events also affect social interaction within an organisation e.g. a pandemic, war, global warming, energy costs.

#### The Morphogenetic Cycle

Archer identifies a sequence of change arising from social interactions which she has named 'The Morphogenetic Cycle'. The cycle applies to both structural and cultural elaboration in organisations<sup>115</sup>, illustrated in Figure Figure 2.6 The morphogenetic cycle:



Figure 2.6 The morphogenetic cycle

Structures enable the organisation's capacity for action. They aim to promote the coordination of social interactions between its participants in line with the organisation's explicit and its participants' own purposes. They include systems for determining and selecting who may join an organisation, deciding policies and budgets and systems of accountability. Cultural conditioning of social interaction consists of ideas which may be complementary or contradictory as Actors advance

<sup>114</sup> Archer (1995. p.326-327).

<sup>115</sup> Archer (1996. p.280).

them in support of their interests and predilections. Interest groups draw on the register of ideas available for use in an organisation's operations e.g. management theories, organisational theories, ideas about the role of technology and how change should be implemented. Cultural conditioning promotes a collective understanding justifying an organisation's policies and actions but not necessarily agreement between participants as they interact and participate in the organisation.

Structural and cultural elaboration proceed from social interactions. Ideational positions promote either morphogenesis (structural change) or morphostasis (structural maintenance). Opportunities and possibilities<sup>116</sup> may at any time come into awareness and new ones may be generated and disseminated through social interactions. There may or may not be a high degree of consensus between different interest groups supporting stasis or change<sup>117</sup> e.g. to do with organisational decision-making, budgeting, the organisation of work and the choice of operational and strategic objectives. The thoughts and actions of different interest groups, depending on their authority and powers of influence, cause changes to or maintenance of the organisation's state. Internal conflicts may have creative or destructive consequences and destructive external forces may become too strong to withstand. Internally, social interaction decays when an organisation's structures and cultural system, including recruitment, become ineffective in supporting the purposes of an organisation. Morphonecrosis, i.e. the death of an organisation, becomes a

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<sup>116</sup> Archer likens cultural systems to libraries (1996. p.299). In a Universal Library that is common property, ideas are available in its contents but are not necessarily common knowledge. 'Sociologically different kinds of readers' tickets give restricted access to different library stacks as part of the differential distribution of cultural capital' (Archer, 1996. p.299). In an organisation, many ideas available to its participants will not be in common use. Those that are, are determined by societal constraints which determine the boundaries of discourse within the organisation.

<sup>117</sup> Chapter 4 discusses different points of view within The Society. See, for example, 4.5.5 evidence for internal secularisation in the Religious Society of Friends: the research findings of Penelope Cummins..

possibility when structural/cultural elaboration fails and organisational members disassociate without new participants replacing them<sup>118</sup>.

#### **2.5.4 Explaining the model Part 3: Structure and culture**

##### **Structure**

Social and organisational structures are 'emergent properties, which are held to have temporal priority, relative autonomy and causal efficacy *vis à vis* members of society'<sup>119</sup>. They are determined initially by those who, through social interaction, created, within a legal context, a Corporate Agent and instituted procedures and structures to support its activities e.g. rules for governance, membership and participation, roles and committees for decision-making. These are changed in time through further social interactions. Rules for changing structures and managing resources are also emergent properties of structural systems. In short, an organisation's structures are the results of decisions arising from the social interaction of organisational actors, which comply with the law<sup>120</sup>. They enable and constrain the current and future behaviour of participants in an association.

The structural system may be more or less integrated in simple and complex organisations. Conflicts point to a lack of integration in an organisation<sup>121</sup>.

Paraphrasing Archer, they arise because of structural confusions e.g. unclear boundaries between organisational roles and between committee responsibilities, and the different viewpoints of organisational participants. Participants in different parts of the system are not necessarily in conflict because the functions of committees are unclear or confused, but they may be if there is disagreement over

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<sup>118</sup> Al-Almoudi and Latsis (2015. p.231).

<sup>119</sup> Archer (2003. p.2).

<sup>120</sup> Archer (2003. Figure 1.2 p.3).

<sup>121</sup> Archer (1995. p.183).

policy and the authority for its determination as will be illustrated in Chapter 4.

Participants may also be in conflict over proposals for changes to structures and procedures claimed to improve the functioning of the organisation as a whole.

Resolving a lack of integration will depend on participants accepting structural changes e.g. structural innovations or adjustments to the decision-making boundaries between parts of the organization effected by compromise, persuasion or coercion, or through individuals leaving the organisation.

Structures and organisational stability and change become effected and effective through participants' actions as Actors in organisational roles that have been created and specified normally prior to Actors obtaining a role, accepting a role or having one bestowed on them.

Actors derive their social identities from the way in which subjects personify the roles they choose to occupy. However, what array of roles is open to them, at any given time, strongly conditions who may become an Actor at that time, and thus who may acquire a social identity. Unlike agency, which is universal to members of society, not everyone can succeed in becoming an Actor – that is in finding a role(s) in which they feel they can invest themselves, such that the accompanying social identity is expressive of who they are<sup>122</sup>.

An Actor brings their own abilities, style and understanding in their personification of a role. They will be influenced more or less by previous life-experiences, their knowledge of the role's requirements, the performance of previous role-holders' and others' expectations of their performance in that role<sup>123</sup>.

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<sup>122</sup> Archer (2003. P.118). (2003. p.254).

<sup>123</sup> Archer distinguishes the self, the person, the agent and the actor. They are emergent (stratified) levels of being a human,. Archer's thinking refines Simmel's ideas about what it means to be an individual and the value he puts on the cultivation of the individual through participation in different social circles. Archer emphasises that that development is also a function of the individual's continuous sense of being a self. Personality and Individuality are not simply products of socialisation.

## Culture and the cultural system

'Culture' is taken by Archer 'to refer to:

all intelligibilia, that is to any item which has the dispositional capacity of being understood by someone' and 'the Cultural System [as that] sub-set of items to which the law of contradiction can be applied'<sup>124</sup>.

Intelligibilia includes all the products of civilisation that may be used and/or appreciated by humankind e.g. all that constitutes the arts, the sciences, the humanities and the technologies that humankind has produced. By the Cultural System, however, is meant those ideas, values and practices, which may be complementary or contradictory with each other i.e.

the register of propositions existing in any given social unit at a particular time ... the corpus of truths and falsehoods cherished in society at any given time'<sup>125</sup>.

In relation to the Religious Society of Friends complementary and contradictory ideas within the cultural system would include e.g. transcendental ideas about a Divinity, Christian doctrines, and non-theism; the sanctity of life and the legitimacy of taking life in war and/or self-defence; the right to eat meat and veganism.

The espousal of contradictory ideas in a group affects the dynamics of social interaction e.g. in justifying the choices a group makes about policy and the allocation of resources; contested criteria in the appointment to roles in group structures; the meaning and practice of worship. These differences may affect the cohesiveness of a group, especially one whose primary communal activity, traditionally, is worshipping.

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<sup>124</sup> Archer (1996. p. xviii).

<sup>125</sup> Archer (1996. p.277).

Archer argues that humankind 'does not necessarily notice inconsistency or unexceptionally find it intolerable'<sup>126</sup>. People may coexist in, for example a political or religious association holding contradictory ideas in the realms of ethics and religion or they may be in conflict because of those contradictions. In other words, the lack of coherence in the register of ideas supported within the cultural system may or may not lead to weakening the cohesiveness of social interactions within the association depending on the attitudes to each other of those with conflicting viewpoints. Love and respect may prevail over theological differences.

### **2.5.5 External agents**

Individual associations, i.e. corporate and social agents, themselves interact with other corporate and social agents external to themselves, including the state. The state determines and upholds laws to which social agents and actors e.g. BYM and Area Meetings and their trustees, should adhere. Opportunities for discourse and action by actors arise as a result of interactions with other actors from external corporate/social agents which also lead to morphogenesis or morphostasis in their own association e.g. in The Society's decision to join Churches Together<sup>127</sup>.

### **2.5.6 The transcendent and imminent Divine**

One feature is missing from the model represented in Figure 2.5: representation of the influence on all components of the model of the unprovable existence of an external transcendent agent or Divinity. Archer has not offered a place for an individual's interaction or their internal conversations with God as a transcendent and immanent reality in her trilogies. There is also no place for discerning the presence of God and God's will in social interactions such as in a Quaker Meeting for Worship

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<sup>126</sup> Archer (1996. p.5)

<sup>127</sup> Cummins (2020. p.180).



for business. She has, however written in her essay<sup>128</sup> in her co-authored collection on *Transcendence*<sup>129</sup> of the 'Thou' with which St. Teresa of Avila communicated. Archer argues that the possibility of a transcendent reality should be taken seriously and that the existence of a transcendent Thou with causal powers remains a possibility not subject to disproof by scientific materialism.<sup>130,131</sup>

Whereas Simmel argued that the existence of God with specified attributes remained indeterminate<sup>132</sup>, Archer and her co-authors<sup>133</sup>, as critical realists, and as declared Christians (p. ix) argued that 'the question of God's existence is indeed susceptible of rational debate ... and has an ontologically objective answer – even if we cannot say definitively what the answer is'<sup>134</sup>. Nevertheless it was possible to 'marshal better or worse arguments'<sup>135</sup> in favour of an ontologically existent transcendental reality. There are 'two contradictory views, even though, ultimately, one must or both may eventually turn out to be mistaken'<sup>136</sup>. It follows that 'The question of God's existence is amenable to the judgemental rationality' of public debate<sup>137</sup>. It was legitimate, Archer and her co-authors argued, to use reported personal experience of a transcendent reality as evidence of its causal power. If 'the beliefs based on our experience of causal powers were routinely incorrect' we could not navigate the world we live in effectively<sup>138</sup>. Of course, that evidence has to be subjected to the

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<sup>128</sup> Archer (2004. p.138).

<sup>129</sup> Archer, Collier and Porpora (2004)

<sup>130</sup> See also Buber (1958) for the significance of 'Thou' and Ward (2008) for his riposte to Dawkins: 'Why there almost certainly is a God: doubting Dawkins.

<sup>131</sup> Keith Ward offers a theologian's defence of theism and a riposte to scientific materialism.

<sup>132</sup> Simmel (2015. p.55).

<sup>133</sup> Archer, Collier and Porpora (2004). These views correlate with a traditional Quaker position. See also the discussion of Disbrey (1994) on George Fox and religious experience in the Literature Review in Chapter 1(1.52).

<sup>134</sup> Archer, Collier and Porpora (2004. p.1).

<sup>135</sup> Archer, Collier and Porpora (2004. p.2).

<sup>136</sup> Archer, Collier and Porpora (2004. p.3).

<sup>137</sup> Archer, Collier and Porpora (2004. p.3).

<sup>138</sup> Archer, Collier and Porpora (2004. p.4).

same kind of scrutiny as other evidence. Misperceptions, hallucinations and wish fulfilment might tarnish or invalidate perceptions of a causal power.

In *On understanding religious experience: St Theresa as a challenge to social theory*<sup>139</sup> Archer argues that rather than discounting St Theresa's account of her religious experience, her account gives good grounds for 'reinstating the God of revelation'<sup>140</sup> into the sociological discourse about religion. She argues that ontological transcendence and the possibility of God

need not imply this [God's] unknowability if God makes himself known in ways that can be grasped by us. Were he to be granted this power, his revelation is a fact about him and not a matter of our judgement, which is a fact about us<sup>141</sup>.

Dandelion, in his discussion as to why Quakers eschew credal statements writes:

If what is known of God by any individual is given by God to that person, no two persons can experience God or what God gives them in the same way. But it does not follow that what is known cannot be shared and analysed in various ways. God gives to humankind whatever knowledge humankind has been able to establish<sup>142</sup>.

This statement resonates with Archer's contention that if there is God, God has the power to make Godself known to individual human beings e.g. to Teresa of Avila and to George Fox, indeed to any human being. God chooses how and what of Godself God reveals to an individual; or to individuals during a process of collective discernment of God's will and in other forms of worship. Even if there can be no satisfactory ontological proof of the existence of God, there is the evidence of what people infer as a transcendent reality which arises from their interpretation of their personal experiencing, their interpretation of human history and their interpretation of

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<sup>139</sup> Archer (2004. pp.138-154).

<sup>140</sup> Archer (2004. p.147).

<sup>141</sup> Archer (2004. p.148).

<sup>142</sup> Dandelion (1996. p.94-95).

nature's working. Interpretations influences all human actions in the world even though interpretations may be mistaken.

Archer and her co-authors distinguish experience from perspective. Through the process of reflection is developed a perspective on one's experience. The reflection might involve producing a description of the experience in spoken, written, visual or musical form. The description is not a reflection but the result of an individual's practice of recollecting an event in reality and having perspective on it. Archer argues that

Practices, discourses and texts do not experience. Only individual subjects do; and what individual subjects experience, when they experience, is reality. Individuals and reality are the twin end-points connected by practices, discourses and texts. .... To the extent that the plurality of stances toward the transcendent originates in the plural ways that the transcendent is experienced (or not) our approach to the transcendent must readmit the category of experience'<sup>143</sup>.

Archer and her co-authors propose that 'Experience consists of three elements: the experiencing subject, the content of experience and the object of experience'<sup>144</sup>.

Their text on transcendence does not elaborate on these three elements. An elaboration is offered below, consonant with critical realism's differentiation of the empirical, the actual and the real and bearing in mind the distinctions made in the previous paragraph.

The empirical is the experience that is described as remembered; the actual consists of the experience in all its detail, not all of which may have been described or explicitly noticed during any instance of a recollection of what was experienced; and

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<sup>143</sup> Archer, Collier and Porpora (2004. p.13).

<sup>144</sup> Archer, Collier and Porpora (2004. p.13).

the real consists of the underlying mechanisms that generated the specific experience.

1. The experiencing of the 'I' that does the experiencing (the experiencing subject) would be the consequence of an intentional or unintentional action or event in the 'I's' experiencing. The 'I' might not only speak of how they felt on interacting with an object but also reflect on the feelings that arose. Reflections and repeated recollections through time might change how the experience is subsequently described and what is remembered (influenced also with whom one is speaking or for whom one may be writing).
2. The content of a remembered experience consists not only of what is remembered of the experience itself but also of the relationship with the experienced object. The relationship itself (as distinguished from the experiencing 'I' and the behaviour of the object) is an emergent property resulting from the contact with an object and has its own attributes. That relationship, as experienced, can change through time, *as can the experiencing 'I' and the object of that experience*.
3. For<sup>145</sup> an experience to be generated there needs to be an object and a subject, both of which have internal mechanisms. The subject must be capable of being aware of objects. The object of the experience might be an entity or process. It may be perceived as an internal object within the experiencing subject (e.g. a pounding of the heart and also a voice Rosemary I.295-321); or as an external object (e.g. another person, or an 'almost physical sense of the Spirit moving in Meeting for Worship' (Joy I. 439-447) or

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<sup>145</sup> To exemplify the argument I refer to extracts from the transcripts of my interviewees.

a sunrise (Phillip I.1082-1089) in which one feels merged. The object may have a material or immaterial form as perceived by the experiencing subject (or other subjects/observers).

God, however, is not an object like other objects in the world. God's existence in reality, God's actuality, is an inference humans may make from experiencing the world and interpreting what is there outside and inside their skin.

In short, a person may come to feel and believe they have a relationship with God and are open to God's guidance. That relationship would be manifest in their internal conversation and could be discerned in their social interactions e.g. in Meetings for Worship and Meetings for Worship for business.

Some, but not all the individuals whom Alice Herron interviewed for her research on *Godless mystics*, had claimed to have had a mystical experience. They then re-embraced religion as a result of their experiences<sup>146</sup>. Herron also demonstrated that someone who defines themselves as an atheist may nevertheless assert they have had mystical experiences<sup>147</sup>. For example, one of Herron's experiencing subjects had a sudden feeling of unity [with the world] (the relationship) whilst hill walking in Scotland (the object, in this case an intended seasonal-time-based process) which had an unintended consequence, a mystical experience<sup>148</sup>.

We can therefore note that an individual's understanding of God, themselves and their relationship with God may change through time, as reported by the interviewees and discussed in Chapter 3.

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<sup>146</sup> Herron (2018 p.79).

<sup>147</sup> Herron (2018).

<sup>148</sup> Herron (2018 p.74).

Those who do believe in a transcendent reality or in scriptures originating from a transcendent source are influenced in their internal conversations by their understanding of how that reality impinges on the life of the world in general and on themselves in particular. Their choices and actions may be influenced by what they understand is asked of them by that transcendent reality and by their encounter with scriptures and other cultural objects and events believed somehow to be related to that reality.

### **Section Summary**

This section presents the work of Margaret S. Archer. The model links her microsociology to her macrosociology, reflexivity to organisational and societal change, through the actuality of social interaction. That model was developed to help explore and explain the empirical data originating from twelve in-depth interviews concerning individuals' relationship to Quakers and Quakerism. It could support those who might like to take stock of the functioning of their own organisations as a basis for policy review and organisational change. An omission from the pictured model (Figure 2.5) was a place for the transcendent and immanent Divine. The inclusion of the concept of transcendence and the purported reality of spiritual and religious experiencing supplements the model in order to enhance the relevance of this model for religious organisations. The conceptual components of this model have influenced how the empirical findings of this research have been analysed as the second part of IPA's double hermeneutic. That analysis follows Chapter 3, in which the empirical results of the first part of the IPA hermeneutic are reported and discussed, in Chapter 4.

## 2.6 Choice of research methodology: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was chosen as the methodology to be used for this research<sup>149</sup>. It incorporates a double hermeneutic, consonant with critical realist approaches to the social sciences<sup>150</sup>. Firstly, the results of empirically generated data, normally interview data, are analysed thematically and organised in tables; secondly, the significance of the tables are interpreted according to the researcher's chosen discipline-based discourse domain. Different possibilities were considered for this research e.g. sociology, theology and practical theology, psychology. Simmel's and Archer's theories are predominantly sociological rather than theological or psychological.. A study situated in practical theology, for example, would normally be related to Christian theology in relation to the state of contemporary society, ethics and pastoral work<sup>151</sup>. My analysis grew out of readings in the sociology and the sociology of religion.

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<sup>149</sup> Jonathan A. Smith, Paul Flowers and Michael Larkin co-authored a comprehensive guide to conducting research in IPA on which I have relied supplemented with the work of Prunella Gee and Pnina Shinebourne (Smith, Fowers and Larkin. 2009; Gee. 2011; Shinebourne. 2011)

<sup>150</sup> See discussion on critical realism at 2.2

<sup>151</sup> E.g. As examples of pastoral/practical theology are texts by Woodward, J. and Pattison, S. (2000) ; Cameron, H. et al. (2010); .and Fiddes (2000). Woodward and Pattison's reader in pastoral and practical theology puts religious belief, tradition and practice in a dialogue with contemporary experiences (p.7) but the experiences are related back to theology, ethics and pastoral care; Cameron et al are concerned with theological action research; and Fiddes relates the doctrine of the Trinity to pastoral concerns. Their studies start from a theological interest. My initial focus was the individual's attachment to Quakers but became widened to take into consideration The Society's numerical decline and why individuals who detach from Quakers. My initial reading material on research design (Blaikie, 2007) led me to critical realism as distinct from social construction as an ontological framework. Then, Furseth and Repstad (2006) led me to Simmel's sociological writings concerning the nature of society, why societies persist, his writings on religion as a social phenomenon and to Dandelion's sociological analysis of the theology of Quakers. I became clear I did not want to situate my work within a theological frame, or, for that matter, a psychological frame. Discovering Archer's realist social theory via David Harvey's article linking Simmel and the critical realist, Bhaskar, and Simmel's and Archer's writings on transcendence confirmed me in my intention to frame my analysis of interview data within a sociological/sociology of religion focus. That was confirmed on reading Dandelion's *Cultivation of conformity* and having the privilege of Dandelion, a sociologist, as my supervisor.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin<sup>152</sup> in the introduction to their comprehensive guide to IPA, define IPA as ‘a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences’<sup>153</sup>. It consists of detailed phenomenological analysis and, a further interpretation of participants’ accounts - a double hermeneutic. IPA is increasingly picked up by those working in cognate disciplines in the human, social and health sciences’, although best known in psychology<sup>154</sup>.

IPA was chosen in preference to thematic analysis or grounded theory for this research for the following reasons:

IPA has a dual focus on the unique characteristics of individual participants ... and on patterning of meaning across participants. In contrast, TA (thematic analysis) focuses mainly on patterning of meaning across participants (this is not to say it can’t capture difference and divergence in data). So IPA focuses on developing each stage of the analysis for each data item, before moving to the next; whereas TA involves developing each stage of analysis across the whole dataset<sup>155</sup>.

IPA concentrates on the lived experience of individuals and emphasizes:

The convergence and divergence between participants. By contrast, a grounded theory study of the same broad topic is likely to push towards a more conceptual explanatory level based on a large sample and where the individual accounts can be drawn on to illustrate the resultant theoretical claim<sup>156</sup>.

Grounded theory involves a search for and an explanation of a pattern across a group explaining it with reference to a core category, or overarching theme where ‘only variables related to the core will be included in the theory’<sup>157</sup>. In contrast, IPA

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<sup>152</sup> 2009

<sup>153</sup> Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p.1).

<sup>154</sup> Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p.1).

<sup>155</sup> This was a web page I accessed on 27/02/2021 that was not present on 28/02/2023. Details in Zotero into which I entered a reference are: University of Auckland. School of Psychology. “FAQ: [Themes, Subthemes and Codes],” <https://www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/our-research/research-groups/thematic-analysis/frequently-asked-questions-8.html>. (University of Auckland. School of Psychology, 2016?).

<sup>156</sup> Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p.202).

<sup>157</sup> Glaser and Holton (2005).



involves an exploration of the meaning of both individual differences and similarities on individuals' own terms<sup>158</sup>. I was interested in establishing the range of individual Quaker's religious experiences, faith and practice. The IPA analysis provided an effective means first of identifying individual themes in the individual's own words, and then collating similar themes and subthemes, anchoring the arrangement in the interviewees' own words. The table contents would be the initial basis for further theoretical analysis from critical realist and Simmelian perspectives, the second part of the double hermeneutic. The use of IPA in this thesis was a further extension of IPA beyond psychology<sup>159</sup>.

### **IPA's social constructionism and critical realism**

IPA was developed within the domain of phenomenological psychology and subscribes to 'social constructionism but to a less strong form of social constructionism than discursive psychology'<sup>160</sup>. Social constructionism is a form of the constructionist ontology which holds that:

Because it is impossible for fallible human beings to observe an external world unencumbered by concepts, theories, background and past experiences, it is impossible to make true discoveries about the world<sup>161</sup>.

As argued above (2.2), critical realists would disagree. A critical realist would deny social arrangements are simply constructions of human minds<sup>162</sup>. The challenge was then to offer tentative but plausible descriptions as to what mechanisms underlay the

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<sup>158</sup> Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p.202).

<sup>159</sup> Susan Robson used IPA 'to start the analytic process' for her ethnographic study of conflict handling among Quakers for marking up the transcripts of her interviews ( Robson, 2005, p.86).

<sup>160</sup> Smith et al. (2009, p.196).

<sup>161</sup> Blaikie (2007, p.23).

<sup>162</sup> Borhek and Curtis (1975, p.45); (Gorski, 2013). It has been suggested, however, that social constructionism and critical realism are reconcilable positions (Elder-Vass, 2012).

empirical findings produced and analysed through IPA. Discovering Margaret Archer's morphogenetic theory answered that challenge (2.5).

### **2.6.1 IPA procedures**

Chapter 3 describes the results of using IPA in this research<sup>163</sup>. The description of the recruitment of the interviewees, the interview process and how IPA analyses for each interview were generated and then integrated into five 'Master Tables', i.e. the first stage of IPA's double hermeneutic, follows.

#### **Recruitment and Informed Consent**

The recruitment of participants was in two stages, one for a pilot project and one for the substantive research. A Participant Information Pack was prepared in advance (see Appendix 1)<sup>164</sup>. The pack described the project and included an Agreement Form to be signed at the beginning of the interview.

Participants were told that they could stop and withdraw from the interview without explanation and up to three months after the interview, again without any explanation needed. In the case of withdrawal all information recorded would be destroyed, otherwise, with suitable anonymity procedures, an interview could be used and published for academic purposes. No one withdrew consent.

For a pilot set of interviews I asked members I knew associated with North West London Area Meeting if they would like to be interviewed for a pilot and comment on the information pack I had prepared. That gave me experience of four interviews and material for four interview analyses. I asked for feedback on the interview structure and my interviewing skills.

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<sup>163</sup> I had previous experience of using IPA to analyse four interviews on the topic of 'spiritual journeying among Friends' for my MA in Pastoral Theology at Heythrop College.

<sup>164</sup> as approved by the University Ethics Committee.

I had sent the pilot interviewees the general research question and a full interview schedule (see below). Only one of these Friends said they had spent much time beyond the general research question looking at the interview schedule to prepare for the interview; one had not looked at it at all. At the conclusion of the interview when I asked for feedback interviewees said that they thought the interview structure was helpful and were positive about the questions and the way the interview was conducted. They said they preferred to go into the interview with the knowledge of the general research question only and then respond to my questions, I decided, therefore, to send out only the general research question in the information pack for interviewees for the substantive research and to keep the detailed questions as a memory-aid by my side.

For the substantive research I did not want to interview anyone with whom I had any previous acquaintance. I wrote to the clerks of the other Area Meetings in the Greater London area enclosing an information sheet about the research. I asked if they would distribute it to their constituent Local Meetings with my request for interview volunteers to contact me. Ten volunteers contacted me: eight women and two men. At a subsequent weekend conference I attended I asked two men with whom I was sitting at lunch who showed interest in my research if they were interested in being interviewed for it. I wanted a less unequal male/female ratio. I sent them an information pack. They then contacted me and we agreed dates for the interviews.

The richness of the subsequent twelve interviews, with eight females and four males, and their analysis was such that my supervisor and I agreed that I need not search for further interviewees.

## 2.6.2 The semi-structured interview and the interview schedule

Interviews were begun in June 2015 and completed that year.

Normatively, according to Rex Ambler, Quakers 'live their lives, their practical, everyday lives, as they are led by the Spirit within them' [*Italics in the original*] <sup>165</sup>. As Ambler explains:

The 'Spirit' that leads has nothing to do with the whim of the moment; it is not itself a feeling or an emotion. It is deep down within us, and manifests itself only as we let go the claims of the ego, including our selfish desire, and let its voice be heard, or its light shine. The voice within 'speaks to our condition'<sup>166</sup>.

Ambler is referring back to George Fox's insight, discussed in Chapter 1. I had

Ambler's idea of Quakerism in mind when I prepared the questions.

The semi-structured interview schedule was prepared in four parts for the interviewees:

- a) Questions about their becoming a member of The Society.
- b) Questions about their faith and belief.
- c) Questions about their worship, prayer and practice.
- d) Questions about their experience of The Society and their spiritual journey since joining Friends<sup>167</sup>.

Most questions were open and intended to invite discursive responses with follow-up questions for clarification and further explanation as necessary. At the end of each

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<sup>165</sup> Archer (2013. p.82).

<sup>166</sup> Archer (2013. p.83).

<sup>167</sup> By spiritual journeying, I mean the process of spiritual movement which takes place when a person engages in their spiritual development. By spiritual development I refer to what happens to a person's self-understanding and the quality of their interactions with the world when they explore questions about the meaning of their own existence. That includes the way they interpret their experience of being alive, reflect on their values and relationships, engage in 'spiritual' practices and, perhaps, express their faith through commitment to a religion or an involvement in 'new spirituality' (Lynch, 2007. p.22; Gallagher, 2003. p. 159).

part of the interview I would check the schedule and ask a further question if I thought a further response was needed. I spoke the broad research question:

How does the experience of membership in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) make a difference to your life, faith and practice?

at the beginning of the interview but said I would ask them to answer that question directly as the final question in this interview. The broad question framed the interview. I thought that having worked through the four subsections of the interview, the interviewee would be in a better place to answer the broad question as a summative conclusion to the interview. The full schedule is given below:

#### **Questions about joining:<sup>168</sup>**

*When did you join Friends?*

*For how long had you been attending before joining?*

*Were you involved in any religious or secular-based voluntary activities before then?*

*What would you like to say about your spiritual journey or religious development before you joined Friends?*

*Were there any highlights you could describe?*

*How did you come to decide to apply to Friends?*

*What would you say were the main features of The Society that interested or attracted you at that time?*

*Were you familiar with The Society's Testimonies?*

#### **Questions about Faith and Belief**

*How would you describe your Faith?*

*What do you understand by the word Trust? Would you like to say about whom or what you have trust in?*

*Are there any Christian ideas and doctrines you would say you believe in?*

*(Prompt e.g. the status of Jesus, the Bible; the Trinity; the Virgin Birth; the Resurrection; the after-life; Communion; the Priesthood;. Mary and the Saints)*

*How do you feel about calling yourself a Christian?*

*The first Quakers were convinced that their own inner experiencing was an experience of God, or Christ Jesus, or the Light of Christ, and they tried to live in that knowledge. They found it conformed to their reading of the Bible. How do you relate to those assertions?*

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<sup>168</sup> The actual questions were a memory-aid for me. I used the aid after I completed each of the four sections of the interview to confirm that the interviewee had covered in their responses what I had wanted to discover from them.

*Are there any ideas and doctrines from other religions or faiths or world views you do believe in or have some commitment to e.g. Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Sikhism, Bahai, Universalism, Atheism, Communism, Socialism?*

### **Questions about Worship and Prayer**

*What does worship mean for you?*

*How often do you go to Meeting? (Prompt: And Local and Area Business Meetings)*

*Have you ministered? What would you like to say about yours' and others' vocal ministry?*

*How do you understand or explain vocal ministry?*

*Do you engage in other religious or spiritual activities by yourself or with others?*

*What do you think about prayer; how do you pray, or don't you?*

*Are you involved in any voluntary activities now? What would you like to say about them?*

*Are you someone who enjoys spiritual or religious reading? Are you reading anything now?*

### **Final Questions**

*What would you like to say about your spiritual journey or religious development since you joined Friends?*

*How do you think, if at all, being a Friend has affected a) Your work and relationships at work and b) your social relationships and private life?*

*Is there anything more you would like to say about theology, religion and your spiritual life?*

*Do you have any thoughts why there are fewer Friends now than when you joined The Society? Why have you stayed?*

*I am now going to repeat the overall research question and invite you to respond directly: "How has the experience of membership in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) made a difference to your life, faith and practice?"*

### **The Interview Process**

All but the first of the substantive interviews<sup>169</sup> opened with some silence of a couple of minutes which for Quakers is a normal feature to introduce a significant 'event'.

My particular purpose was to help us come to attend to what we were about to do.

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<sup>169</sup> In my anxiety the interview just began without a formal start. Reflecting later, I realised I needed silence for myself to place a formal marker between initially meeting and greeting and being greeted by an interviewee and beginning a special encounter that is an interview of this kind. Silence was the traditional Quaker way for doing that. Silence begins and ends a Meeting for Worship for business.

Part of coming to attention for me was bracketing my ego and my own involvement with the subject matter so that my capacity to listen empathically and curiously would not be impaired. I hoped not to get drawn in by the interviewee into agreeing or disagreeing with what they said.

The first interview was less explicitly structured than the eleven others. Rather than explaining the structure of the interview, I invited the interviewee to talk about their Quaker experience. He immediately started talking about his ministry at the previous Sunday's Meeting for Worship. Spoken ministry is a central feature of Quaker practice. It was important to this interviewee. That he ministered and what he ministered was relevant information. If I had continued to follow the interviewee's process, however, I feared I would lose control of the interview. I had hoped the interviewee would start by saying how he came to Friends. Eventually I intervened to ask how he came to Friends. In the following interviews, after the silence, I spent time indicating the structure of the interview and I asked the first question which was "How did you come to Friends?".

I am still unsure about that interview strategy. I might have trusted and followed each interviewee's process in the following interviews rather than taking up time explaining the interview structure and imposing my first question.

In response to the content of the first two or three interviews in the substantive project, I decided to add to the schedule additional questions about specific elements of Christian faith. When disclosing the place of Christianity in their faith the ideas of interviewees were relevant to describing the presence of Christian ideas among Quakers. I thought it useful to be more systematic in collecting information about responses to specific orthodox Christian doctrines e.g. the Virgin birth and the Resurrection and the after-life. In the event an interesting observation became

possible: three of the four interviewees not identifying as Christian, including the non-theist, responding to questions about Christian doctrines, remained influenced by certain Christian doctrines. They were also positive about the care and tolerance they experienced at their Roman Catholic secondary schools run by Catholic orders of nuns. The fourth had had a secular schooling but sought Anglican baptism and confirmation as an adult. She had been a Sunday School teacher and spoke about her encounter with Christ before moving on to other non-Christian religious groups. So although many Quakers deny being Christian, that does not exclude the presence of certain Christian ideas in their prototypical Quakerism.

I recognised that the four-part structure and my prepared questions were a major determinant of what transpired in the interviews. Another interesting research project would be to have a very broad research question such as 'What is important about religion to you?' I would follow the interviewees' process and not attempt in advance to structure the interview or systematize the questions. I would allow only my own curiosity about specific replies to steer the interview. I would ask for clarification only about how what the interviewees says is important to them and how that affects their interior and exterior lives. That approach, however, would, I think, be more suitable within the frame of the psychology of religion. For research grounded in theology or, more specifically, in practical theology, but whose study population was participants in Quaker Meetings, I would be more curious in their interviews of their use of and responses to *Quaker faith & practice*, and other religious texts they said were important to them. I would have asked interviewees themselves to bring to an interview, if they wished, texts they would like to talk about. I was, however, interested in the reasons for their association and continuing association with the Society and how that affected their lives. That was of sociological interest.



Interviews lasted from 2 to 4 hours. Most were about three hours. A digital recorder was used and the recording transcribed with the aid of Dragon voice recognition software. Each transcript was printed out on an A3 artist pad for processing as discussed in the next section.

### **2.6.3 Conducting the Analysis: the six steps in the analysis of a transcript**

The IPA analysis was conducted informed by the recommendations of Jonathan A. Smith, Paul Flowers and Michale Larkin<sup>170</sup>, Prunella Gee<sup>171</sup> and Pnina Shinebourne<sup>172</sup>.

**In step one** a transcript is read and reread; free reactions are jotted down in a notepad. For example responding to Trevor's comment:

What struck me about the Quaker Meeting was that I'd spent all these years in services where we're busy talking to God and singing to God, and suddenly they're these guys who simply sat there and try listening to God [laugh]. And it seemed like quite a good idea [laugh] (Trevor I. 27-29).

I noted the impact Meeting had on Trevor and his contrasting it with previous religious services.

**In step two**, on each page phrases and words are underlined that are significant to the interviewee. These could refer to people, events, experiences and valuations. Further notes were sometimes made in the margins around the text indicating why something seemed to me significant to the interviewee. In response to my question 'How did you come into membership', Linda, my third interviewee, said

Linda: Well, well, I first went to Meeting 23 years ago and I hope this interview isn't going to be very boring.

John: Not to me.

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<sup>170</sup> Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009)

<sup>171</sup> Gee (2011)

<sup>172</sup> Shinebourne (2011).

Linda: I don't have a huge amount of profound things to say (Linda I.44-49).

I underlined both parts of the reply. They were important for different reasons. One was that the length of time Linda had been an attender was in contrast with my first two interviewees (Trevor and Andrea) who had both joined within two years. Another was to do with understanding our interactions in the interview. I noted my defensiveness about the interview possibly being 'boring' and my urge to reassure after what seemed to be her self-deprecatory put-down. That social interaction felt prickly. I was alerted to the need to examine her social interactions with other Quakers as I read and reread through her transcript. I would look for clues as to why only after 23 years did Linda make the decision to apply for membership.

Photographed examples from Caroline's transcript are presented in Figure 2.7 and Phillip's in Figure 2.8.

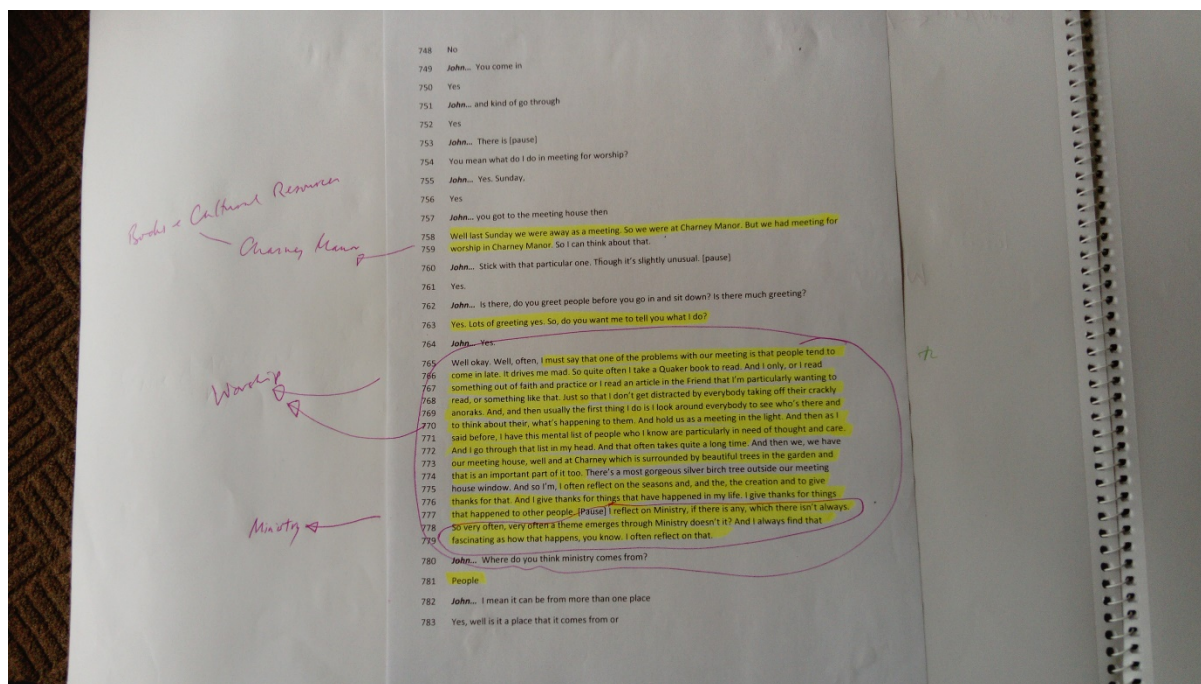


Figure 2.7 Extract from Caroline's transcript to do with worship

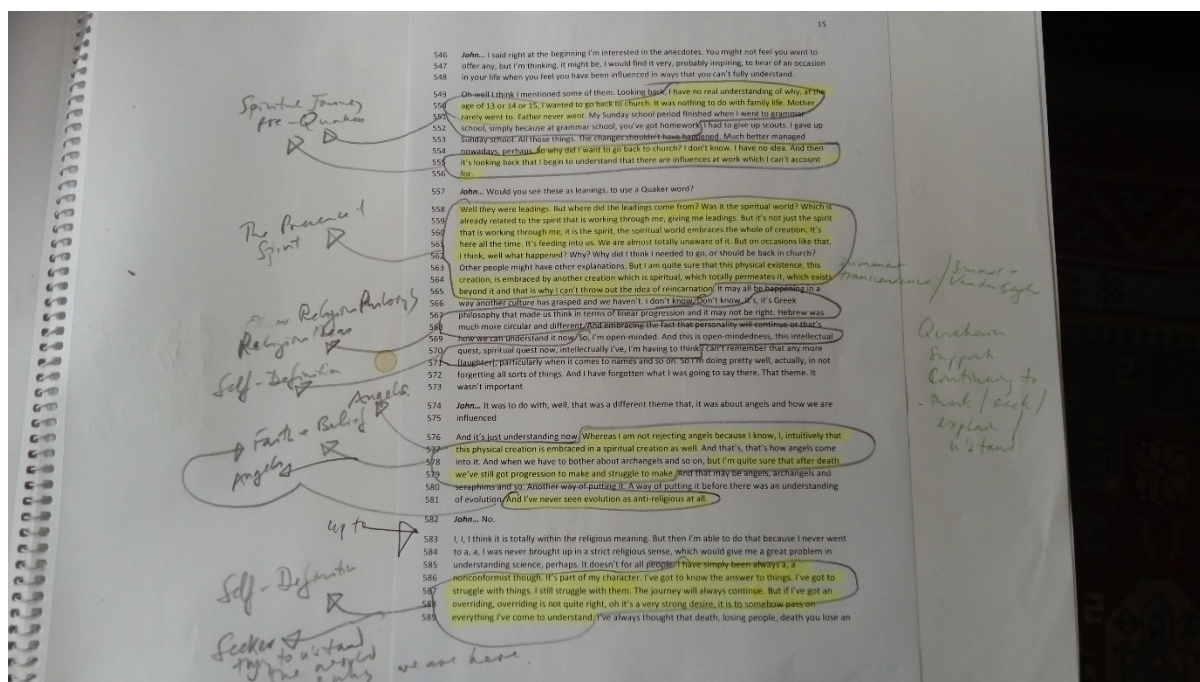


Figure 2.8 Extract from Phillip's transcript to do with spiritual journey and faith

**Step three** involved making further comments about those words and phrases highlighted as important in stage two. Of particular importance were evaluations and connections between judgements and events. Phillip said:

It's an experience. And it's nothing to do with being a Quaker. But it's an experience. I had to get up early, I'm talking about 5 o'clock, to drive somewhere. I was on the M25 and I was striving easterly, I hope I can tell you this, and it was sunrise and it was at a time when you could look exactly into the sun and the point [pause] at which the sun was fully over the horizon [very moved] for a split second, I know it was only a split second, I no longer existed. I was part of something greater. It was a split second experience, but one that could never be denied. And, I suppose, that's a form of truth for me that we are all part of something bigger. That there is a spiritual world that embraces this physical world (Phillip I.1082-1089).

For Phillip, his experiencing led to his theologizing about his very intense reaction to an event. He stressed that that was independent of the fact that he was a Quaker. His Quakerism, from his conversation, had seemed more cerebral until this event. His process of describing this event added to my understanding of the emotional

quality of his religious commitment and of his prototypical Quakerism, partly evidenced in his last sentence.

**Step four** suggests noting how the interviewee uses language and express themselves non-linguistically, responding freely and drawing on the interviewer's own experience, perceptions and understandings that are evoked by the interviewee's narrative. Susan, an academic, who came from a non-observant Jewish background, described her conversion experience. She was a long-time attendee although at the time of the experience not formally attached to a Quaker Meeting. After watching and being inspired quite unexpectedly by Rowan Williams giving the Richard Dimbleby lecture on the TV in 2002, she sought out the local Anglican priest, whom she had not previously known, to discuss it. Susan noted the priest happened to be a Cambridge graduate and she experienced him as a person of intellectual substance. That was important to her, as an academic herself. At the end of a stimulating discussion in which he made no effort to convert her and suggested she should return to Quakers, the priest offered to bless her. She decided to accept the offer and the priest put his hand on her head. She felt an unexpected overwhelming sensation she had never experienced before. Susan followed that initial meeting with a priest by exploring Anglicanism further. That led to her meeting three Anglican priests at a central church in London and an Anglican reader three of whom were, it happened, also Quakers. She also read Richard Hooker, an important Anglican theologian of the sixteenth century. She began and completed the process of becoming confirmed as an Anglican and of becoming a member of The Society after 38 years attending. Susan said:

I call myself a Quanglican. And becoming Christian was, the biggest surprise, especially coming from ['K'] where most sensible people would think that Christians were just nutcases. And Protestant and violent and anti-gay and all

of those things. The vocal Christians there are, the evangelical crazies as I would call them. And I have to tell them that ... it wasn't evangelical crazies who got me but the Oxbridge people. And I tell them, maybe, the story about Rowan Williams understanding society and late modernity better than the sociologists (Susan I.1297-1307).

In her time attending Quaker Meetings, Susan had emphasised in her interview that it was the Quaker ethical commitments to humanity that attracted her. It mattered too that she had not been a Christian and Quakers had not pressured her to be one. The blessing from a priest and its consequences surprised her. I noted that her physical experience led to a more integrated emotional, intellectual and spiritual commitment that complimented her ethical commitment to her religious faith.

Susan's story resonated with mine. I come from a Jewish background. I felt embraced and held in the silence by what I then did not understand at my first Meeting for Worship. I was aware of a desire to disclose my own spiritual journey which I had to control. In the event I revealed my own Jewish background and how I felt at my first Quaker Meeting. I am appalled by the kind of Christian views that Susan is appalled by. I am excited by Rowan Williams' theological writings. I enjoy reading challenging material e.g. Georg Simmel on religion and the relationship between the individual, the group and society. I am moved by and, at that time often attended the Anglican evensong service at my local parish church, but I am not a Quangelican. I appreciated how Susan's faith moved from an ethical and intellectual commitment to an emotional and embodied one as a participant in the eucharist.

**Step Five** invites conceptual and psychological comments to be made by the interviewer. I became aware of the challenges for Andrew to making a commitment to religion. I noted (between I. 82 and I.124) Andrew's 'ambivalence' perhaps because of his experience of two strong adult males, his father and another member of a Quaker Meeting.

His father was 'a career army officer', 'an earnest Anglican Christian' who when he left the army trained as a teacher, became a lay preacher and then fell out with the church. He discovered Quakers and transferred himself and his family to a Quaker Meeting. At about 11 Andrew was sent to a Quaker boarding school. After some years his father became an atheist and left Quakers and his family.

Andrew also spoke of another member of the Meeting who was a conscientious objector in the World War 1. He had been sentenced to be shot. Andrew had built up a warm relationship with him from when he was a child of about '9 or 10' over stamp collecting.

Andrew was presented with two adult male role models. He retained respect for 'an unavoidable figure' (his father) who 'wanted me to adopt his way of thinking' (l. 98-99) yet Andrew resisted and wanting to be his own person. He kept in touch with the conscientious objector until he died. By that time, Andrew considered himself neither religious nor a Quaker. On the other hand he said:

The Quaker values (at the Quaker boarding school), I really, I really sort of absorbed them I think even though I wasn't going to call myself a Quaker or even a, you know, I certainly wasn't, I didn't think of myself as, as religious really. I didn't, I didn't. (Andrew l.124-127)

It was a girl friend's interest in Quakerism that took him back to a Quaker Meeting. He recounts how he and his girl-friend (now his wife) became increasingly involved with The Society. He sometimes felt himself being pushed against his resistance to speak in Quaker Meetings:

I experience a feeling that I must ... But it's not an involuntary, you know. I, I have to, a) I have to know what I'm going to say.... I don't, not that I'm ever, I would, I would never, I've never been to Meeting thinking I'm going to speak about this, which I fear, that some friends do. .... Yes. Yes. And sometimes I sort of slightly lose what I think I wanted to say and I might end up saying something more important [laughter]. (Andrew l.1158-1176)

Andrew's transcript reveals how he and his wife subsequently joined Quakers and eventually self-identified as Christian (Andrew I.773-784).

Andrew's story as Phillip's and Susan's, reveals a movement to an embodied Christian identity and an emphasis on their own intellectual differences from others. The content of their interviews suggest a journey to an integrated spiritual, emotional, intellectual and personal identity developed and still developing as the result of their interaction with other Quakers and other Christians. They described psychologically striking family and personal histories. They came to forge their own religious identities and their own prototypical and embodied Quaker-based faiths.

**Step six** is about developing emergent themes. The researcher tentatively identifies for each transcript themes and sub-themes illustrated by extracts from the transcript. For example, **Error! Reference source not found.** shows a theme from Joy's transcript named 'Awareness of the Spirit and being Spirit-Led' under which relevant extracts are arranged as part of the IPA table constructed for Joy:

### **Awareness of the Spirit and Being Spirit-Led**

I felt led (to join) (Joy I.241)...I felt very supported by him throughout what I was doing on this particular day and how to separate that from being supported by the Spirit, you know ... I don't think I need to (Joy I.311-317). Yes, so, but I knew he was, if you like, the vehicle, you know, and I just felt that all day (Joy I.326).

And sometimes when I'm in Meeting for Worship and at other times I can have a sense of, you know, Christ facing you with his arms like that. And it's it's a concept of being held in the Spirit. And it's a symbol for me for that. And that's I'm fine with that (Joy I.397-400).

Well I have complete faith in the sense of the Spirit. And, yes, I'm aware of the God within, the goodness within, [indistinct] within. But I also know that at times when I'm on my own or with the people at Meeting for Worship I have the sense of the Spirit moving... The sense of the Spirit moving amongst us. Absolutely. And I've been Clerk of our Meeting now for four and a half years. And I, it happens. I'm not imagining it. It's [laughter] it's the truth. And you can feel it. Absolutely feel it. And sometimes in Meeting for Worship, sometimes in Meeting for Worship for business, I can get a sense of where the ministry is going to come from. A physical, almost a physical it's going to be over there [laughter] (Joy I.439-447).....

But when I went to Britain Yearly Meeting, was it when was it two years ago at Friends House, I was astonished by it... That we could have a Meeting in the Spirit with so many of us and that clerks could hold that (Joy I.747-750).

So I do feel it it's not my Ministry... It comes from the Spirit... Yes, it comes from the worship and Spirit. Definitely, yes (Joy I.772-776).

Figure 2.9 Extract of table 'Awareness of the Spirit and being Spirit-Led' from the transcript of Joy

An abbreviated list of themes which emerged from the analysis of Joy's transcript is shown in Figure 2.10, without the extracts that gave rise to them (I have italicized ***Awareness of the Spirit and Being Spirit-Led*** so that the place of this theme can be located by the reader in relation to the other themes that emerged from the analysis of Joy's transcript):



### **Abbreviated Table of Themes from Joy's transcript**

Attitude to Interview  
 Importance of Friendship and Family  
 Importance of Discussion, Conversation and Learning  
 Importance of Choice and Discernment  
 Spiritual highlights  
 Family, School and Religious Influences Pre-First Meeting for Worship  
 Becoming a Member  
 First Meeting for Worship  
 Meetings for Worship  
***Awareness of the Spirit and Being Spirit-Led***  
 Worship and Prayer  
 Other Spiritual Practices and Developments  
 Ministry  
 Religious Identity and thoughts about Christianity and other beliefs  
     Status of Jesus  
     The Bible  
     The Resurrection  
     The Trinity  
     [Responses to questions on other doctrines]  
 Practice  
 Professional Work as a teacher  
 Quaker Service and other Voluntary Work  
 Quakers and Quakerism

Figure 2.10 Table of themes and sub-themes developed from Joy's transcript (abbreviated)

#### **2.6.4 Creating the Master Tables**

When the analysis of each transcript is completed, the named themes and sub-themes, with their associated extracts, are assembled in a table for each transcript.

The themes for each transcript may then be compared. The themes, according to

their related meanings, are then combined and renamed iteratively as suggested by the material as necessary. Differentiated Master Tables of themes are then created.

On completion of the analysis of twelve transcripts, five Master Tables, each under a its own name, were created:

Master Table A: Faith and Religious Practice Pre-First Meeting for Worship

Master Table B: From Going to Meeting for the First time to Becoming a Member

Master Table C: Theology and Belief

Master Table D: Faith in Practice Pre- and Post- Membership

Master Table E: Reflections on Quakers and Quakerism

Figure 2.11 The Master Table Titles

The first table contained themes related to participants' religious experience and religious practices before their first Meeting for Worship. It transpired that all interviewees had involvements with religious institutions before going to a Quaker Meeting as adults, mostly in spite of the indifference to church-going of their parents but not necessarily other relatives. Some interviewees spoke of intense childhood religious experiences.

The second table emerged because it was of interest as to why interviewees went to their first Quaker Meeting as adults. It was also of interest as to why and when they subsequently chose to apply for membership of The Society.

The third table collated themes to do with participants' theology and beliefs. A diversity of individual beliefs became apparent which could nevertheless be used to identify three kinds of Quaker: Self-identified Christian Quakers; Theistic Quakers who denied being Christian; and a Non-Theist Quaker.

The fourth table was developed to compare the influence of a participant's faith on their service to the community before and after membership.

The fifth table collated participants' positive and negative reflections on Quakers and Quakerism.

To illustrate how a theme was identified and then reprocessed and relocated into a Master Table, the example of a theme and extract from Joy's transcript follows. The theme named *Awareness of the Spirit and Being Spirit-Led* and associated extracts from her transcript was used in the table of themes for Joy but not used without modification of its name in any Master Table. One of the associated extracts that contributed to giving rise to that named theme as a feature of Joy's interview was also used to illustrate four other themes. The extract in full was:

Well I have complete faith in the sense of the Spirit. And, yes, I'm aware of the God within, the goodness within, [indistinct] within. But I also know that at times when I'm on my own or with the people at Meeting for Worship I have the sense of the Spirit moving (Joy I.439-447).

What Joy had said was so rich in content that the extract contributed in abbreviated or repeated form, to four differentiated themes in Master Table C: Theology and Belief under which extracts from other interviewees could also be collated. The four themes supported by that extract were named as: Faith and trust; God's relationship with us; Perception of the Spirit and the Spirit's relationship with 'us'; and Meeting for Worship. For reasons of space the fourth theme, Meeting for Worship with its associated extracts, has not been included in Figure 2.12.

### **Faith and trust**

Something about trust. Trusting in the spirit. [Pause. Pause.] I don't I don't think of it as a sort of, this is fairly obvious, I don't think it's really a set of beliefs. I think it's an ongoing discovery. It's to do with following that of God within you, I suppose ... [Pause] Well, trust the process I suppose trust the light within. ... (Gillian I.286-294)

Well I have complete faith in the sense of the Spirit. And, yes, I'm aware of the God within, the goodness within, [indistinct] within. But I also know that at times when I'm on my own or with the people at Meeting for Worship I have the sense of the spirit moving (Joy I.439-447).

I feel I have covered a fair bit of what, what my faith is about. Because it's about the invisible world, believing in it, believing in that invisible world and believing that it does have some impact on us if we can tune in and listen to it. ... (Rosemary I.754-762).

### **God's relationship with 'us'**

And then I had an inspiration, if you like, by I decided God or the light of God whatever you choose to call it was within me and that would be my guide and that would be my religion if you like (Gillian I.38-40).

Well I have complete faith in the sense of the Spirit. And, yes, I'm aware of the God within, the goodness within, [indistinct] within. (Joy I.439-440)

And I think, I'm very comfortable with the idea of, of God, including, including the kind of God I, I go for, with the not all powerful, the loving the weak, being multifaceted and having different aspects and having and having aspects very strongly projecting, emanating through, through individuals, and through individual humans (Matthew I.800-803).

### **Perception of the Spirit and the Spirit's relationship with 'us'**

[In worship] I'm listening to the Holy Spirit and I'm discerning the Holy Spirit's will. And if I'm lead to minister that comes from a feeling of discernment and clarity. That is something I have got to do (Andrea I. 773-777).

Well I have complete faith in the sense of the Spirit. And, yes, I'm aware of the God within, the goodness within, [indistinct] within. But I also know that at times when I'm on my own or with the people at Meeting for Worship I have the sense of the Spirit moving ... The sense of the Spirit moving amongst us. ... And I, it happens. I'm not imagining it. It's [laughter] it's the truth. And you can feel it. ... And sometimes in Meeting for Worship, sometimes in Meeting for Worship for business, I can get a sense of where the ministry is going to come from. A physical, almost a physical it's going to be over there [laughter]....] And somebody stands. (Joy I.439-449)

After about three or four Sundays, it, it was just a totally amazing thing because I was just moved by the Spirit to forgive my husband. Which was just incredibly powerful. ... And that, and then being at Quakers and being in that silence and, and being in the presence of the Spirit just allowed that to happen. ... So that was a very powerful [pause] incentive really to feel that Quakerism was the right thing for me (Caroline I.105-113).

Figure 2.12 Illustration of a multi-faceted extract collated under three different named themes

## 2.7 Researcher Distance and the Insider/Outsider Factor in Research

I am an insider rather than an outsider in relation to Quakers, having been a member of The Society for over 49 years when the research started in 2015 (and became more active in my Local and Area Meeting since 2005). I was alert to the need to avoid bias and to be as transparent as I could in conducting this research.

The Insider/Outsider problem is reviewed in Maria Kennedy's PhD thesis on contemporary Irish Quaker identities<sup>173</sup>. She reports that she felt 'like both an insider and an outsider to the group, depending on the circumstances'<sup>174</sup>. Peter Collins, a Quaker academic and ethnographer, makes a similar observation and questions the helpfulness of the dichotomy:

One's membership of a group, that is one's status as an insider/outsider is, to a large extent, an intricate process of negotiation .... My sense of belonging was determined not only by my own perceptions, but also by those of others<sup>175</sup>.

He continues:

In epistemological and methodological terms, the insider/outsider dichotomy proves merely unhelpful... Comprising a multitude of voices, we each become simultaneously insiders and outsiders, and therefore the distinction is largely redundant<sup>176</sup>.

Two questions still presented themselves: Can a detached outsider make sense of an insider's experience; can an involved insider offer detached descriptions of phenomena they study in which they have a personal commitment?

My answer to both questions is a conditional 'Yes!' An outsider without acquaintance with the religious culture of the interviewee and sensitivities to the insider's use of language, has at least one extra learning curve to negotiate; more if the interviewer's

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<sup>173</sup> Kennedy (2016).

<sup>174</sup> Kennedy (2016, p.65).

<sup>175</sup> Collins (2002, p.87).

<sup>176</sup> Collins (2002, p.92).

age, gender, social class and ethnic background are different from the interviewees'<sup>177</sup>. An insider cannot assume their interviewee has the same understanding of Quakerism as they have; and the insider has to bracket their own position on the subject being researched.

Russell McCutcheon suggests a particular posture for an insider interviewer:

The emic or insider perspective might better be understood as the outsider's attempt to reproduce as faithfully as possible – in a word, to describe – what might be considered to be the informant's own descriptions of his or her ... behaviours, beliefs, meanings, institutions<sup>178</sup>.

The interviewer's primary task, insider or outsider, is to represent the 'informant's' understanding of their position. Interpretation of that position and of the significance of positions an interviewee takes, comes later. That represents the double hermeneutic. of IPA.

Understanding the interviewee is a function of the empathic capacity and self-awareness of the interviewer<sup>179</sup>. Empathy is about sensitivity to the other, not merging with them. Empathy is not to be confused with sympathy or identifying with the interviewee. Accurate empathy is dependent on paying full attention to what the interviewee has to say and how they say it. This is possible if the interviewer<sup>180</sup> is able to set aside or bracket their own feelings and thoughts about the matter in hand<sup>181</sup>. As far as possible, the accuracy of the interviewer's understanding should be confirmed by checking with the interviewee during the interview. Empathy, properly deployed, overcomes the insider/outsider conundrum. Blaikie discusses the

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<sup>177</sup> Kerstetter (2012); Dwyer and Buckle (2009).

<sup>178</sup> McCutcheon (2007, p.51).

<sup>179</sup> Haugh and Merry (2001). The collection of essays edited by Sheila Haugh and Tony Merry is focused for therapists but the essays explore the meaning and practice of empathy and are relevant for any one conducting in-depth interviews.

<sup>180</sup> As a practicing counsellor and leader of PG and MA Counselling courses, this capacity is one developed in me through training and supervision.

<sup>181</sup> Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p.61).

importance of empathy if a researcher is to understand what it is they are researching<sup>182</sup>. Martin Stringer, not a counsellor and not a Quaker, in his Introduction to *Theorizing faith: the insider/outside problem...* values empathy as 'a way of trying to undermine or counteract the impenetrability of the boundary between the insider and the outsider as far as religion is concerned'<sup>183</sup>.

### 2.7.1 A personal reflection

There were two particular challenges for me in this research. The first was to bracket my own theological commitments. These had become more traditionally Quaker since membership. I found the Christian theology as presented in the work of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Quaker Robert Barclay in his *Apology* persuasive<sup>184</sup>. Several extracts from his work appear in *QF&P*. The following expresses a view with which I agree:

The church [is] no other thing but The Society, gathering or company of such as God hath called out of the world and worldly spirit to walk in his light and life... Under this church ... are comprehended all, and as many, of whatsoever nation, kindred, tongue or people they be, though outwardly strangers and remote from those who profess Christ and Christianity in words and have the benefit of the Scriptures, as become obedient to the holy light and testimony of God in their hearts... There may be members therefore of this Catholic church both among heathens, Turks, Jews and all the several sorts of Christians, men and women of integrity and simplicity of heart, who ... are by the secret touches of this holy light in their souls enlivened and quickened, thereby secretly united to God, and there-through become true members of this Catholic church.<sup>185</sup>

To ensure that my own commitments and preferences did not get in the way of any interview, my own reflexive practice and pre-interview preparation were important.

As Eleanor Nesbitt, a Quaker ethnographer says, an ethnographic researcher requires 'an ongoing interrogation of her/his cultural conditioning and

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<sup>182</sup> Blaikie (2009, p.51).

<sup>183</sup> Arweck and Stringer (2002, p.16).

<sup>184</sup> Barclay (1678 [2002]).

<sup>185</sup> QF&P (2013, 27.05).

religious/ideological stance'<sup>186</sup> Indeed, she goes further asserting that 'Reflexivity (in the sense of continuous reflection on their Quakerism) is intrinsic to being a Quaker'<sup>187</sup>. 'Quaker ethnographers experience listening as central to both their Quakerism and their ethnographic practice'.<sup>188</sup> In reviewing the interviews I sometimes found myself wanting to have been a better listener, better questioner and better bracketed, but I believe that has not prevented me from identifying the significant themes of each interview, integrating them into master tables and then discussing their significance with reference to the work of sociologists, social theorists and ethnographers.

The second challenge arose because of my profession as a person-centred/existential counsellor. Person-centred counselling abilities and attitudes and the existential concern with meaning and values facilitated this research. Carl Rogers advocated them in his adaptation of his person-centred approach to counselling for doing social research<sup>189</sup>; but I knew I needed to avoid falling into a counsellor-therapeutic role during the interviews and I think I did not.

What surprised me most about the results of the interviews and their analysis was how so many interviewees sought a religious organisation to contain the spiritual and religious longings they recognised they had before arriving at Quakers. In addition I was surprised at the depth of commitment that was expressed at the same time as qualifications were expressed by a few about The Society's theological diversity. I was not surprised about the limited concern with the effectiveness of their own Area Meeting's and BYM's outreach activities in the light of The society's falling numbers,

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<sup>186</sup> Nesbitt (2002, p.137).

<sup>187</sup> Nesbitt (2002, p.140).

<sup>188</sup> Nesbitt, 2002, p.141

<sup>189</sup> Rogers (1945).



but only one interviewee expressed concern about the 'bureaucracy' at 'Friends House'. They were issues that became more important to me after the interviews had been completed and the publication of Dandelion's and Cummins' work on internal secularisation.

## **2.8 Chapter Summary**

Chapter 2 began with an outline of this chapter. **2.1** discussed the choice of a research strategy, and **2.2** discussed critical realism and its relevance to this research. **2.3** discussed the influence of Georg Simmel on my understanding of the phenomena I was researching. It also argued that Simmelian concepts anticipated concepts in critical realism. **2.4** Presented David Harvey's model of Agency and Community as a starting point for social research in a critical realist vein. That was of particular interest because it linked Simmelian ideas, critical realism and introduced me to the work of Margaret S. Archer. **2.5** discussed Archer's work and presented an integrated model linking her reflexive and social theories. **2.6** discussed IPA as a methodology for data acquisition and analysis chosen for this research. Its dual focus on the unique lived experience of individuals and on patterns of meaning across a set of individuals made it appropriate even though its social constructionist leanings were rejected. **2.7** engaged with the insider/outside factor in research especially as it might have affected this research and then offered a personal reflection in 2.7.1.

## CHAPTER 3: THE INTERVIEWS: FINDINGS AND THEMES

### 3.1 Introduction to the interviewees and the chapter outline

This chapter presents the results of the interviews analysed according to the IPA methodology. The previous chapter introduced critical realism as providing the ontological underpinnings for the research design. A conceptual model (Figure 2.5) was created on the basis of concepts and theories taken from the works of Georg Simmel and Margaret S. Archer to provide the analytical purchase on the empirical data generated by the IPA.

The interviewees are introduced, pseudonymously, with data relating to interviewees' membership. The chapter then summarises the thematic content of the interviews organised in Master Tables A-E generated by the IPA. Tables A to D are summarised with respect to their most significant contents. Their findings lead to the construction of Table E. A detailed description and refined organisation of the contents of Table E is provided because of its importance for this thesis<sup>1</sup>. That table collates themes and quotations from the interviewees' reflections on their experience of Quakers and Quakerism according to whether they self-define as Christian, not Christian but theist and non-theist. From their reflections it is possible to explore reasons for their enthusiasm for Quakerism and their reservations. Their reservations and the fact of The Society's numerical decline triggered the search for reasons for members' enthusiasm, disaffection and disaffiliation from The Society as presented in chapters 4 and 5.

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 contain themes and quotations from Master Tables B and E. Table E is in an alternatively organised version of the Table presented in this chapter. That shows a simplified listing of positive and negative statements.

The table below (Figure 3.1) lists names for the interviewees with some relevant demographic data relating to their membership and their age at interview:

	Age at first Meeting	How long an attender	Age at becoming a member	How long a member	Age at interview
Caroline	64	3 years	67	6	73
Shirley	50	14 years	66	1	67
Andrea	48	24 months	50	33	82
Gillian	47	6 months	48	27	75
Rosemary	40	14 years	54	11	65
Joy	39	30 months	41	24	65
Phillip	39	12 months	41	40	82
Trevor	32	15 months	34	23	56
Andrew	29 (taken as child)	6 years	35	27	62
Linda	22	27 years	49	2	51
Matthew	17 (taken as child)	6 years	23	10	33
Susan	12 (own choice as child)	38 years	50	10	60

Figure 3.1 Participant names and membership data as of 2015

Figure 3.1 shows the age at which interviewees first went to a Quaker Meeting (oldest first), the elapsed time between then and applying for membership, and the

length of time as a member. The elapsed time between first attending and applying for membership shows a very wide range from 6 months to 38 years. That is discussed further in Chapter 4 in relation to a theory of social belonging.

Three of the interviewees went to a Meeting for Worship as children. Andrew was taken by his parents to Meeting regularly Matthew was taken by a grandparent occasionally. Andrew rejected Quakerism when he left a Quaker boarding school he had had no choice but to go to. He returned to Quakers in his late twenties because his girlfriend was interested. His own interest was then re-awakened. Matthew chose to go to Meeting as an older teenager and then as a university student after a gap year teaching English to Buddhist monks in India. Susan chose to go out of curiosity when she was 12. Her parents were atheist and of Jewish origin but they had no objection to her interest. There were close relatives in the family who had become Quakers, but lived some distance away. She asked to be taken by a Quaker neighbour to Meeting. After the first Meeting she wanted to attend regularly and did so during her teenage years and at University. She asserted she attended not as a Christian, but as one affirming Quaker ethics. After marriage in a Quaker Meeting house and after having children, her attendance dropped for some 10 years until a Christian conversion experience. She then returned to worship at Meeting and began worshipping at an Anglican church.

### **3.2 The Master Tables**

This chapter continues by describing each of the five tables derived from the interview analysis<sup>2</sup>, see Figure 3.2 below:

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<sup>2</sup> All transcripts and individual interview tables are available on request by the examiners. Master Tables are available to *bona fide* researchers. The procedures for creating the tables were described in Chapter 2. Examples of partial tables were given in Chapter 2.

Master Table A: Faith and Religious Practice Pre-First Meeting for Worship  
 Master Table B: From Going to Meeting for the First time to Becoming a Member  
 Master Table C: Theology and Belief  
 Master Table D: Faith in Practice Pre- and Post- Membership  
 Master Table E: Reflections on Quakers and Quakerism

Figure 3.2 The Master Table Titles

Once each Master Table was established, their developmental relationship informed their sequencing: from the interviewees' faith and religious experience as children to their contemporary faith and religious experience as adults who chose to be members of The Society.

Themes were identified and derived from each interview. A table includes an aggregate of all the themes derived from the individual interviews. They should not be seen as themes of equal importance to every interviewee but they are themes about which one or more interviewee has had something of importance to them to say. For example, in relation to Table A, one interviewee has had a Near Death Experience, some interviewees have had something to say about their siblings' religiosity and all had something to say about their experience of religion post-school, whether positive, negative or of their disinterest.

### **3.2.1 Master Table A: Faith and Practice Pre-First Meeting for Worship**

Master Table A (Figure 3.3) indicates the themes related to interviewees' faith and practice prior to their involvement as adults with Quakers. The interview themes are arranged in three parts. The first illustrates influences on the individual's faith and spiritual development. The second indicates the participants' own spiritual and religious experiences before their first Meeting for Worship as adults. The third illustrates interviewees' involvement with paid work, volunteering and social activism prior to engagement with Quakers as adults.

<p><b>Master Table A: Faith and Practice Pre-First Meeting for Worship</b></p> <p><b>Part 1: Influences on Interviewees' Faith</b></p> <p><b>A1</b> Family influences on Faith</p> <p>A1.2 Parents</p> <p>A1.2.1 Quaker Meeting as a Child</p> <p>A1.2 Siblings</p> <p>A1.3 Other Family Influences</p> <p><b>A2</b> School Influences on Faith</p> <p>A2.1 Other Spiritual and Religious Influences until leaving school</p> <p><b>A3</b> Experience of Religious Institutions/Denominations post-school</p> <p>A3.1 Positive experiences</p> <p>A3.2 Negative experiences</p> <p><b>Part 2: Interviewees' religiosity<sup>3</sup></b></p> <p><b>A4</b> Own religiosity and spiritual experiences from childhood until First Meeting for Worship</p> <p>A4.1 Leadings (Sense of being led by God or a transcendent power)</p> <p>A4.2 Intense experiences from childhood prior to first Meeting for Worship</p> <p>A4.3 Near Death Experience (NDE)</p> <p>A4.4 Experience of visions and 'metaphors'</p> <p>A4.5 Importance of discussion, conversation and learning</p> <p><b>Part 3: Interviewees' Practice</b></p> <p>A5.1 Paid Work</p> <p>A5.2 Voluntary Service and Activism</p>
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Figure 3.3 Master Table A: Faith and Religious Practice Pre-First Meeting for Worship

Interviewees' early experiences of religion were, except for Andrew, reported as positive. Andrew's experience was of a domineering father who was Anglican, then became Quaker, then atheist. Andrew was sent to a Quaker boarding school about which he was not enthusiastic. He had some 'grim experiences there' but he did 'absorb Quaker values' although 'I wasn't going to call myself a Quaker'<sup>4</sup>.. Although other parents were reported as relatively indifferent to religion, four interviewees

<sup>3</sup> The meaning of religiosity is discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew (l.119-129).

were sent to Roman Catholic church schools. Interviewees spoke well of their teachers<sup>5</sup>.

As adults (but not Andrew<sup>6</sup>) interviewees sought a denomination to belong to that fitted their spiritual<sup>7</sup>, religious and ethical leanings at particular times of their lives. They had had significant experience of Christian and non-Christian religious groups<sup>8</sup>. Andrea and Rosemary spoke of intense spiritual/paranormal experiences continuing from childhood, but did not connect them with religion. Andrea had been uninterested in religion since leaving school. After illness and a Near Death Experience, during her rehabilitation, she met a squash partner who happened to be a Quaker. Andrea became curious. Her squash partner took her to her local Quaker Meeting and that was a turning point in her religious life.

All worked in explicitly pro-social occupations. In terms of paid work, employment was or had been in education (4), nursing education (1), social work (3) the civil service (2) the treatment of offenders (1) and local community service (1).

Apart from Andrea, who had been a nurse and then nurse-trainer, interviewees reported their involvement in one or more voluntary organizations prior to becoming regular attenders at a Local Meeting.

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<sup>5</sup> Shirley, Linda, Andrea and Trevor went to Roman Catholic schools.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew's girlfriend became curious about Quakers and wanted to go to a Meeting when Andrew told her about his upbringing. Andrew took her to Meeting. They appreciated their welcome and that was why he returned to Friends.

<sup>7</sup> Spiritual here refers to values and beliefs distinct from values and beliefs tied to a particular religion or church.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. Trevor had had Roman Catholic and United Reform Church connections. Shirley had had Catholic, Anglican and United Reform Church connections. Rosemary had had Anglican, Buddhist and Brahma Kumari connections, Joy as child and teenager and Phillip as an adult had had strong Methodist connections. Phillip had had as a child and teenager Congregationalist connections about which he was positive before arriving at Methodism. Matthew had had Anglican and Buddhist connections. Caroline had Anglican connections. Andrea and Linda reacted strongly as young adults against an evangelical/fundamentalist sibling, but that did not prevent Linda from attaching for a time to a charismatic Roman Catholic group.

### 3.2.2 Master Table B: From Going to Meeting for the First time to Becoming a Member<sup>9</sup>

Master Table B (Figure 3.4) collates interviewees' reasons for going to their first Quaker Meeting and their thinking that then led them to apply for membership. It is in three parts. The first is concerned with the reasons and triggers that led them to their first Meeting. The second is to do with the observations they made on their experience of their first Meeting. The third is to do with the decision to apply for membership.

#### **Master Table B: From Going to Meeting for the First time to Becoming a Member. List of themes**

- B1 Knowledge of Quakers prior to First Meeting for Worship
- B2 The First Meeting for Worship: triggers and reasons for going
  - B2.1 The Curious Group
  - B2.2 The Crisis Responders Group
- B3 Reported Experience of the First Meeting
  - B3.1 The Curious Group
  - B3.2 The Crisis Group
- B4 Becoming a Member
  - B4.1 The Curious Group
    - B4.1.1 The Visit
  - B4.2 The Crisis Group
    - B4.2.1 The Visit

Figure 3.4 Master Table B: From Going to Meeting for the First time to Becoming a Member. List of themes

#### **The motivation to attend a Quaker Meeting**

On speaking of their reasons to go to their first Meetings, two groups could be identified: a Curious Group and a Crisis Responders Group. The latter hoped to resolve or find some alleviation to their personal crises.

<sup>9</sup> Master Table B with quotations is in Appendix 2.



### **Interviewees' responses to their First Meeting**

Two categories of response can be identified: those related to the form of worship and those related to belonging and inclusion.

Accounts in relation to the form of worship described the silence, the spoken ministry, and the individual's sense of a direct connection to what they felt was present in the Meeting room. In relation to belonging and inclusion, comments included a sense of coming home, the quality of the welcome, and of liking and love in relation to the group.

Similarities and differences in relation to what individuals said they experienced in their first Meeting for Worship as noted in their transcripts were recorded and are revealed in Figure 3.5 Experience of First Meeting for Worship as derived from Table B Section B1.3 Reported Experience of the First Meeting. C= Curious Cr= Crisis below.

The single feature most commented upon, by six interviewees, was the direct and experiential quality of the unprogrammed worship. The fact and/or quality of the silence was positively commented upon by five of the interviewees.

Trevor made three comments about the worship but no comment about belonging and inclusion. Two interviewees made no comment about the form of worship: Andrew had been used to Meeting for Worship since childhood so he would not be struck by its novelty. Linda commented that she felt she was with the right people and felt comfortable, but that otherwise it was not a special experience for her. The importance of feeling comfortable in a Meeting should not be underestimated. Rosemary felt tense. Social inclusion was an issue for her and for Linda as the elapsed time before deciding on membership suggests: 14 years for Rosemary and

27 for Linda. Even so, Rosemary reported a strong sense of being led to a place where she could do her spiritual work. The form, not the welcome, was the significant factor in Rosemary's first experience of Quaker worship.

	FORM			BELONGING AND INCLUSION				
	Silence	Ministry	Direct / Experi ential	Home	Welcome	Liking / Love	Comfort- able	Tense
Trevor C	*	*	*					
Andrea C			*	*	*			
Shirley C		*		*				
Gillian C	*				*			
Matthew C <sup>10</sup>			*			*		
Andrew C				*	*			
Phillip C	*	*			*			
Susan <sup>11</sup> C/Cr			*				*	
Linda Cr							*	
Joy Cr			*	*				
Rosemary Cr	*		*					*
Caroline <sup>12</sup> Cr	*					*		

Figure 3.5 Experience of First Meeting for Worship as derived from Table B Section B1.3 Reported Experience of the First Meeting. C= Curious Cr= Crisis

<sup>10</sup> Not strictly the first Meeting for this participant, but it was the first Meeting when he was 17 and the first Meeting that had an impact on him.

<sup>11</sup> The entry C/Cr here refers to Susan's first Meeting for Worship, which she chose to go to as a child. After about a ten year absence she returned to a Quaker Meeting when she was experiencing a psychological crisis. She went on the encouragement of an Anglican priest.

<sup>12</sup> Caroline said she 'immediately liked it'. I have taken this to mean she liked both the silent form of worship and that she liked being with others in the worship.

### The variations in the elapsed time from first Meeting to membership<sup>13</sup>

An analysis of the transcripts revealed significant variations in the elapsed time taken from first attending their first Meeting to applying for membership, illustrated in Figure 3.6 Table indicating age at first Meeting and the period between attending and becoming a member.

Three main groupings are revealed: 6 who joined within three years, 2 for whom Quaker practices had been familiar as children, joined after six years involvement as adults, and 4 who applied for membership after fourteen or more years involvement.

	Age at First Meeting	How long an attender	Age at joining	Years as a member (as of 2015)
Gillian	47	<b>6 months</b>	48	37
Phillip	39	<b>1 year</b>	41	40
Trevor	32	<b>15 months</b>	34	33
Andrea	48	<b>2 years</b>	50	33
Joy	39	<b>2.5 years</b>	41	24
Caroline	64	<b>3 years</b>	67	6
Matthew*	17	<b>6 years</b>	23	10
Andrew*	29	<b>6 years</b>	35	27
Shirley	50	<b>14 years</b>	66	1
Rosemary	40	<b>14 years</b>	54	11
Linda	22	<b>27 years</b>	49	2
Susan*	12	<b>38 years</b>	60	10

Figure 3.6 Table indicating age at first Meeting and the period between attending and becoming a member

\* Matthew, Andrew and Susan had attended their first Meeting as children, but only Susan deliberately chose to go to her first Meeting, aged 12.

<sup>13</sup> James Chadkirk explored patterns of membership in his MPhil thesis on *Pattern of membership and Participation Among British Quakers, 1823 – 2012*. He examined statistics relating to members and attenders. The data implied that while some attenders apply for membership very soon after first attendance a large minority spend some years considering their position (Chadkirk. 2014, p.192) and most leave (Chadkirk (2014, p.216). In my data 6/12 (50%) applied within three years, 2/12 (17%) within 6 years and 4/12 (33%) over 14 years which shows similarities to Chadkirk's findings. Chapter 4 of this thesis at 4.3 further explores reasons for these variations within a frame of Social Belonging and in relation to the interviewees for this thesis.

A second table, Figure 3.7 Table showing the elapsed time before joining of the curious and the crisis groups, reveals the elapsed time before joining of the curious and crisis resolver groups:

Curious (C) or Crisis (Cr)	How long an attender		Age at First Meeting	Age at joining	Years as a member (as of 2016)
<b>C</b>	6 months	Gillian	47	48	37
<b>C</b>	1 year	Phillip	39	41	40
<b>C</b>	15 months	Trevor	32	34	33
<b>C</b>	2 years	Andrea	48	50	33
<b>C</b>	6 years	Matthew*	17	23	10
<b>C</b>	6 years	Andrew*	29	35	27
<b>C</b>	14 years	Shirley	50	66	1
<b>Cr</b>	2.5 years	Joy	39	41	24
<b>Cr</b>	3 years	Caroline	64	67	6
<b>Cr</b>	14 years	Rosemary	40	54	11
<b>Cr</b>	27 years	Linda	22	49	2
<b>C/Cr</b>	38 years	Susan*	12	60	10

Figure 3.7 Table showing the elapsed time before joining of the curious and the crisis groups

Two of the crisis group joined relatively quickly within the three years. The three other crisis members waited 14 or more years. Being in crisis has some correlation with the length of time before joining: either quickly or slowly. It may be that some quickly want to be fully involved with the Meeting they join whilst others are more conscious of their difference. They may fear engulfment<sup>14</sup>. Four in the curious group joined within three years; one took 14 years. Two of the curious group who had childhood Quaker experience took six. They joined, they said, only after being encouraged to by Friends in their Meeting. They had not felt any urgency to join as members.

<sup>14</sup> Engulfment is a concept developed by R.D. Laing in his *The divided self* (1965) to refer to a person's fear of losing their identity.

### **Comments about interviewees' decisions to join**

Elapsed time before joining The Society is discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to a theory of social belonging. Non-predictable factors affecting some individual interviewees' decisions to join are commented upon here.

Gillian, the fastest to join after 6 months, enthused about her first Meeting. A short while after her first Meeting, she had a vision of St Thérèse of Lisieux. She then came to an understanding about Christ and the Cross which profoundly affected her thinking. The experience gave her a new insight into what Christ was about: Christ manifested the power of love.

Another interviewee, Susan, of Jewish heritage, who took the longest time before joining, reported two connected intense experiences when she was already in crisis following a work incident. The first was a response to a Rowan Williams lecture<sup>15</sup> and the second followed a blessing from a priest she went to see in a nearby church to discuss Williams' lecture. It was a good discussion with a well-educated priest. She was offered a blessing. The blessing she agreed to receive caused an unexpected intense physiologically experienced reaction. She then explored Anglicanism further leading to a conversion to Christianity, a Quangelican<sup>16</sup> commitment, baptism and confirmation and an application for membership to The Society, 38 years after her first Meeting for Worship.

Linda had always perceived a class difference between herself and most Quakers and that too seems to have delayed her application for membership for 27 years.

Many factors affected her decision: issues of belonging, class differences, how she

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<sup>15</sup> Rowan Williams giving the Richard Dimbleby lecture on the TV in 2002

<sup>16</sup> Quangelican is a name given to Quakers who are also baptised and confirmed Anglicans (Thackray, Dec 22, 2018).

was seen by others, gratitude, the wish to contribute, and, not least, for her own integrity and integration. But it was discomforting social interactions in one Meeting and good experiences of another, the one she first went to, that led to her actual decision to make a commitment to Quakers and her application for membership.

### **Some reflections on joining**

An individual's application for membership to a religious association is the result of a significant decision-making process for them. Those who quickly embrace the Quaker way and have found a congenial Meeting are not inhibited from applying. Others find the decision to apply more difficult. An individual who requests belonging, opens themselves to rejection. Some apply only after prompting from an existing member of their Meeting, as did Matthew and Andrew. In the cases of the four interviewees who had associated with Quakers for 14+ years, there were external stimuli that triggered the decision. In two cases where Friends prompted them to apply there were significant delays in processing their application without explanations being offered by the Area Meeting for the delays. But the delays were tolerated as a commitment had been made and both were aware of the time they themselves had taken before making their commitment. They were also aware of their difference from the norm of their Meetings: Shirley as a non-theist in a Christocentric Meeting and Susan as a newly convinced Quaker. In the other two cases emotions were involved in leaving Meetings. Their decisions had a significance in expressing gratitude to supportive Friends they had known<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> In Rosemary's case, it was to give thanks for the support she had received from the Meeting she was leaving. In Linda's case her decision was prompted by an insensitive breach of confidentiality. She returned to a Meeting in which she had felt comfortable and supported in the past.

### **Summary of Master Table B: From Going to Meeting for the First time to Becoming a Member**

Interviewees went to their first Meeting as adults either because they were curious or in crisis. Eleven of the twelve remembered positive personal contact with a Quaker or Quakerism either as children or as adults preceding their first Meeting. Some went with the Quaker with whom they had initial contact. The distinctive form of worship and a sense of belonging and inclusion were factors that struck and impressed interviewees.

There were differences in the elapsed times before interviewees applied for membership. These pointed to factors affecting an individual's decision to apply for membership mainly to do with issues of identity, belonging and social inclusion.

The meaning of membership for an individual applicant is on a different plane from the meaning of membership for members who are asked to process an application. There are psychological factors for the individual applicant and organisational factors for The Society. Membership criteria are clearly enough stated in *QF&P* 11.01. The fact that there were delays with two applicants who happened to be interviewees for this research suggests there can be problems for Area Meetings in applying the criteria in a timely manner and managing their procedures.

#### **3.2.3 Master Table C: Theology and Belief**

Master Table C (Figure 3.8) is organized in three parts. The first has its focus on individuals, their religious self-identity and their understanding of their own spiritual and religious experience. The second is concerned with attitudes to Christianity, prayer and worship. I thought it necessary to clarify interviewees' attitudes to Christianity and Christian doctrines given the diversity of belief that emerged in the interviews. The third contains a less homogenous set of themes including

participants' spiritual practices other than Quaker and includes views expressed about evangelicalism, fundamentalism and other religions.

<p><b>Master Table C: Theology and Belief. List of main themes</b></p> <p><b>Part 1: The Individual</b></p> <p>Self-defined Religious Identity          Faith and Trust          Perception of God          God's Relationship with Us          Discerning God's Voice          Perception of the Spirit and the Spirit's relationship with us          The Light          Encounter with Christ          Leadings</p> <p><b>Part 2: Christianity and Christian ideas in general</b></p> <p>The Bible          The Status of Jesus          The Virgin Birth          The Crucifixion and The Cross          The Resurrection          Life before and after Death          The Trinity          Sin and Evil</p> <p><b>Part 3: Spiritual practices</b></p> <p>Prayer and Worship          Meeting for Worship          Attendance at weekly Meeting for Worship          Attendance at Meeting for Worship for Business (LM &amp; AM)          Attendance at Yearly Meeting in session          Ministry          Communion          Other Organised Spiritual Practices<sup>18</sup>          Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism          Other Religions</p>
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Figure 3.8 Master Table C: Theology and Belief. Main Themes

<sup>18</sup> The list in the table, for reasons of space, places subthemes that are individually listed in the full table of themes under general terms i.e. Other Organised Spiritual Practices and Other Religions. .



## The Individual

Of the twelve interviewees, eight self-identified as Christian<sup>19</sup> with a belief in receiving guidance from God or promptings from God's Spirit. Most nevertheless held agnostic positions on some items of 'orthodox'<sup>20</sup> Christian theology. Three other interviewees denied they were Christian but held distinctive Christian beliefs, especially those related to Spirit<sup>21</sup>. I have described their position as theist.

Rosemary (theist) said when going to her first Quaker Meeting: 'I felt I had been led, not to Quakers but to God'<sup>22</sup>. Just one of the twelve interviewees self-identified as a non-theist<sup>23 24</sup>.

## Christianity and Christian ideas in general

This section considered similarities and differences in participants' approaches and attitudes to Christianity. Interviewees who did not identify as Christian may nevertheless hold beliefs that a Christian might hold e.g. a belief in the invisible world (Rosemary, theist and Phillip, Christian)<sup>25</sup>, the possibility of the Virgin Birth (Andrea, theist and Susan, Christian<sup>26</sup>) and the Resurrection and an after-life (Andrea, theist

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<sup>19</sup> Trevor, Gillian, Joy, Susan, Caroline, Matthew, Andrew, Phillip.

<sup>20</sup> E.g. as in the Virgin Birth (Joy I.578-585) and the Resurrection (Matthew I.746-762).

<sup>21</sup> Andrea, Linda, Rosemary.

<sup>22</sup> Rosemary I.78-80.

<sup>23</sup> Shirley I.127

<sup>24</sup> Universalism and Non-theism are recognised within The Society as valid religious orientations i.e. Quaker Universalist Group and the Non-theist Friends Network (<https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/quaker-groups> Accessed 27/04/2023).

<sup>25</sup> Phillip said 'That there is a spiritual world that embraces this physical world' (Phillip I.1082-1089; (Rosemary I.754-762).), a belief also of the Roman Catholic Cardinal Manning (See <https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/catholic-contributions/the-invisible-world.html>. Accessed 22/09/2022. In relation to the Resurrection, Phillip had worked through to his own view that it was a resurrection of the personality (Phillip I.407-415); Rosemary said 'I could believe that' (Rosemary I. 1295-1298).

<sup>26</sup> Andrea I.609-612. Susan I.1509-1510.

and Gillian, Christian<sup>27</sup>) and of the reality of love in its own right (Linda, theist and Shirley, non-theist<sup>28</sup>).

### **Spiritual practices and Meeting for Worship**

The Christian and theist groups share some common attitudes and actions, whether initially attracted to Quakerism from curiosity or from being in crisis. Christian and theist Friends try to be in relationship with the Divine and believe they have experienced that relationship<sup>29</sup>. They make reference to paying attention to the presence of God or Spirit in Meeting, asking for leadings and to be led, and to holding a person in God's Light. They share a reluctance to ask for something specific for themselves, but might cry out for help. There is hope that prayer, worship and good thoughts influence others, as well as their own wellbeing and their life choices. All have felt prompted to minister.

The self-identifying Christians are not exclusively Quaker in their practices. Trevor, raised as a Roman Catholic, and Gillian, raised as a Spiritualist who joined an organisation devoted to the Roman Catholic Teilhard de Chardin as a young woman, retained their interest in Roman Catholicism<sup>30</sup>. Gillian enjoyed attending mass as a governor of an RC primary school. Susan, as we have seen, had become Quanglican and Caroline enjoyed participating in Anglican evensong<sup>31</sup>.

The non-theist, Shirley, gave an ethical reason for not praying: a disbelief in the possibility of a loving personal God. She was angry at the suffering her father experienced with Alzheimer's disease. Yet Shirley can believe in love 'as a thing in

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<sup>27</sup> Andrea I.609-612; Gillian I.654-673.

<sup>28</sup> Linda I.778-782; Shirley I.544-555.

<sup>29</sup> E.g. The theist Andrea's Near Death Experience; the theist Linda's experience of charismatic Catholicism as well as her comments on Meeting for Worship being a place for communion.

<sup>30</sup> Trevor I.68-69; 218-221; 454-462. Gillian I.44; 454; 460; 1281

<sup>31</sup> Caroline I.888

its own right'<sup>32</sup> that impacts humankind but without believing that that thing in itself might be related to a transcendent Divinity. At the interview she preferred biological and evolutionary to other explanations for the power of love. She volunteered that she could change her mind in the future.

### **Meetings for Worship**

This section discusses the importance for the twelve interviewees of Meetings for Worship and Meetings for Worship for business<sup>33</sup>. No discernible differences between Christian, theist and non-theist Friends were found in their attitudes. The non-theist, although not believing in a personal God, emphasised her need for Meeting for Worship.

For most, attending Meeting is central to the practice of their Quakerism but for Trevor, Rosemary and Susan it seems more an extension of their spiritual practice. Trevor spent much time in contemplative prayer at home<sup>34</sup>. That was as important to him as regular attendance at Meeting for Worship, given he spent some of the year living abroad without access to a Quaker Meeting for Worship. Rosemary's interior spiritual world is rich and vital. She does not seem to be dependent on Meeting for Worship in the same way as the non-theist Shirley. Susan, having become an Anglican, found participating in the eucharist at least as important as participating in Meeting for Worship<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Shirley I.544-555. Appendix 5 presents an overview and the analysis of Shirley's transcript.

<sup>33</sup> Briefly, the latter have a formal agenda and deal with matters of church affairs; the former are for unprogrammed worship normally for one hour on Sunday mornings. Meetings for Worship and Meetings for Worship for business are discussed in Chapter 1.

<sup>34</sup> Trevor I.429-435; Rosemary I.1235-1238

<sup>35</sup> 'Well I don't experience God in the same way at Quaker meeting as I do at the Eucharist (Susan I.2036).

Some interviewees expressed difficulty with the meaning of the word 'worship'<sup>36</sup>. Meeting for Worship is nevertheless seen, also by Shirley, as an opportunity to be together with other Friends in a Meeting for Worship. Christian and theist Friends try to attend to the presence of God and make themselves, as individuals, open to receive God's guidance, some using the word communion in relation to Meeting for Worship<sup>37</sup>.

The theme Meetings for Worship for Business (MfWB) included those for their Local and Area Meetings and Yearly Meeting. Interviewees expressed positive enthusiasm for the Quaker business method which characterises how MfWBs function. Phillip and Matthew, commented on the importance of proper procedures in Quaker business meetings<sup>38</sup>. Phillip also warned about the influence of 'the bureaucracy of Friends House' in relation to the management of The Society's business and the importance of Quakers, as distinct from non-Quakers 'running committees'<sup>39</sup>. Phillip was concerned about their proper conduct. These were the only comments that could be construed about governance in any interview<sup>40</sup>.

The members of this group generally accept a responsibility for involvement with local and area church affairs. For some, Meetings' scheduling and accessibility were obstacles and they gave priority to other responsibilities<sup>41</sup>. It is natural that Local Meetings for Worship for business should seem closer and more accessible than

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<sup>36</sup> E.g. Caroline I.736-744; Andrew I.1385-1392;

<sup>37</sup> E.g. Shirley I.317-336; Gillian I.689-692; Andrew I.1037-1041; Linda I.858-862.

<sup>38</sup> Matthew I.1209-1213, Phillip I.889-894.

<sup>39</sup> Phillip I.931-940.

<sup>40</sup> In the interviews I had asked no questions about The Society's governance. No interviewee spoke about trusteeship or, specifically, about Britain Yearly Meeting as a charity, nor about its relationship to Area and Local Meetings. It was only after reflecting on the fact of The Society's numerical decline and reading Dandelion (2019) and (Cummins (2020) that I considered The Society's numerical decline more deeply and critically and reflect on The Society's governance. These considerations appear in the next chapter in the Analytical Review.

<sup>41</sup> The development of the Zoom software for online Meetings and the possibilities of blended Meetings occurred after these interviews.

Area Meetings. A minority of interviewees spoke positively about going to Yearly Meeting in session. No one spoke of their involvement with the committees supporting the work of BYM the charity although some were involved with national groups. Interviewees' own roles in and service to their Local and Area Meetings and national affairs are discussed further in Master Table D: Faith in Practice Pre- and Post-Membership (3.2.4).

### **Spoken Ministry**

All interviewees have felt prompted to offer spoken ministry. In that respect Meeting has provided a space for interviewees to share in public what should be, as canonically understood, Spirit-inspired contributions to a Meeting's worship<sup>42</sup>.

Andrea (theist) believed that when ministry 'happens to me and most other Quakers it's something we have to do and that it is a leading from the Holy Spirit'.

All interviewees agreed that ministry needed to come from a place that should be inspired and ego-free. Andrew (Christian) emphasised the need for self-discipline before offering ministry but still found himself unaccountably on his feet.

The non-theist Shirley's initial attachment to Meeting was encouraged hearing ministry critical of the Lord's Prayer. It was evidence for Shirley that her critical approach to religion was not out of place in that Quaker Meeting. She said she felt prompted to speak when she ministered, but not that that was a prompting from the heart or a leading from God.

No one made a distinction between vocal ministry in Meetings for Worship for business and the normal Meeting for Worship.

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<sup>42</sup> QF&P (2013. 2.50-2.73).

### **Summary of Table C: Theology and Belief**

Three different groups of Friends were identified: Christian, theist and non-theist.

The non-theist position represented by Shirley denies the possibility of a personal God that can communicate with humankind. She, as all interviewees, affirmed the importance of Jesus but there was no agreement on his theological status even among those who self-identify as Christian in relation to traditional Christian doctrines e.g. Jesus as Son of God, the Virgin Birth and The Resurrection.

Interviewees who did not identify as Christian may nevertheless hold beliefs that a Christian might hold e.g. in the invisible world, the possibility of the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, an after-life and of the reality of love in its own right. The theologies represented in the theist and Christian group are diverse but overlap. Diverse beliefs do not necessarily affect social cohesion in the Local Meeting. Shirley, identifying as a non-theist, but well versed in Christian beliefs, was invited to apply for membership by her Christocentric Meeting and was pleased to be accepted by the Area Meeting.

Most interviewees had participated in their Meetings' church affairs at Local level, less at Area level and less at BYM, the charity. Some commented positively about their experience of Yearly Meeting in session. Only two interviewees emphasised the importance of proper procedures in Quaker business meetings. Trevor and Matthew, (Christians), and Shirley (non-theist), spoke of how they had used the method sometimes in their own committee work. Phillip spoke of the importance of Quakers 'running committees' and 'warned about 'Friends' House bureaucracy', but there was, overall, little comment on The Society's governance as such.

### 3.2.4 Master Table D: Faith in Practice Pre- and Post- Membership

Master Table D (Figure 3.9) collates data about interviewees' paid and unpaid work and how their faith has influenced their work.

<b>Master Table D: Faith in Practice Pre and Post-Membership Themes</b>
Comments about service, activism and work
Voluntary service Pre-First Meeting
Quaker Service Post-First Meeting
Other Voluntary Service Post-First Meeting
Work choices

Figure 3.9 Master Table D: Faith in Practice Pre and Post-Membership Themes

#### **Work and service choices**

As adults, the occupational choices of all participants had a public service emphasis as shown in Master Table A <sup>43</sup>. At the time of the twelve interviews, four participants were in full time paid work, eight were active pensioners.

Ten were contributing to the organisation of The Society in roles such as, elder, overseer, treasurer, clerk, and committee member at local, area and national levels but there was no mention of current participation on the central committees of BYM, the charity, nor on Meeting for Sufferings, committees concerned with BYM's central work and The Society's governance. Of the two not in a Quaker role, one retiree was 'resting' after stressful service as clerk of two Meetings that were laid down; and one, still employed, was the unpaid organiser of an annual charity event.

No difference could be identified between Christian, theist and non-theist attitudes to faith in practice. All had a sense of wanting to give service either to Quakers and/or to charitable ventures unassociated with Quakers.

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<sup>43</sup> In education (5), social work (3) the civil service (2) the treatment of offenders (1) and local community service (1).

## Comments about service, activism and work

A member is expected to accept service as one of the fundamental elements of being a Quaker:

It means contributing to the Meeting, in whatever ways are right for the individual, by giving time and energy to events and necessary tasks, and also being willing to serve on various regional or Yearly Meeting committees and other groups. There is a special expectation that Friends attending Meetings for church affairs will benefit from working together under Quaker discipline on the decisions that need to be made<sup>44</sup>.

Trevor, a Christian Quaker, said that:

We are called to do things in this world. We don't just pray to God we have to do it ourselves (Trevor I.64); and 'If one's Quaker faith is really part of oneself it just infuses everything you do<sup>45</sup>.

Gillian and Linda, however, expressed concern about the balance between spiritual attention and social activism in Meetings as such<sup>46</sup>. Getting the right relationship between attending to one's own and the Meeting's spiritual life and social activism, including role holding within the Religious Society of Friends, is a challenge that individual Quakers have to respond to. *Advice and query 28* makes the point:

Every stage of our lives offers fresh opportunities. Responding to divine guidance, try to discern the right time to undertake or relinquish responsibilities without undue pride or guilt. Attend to what love requires of you, which may not be great busyness.<sup>47</sup>

Interviewees' comments illustrate how for these individuals, their faith and practice are dynamically related in their lives, and that since engaging with The Society, that relationship has had many opportunities to express itself. Responding to divine guidance helps to discern when to undertake or relinquish social responsibilities.

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<sup>44</sup> QF&P (11.01).

<sup>45</sup> Trevor (I.811-812).

<sup>46</sup> Gillian, a Christian, noted that Friends are 'really keen on the doing good bit and and they sort of forget about the spiritual contemplationy bit'. (Gillian I.1563-1564); Linda, a theist, spoke of the need 'to look after the spiritual side of the world as well (Linda I.739-741).

<sup>47</sup> QF&P. (1.02.28).



Phillip, for example, was moved to give up his professional career and become an independent ecumenical peace worker for a number of years. He had held many local, area and national roles.

### **Voluntary service Pre-First Meeting**

I had wondered whether becoming Quaker had had the effect of stimulating their service to society. It had not. Eleven had been involved as volunteers in forms of community service as adults before adult involvement with Friends. The twelfth, now retired, had been employed in the National Health Service.

As adults all 12 continued to offer unpaid service to the Quaker community and/or to other charitable organisations. What could not have been used in their pre-Quaker service was the Quaker Business Method. Three interviewees reported making use of it when they could in their voluntary community service<sup>48</sup>.

### **Summary of Master Table D**

All interviewees were involved in unpaid service to the Quaker and the wider communities. Some interviewees said they made use of the Quaker business method in their committee work outside The Society. At national level, no one had said they were participating currently on any of the central committees of BYM the charity, but some had contributed to The Society's national groups.

### **3.2.5 Master Table E: Interviewees' Reflections on Quakers and Quakerism**

This table became the most significant for my research as the focus of the research was broadened from a consideration of the features of The Society that attracted enthusiastic commitment to consider reasons for disaffection and disaffiliation and

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<sup>48</sup> Shirley said she found using 'a sort of Quaker business method in Meetings' and that when there is time it 'really works very very well'. (Shirley I.1024-1030). Matthew (Matthew I.1522-1528) and Trevor (Trevor I.750-753) also spoke of how they have been influenced by it in their practice.

the annual decline in membership. Interviewees' positive and negative reflections on their experience of The Society would be the empirical basis for theorising about that which led to commitment to and to disaffiliation from The Society.

The organisation of the presentation collated reflections by theme then under participants' self-identified theological disposition i.e. as Christian Quakers, theist Quakers and non-theist Quakers; and then by positive and then negative reflections. That arrangement allows comparison of participants' reflections on Quakerism according to their theological disposition as a Quaker. On a much larger scale it would be interesting to discover whether a theological disposition correlates with particular positive or negative reflections on an individual's experience of Quakerism. In Appendix 3 the arrangement is simplified. All the positive reflections are collated according to theme and by interviewee and then all the negative reflections<sup>49</sup>.

Eight themes were identified based on the interviewees' positive and negative reflections about their experience of Quakers and Quakerism. They are listed in Figure 3.10 below.

**Master Table E: Interviewees' Reflections on Quakers and Quakerism. Themes**

Being a Quaker  
 Joining the Religious Society of Friends  
 The meaning and institution of membership  
 Quaker theological concepts  
 The Quaker Meeting for Worship (as liturgy)  
 The Quaker Meeting as community  
 Quaker social activism, including the Quaker testimonies  
 Remaining a member of the Religious Society of Friends

Figure 3.10 Master Table E: Interviewees' Reflections on Quakers and Quakerism Themes

<sup>49</sup> The original Master Table distinguished positive and negative comments, but not according to whether they were made by Self-identified Christian Quakers, Theist Quakers or Non-theist Quakers. It is presented in its original form in Appendix 3.

The *Being a Quaker* theme collates comments about the experience of commitment to a Quaker faith and identifying as a Quaker in life. *Joining the Religious Society of Friends* and *The Meaning and Institution of Membership* refer to the process of becoming a member of The Society and the meaning of membership. Participants' comments on *Quaker Theological Concepts* and the *Quaker Meeting for Worship (as liturgy)* are on specifically religious themes. *Quaker Meeting as Community* are to do with the interviewees' experience of community at their Local Quaker Meeting and within The Society. *Quaker Social Activism, including the Quaker testimonies* includes reflections on Quaker values and involvement in social activism. Finally, in order to identify the main reasons for their continuing membership, interviewees' responses were collated under the theme *Remaining a member of the Religious Society of Friends*.

## **Being a Quaker**

### **Self-identified Christian Quakers**

#### **Positive**

Interviewees spoke of the impact being a Quaker had had on their lives. Joy reflected that it had made her life more valuable and productive for herself and for others and contributed to her living a better life<sup>50</sup>. Since Andrew became a member, his commitment had become 'more important and passionate'<sup>51</sup>. He had felt himself to be more integrated.<sup>52</sup> Phillip used the word 'cemented' to describe how the Quaker ethos had made him the person he had become. Now it 'is absolutely fundamental to my life ... by the grace of God'<sup>53</sup>. Others spoke of both belonging and

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<sup>50</sup> Joy (I.1112-1113).

<sup>51</sup> Andrew (I.472-473).

<sup>52</sup> Andrew (I.538-539).

<sup>53</sup> Phillip (I.1111-1118).

feeling supported in following their own path (Gillian), of the depth of their commitment (Susan, Caroline) and becoming more like the early Christian Quakers (Matthew, Andrew)<sup>54</sup>.

### **Negative**

The negative criticisms about The Society were to do with it not being 'very good at getting our message over ... In some instances we are not totally clear what our message is' said Trevor<sup>55</sup>. He also thought that worrying too much about The Society declining indicated that 'it may be that we are not trusting in God enough<sup>56</sup>. Joy said 'we're not known about enough... But I think it's making ourselves more visible without compromising our position on people finding us freely<sup>57</sup>. Gillian thought people got 'the wrong impression about Friends' - that they were 'a bit dour and don't have any fun' which is 'the wrong idea'<sup>58</sup>.

### **Theist Quakers**

#### **Positive**

Being a Quaker was central to Andrea's whole life 'and it's mainly what I do. And It's me [laugh]<sup>59</sup>. Linda emphasised that, even though ' I don't feel I always belong it [ her Local Meeting] gives me a great sense of belonging, of structure of safety and of security of...identity yes'. Going to Meeting ' is sort of the highlight of my week, Yes!<sup>60</sup> Rosemary talked of the 'support' she received from Quakers but also made the point that 'If you are a Quaker it is down to you to be active'<sup>61</sup>. Rosemary

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<sup>54</sup> See Appendix 4 for complete Master Table with extracts from each interviewees' transcripts arranged under the theme names.

<sup>55</sup> Trevor (I.718-722).

<sup>56</sup> Trevor (I.729-732)

<sup>57</sup> Joy (I.1083-1087).

<sup>58</sup> Gillian (I.1748-1761).

<sup>59</sup> Andrea (I.1117).

<sup>60</sup> Linda (I.1622-1626).

<sup>61</sup> Rosemary (A31-39). There was an issue with the line numbering of the transcript during processing the voice file, hence the need to distinguish two sequences by this notation.

emphasised the importance of following the leadings of God. She believes she was led to God via Quakers. There she has found her place to worship in a way that works for her.<sup>62</sup>

### **Negative**

Andrea thought Quakers were 'too middle-class'. Linda also thought them 'too middle-class', white and English although I liked them a great deal' yet it was 'not sort of quite me'<sup>63</sup>. She reacted against some whom, she felt, 'had a sense of entitlement'<sup>64</sup>).

Rosemary thought Quakers, should 'face what people want for themselves when engaging with newcomers, not what they want to give to Quakers ... You know, we all are searching for a deeper meaning'<sup>65</sup>.

### **The Non-theist Quaker**

#### **Positive**

Shirley thought that at a fundamental level being a Quaker was a huge responsibility and a huge gift<sup>66</sup>. 'It's made me more thoughtful, certainly made me more accepting of myself and my shortcomings and therefore it's easier to try and do something about them'. Her experiences of life makes her skeptical of 'some aspects of spirituality'. She may or may not change in that respect but she thinks Quakerism has given her and others 'that grounded feeling from which you can grow and change and that effects all of your life'<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> Rosemary (l.78-80)).

<sup>63</sup> Andrea (l.1055-1066); Linda (l.153-155); (Linda l.1684-1689).

<sup>64</sup> Linda (l.1684-1689).

<sup>65</sup> Rosemary (l.1853-1855).

<sup>66</sup> Shirley (l.1065-1066).

<sup>67</sup> Shirley (l.1146-1151).

### **Negative**

Shirley thought that 'there's an awful lot of people who would respond very much to Quakerism' and without being 'evangelical ... I do think we ought to be a bit more in your face about what we are'. She thought that although Quaker 'history is hugely important and beautiful ... we get a little bit bogged down in it' which prevents being 'able to move forward'. The early Quakers were special because of themselves, but 'we' are not special because of them. 'We ought to be out there doing a bit more'<sup>68</sup>.

Shirley uses the term 'we' in the positive and negative comments indicating her identification with Quakers. The negative comments are to do with the unsatisfactory promotion of the Quaker way, as she saw it. She wanted more emphasis on their contemporary relevance.

### **Commentary**

Individuals in all three categories report that being a Quaker has enhanced their lives. It provided for direction and action and a sense of belonging, support and security. The commitment has helped, through association with Friends, to give a sense of personal and social integration. Commitment to Quakerism grows with the experience of Quakerism. Lives had thus changed for the better even though some feel they do not quite belong, aware of their class and other differences from the majority of Quakers they have met. A positive feature of being a Friend is to be challenged to take responsibility for oneself, irrespective of being Christian, theist or non-theist. Another was to be able to identify as a Quaker.

There was a common view that who Quakers are now and what they represent needs a clearer message and better promotion. What has constituted that

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<sup>68</sup> Shirley (I.1099-1106).

commitment, the Quaker ethos and, for most, growth in trust in one's relationship with God, 'like the early Christian Quakers', is not effectively articulated or promoted by The Society to those outside it. There was dissatisfaction with the demographic of the majority of Friends i.e. white and middle class. The attitudes of a sense of entitlement of some were distasteful to working class Quakers. Quakers can forget that those who engaged with them were searching for deeper meanings to life. That should influence Friends' contact with newcomers more than it does. No negative comments were made about membership being middle-aged and older rather than younger.

As noted in Table C, the Quakerism of Trevor and Gillian, and of Susan and Caroline was supplemented by their involvement with Roman Catholic practices and Anglicanism, respectively.

### **Joining the Religious Society of Friends**

Becoming a member was initially described in Chapter 1 1.4 under Area Meetings. The traditional procedures were followed in their Area Meetings with my interviewees. They involved an attender applying for membership to the Area Meeting Clerk. They should have written support from their Local Meeting. Two Friends, one from the applicant's meeting and the other from a different local meeting within the area meeting, are appointed to visit the applicant. They report back to the Area meeting on the visit orally and in writing for the AM's records, without making a recommendation. The Area Meeting, through discernment, makes the decision based on the report<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> QF&P (11.11).

Figure 3.6 Table indicating age at first Meeting and the period between attending and becoming a member.

### **Self-identified Christian Quakers**

#### **Positive**

Five in this group applied for membership within three years. Gillian joined within six months. She did not identify as Christian then but felt 'I was already a Quaker in a sense'<sup>70</sup>. Caroline, who always had identified as Christian, said once she had got to know people joining was 'the natural thing to do'. She wanted to contribute to the life of the Meeting<sup>71</sup>. Joy went to a Local Meeting's open day with her closest friend who grew up in a Quaker family 'and I know I loved that extended family'. Joy wanted 'to be fully informed about what I was joining' and had some 'very deep, detailed conversations with people' and 'I felt led'<sup>72</sup>. Phillip knew after his first Meeting that was what he wanted and joined within the year<sup>73</sup>; Trevor joined within 15 months. The other three in this group with Quaker childhoods applied for membership after encouragement from others. Matthew and Andrew applied after six years. Matthew, a student at the time, felt supported by a Friend in the Meeting with pastoral care responsibilities. Andrew, now with young children, said it was more his wife's idea<sup>74</sup>. He also said 'it was an important step at the time'<sup>75</sup>.

Susan considered herself a Quaker without applying for membership. As a teenager, she discovered the Quaker testimonies<sup>76</sup> and confirmed for herself that her understanding 'was consistent with what other Quakers had worked out'. She did not

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<sup>70</sup>Gillian (l.71-72).

<sup>71</sup> Caroline (l.44-49).

<sup>72</sup> Joy (l.241-255).

<sup>73</sup> Phillip (l.56-58).

<sup>74</sup> Andrew (l.423-426).

<sup>75</sup> Andrew (l.460-461).

<sup>76</sup> Susan (l.29-30).



want to be identified as Christian and did not want a 'formalised' commitment<sup>77</sup>. Only after her Christian conversion experience and friendship with two Quanglicans did Susan apply for membership, 38 years after her first Meeting<sup>78</sup>.

In relation to visits, the experiences of individuals were varied. It was positive for Matthew:

it was absolutely fantastic and I kind of feel that everyone should be forced to have them as, like a Quaker MOT every five years because it's such a positive, is such a positive experience where you get to have a really, a really deep and open conversation. A somewhat vulnerable conversation about you and your spiritual journey and where you've got to. And have you got to a place which is a Quaker place? And, and it's great and it's, and I haven't had a conversation like it, or planned a conversation like that before or since<sup>79</sup>.

Susan opened her visit by 'saying in the very first sentence I am applying for membership in the religious Society of Friends and I'm preparing for baptism into the Church of England'. She seems to have startled the visitors, but a dialogue occurred: 'They wanted to think about it or something like that. And I don't think I had a second visit... But it wasn't just taken for granted... ... [they] thought well, X could do it and Y could do it [i.e. be Quanglicans] too, well, why not, kind of thing<sup>80</sup>. In that sense, Susan recognised her application was being taken thoughtfully and seriously, even though she did not experience the positive welcome others in this group received. She was, however, supported by X and Y, well known in The Society<sup>81</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> Susan (I.294-298).

<sup>78</sup> Susan (I.1188-1196).

<sup>79</sup> Matthew (I.1456-1462)

<sup>80</sup> Susan (I.1204-1232).

<sup>81</sup> Susan (I.1204-1232).

Phillip remembers 'a very amicable visit' which stressed the need to support the Monthly Meeting<sup>82</sup> <sup>83</sup>. Gillian's visit ' was very nice'<sup>84</sup> and Joy experienced it as a welcoming into the Meeting<sup>85</sup>.

### **Negative**

Susan accepted delays in the decision 'And then eventually it happened'.<sup>86</sup> She did not say that her Local or the Area Meeting kept her informed of the progress of her application.

Andrew did not remember the visit 'being very challenging'. He was unsure whether it was 'just a formality really'. 'It was all quite cosy and, and affirming and nobody disagreed with anybody about anything<sup>87</sup> ... it felt like it was pretty much on the nod<sup>88</sup>.

### **The theist Quakers**

#### **Positive**

Andrea felt encouraged from the beginning. 'They had it all set up for attenders' and she was 'sent off to an enquirers meeting ... and I just knew that that was the place for me'<sup>89</sup>.

Linda joined after 27 years 'because there wasn't a reason not to ... it seemed important to other people. So I wanted to give back to them<sup>90</sup>. Rosemary felt a similar impulse but in her case it was triggered because she was relocating. 'I

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<sup>82</sup> Now called the Area Meeting

<sup>83</sup> Phillip (I.69-73).

<sup>84</sup> Gillian (I.419)

<sup>85</sup> Joy (I.894-914).

<sup>86</sup> Susan (I.1204-1232).

<sup>87</sup> Andrew (I.481-485).

<sup>88</sup> Andrew (I.494-495).

<sup>89</sup> Andrea (I.61-63).

<sup>90</sup> Linda (I.252-253).

wanted to, to be part of that Meeting. Because they had, they had held me'.<sup>91</sup> Joining was a parting gift from thankfulness and, perhaps, a way of remaining symbolically connected.

### **Negative**

Andrea's visit was a disappointment:

I felt they didn't really understand me at all [laughter]. I felt that they were inexperienced and did not know how to ask questions and weren't getting to the bottom of why I was reluctant to tell them about my near death experience; because there were lots of people in Quakers who felt that you should not talk about psychic experiences and you shouldn't you know that Quakers were here and now people who did things and you didn't think about the afterlife and so on<sup>92</sup>.

Andrea felt that those chosen to visit her were inexperienced. They did not know how to get to the bottom of her reluctance to talk about her psychic experiences that mattered profoundly to her and she thought many Quakers thought they should not be spoken about.

### **The non-theist Quaker**

#### **Positive and negative**

Shirley recognised joining was an important step to take and because of what people had said to her she was confident she would be accepted:

It was like living with someone for years and years and years and then for some reason going through a form of marriage. ... it felt like a formality and therefore I didn't mind the wait at all<sup>93</sup>.

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<sup>91</sup> Rosemary (l.658- 676).

<sup>92</sup> Andrea (l.313-318).

<sup>93</sup> Shirley (l.43-46).

The visit itself was very interesting 'exploring different people's approaches or feelings about being a Quaker where they were with the theists, non-theists and so on. I mean it was a, a very, it was very interesting. I enjoyed it'<sup>94</sup>.

Like Susan, she too had to wait longer than she had expected for a decision after the visit. Like Susan she says she did not mind, and like Susan she did not get any kind of communication explaining the delay. Shirley had been coming for 15 years when she applied 'so I really felt that I absolutely had no right to complain [Laughter]'<sup>95</sup>.

### **Commentary on the process of joining The Society**

The above comments illustrate different factors involved in deciding to apply for membership. The first was to do with theological affinity. The second was to know, and presumably feel comfortable with, a Quaker group, before committing to what Quakers seemed to stand for. Some needed encouragement to join, even those with Quaker family backgrounds. Finally, others, like Susan, Linda, Rosemary and Shirley<sup>96</sup>, had developed a long-term association with Quakers but for their own reasons are unwilling to embrace membership until or unless moved to apply by significant events in their lives and/or with encouragement from a Quaker.

Most found the visit interesting and were pleased for the opportunity to talk about their spiritual life. Matthew found the visit 'absolutely fantastic'. He thought a five-year official visit to review one's spiritual journey would be a positive experience for all Quakers. For some, the experience of the visit seemed a formality or worse.

Andrea and perhaps Susan, felt that they were not understood. Andrew indicated

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<sup>94</sup> Shirley (l.52-56).

<sup>95</sup> Shirley (l.32-.41).

<sup>96</sup> The event in Shirley's life was a demanding new role and then recognising her need for Meeting as an 'anchor' (Shirley l.319).

explicitly that it was an important decision to take but that did not seem to be recognised. Having applied, the visit and the joining seemed a formality.

It is unclear how much Quaker education interviewees had received. Three had been at Friends Meetings in childhood and would have absorbed something of the Quaker way and testimonies. But Quaker education or instruction in Quakerism is not a condition of membership. Only Shirley, the non-theist had participated in Quaker Quest<sup>97</sup> as an attender. Andrea was pleased with the way her Local Meeting had set things up so attenders could learn 'how to become a Quaker'. She was the only interviewee to report such attender-preparedness by her Local Meeting. Joy had the opportunity of deep conversations with Friends before making an application but it is unclear if she made the opportunity or was personally given the opportunity.

Although some interviewees referred to the responsibilities of being a member, no interviewee referred specifically to chapters 10 and 11 in *Quaker faith & practice* concerned with 'Belonging to a Quaker Meeting' and 'Membership', and including 'the fundamental elements of being a Quaker'<sup>98</sup>. That might mean that the canonical guidance on belonging to a Meeting and the canonical criteria for membership were insufficiently discussed and emphasised.

Two applicants spoke of delays in processing their applications after their visits. Both had been attenders for 14 or more years. One had been in crisis and one not at the time of application. No explanations were recalled explaining the delays by their Area Meetings.

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<sup>97</sup> Quaker Quest is a programme of six sessions in which Quaker speak on specific Quaker topics and of their experience of being Quaker. Time is given for discussion

<sup>98</sup> *QF&P* (11.01).

## **The meaning and institution of membership**

Some interviewees spoke about what becoming a member as such has meant to them and some questioned the distinction that is made between members and attenders.

### **Self-identified Christian Quakers**

#### **Positive**

The meaning and institution of membership was seen as an outward sign of an inward experience like 'marriage'. That includes the possibility when asking for acceptance, of, 'rejection', by the Quaker group and 'that being an issue'.<sup>99</sup> It was also a recognition of personal responsibility to and for the ongoing life of the Meeting which included making a financial contribution<sup>100</sup>.

For the individual, becoming a member can have slow-burning consequences. Andrew's experience of membership led to a transforming process of 'finding' himself as a Quaker. That was 'in a sort of evolving rather than a sort of blinding revelatory way ... and feeling confident enough to make that, make a commitment ... That's part of me'<sup>101</sup>. He thought that would not have happened but for his membership.

#### **Negative**

Gillian understood 'it's a sort of commitment' but was puzzled when a longstanding attender who was very involved for years with the Meeting 'and donates money to the Meeting but she doesn't want to join. ... so I think it's a bit, a bit I think it's a bit, a slightly artificial distinction'<sup>102</sup>. Gillian's comment, as someone who became a member, thought the distinction 'slightly artificial' even though she was quite clear

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<sup>99</sup> Matthew (I.1374-1380).

<sup>100</sup> Susan (I.1656-1660).

<sup>101</sup> Andrew (I.2058-2064).

<sup>102</sup> Gillian (I.93-97).

she herself wanted to join. Gillian seems to be expressing discomfort with the current consequences of making a distinction e.g. exclusion of attenders from certain roles in her Area Meeting.

Caroline said that 'We've got several attenders who have been coming for ages and they are an important part of the Meeting' and when she asks them to think about becoming a member 'Woah! They say, I'll get lots of jobs'<sup>103</sup>. Some committed attenders do not want membership if it means that they would feel obligated to their Meeting to contribute more than whatever they currently freely contribute. Obligation would affect their commitment.

Phillip thought that 'Quakers have no shell..... Virtually anybody can join us. And I, maybe we're a bit too easy sometimes'<sup>104</sup>. He implies that there should be a boundary between Quaker and non-Quaker and Quakers should not be afraid of the difficulty of holding that boundary.

Matthew said that a reason for young Quakers stopping coming was because membership is assigned to a geographical area: young Quakers tend to move around in their early working lives. He has changed his meeting more than once 'but it's a little bit of a fuss'<sup>105</sup>. The Society could be a little more accommodating to those who, for reasons of their frequent relocations, might welcome a non-geographically defined membership until they become more fixed in their abode.

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<sup>103</sup> Caroline (l.1077-1080).

<sup>104</sup> Phillip (l.1176-1180).

<sup>105</sup> Matthew (l.1640-1643).

## Theist Quakers

### Positive

Linda thought that in spite of it being like ‘a stamp of very boring respectability ...it does feel a bit like what people tell me marriage is like ... it feels different and you feel more that you belong [pause]... people see you different as well<sup>106</sup>. That was a benefit of formal membership for someone who did not feel they always belonged.

Rosemary, like Linda, was one of those taking more than 14 years to decide to apply for membership and ‘it was hard to make the decision to be a member’. Like Linda, she also said ‘It’s like marriage. You could say that you don’t need to get married. You love somebody, you get a mortgage together and you have kids. But that verbal social, sort of visible, social comment of actually commitment creates a promise’ and she thought that was ‘ok’<sup>107</sup>.

### Negative

Andrea, like Gillian, was uncomfortable about the distinction between member and attender. The Local Meeting wanted to appoint someone to the oversight team who was not a member:

She had had a mother in, in a camp when she was a child because she is Austrian and, and Jewish and she’s a very spiritual person. She’s in her 80s and she’s been a social worker. She was absolutely ideal to be an overseer and you know people objected because she wasn’t a member. I think this was so silly<sup>108</sup>.

Whilst Linda recognised the benefit for her of becoming a member, she said ‘I still don’t quite understand the point of membership. I slightly don’t understand the point of membership, you see, because you don’t always see what the difference is’<sup>109</sup>.

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<sup>106</sup> Linda (I.1405-1407).

<sup>107</sup> Rosemary (I.786-789).

<sup>108</sup> Andrea (I.1022-1027).

<sup>109</sup> Linda (I.212-215).



## Non-theist Quaker

### Positive

I needed something where I'd got an anchor<sup>110</sup>.

The decision to apply was the important thing and ... it was like living with someone for years and years and years and then for some reason going through a form of marriage.<sup>111</sup>

[No negative reflections made about the institution of membership].

### Commentary on the institution of membership

In each of the three categories, Christian, Theist and Non-Theist Quaker, individuals likened becoming a member to marriage. Interviewees realised that membership signified a commitment. There were roles opened to members not open to attenders. It was observed that for some long-standing attenders that was a reason not to become members as they did not want to feel obligated to giving service.

For some becoming a member was slowly transformative in their understanding of Quakerism, including the meaning of membership. Matthew once thought:

it would probably be better if you didn't have membership. ... And now I'm more comfortable with it <sup>112</sup>... I worry that there is a whole dimension to the nature of the Quaker, of Quakerism that you're not, you're not acknowledging or experiencing or ready to accept or accepting<sup>113</sup>.

Andrew, also Christian, found that being a member helped him to find his way of being Quaker.

For some individuals in all three groups who have found it difficult to feel that they belong or to commit, making the decision to join led to a stronger feeling of

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<sup>110</sup> Shirley (I.319).

<sup>111</sup> Shirley (I.43-45).

<sup>112</sup> Matthew (I.1357-1380).

<sup>113</sup> Matthew (I.1428-1430).

belonging. The meaning of membership was enhanced by the procedures for becoming a member as Matthew said, because of the possibility of rejection.

A group that wants new members also has to manage its own fear as a group of themselves being rejected i.e. individuals not wanting membership. That is a consequence if it asserts its boundaries i.e. criteria for membership. Phillip's view is that 'Quakers have no shell ...[and that] ... . Virtually anybody can join us'<sup>114</sup>. That points to Area Meetings' difficulty in asserting the canonical criteria for membership, i.e. the understanding of God's guidance, obligations of service and the requirement to accept and follow Quaker procedures<sup>115</sup>. When those criteria are not spelled out to applicants for fear that they may be off-putting or a new member is not required to meet those criteria, The Society's theological coherence and its cohesiveness are undermined.

It was recognised by all interviewees that membership criteria includes readiness to take some responsibility towards the life of The Society. There is, however, a lack of clarity about what roles may be performed only by members and those that can be performed also by attenders.<sup>116</sup> That flexibility affected the dynamics of social interaction negatively in Andrea's Local Meeting. Local and Area Meetings are self-managed and depend on the willingness of participants to accept roles in their organisation. Negative social dynamics and inflexibility which might inhibit that willingness and weaken cohesion has to be balanced with the maintenance of a boundary between what is and what is not the Quaker way – given there is a Quaker way.

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<sup>114</sup> Phillip (I.1176-1180).

<sup>115</sup> *QF&P* (11.01).

<sup>116</sup> See *QF&P* 3.24i.

## Reflections on theological concepts

The section below collates and describes interviewees' reflections on their theology. Together they point to which concepts had most traction for them. The discussion of Table C Theology and Belief included directed questioning comments on specific Christian doctrines, but that was in order to elicit responses from each interviewee.

### Self-identified Christian Quakers

#### Positive

Gillian's commitment to Quakerism came because she 'discovered that the basic belief of Quakers is that the light of God is in everybody'<sup>117</sup>. Gillian holds 'that we all, we all have the Light of God within and we're all lead by the Light of God within... We have access to it ... Yes. If somebody said to me what does Quaker being a Quaker mean that's what I would say'<sup>118</sup>. Matthew expands on that idea:

the idea is that the Spirit, you know that, that God and the Spirit sort of runs through all ... and is the light and illumination and the origin, and the cause of what you are looking to ... Which is why things like Quaker business meeting is not just, it's not, you're not even trying, really, to get the sense of the meeting. You're trying to, you're discerning the will of God in this matter'<sup>119</sup>.

The terms Spirit and God are used alternatively. All that there is, is sustained by the Spirit and God's presence runs through all existence. That view leans to panentheism. It is not pantheistic, nor necessarily Christian. God or the Spirit accompany us from without as well as sustaining us from within<sup>120</sup>. God is transcendent to the world but also immanent within it and within human beings. The

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<sup>117</sup> Gillian (I.70-71)

<sup>118</sup> Gillian (I.739-745)

<sup>119</sup> Matthew (I.1435-1440).

<sup>120</sup> Chapter 5 *On being creatures* in Rowan Williams' *On Christian theology* (2000. p.63). Williams discusses panentheism making the point for Christians that God has been with us historically as well as sustaining us and the world from within.

emphasis is on the universalism of the claim that all may become aware of that of God in themselves.

For Matthew, what follows is that trying to discern God's will as it reveals itself is what collectively Friends are, or should be, trying to do in Meetings for Worship for business in relation to ongoing church affairs. Collectively Friends may come to unity, that being a sign that they may be provisionally confident that they have discerned God's will by which they should be lead<sup>121</sup>.

The belief that the Spirit is active in the world and leads one to decision was also expressed by Phillip, but that requires initial inaction. 'Doing nothing allows the Spirit to lead you. That's something I have learnt to my cost, [very moved] perhaps, but I know is a fact'<sup>122</sup>. As an individual Phillip believes that individuals can be Spirit-led but that that depends on quieting thought, emotions and will in order to be aware of the Spirit's leading. One cannot be fully listening if one is doing something else.

Trevor thought that 'of all the attractions of Quakerism it's non-creedal and you don't have to sign up to 'I believe'. I sign up to 'I trust'<sup>123</sup>. Trevor's trust is in the possibility of a relationship with God. He does not have to say 'I believe in...'. Matthew spoke of the 'non-dogmatic element, the fact that there is no requirement on what you, on what you have to do or believe'<sup>124</sup>. That was an initial attraction for Matthew but he is aware that 'my thoughts on that have changed slightly'<sup>125</sup>. Matthew had become surer in the possibility of discerning God's will (see extract from Matthew's transcript at the beginning of this section).

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<sup>121</sup> QF&P 3.07.

<sup>122</sup> Phillip (l.754-755).

<sup>123</sup> Trevor (l.263-266).

<sup>124</sup> Matthew (l.291-292).

<sup>125</sup> Matthew (l.291-292)

Susan too referred to Light and believes ‘that the Light is around us always’ but also that

life is sacramental. But you can take a lens and gather it and focus the Light and that is what the Sunday service and the sacraments are all about. And I thought, boy, it took me a while to take that on board. But that was, you know, [my Quanglican friends] were able to have theologies that successfully combined Quakerism with Anglicanism<sup>126</sup>.

Joy has a similar view that life is the sacrament given to all. ‘One of the things that drew me to Quakers was that our life is communion’<sup>127</sup>. But Joy also spoke of the status of Jesus and the Christ:

Well,[pause] you know if you, [pause], if I was asked by someone who was a fundamentalist did I believe Jesus was the son of God, I would have to explain where I stood. Because I know that I wouldn’t share that belief. I do believe that Jesus taught us hugely important lessons about life. The concept of son of God I, pause, I don’t know that I need to get it. ... some people might ask me that question for whom my answer was very important... They might want to see me as absolutely agreeing with them<sup>128</sup>.

And I, I love that picture of Christ with his hands out in the white robe along. I really like that. [laughter]. And sometimes when I’m in meeting for worship and at other times I can have a sense of, you know, Christ facing you with his arms like that. And it’s it’s a concept of being held in the Spirit. And it’s a symbol for me for that. And that’s I’m fine with that<sup>129</sup>.

Joy does not want her faith to be misunderstood or to feel coopted by traditional Christians. But her sense of Christ facing her in Meetings is strong. A. Barratt Brown’s quote in *Quaker faith and practice* is relevant here:

It is a bold and colossal claim that we put forward – that the whole of life is sacramental, that there are innumerable ‘means of grace’ by which God is revealed and communicated – through nature and through human fellowship and through a thousand things that may become the ‘outward and visible sign’ of ‘an inward and spiritual grace’<sup>130</sup>.

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<sup>126</sup> Susan (l.1175-1178).

<sup>127</sup> Joy (l.643-644).

<sup>128</sup> Joy (l.371-380).

<sup>129</sup> Joy (l.396-400).

<sup>130</sup> *QF&P* (27.43).

Brown identifies the Quaker claim as ‘colossal’ and speaks of God and grace and the variety of ways how God is revealed and communicated. The interviewees self-identifying as Christian, or theist, do not seem to need to reference publicly institutionalised Christian doctrines about the meaning of what happened at the beginning of the common era, whatever their inward reflections on spiritual matters, Jesus and Christianity.

### **Theist Quakers**

#### **Positive**

The theological concepts that mattered to the theist Quakers were similar to those for the self-identifying Christian Quakers. All three theists used Christian theological concepts in explaining their theologies.

Andrea enthusiastically supported the propositions that ‘there was that of God in everyone’ and then of not having any dogma or any creed ‘because I could have an experiential faith. And my experiences could be what I could believe in’<sup>131</sup>. Her understanding of the world was transformed by her Near Death Experience (NDE). Her ‘experiences were being sent to me by the Holy Spirit. ... And I think it was what was told to me, showing me, [in my] near death experience’<sup>132</sup>. After her NDE Andrea came to a faith grounded in understanding that God was revealed in people’s experience. Andrea also spoke of holding situations ‘in the Light’ and that ‘The Light of Christ’ is what she could relate to<sup>133</sup>; ‘I don’t want to believe the Bible is the only Word of God’<sup>134</sup>. She did not identify as a Christian because, for Andrea, the Word of God transcended institutionalised religions. The Word was ongoing in the world, not

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<sup>131</sup> Andrea (l.484-486).

<sup>132</sup> Andrea (l.488-490).

<sup>133</sup> Andrea (l.347)

<sup>134</sup> Andrea (l.642-647).

confined to the Bible, and was discernible by individuals in their own experience and in worship.

Linda too believed that in worship, 'We are in communion with God' (Linda I.858-862).

Rosemary thought of God as:

purity of Light that never reaches any human contamination... you've got layers and levels of, of Spirit and life forms that are either living or they have lived or they might live... I suppose I try and [pause] open up my aerial or my oxygen mask and get some feeding from the people in between<sup>135</sup>.

Rosemary's use of the term 'Light' is idiosyncratic. Her picture is of a layered universe through which Light reaches humans via life forms in between a formless God and the human world. She tries to be open to receiving whatever she is given through that layered universe 'by the people in between'. Rosemary believes in Christ's historic existence and spoke more of her contact with Christ than other Friends:

I believe in Christ. I believe that Christ existed. I believe that he did listen. He was led. He did act. He was also, was very human. Not sure about the magic tricks. ... I've been influenced by his coming. ... I believe that he exists because he actually came to me twice. And I believe in his power. And his position. And his role. I believe in him. But I don't believe in the way that Christianity uses his name because I don't think that's what he wanted. I don't think that he would welcome the way that his name is followed...By institutional religion<sup>136</sup>.

Rosemary spoke of experiencing Christ Himself twice. Rosemary's objection to Christianity is because of the way his name has been used and because of its use by institutionalised religion.

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<sup>135</sup> Rosemary (I.1212-1226).

<sup>136</sup> Rosemary (I.1444-1459).

### Non-Theist Quaker

Shirley explains that her beliefs are centred more around 'caring for the vulnerable. Caring for each other. That that sort of way of, of thought. What I can't do with any confidence is some sort of super entity'<sup>137</sup>. For her 'Quakerism is a broader way of life than Christianity'<sup>138</sup>.

Asked about the status of Jesus Shirley thought:

I have no idea. Partly I accept because I don't know enough. I don't know enough about how accurate the reports in the Bible are. And how because I don't, I couldn't read the original anyway. So that gives me a certain lack of certainty. What's reported I like enormously. Laugh. And I think he sounds like he would have been tremendous company and at the very least a philosopher whose ideas I think are incredibly important<sup>139</sup>.

When asked about the Trinity, Shirley replied:

I can understand the concept of love being such an enormous thing that it's a thing in its own right and that it binds the other parts together ...and that the father and the son can be two aspects of the same being. After all we are I'm a daughter and a mother here.... so I don't see that that's, I can see how it comes about as an explanation for something. I don't want to get too...I don't want in my head more bogged down than that...I think it's a good explanation of something and if we start you know getting into angels dancing on pins and things you know.<sup>140</sup>

She describes herself as a non-theist 'Whatever that means. .... Because we are talking about things that are so difficult to define and maybe better for that'<sup>141</sup>. Her understanding of love as 'a thing in its own right', however, is of a transcendent value as well as a human capacity.

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<sup>137</sup> Shirley (I.449-450).

<sup>138</sup> Shirley (I.697-699).

<sup>139</sup> Shirley (I.452-456).

<sup>140</sup> Shirley (I.544-555).

<sup>141</sup> Shirley (I.655-657).



## Commentary

Interviewees made no negative comments about their own theologies or Quaker theology. The language of Christianity provided terms for all three groups in explaining their beliefs, or, in the case of the non-theist, explaining Shirley's difficulty in offering a theology. Apart from Shirley, the interviewees were positive about the proposition that there is that of God in everyone and that God's guidance can be discerned and that individuals and groups may be led by the guidance discerned. Shirley focused on the ethics of caring for each other. Individuals in all groups have spoken positively of Christ or Jesus (see Table C), but his name was not prominent in their final reflections on Quakers and Quakerism and most were agnostic, or rather did not want to commit on his status in relation to God. There is in all three groups the appreciation of a lack of dogma in Quakerism. The Quaker approach to theology allows diversity and non-commitment to specific beliefs. That has not prevented any of the interviewees from becoming members. The Christian and theist Quakers trust that in their own interior experience and experience of the world is to be found the evidence of a non-material reality referred to in language provided to them by Judeo-Christian concepts. They used the concepts of Light, holding in the light, and Spirit and were not afraid to use the word God.

The concept of communion in relation to worship and contact with God and each other were also used by Christian and theist Quakers.

Christian and theist Quakers did not want to be confused with fundamentalists.

Shirley's non-theist rejection of God as some sort of 'super entity' and her difficulty of talking about things 'so difficult to define' is theologically supported by the Anglican theologian Rowan Williams who writes:

The challenge of speaking about God is the challenge of referring appropriately to what is not an object among others or a definable substance that can be 'isolated and examined'<sup>142</sup>.

Shirley talked of love being 'a thing in its own right' and as part of her experience<sup>143</sup>.

That idea is congruent with the concept of a transcendent and immanent Deity as the source of love impacting the world. Care for the vulnerable and care for each other were ethical imperatives to which she subscribed. Love, how humans should treat each other and ethical behaviour are part of Quaker and Christian religious discourse. Those concepts are apprehended in the religious cultures and institutions in which all interviewees had participated before they formed their own Quaker identities.

That there were no negative comments about Quaker theology points to the fact that the interviewees themselves felt accommodated within the theology of Quakerism.

### **Quaker Meeting for Worship (as a liturgical form)**

This section relates to interviewees' experience of the normal regular Sunday Meeting for Worship<sup>144</sup>.

#### **Self-identified Christian Quakers**

##### **Positive**

Phillip knew at once that Meeting was the form of worship he wanted. It suited his character. He described the form as beautiful. He joined within a year and 'I've been there over the last 40 years'<sup>145</sup>. Four of this group joined within three years sufficiently attracted by the form of worship. The three remaining had experienced

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<sup>142</sup> Williams (2014, p.17).

<sup>143</sup> Shirley (I. 544-555).

<sup>144</sup> Reflections on the other kinds of Meeting for Worship are to do mainly with The Society's business and organisation as a community. Those reflections are subsumed in the next section.

<sup>145</sup> Phillip (I.30-36).

the form as children and were not so impacted by the originality of the form. As adults, however, they returned to Quaker Meeting rather than other liturgical forms; and they identified as Christian.

As members of this group grew into the Quaker way, the quietness, the shared understanding of Quaker worship, 'what we are waiting and listening for... seeking some kind of leading' and what Matthew goes on to describe as 'a sense of being grounded and elevated at the same time', results in their strong attachment to the Meeting for Worship as liturgy<sup>146</sup>. Joy comments, 'The presence, the sense of the, yes, the gathered Meeting'<sup>147 148</sup>, Oh! yes, and listening to the ministry and learning. What it is that we do in Meetings for Worship. What, what we're there for'. What it's all about<sup>149</sup>.

### **Negative**

On the negative side, Meeting can be disturbed by inappropriate ministry. Some is 'too theoretical' (Susan I.417-418). Susan also needs the Anglican Eucharist where she experiences God differently from at a Quaker meeting<sup>150</sup>.

There can also be too much ministry. Trevor records that a Meeting warden said 'the elders were the worst offenders'<sup>151</sup>. Andrew, who has been an elder, remarked that when elders talk about the quality of spoken Ministry, they could occasionally agree about completely inappropriate Ministry, but not what was thought to be genuinely Spirit-led Ministry. He thought that there is

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<sup>146</sup> Matthew (I.1431-1440)

<sup>147</sup> A 'gathered meeting' is one that has been described when unity of those gathered is felt as a time 'of extraordinary togetherness' and where there may be a sense of 'the spirit's presence' (Birkel and Vandenbark, 2019. p.31)

<sup>148</sup> Joy (I.228).

<sup>149</sup> Joy (I.260-261).

<sup>150</sup> Susan (I.2036)..

<sup>151</sup> Trevor (I.523-526).

a pretty high percentage of ego in Ministry and, and that will often outweigh the, the, the spiritually led element. But that doesn't mean, mean that the, that it isn't worth hearing, you know [laughter]. And so if we only hear the ego of the other person in Ministry, we, we may miss what else is there<sup>152</sup>.

Andrew recognises a conundrum of eldership: to intervene or not to intervene when they think ministry inappropriate, aware that although there may be ego in ministry, there may be other content in an individual's ministry that should not be missed.

He also thought it sad that Quakers did not have song as part of worship. He thought that Quakers should not be so dogmatic about not having structure helping the Meeting focus on 'what we're doing there and why'. Andrew had had good experiences of programmed meetings in America<sup>153</sup>.

### **Theist Quakers**

#### **Positive**

Andrea and Rosemary both talked about connecting with what was a reality for them.

Andrea spoke of 'listening to the Holy Spirit and I'm discerning the Holy Spirit's will.

And if I'm lead to minister that comes from a feeling of discernment and clarity'<sup>154</sup>.

Rosemary spoke of 'A connection ... between me and the Light source. To feed me to do work ...to be led and to be guided (Rosemary I.1572-1573).

Linda put Meeting 'on a par with physical exercise ... All I need in life is Quakerism and going to the gym'<sup>155</sup>.

#### **Negative**

Linda thought there are people who come to deliberately say something. 'That's human nature I suppose'<sup>156</sup>.

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<sup>152</sup> Andrew (I.1125-1141).

<sup>153</sup> Andrew (I.1456-1459).

<sup>154</sup> Andrea (I.773-777).

<sup>155</sup> Linda (I.1631-1632).

<sup>156</sup> Linda (I.1206-1207).

## Non-Theist Quaker

### Positive

The space and silence of a Meeting for Worship has become for Shirley 'not just something I do because it's Sunday and I potter up to Meeting ... it is something I actually depend on'<sup>157</sup>.

Shirley thinks carefully when she is going to minister worrying whether she is

being self-indulgent ... and sometimes I think what I was going to say was more important [Laughter]. Frankly I did think though it's an organic thing and what happens is going is you know is going to happen and you can't tell what's important for people. Sometimes people say the most bizarre things and you think what's that about where did that idea what's what... And then somebody else turns up and says I was really moved by that'<sup>158</sup>.

She ministers when inspired only after careful self-discipline; and she acknowledges that other can be moved by the ministry which leaves her unmoved.

[No negative comments]

### Commentary

The comments above speak of the experience of a beautiful form of worship with others, based on silence. The form is appreciated because it facilitates an individual's communion with God or Holy Spirit or light source that nourishes and leads the person. It is the positive experience of Meeting for Worship that leads attenders to membership. Silence may prompt inspired ministry whether or not that is understood with reference to the Holy Spirit. From inspired ministry comes learning and guidance.

Critical comments were made, predominantly by Christian Quakers on inappropriate Ministry. Elders, whose responsibility is the spiritual care of the Meeting, might not

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<sup>157</sup> Shirley I.327-336).

<sup>158</sup> Shirley (I.844-852).

agree on what was inappropriate ministry. Elders in one Meeting were themselves criticised for speaking too often. Maintaining the Meeting for Worship as a worship space in which Spirit-inspired ministry arises was seen as a challenge for Eldership. Most but not all interviewees<sup>159</sup>, in all three groups, say they try to attend the weekly Meeting for Worship, which ‘grounds and elevates’ their lives and on which, some say, their lives depend. The form facilitated spiritual growth and the experience prompted feelings of gratitude.

In terms of other negatives expressed, Andrew regretted ‘the lack of song’ and the ‘dogmatic’ rejection of ‘any kind of structure’ in Quaker worship in Britain. Andrew had experienced the positive qualities of programmed Meetings in America.

### **The Quaker Meeting as community<sup>160</sup>**

Quaker community as a theme in this chapter relates to both community activities and the community’s self-governance. It is in the local community that the ties of association to Quakerism are first created through participating in Sunday Local Meeting for Worship and other Local Meeting activities. As members they have a right and as attenders they are likely to be invited to participate in Meetings for Worship for business and occupy roles in local, area and national Quaker committees and groups. It is through committees and groups and taking on roles and responsibilities that Quakers in local, area and national organisations organise and act from what, canonically, Quakers discern as God’s will, for their own and the public good.

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<sup>159</sup> See discussion of Table C. Some have other obligations or responsibilities to meet on Sundays.

<sup>160</sup> ‘The median size of a Quaker local meeting is now 21 individuals, while in 2009 it was 24’. (Elliott, Penny. 2022? <https://www.quaker.org.uk/blog/the-changing-shape-of-quaker-meetings>. Accessed 15/12/2022).

## Self-identified Christian Quakers

### Positive

The first Meeting Joy went to didn't suit her. Still interested in the Quaker way, she tried another Meeting further from home<sup>161</sup>. There she found a mixture of people with varied life and Quaker experience which did suit her. She has been there for twenty-four years (Joy I.795-809). The Meeting also supported activities in addition to Sunday worship e.g. house groups. Joy's meets every six weeks or so. They share 'where we are, which could take a whole evening' and 'we ... consider, you know, some spiritual reading ... and the questions connected with that'<sup>162</sup>. Such positive contacts reinforced her attachment.

Others are similarly positive about their current Meeting. For Caroline some of the joys of her Meeting were the children: 'we have a lovely all age worship and the children are just, I, I just love the children there'<sup>163</sup>. Andrew found himself involved with Quaker youth work in his Local and Area Meeting because of his background as a social worker. He enjoyed that and also going to the Area Meeting's residential camp 'with a great all age mixture of people': 'A community that happened'<sup>164</sup>. Susan felt she was with 'like-minded people. ... and ...It's great they're doing things'<sup>165</sup>.

Diversity and like-mindedness both matter, but there can be tension between the two. Gillian liked belonging to a group where 'I don't have to believe in a particular set of dogmas and I can, I can follow my own path and still and still I'm still in the group. Which I think is one of the things I like'<sup>166</sup>.

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<sup>161</sup> Joy (I.108-115).

<sup>162</sup> Joy (I.837-847).

<sup>163</sup> Caroline (I.984-985).

<sup>164</sup> Andrew (I.599-603).

<sup>165</sup> Susan (I.2674-2679).

<sup>166</sup> Gillian (I.136-138)

Trevor thought that:

one of the beautiful things about Quakerism is we actually have the most diverse range of belief but we still simply seem to be able to work together. And whereas I think some churches do get obsessed about what do people believe Quakers do seem to have this ability to say 'okay, well, not comfortable with that' but we will get on and do things together<sup>167</sup>.

Spirituality and community mattered equally to Matthew. He recalled his experience of participating in Young Friends General Meetings held over a weekend. He referred to 'the intensity of it' and 'that you have to cook and eat together... and the depth of the worship and how quickly and deeply I would settle into worship'. For him it was 'better and stronger there than in other, than in other Quaker Meetings'<sup>168</sup>.

When these Friends spoke about community appreciatively, they spoke about the characteristics of Meetings they belong or had belonged to. Inevitably Meetings vary in size and composition and their character suits the needs of different individuals.

### **Negative**

Caroline found 'all these non-theist or whatever they're called ... really difficult. I don't know how you can be a Quaker and not have an idea about the deity'<sup>169</sup>. Gillian too referred to non-theists, finding it quite difficult to talk about my beliefs with some Friends:

... particularly nontheists, you know, because there is this sort of atheistic sort of thing. I also find sometimes that Friends are really keen on the doing good bit and and they sort of forget about the spiritual contemplation bit. And I do get a bit fed up with pacifists [laughter] to be absolutely honest. [laughter] You know, I mean this sort of banging on about it, you know. ... But on the whole I mean, I find them, Quakers are pretty tolerant, you know<sup>170</sup>.

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<sup>167</sup> Trevor (l.336-340).

<sup>168</sup> Matthew (l.342-354).

<sup>169</sup> Caroline (l.374-375).

<sup>170</sup> Gillian (l.1559-1567).



Gillian also was critical of those who don't realise the importance of business in generating the taxes that fund social services but 'go on about the caring professions, you know, as if most of us don't care'<sup>171</sup>.

Phillip thought that there were 'still enough people who are traditional Quakers' but he thought 'the Quaker way has suffered with being so prominent in the peace movement'. It has 'drawn a lot of people in who probably had no religious background. And we're struggling with it now'. He thought that though 'struggle is a good thing' Quakers had to be careful they 'don't become too secular'. Quakers should remember 'it is the Spirit moving us to those testimonies'. Quakers always should make space for worship:

It's being true Quakers that drives us out into the world. Well, we've had an influx of people who are political people and are politically driven into the world. I mean, over 30 years, in the course of 30 years. So we've got to make sure we establish our spiritual, maintain our spiritual basis<sup>172</sup>.

Phillip thought that In terms of Quaker membership, there has been weeding and 'there are still weeds to be weeded'<sup>173</sup>. He is also 'sad that well established meetings have shrunk'. His own Area Meeting is now 'worried about its future' yet it is:

very loathe to do outreach work. And again, I don't know why, except outreach work always requires something extra from you to be public. So, I'm sad about Quakers shrinking. I don't know the answer<sup>174</sup>.

Matthew wondered whether there was an issue of 'our elders and overseers doing their sort of individualised pastoral and spiritual care?' (Matthew I.1638-1639). They might have a more significant role in ensuring the wellbeing of Area and Local Meetings than they realised.

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<sup>171</sup> Gillian (I.947-949).

<sup>172</sup> Phillip (I.325-335).

<sup>173</sup> Phillip (I.1121-1128).

<sup>174</sup> Phillip (I.1121-1128).

Andrew identifies himself as a Quaker and does not want to see The Society wither away. 'But it depends what it is, what it is to become'. He does not want it to become a kind of social club for people who want to be nice to each other, kind to the planet and not go to war, making 'that sort of policy statements that Quakers agree to:

I'd like to hang on to what I feel is unique to Quakers. ... If Quakerism had just become those that that sort of rather mushy thing, then I'd probably wouldn't want to be one myself any more<sup>175</sup>.

The negative comments of this group are to do with the perception of threats to traditional Quaker spirituality from non-theism and how those threats may be countered through better vetting of the membership, attending to its wellbeing and taking up the challenge of outreach.

### **Theist Quakers**

#### **Positive**

Andrea's narrative demonstrated the opportunities for personal and spiritual development through the existence of different kinds of Local Meeting and national level subject-specific groups. Every meeting that she had belonged to was different. Some were 'really alive and big ... There were some wonderful people in it'. She liked that some were political and that concern for the world was manifest in the ministry she heard. She also experienced 'a tiny little meeting' which was 'quite sleepy and not very active at all' but she valued that Meeting 'for being able to be contemplative and meditative and for 'it not really doing very much except develop a prayer life'. She then relocated and went to a Meeting that at the time was 'a bit posh ... not at all working-class' but which has now 'completely changed'<sup>176</sup>.

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<sup>175</sup> Andrew (I.2038-2045).

<sup>176</sup> Andrea (I.1055-1064).

When a new national Quaker group focused on her particular concern was formed, Adrea joined 'with alacrity' and became a committee member. She was pleased for the opportunity to help others 'talk about their experiences'<sup>177</sup>.

Linda spoke of the trust she has in the love of her Meeting, She has felt safe loved and supported<sup>178</sup> She also said how Yearly Meetings were 'fantastic'<sup>179</sup>.

### **Negative**

Andrea felt many Quakers uncomfortable with what she said about and how they responded to her paranormal experiences and the dramatic Near Death Experience she had as an adult. They were unhelpful in telling her how to handle them. She thought many Quakers were too concerned only with the here and now<sup>180</sup>.

Linda said she thought Quaker Universalists and non-theists 'could waffle on forever' although she also said she was on the email list of the non-theist newsletter<sup>181</sup>. On an interpersonal level she thought some 'some Quakers are very po-faced and convinced that they are right'<sup>182</sup>. They are:

very much at the upper end of the upper-middle-class spectrum so yes so there is a sort of southern superiority and that I find difficult being Irish so... Yes, sense of entitlement ... [which] doesn't go with notions of equality<sup>183</sup>.

Rosemary thought that 'Quakers aren't very good at holding you. You know the door is wide open. You're, you feel like a canary. You go flying in and out the cage'<sup>184</sup>.

She also felt that there are people there who are a real challenge. 'They're just so hell bent on, on being a Quaker the way they see it [and] They're very rigid. They're

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<sup>177</sup> Andrea (l.318-320).

<sup>178</sup> Linda (l.778-782).

<sup>179</sup> Linda (l.1086-1088).

<sup>180</sup> Andrea l.952-955).

<sup>181</sup> Linda (l.715-718).

<sup>182</sup> Linda (l.1028-1030).

<sup>183</sup> Linda (l.1684-1689).

<sup>184</sup> Rosemary (l.665-667).

very [pause] forceful ... They sometimes spoil it for others<sup>185</sup>. She objects to those who 'use it as a platform for political rallying:

“And, you know, as Quakers we should do this”. And I think you're not supposed to be telling me what to do. I've got my own journey to have. And I've been made an elder so, you know, and I'm going to have to maybe be called upon to, to bring this up<sup>186</sup>.

### **Non-theist Quaker**

#### **Positive**

Shirley liked that Quakerism is 'a thoughtful way of life that puts the responsibility on you', which, though 'hard' is what she wants. She did not like being told what to think<sup>187</sup>. She also liked 'the fact that we can all argue and discuss and come from different experiences, different backgrounds and so on'. She had quite liked in her previous church association talking to someone trained in theology, i.e. a cleric, and thinks 'that's valuable but ... there is an awful lot of other things that people bring which are equally valuable'<sup>188</sup>.

[No negative comments]

#### **Commentary**

There are some strong positive and negative comments about the Meetings that these interviewees have experienced. Different Meetings have different character and some suited the interviewees more than others. Some Christian and theist Quakers commented negatively and some positively on the political and activist participants in their Meetings. The non-theist Quaker made no negative comments about the Christocentric Meeting she had participated in since the beginning of her

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<sup>185</sup> Rosemary I.1774-1781).

<sup>186</sup> Rosemary I.1784-1790).

<sup>187</sup> Shirley (I.100-102).

<sup>188</sup> Shirley (I.624-629).

association with Quakers. Diversity of belief and lack of dogma was much appreciated. Her views were held also by some Christian Quakers. On the other hand negative comments were made by both Christian and theist Quakers about non-theism.

A Christian Quaker and a theist Quaker, who had beliefs in the after-life and in healing and had powerful paranormal experiences, thought that those beliefs were not acceptable to and dismissed by some Quakers. They felt somewhat disrespected for having them.

Interviews revealed three divisive underlying issues in Quaker communities. The first is to do with the boundary between what is and what is not theologically acceptable as 'Quaker'. That manifested itself most obviously in attitudes to non-theism, but also to paranormal experiences. The second is to do with the relationship between the spiritual and the political. Some Christian and theist Quakers thought the balance in their Meetings were too weighted towards the activist. The third is to do with social diversity. Some interviewees regretted that Quakers were predominantly white, middle class, university educated and middle-aged as evidenced by Quaker surveys<sup>189</sup>. The fact of social homogeneity and comments about class suggest that that homogeneity of class, ethnicity and age might constitute a barrier to attracting a more diverse membership. These issues will be discussed in the next chapter.

A fourth issue arises to do with Quaker liturgies. Andrew wondered whether opportunities for programmed worship be considered more seriously within The Society. Should the standard unprogrammed form of Meeting for Worship in Britain, which is a minority form in worldwide Quakerism<sup>190</sup>, be supplemented by providing

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<sup>189</sup> To be discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>190</sup> Dandelion (2007. p.242).

for the programmed form? Would that, perhaps, encourage more or different ministry? That is an ecclesiological as well as a theological issue and maybe a class issue because it is the unprogrammed liberal form of worship that has attracted the current membership to Quakerism.

Matthew also commented on the importance of Elders and Overseers in their contribution to the wellbeing of Meetings and the non-theist Shirley spoke of the benefit of talking to someone trained in theology. Their comments point to the possibility of an unmet need within The Society for more variety in the form of worship and for trained spiritual care to be available to Meetings.

## **Quaker social activism, including the Quaker testimonies: positive reflections**

### **Self-identified Christian Quakers**

#### **Positive**

Reference was made to the testimonies by all in this group; and all in this group have been and are involved with putting their faith into practice.

Trevor 'was a pacifist before I was a Quaker' influenced by George MacLeod<sup>191</sup> <sup>192</sup> . As far as she could remember Caroline was a pacifist and became involved with the women's peace movement where she campaigned with Quakers<sup>193</sup>. Having gone to her first Meeting she learnt about the testimonies almost 'straight away'<sup>194</sup>. Andrew said he 'had that sort of pacifist code, non-violent' that he had 'adopted and taken

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<sup>191</sup> George McLeod was founder of the Iona Community. He was a decorated WW 1 officer who became a Presbyterian minister and then a pacifist and socialist (Ferguson, Ron. George MacLeod. Collins Fount, 1990).

<sup>192</sup> Trevor (I.173-174).

<sup>193</sup> Caroline (I.230-232).

<sup>194</sup> Caroline (I.52-54).

on'<sup>195</sup>. Susan was a teenager when she first heard about the testimonies at her Meeting. She thought them 'a good basis on which to build a moral framework'<sup>196</sup>.

What Gillian found attractive about Quakers was 'the social conscience thing. I mean the thing of caring about the world and doing good and wanting to be active in the world and doing practical things. I'm a practical person' but she also made a point of saying 'not that other people don't do it as well'<sup>197</sup>.

Phillip doubted whether he knew the Quaker testimony on peace or the testimonies before engaging with Quakers. That 'opened up for me as I moved across into a new form of worship'<sup>198</sup>. Phillip eventually gave up his professional career long before retirement age. He was led to become an independent ecumenical peace worker. (Phillip I.293-294). Joy, now retired from a demanding educational role, said she and a friend had 'foolishly' agreed to take an idea forward at the Area Meeting. 'Now [that Friend] really hasn't got time but somehow I'd like not to do it, but it won't lie down. So... [laughter]<sup>199</sup>. Joy has 'a sense that there might be something coming up... '<sup>200</sup>

### **Negative**

Not everyone gives unqualified support for the peace testimony. Gillian thought 'that there is peacemaking and there is pacifism' and that 'there may be occasions where, where as a last resort ... I wouldn't say I was an absolute pacifist.'<sup>201</sup>

Susan became disillusioned with both the truth and the peace testimony as result of a personal psychological attack at work. She said 'that did almost kill me and one of the reasons for the attack was that I didn't fight back. And this was a Quaker

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<sup>195</sup> Andrew (I.162-168).

<sup>196</sup> Susan I.29-30).

<sup>197</sup> Gillian (I.1797-1807).

<sup>198</sup> Phillip (I.280-281).

<sup>199</sup> Joy (I.1018-1022).

<sup>200</sup> Joy (I.2013-2015).

<sup>201</sup> Gillian (I.114-119).

thing'<sup>202</sup>. She thought that it was 'folly' to use that approach 'in an environment in which people are not prepared to accept the truth. So the peace testimony collapsed. The truth testimony collapsed because it didn't work'<sup>203</sup>. Susan's disillusionment was profound, but it had precipitated her conversion experience and her becoming a Quangelican.

With reference to social activism, Caroline was surprised that a survey she conducted with Churches Together revealed that 'it was the evangelicals who did the most'<sup>204</sup>. Andrew made a similar discovery in America. The Evangelical Friends he met were more engaged and 'in some ways, more, more radical and active in, in, in witnessing to ... To their social testimony than the liberal Quakers'<sup>205</sup>.

### **Theist Quakers**

#### **Positive and Negative**

Andrea was a pacifist and had joined the Peace Pledge Union before she joined Quakers<sup>206</sup>. The testimonies have also contributed to the development of her Quakerism<sup>207</sup>.

Linda read about Quakerism and the testimonies 'in my earlier first enthusiastic 20s'<sup>208</sup>. She is struck by 'the amazing thing that Quakers do around the world, the amazing things they've done for me and my daughter. And for other people ... [but she also is tolerant of the fact that] ... they are human so you know they can get it wrong'<sup>209</sup>.

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<sup>202</sup> Susan (l.893-894.)

<sup>203</sup> Susan (l.921-928).

<sup>204</sup> Caroline (l.326-331).

<sup>205</sup> Andrew (l.949-953).

<sup>206</sup> Andrea (l.498-499).

<sup>207</sup> Andrea (l.900-905).

<sup>208</sup> Linda (l.640).

<sup>209</sup> Linda (l.1690-1695).



Rosemary thought the Testimonies part of a Quaker 'rulebook' which helped connecting with other Friends at home and abroad because 'you are all on the same, coming from the same place. The Testimonies are very simple. Very basic. And very limited. And at the same time each one is very broad'<sup>210</sup>. Rosemary, however, was irritated by 'the political ones' who thought every Quaker should be activists like they were<sup>211</sup>.

### **Non-theist**

#### **Positive and negative**

Shirley was familiar with the testimonies before membership and 'the peace and social witness bit is probably the, the part that I feel most comfortable with'<sup>212</sup>. She thought Quakers 'a very progressive movement towards improving society' and mentioned prison reform, slavery and 'all of those sort of big things' and on a smaller scale things 'that happen locally which are to do with caring for each other, and caring for the community at large'<sup>213</sup>.

### **Commentary**

Activism was one of the attractive attributes of The Society commented upon by the interviewees. The Society gave them an opportunity to take responsibility for its operation and to express their concerns by acting with other Friends. Social activism as an activity in itself was not one that attracted criticism.

The negative comments to do with social activism were mainly to do with the balance between spiritual and activist concerns in a local meeting and the behaviour of some Quaker activists. Surprise was expressed that, in the experience of two liberal

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<sup>210</sup> Rosemary (A24-27).

<sup>211</sup> Rosemary (I.1784-1790).

<sup>212</sup> Shirley (I.391-402).

<sup>213</sup> Shirley (I.386-389).

Christian Quakers, evangelical Christians they had encountered were often more active in witnessing to social issues than liberal Quakers.

There was awareness and support for the Quaker testimonies. The peace testimony was singled out for positive mention but two of the self-identified Christian Quakers had reservations about it. One differentiated peacemaking from pacifism and was not a 'total pacifist'. Another thought her previous long-standing commitment to the peace testimony and truth and rationality had negatively affected her capacity to handle a colleague's psychological attack on her<sup>214</sup>.

### **Remaining a member of the Religious Society of Friends**

The question "Why do you remain a member of The Society?" was intended to elicit positive statements in the last part of the interview. There is an entry for each interviewee in this section. Negative comments about aspects of Quakerism are listed under previous themes.

### **Self-identified Christian Quakers**

**Trevor:** I have almost got a sense of having come full circle. I can recognise elements of Catholicism in Quakerism<sup>215</sup>. The reason I'm sticking with Quakerism is that there is nowhere else to go<sup>216</sup>.

**Gillian:** Why have I stayed? Because I like the way Quakers do things<sup>217</sup>.

**Joy:** I hope it's made my life more productive and more valuable to other people and to myself. I hope I live better because of it<sup>218</sup>.

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<sup>214</sup> There is no organised training within The Society for non-violent communication which might contribute practically to The Society's witness to peace by equipping Friends with verbal assertiveness skills.

<sup>215</sup> Trevor (l.68-69).

<sup>216</sup> Trevor (l.623-625).

<sup>217</sup> Gillian (l.114).

<sup>218</sup> Joy (l.1112-1113).

**Susan:** Oh I'm, I'm committed. I'm not leaving. Whatever my not going to meeting is, it's not even all that important. In the grand scheme of things you know. In the 10 years I didn't go it didn't stop my belief or faith. Or my selecting for personal and social action what my priorities were. I think going to meeting is not what Quakerism is about. It's something that's, it helps but it's not to be confused with Quakerism<sup>219</sup>.

**Caroline:** Oh I'm a fixture. [Laughter] I'm a Quaker for life<sup>220</sup>.

**Matthew:** It's bound me in more. It's increased, I think it's probably increased my commitment not in a sort of very big overt way but in a more subtle and background way<sup>221</sup>.

**Andrew:** Obviously I feel, I identify myself as a Quaker and it, it would seem that I, I have got an attachment to The Society that would not want to see it wither away<sup>222</sup>.

**Phillip:** I've often, not often, but yes I have thought sometimes about where would I go after Quakers, if I became dissatisfied with Quakers. And the answer is, there is nowhere else to go except totally independent. But the Quaker ethos embraces you as a total independent .... So, I don't have to worry about where I go, spiritually, or for my spiritual home. ... Quakers is the place for me<sup>223</sup>.

### **Theist Quakers**

**Andrea:** Well it's my whole life. And it's mainly what I do. And It's me.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Susan (I.2620-2618).

<sup>220</sup> Caroline (I.1089).

<sup>221</sup> Matthew (I.1688-1689).

<sup>222</sup> Andrew (I.2038-9).

<sup>223</sup> Phillip (I.424-430).

<sup>224</sup> Andrea (I.1117).

**Linda:** Well it gives me a great sense of, despite me saying I don't feel I always belong it gives me a great sense of belonging of structure of safety and of security of identity. Yes. You know like this is what life's about<sup>225</sup>.

**Rosemary:** I stayed. I nearly changed. But I had a chat, a chat with ---- [who] feels that the spiritual nurturing of the Meeting gets submerged in the politics. And I said to him at one point, a couple of years ago, I dropped away for a few months because I was taking on a lot of jobs. It was too difficult. ... And he said, have you ever, have you thought, have you thought that you are exactly what we need? Maybe this is your journey<sup>226</sup>.

#### **Non-theist Quaker**

**Shirley:** I needed something where I'd got an anchor. And that ... This is it. Yes!<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Linda (l.1621-1625).

<sup>226</sup> Rosemary (l.1798-1805).

<sup>227</sup> Shirley (l.319-323).

## Commentary

Interviewees talk of a sense of belonging and having nowhere else to go, of being a fixture and anchored. They assert their commitment. In one case a conversation with a sensitive Friend, when they were thinking of leaving because of their antipathy to the political voices in the Meeting, suggested that the Meeting needed them; and they stayed. In another case (see section on Quaker community above) they thought they might not stay if The Society became too much a social club or too involved with policy statements about social and world issues. They wanted to hang on to what they thought was unique about Quakers, which they could 'not easily pin down'.

It is a desire for a spiritual base, community and activism that the three kinds of Quaker group have been attracted to The Society. That is notwithstanding that within each group there are different emphases. They stay because of the importance to them of Quaker spirituality, notwithstanding the non-theist's difficulty with religious language and traditional beliefs in a personal God, of Quaker community and, to a slightly lesser degree<sup>228</sup>, Quaker social activism.

### 3.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the empirical data on which this thesis is based. Themes from each interview were integrated under inclusive headings and organised with their collated quotations into five Master Tables. These Tables were placed in an order with a narrative that sequenced them historically: from interviewees' pre-Quaker religious experience to their reflections on Quakers and Quakerism. The themes identified within each of the Master Tables were to do with:

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<sup>228</sup> E.g. Gillian's comments on activist Quakers forgetting the importance of the spiritual underpinning, Phillip's comments on those who have joined primarily for the peace witness and social activism rather than Quaker spirituality and Rosemary's comments on the political ones who 'spoil' things.

- (1) Table A: interviewees' pre-Quaker involvement with religion
- (2) Table A/B: factors that brought participants to their first Quaker Meeting and their subsequent decision to apply for membership
- (3) Table C: the content of their faith and beliefs
- (4) Table D: the practice of their faith in action
- (5) Table E: reflections on their engagement with Quakers and Quakerism.

Two findings were unexpected by this researcher. The first was that most interviewees had had previous serious involvement with other religious groups before committing to Friends. The second was that interviewees could be grouped according to the elapsed time before they applied for membership: within 3 years, in the sixth year, and from 14 to 38 years. Other findings were:

1. Table C: Three ways of being a Quaker according to interviewees' religious orientation: self-identified Christian, theist and non-theist;
2. Table C: The use of Christian concepts in all the interviewees' descriptions of their faith and belief, including the non-theist's particular use of the word 'love'.
3. Table B & E: Four factors that contributed to their attraction to and remaining members of The Society: the theology, the ecclesiology (non-hierarchical and equality), belonging to the Quaker community, and social activism. They varied in importance for each interviewee, irrespective of their religious orientation.
4. Table E: Tensions in the Quaker community between those who were more concerned with the spiritual dimension of the Quaker way and those concerned with the activist dimension.

5. Table E: Criticism or a lack of appreciation of non-theism from within both the self-identified Christian and theist groups.
6. Table E: Disappointment that Friends were not better known as a Religious Society in Britain and thus with the way that Friends promoted themselves.
7. Table E: Concern that Friends themselves may be unclear about what the Quaker message was or should be.

Only one interviewee expressed concern about governance: what he termed the 'bureaucracy' at Friends House. There were no comments about governance more generally i.e. about authority, power and decision-making in The Society. There were positive statements about the Quaker Business Method as a mode of decision-taking.

One interviewee thought that The Society may not be trusting enough in God and others expressed concerns about how The Society might lose its religious character e.g. by accepting into membership those who were attracted primarily by its peace witness rather than the spiritual underpinning of Quaker testimonies; and that the Society should not turn into a kind of social club for people who want to be nice to each other, kind to the planet and not go to war making that sort of policy statements that Quakers agree to:

I'd like to hang on to what I feel is unique to Quakers. ... If Quakerism had just become those that that sort of rather mushy thing, then I'd probably wouldn't want to be one myself any more<sup>229</sup>.

What was nevertheless clear from Table E was the interviewees' strong current commitment to being Quaker and how that had enriched their lives. That is confirmed when they apply for and are accepted into The Society.

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<sup>229</sup> Andrew (I.2038-2045).

I recognised these findings were somewhat determined by the structure of the interview, the questions asked, the self-selected interviewees and by the interactions between interviewee and interviewer. The negative comments in Table E made in 2015 then took on an extra significance with the publication of Dandelion's work in 2019 on internal secularisation<sup>230</sup>, Cummins' work accessed in 2020 on the impact of Charity Law on The Society's functioning<sup>231</sup>, and a closer examination of Dandelion's 2002 article on disaffiliation from The Society<sup>232</sup>. As a result of the analytical review, in the next chapter, the paradox of a Quaker theology which asserted the possibility of an individual discerning God's will for themselves and of Quaker groups discerning God's will in Meetings for Worship as against the decline in participation in Quaker worship suggested there were issues to do with theological coherence, social cohesion and governance that were factors in The Society's declining numbers.

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<sup>230</sup> Dandelion (2019)

<sup>231</sup> Cummins (2019; 2020)

<sup>232</sup> Dandelion (2002). In chapter 5 of this thesis.



## CHAPTER 4: ANALYTICAL REVIEW

### 4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 identified the salient themes of each of the twelve interviews and integrated them into five Master Tables using IPA. In this chapter the key points summarised at the end of the previous chapter become the focus for further reflection and interpretation in accordance with critical realism's and IPA's double hermeneutic.

### 4.2 The Master Tables<sup>1</sup> and the questions that arise.

Table A's significant finding was that interviewees' membership of The Society succeeded engagement with other religious organisations. What might explain that process of interviewees' engagement with one or more religions or religious denominations before interviewees found Quakers? What then led them to Quakers and what sustains them there?

Table B's significant finding was that the elapsed time between the interviewees' first Meeting for Worship and their decision to apply for membership varied greatly. What might explain the variations in the elapsed times? What triggered interviewees' applications for membership?

Table C indicated three basic orientations in being Quaker: those who self-identified as Christian, those who believed in God or a Higher Power but denied being Christian, and the one non-theist. What supported that diversity within The Society

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<sup>1</sup> The five Master Tables:

Master Table A: Faith and Religious Practice Pre-First Meeting for worship

Master Table B: From Going to Meeting for the First Time to Becoming a Member

Master Table C: Theology and Belief

Master Table D: Faith in Practice Pre- and Post- Membership

Master Table E: Reflections on Quakers and Quakerism

and what consequences of such diversity might there be? What categories of Quaker have been identified in questionnaire based surveys?

Table D represented the participants' faith in practice. Had that changed since their engagement with Quakers?

Table E collated interviewees' final reflections on the research question: How does your experience of membership of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) make a difference to your life, faith and practice? The responses here contributed to identifying the overall attractions of The Society but also those features of Quakerism that gave rise to more critical comments.

These findings and questions are explored and responded to in this and the next chapter.

### **4.3 Religiosity and religion: seeking and finding**

#### **Simmel's insights on religiosity and religion and their relevance to contemporary Quakers**

Simmel's essay on *The conflict of modern culture* written in 1918, the year of his death, contains ideas and observations that if written in 2020 would be no less apposite in describing the attractions of associating in the British, creedless, Religious Society of Friends:

The mood within contemporary religiosity seems to me to invite the same interpretation as my observation over the last decade or two – that no small number of intellectually advanced individuals satisfy their religious needs by means of mysticism. On the whole, it can be assumed that these people grew up surrounded by the perspectives of one or another of the existing churches. Their turning to mysticism is unmistakably motivated by two factors. On the one hand, the forms that bind religious life to an objectively defined series of images no longer satisfy this life. On the other hand, religious yearning itself has not been deadened but seeks different goals and paths. The main reason for this yearning to be diverted towards mysticism seems to be that the latter allows the fixed definition and delimitation of religious forms to be suspended. Here there is a deity which transcends every personalized – and thus

particularized – image; it seeks an undetermined expanse of religious feeling that does not conflict with any dogmatic barrier, a deepening into formless infinity, developing only from the powerful longing of the soul. Mysticism appears to be the last refuge for religious individuals who cannot free themselves from all transcendental forms, but only, as it were temporarily, from those which are determined and fixed in content<sup>2</sup>.

On the one hand is the recognition of the personal and emotional need to express one's religiosity; on the other there is a need for an intellectually acceptable way to satisfy 'the powerful longing of the soul'. What is acceptable is beyond dogma and abjures those transcendental forms which are 'determined and fixed in content'.

Simmel is referring to the failure of religions with creeds or a deity with a particularized image, arguing that they fail to satisfy 'intellectually advanced individuals' in modernity i.e. from the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Simmel was writing and teaching to 26<sup>th</sup> September 2018 when Simmel died just before the end of World War 1.

The interviewees in my research may be considered Simmel's 'intellectually advanced individuals'. All but one had degrees or professional qualifications like 71% of the 649 respondents of The British Quaker Survey of 2013<sup>3</sup>. All regularly sat in the expectant silence of a Meeting for Worship in which spoken ministry is understood, normatively, as arising from a source distinct from someone's self-willed desire to speak. They had an inclination towards mystical religion<sup>4</sup> and a persisting need to express their religiosity with others in self-governed Meetings for Worship without having to profess a creed and without a separated clergy directing its proceedings. They have persisted in engaging with religious forms in their need to express their religiosity, and, in so doing, apart from the non-theist, they resist contemporary

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<sup>2</sup> Simmel (1997a. p.20).

<sup>3</sup> Hampton (2014. p.21).

<sup>4</sup> The concept of 'mystical' is discussed in the **Quaker theology and Quaker diversity** section below.

secularism's exclusion of a transcendent reality in explaining how their own world works. Their choice in identifying as Quakers is a counter-secular if not a counter-cultural statement. They were exceptions to Steve Bruce's argument that 'society's' religious consciousness has been replaced by 'an empirical, rational, instrumental orientation'<sup>5</sup>. Those who choose to join Quakers in worship, the majority of its current members might also be motivated, like my interviewees, to selfless care for others and by a desire for a better world. Such feelings complement a person's awareness of instrumental reason's role in managing their own lives. They might agree with *Quaker faith & practice* that, at least sometimes in worship: 'The sense of wonder and awe of the finite before the infinite leads naturally to thanksgiving and adoration'<sup>6</sup>. My interviewees sought a place where they might experience their own religiosity and values expressed and affirmed by others.

In *Fundamental religious ideas and modern science: an inquiry* published in 1909, Simmel argues:

The difficulties that currently beset religious life are caused by the conflict between religiousness as an inner state or need of man and all the traditional lore that, as the content of that inner state, offers itself as a means to fulfil (*sic.*) these needs<sup>7</sup>.

To illustrate 'traditional lore' Simmel points to Christianity and Christian doctrines such as 'a child born of a virgin, water transformed into wine, the resurrection and ascension into heaven of a deceased man'<sup>8</sup>. These were doctrines that some interviewees self-identifying as Christian Quakers were sceptical about and some self-identifying as theist accepted and, in relation to the Resurrection and after-life, the non-theist did not totally reject. Simmel argues that 'the general scientific-

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce ((2011. p.2).

<sup>6</sup> QF&P (2013. 2.01)

<sup>7</sup> Simmel (1997a. p.3)

<sup>8</sup> Simmel (1997a. p.3)

intellectual mood of the times ... by no means destroys the subjective, or indeed the objective, religious significance of these traditions'<sup>9</sup>. Individuals may attach to what are presented as historical events 'a quite unique transcendental significance'<sup>10</sup>.

Simmel then writes of the struggle between those who claim 'the spirit of science...has eliminated religious needs' and those who advocate the truth of 'the content of religion' 'drawing on the support of all official authorities'<sup>11</sup>. Simmel suggests that rather than science eliminating religious needs, whatever the objective truths of science and religion,

We may well need to realise that religiosity is a particular *being* [sic. italics in original) a functional quality of humanity ...which entirely determines some individuals and exists only in rudimentary form in others'<sup>12</sup>.

Simmel contends that religiosity is a functional quality of humanity i.e. all human beings. A consequence of that quality would include a person's interior reflections on traditional religious narratives which have been encountered in the culture of their society. For some, Simmel argues, their religiosity entirely influences their being. Simmel's argument predates Archer's more elaborate account of internal conversations and their importance in determining an individual's ultimate concerns and their *modus vivendi* (see Chapter 2).

Inger Furseth and Pål Repstad suggest that distinguishing religiosity from religion was a recent development. They distinguish between 'established and institutionalized traditions', which secularisation undermined, and 'the individual effort to find meaning in life'<sup>13</sup>. In fact, these distinctions were made by Georg Simmel in

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<sup>9</sup> Simmel (1997a. p.3)

<sup>10</sup> Simmel (1997a. p.3)

<sup>11</sup> Simmel (1997a. p.4). In the UK there is an established Church whose head is the British monarch. There is therefore some support from the British establishment for religious observance.

<sup>12</sup> Simmel (1997a. p.5).

<sup>13</sup> Furseth and Repstad (2006. p.23).

1898 and in subsequent writings, as Furseth and Repstad implicitly recognise in their discussion of Simmel<sup>14,15</sup>. They comment that:

Simmel does not find religion able to fulfil the spiritual need of his time ... Religion has become a large bureaucratic system that does not give room for the sincerity, subjectivity, and the expressive need that seems to accompany the new type of modern individuality... He [Simmel] suggests a radical reconstruction of the spiritual life. One must fully grasp the meaning of the idea that religion is not a set of beliefs but an “attitude of the soul” (1997:9<sup>16</sup>) or a perspective, a way of looking at the world<sup>17</sup>.

Whereas in pre-modern times religion had served humanity’s pre-modern spiritual needs, in modernity a bureaucratic religious system does not succeed in accommodating the spiritual and religious needs of the majority of contemporary individuals<sup>18</sup>. The needs that arise from an ‘attitude of the soul’, the source of religiosity, nevertheless remain.

Simmel sees religiosity<sup>19</sup> comprising qualities having ‘a tone that distinguishes them from relationships based on pure egoism, pure influence, or even purely moral forces’<sup>20</sup>. In Simmel’s 1898 essay *A contribution to the sociology of religion*<sup>21,22</sup>, Simmel writes of the ‘multiplicity of psychological motives ascribed to religion’<sup>23</sup>. He notes that they show themselves in connections that are not normally considered

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<sup>14</sup> Furseth and Repstad (2006. p.37)).

<sup>15</sup> It was this text that pointed me to Georg Simmel’s work. Religion as a means of finding meaning in life seemed to be a reason for my interviewees’ interest in The Society in the first place.

<sup>16</sup> Furseth and Repstad refer to Simmel, 1997a. p.9.

<sup>17</sup> Furseth and Repstad (2006. p.39).

<sup>18</sup> Bruce and Voas’s recent article (2023) demonstrate the continuing decline of institutionally-based Christian religious observance in Europe including Britain, and argues that that is also happening in the USA and more widely as a consequence of modernisation, industrial and commercial life.

<sup>19</sup> The Cambridge Dictionary defines religiosity as ‘the quality of being very or too religious, or reminding you of religious behaviour, often in a way that is annoying’. This is very different from Simmel’s definition, but the term has been used in that way.

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/religiosity> (Accessed 27/11/2023).

<sup>20</sup> Simmel (1997a p. 104).

<sup>21</sup> Simmel (1997a. p.101-120).

<sup>22</sup> The references in footnotes 19 and 20 point to Horst Jürgen Helle’s collection of Simmel’s essays on religion referred to in this thesis as (Simmel, 1997a). When referring to Simmel’s works in this research the citation dates refer to Simmel’s texts in translated versions e.g. Simmel, 1997a refers to a text in one of Helle’s 1997 publications.

<sup>23</sup> Simmel (1997a. p.101-120).

religious<sup>24</sup>. Some are 'The relationship of a devoted child to his parent, of an enthusiastic patriot to his country, of the fervent cosmopolite to humanity'<sup>25</sup>. Simmel's examples correlate with religious texts and institutions e.g. the Ten Commandments (Honour thy father and thy mother), national anthems (God Save The King/Queen), and St. Paul's inclusive cosmopolitanism<sup>26</sup>. That tone can also lead to a faith in a transcendent reality whose content constitutes the theology to which individuals, like the interviewees, are attracted and attest. The interviewees sought in various religious attachments before committing to Quakers e.g. in Roman Catholicism, (including the charismatic version and in Teilhard de Chardin's theology), Anglicanism, the United Reform Church, Buddhism, and some non-explicitly religious attachments e.g. Al-Anon, political campaigning and non-violent Marxism, to satisfy what Simmel describes as an 'attitude of the soul'.

There are several more strands to Simmel's argument:

All religiosity contains a peculiar admixture of unselfish surrender and fervent desire, of humility and exaltation, of sensual concreteness and spiritual abstraction ... an inclusion of the subject in a higher order – an order which, at the same time, is felt to be something inward and personal<sup>27</sup>.

The intensity of an individual's religiosity consists of a range of strong feelings and a conscious sense of a higher order in which one may be included. A sense of inner connectedness to that higher order then gives an additional dimension to an individual's interior life and their everyday existence.

Furseth and Repstad note that the term 'spirituality' 'is often used in a wider sense than religion... [as] a search for meaning... relatively free of established religious

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<sup>24</sup> Simmel (1997a. p.102).

<sup>25</sup> Simmel (1997a p. 104).

<sup>26</sup> Galatians 3:2826.: 'There is neither Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female for all of you are one in Christ Jesus'

<sup>27</sup> Simmel (1997a p. 104).

traditions'<sup>28</sup>. They question that distinction because of the implication that 'religion is viewed as a rigid phenomenon devoid of spirit, whereas spirituality is perceived as a phenomenon that provides life and empowerment'. They think that is a false distinction, although some make it<sup>29</sup>. I recognise that the phrase 'I'm spiritual but not religious' is used by those also seeking a higher meaning to life and have, for their own reasons, objections to institutionalised religions e.g. the one in which they have been raised and others they encountered. Those seekers are discussed in Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead's *The spiritual revolution: why religion is giving way to spirituality*<sup>30,31</sup> and are participants in what David Tacey calls *The spirituality revolution*<sup>32</sup>. I would see the distinction as valid when a yearning for meaning is leading to persons seeking an explicitly religious dwelling place to affirm, embody and express their religiosity. Such a place has a form and institutional arrangements within which seeking may be continued even where some meaning has been found, whether in a purpose-built building or private home e.g. their local Quaker Meeting for Worship, or a temple, church or mosque. Quakerism emerged from contemporary seekers' 17th century counterparts who rejected the religious institutions and hierarchies of their day believing they had discovered a direct way of attending to God's voice and experiencing the Holy Spirit outside and inside Meetings for Worship<sup>33</sup>. On the other hand, the interior subjective sources of what Simmel calls

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<sup>28</sup> Furseth and Repstad (2006. p.23).

<sup>29</sup> Heelas and Woodhead (2010).

<sup>30</sup> Heelas and Woodhead (2010).

<sup>31</sup> Tacey regrets that 'God is diminished' and the loss of 'connection to our invisible, life-sustaining roots' (2004. p.222; 226). Heelas and Woodhead argued life-as-religion was giving way to subjective spirituality. Whilst statistical evidence of church decline is incontrovertible 'levels of engagement in the holistic milieu are still very small, just 1.6% of the population' so how much the holistic milieu will grow is questionable (Dandelion, 2019. p.36). I also think Heelas and Woodhead falsely oppose life-as-religion to subjectivities e.g. note the emphasis Quakers place on experiential religion as discussed in Ch.1 of this thesis and other Christians' emphasis on developing personal trust in God e.g. Rowan Williams' *Tokens of trust* (2007). Trust involves subjectivity.

<sup>32</sup> Tacey (2004).

<sup>33</sup> Dandelion (2007. Chapter 1).



religiosity and Heelas and Woodhead call 'subjective life spirituality'<sup>34</sup> and which I understand as spiritual yearnings and a yearning for meaning in life are difficult to distinguish, if not indistinguishable.

The final strand in Simmel's argument is to do with the foundation of religions:

forms of social relations either condense or refine themselves into a system of religious ideas or add new elements to existing ideas. Viewed differently, a specific kind of emotional content that arose in the form of individual interaction transmutes itself in this relationship into a transcendent idea. It becomes a new category in which both forms and contents take on new life, although originating in human relationships<sup>35</sup>.

From social interaction, a process of belief formation is generated and 'a transcendent idea' arises. Emerging from further social interactions, including talk about events and their meaning, understandings about the world and one's place in it, a set of beliefs and religious practices arise e.g. liturgies and prayer. They become expressed and practised when like-minded individuals come together in religious associations. In his later *Essay on religion*, Simmel argues that 'religion does not create religiosity, but religiosity creates religion'<sup>36</sup>. The religions of the world comprise ideas and practices upheld and performed by individuals and maintained by them in associations which become structured as, and governed by, formally constituted institutions which promote their beliefs and values<sup>37</sup>.

An individual's religiosity then may lead to religious commitments and relationship to a particular association or named religious denomination, that is, an institution with its own social-organisational form, or ecclesiology. That form, an individual hopes,

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<sup>34</sup> Heelas and Woodhead (2010. p.75).

<sup>35</sup> Simmel (1997a. p.108).

<sup>36</sup> Simmel (1997a. p. 150).

<sup>37</sup> Disbrey (1994).

will provide for the satisfaction of their religiosity and its confirmation through interacting with others.

Simmel is agnostic about what *initially* triggered in an individual the arousal of 'a specific kind of emotional content' other than 'an attitude of the soul', when that attitude has a pronounced religious tone<sup>38</sup>. From a philosophical perspective he conceives of life, in *Life as transcendence* the first essay of his *The view of life*<sup>39</sup>:

as a continuous stream proceeding through successive generations. Yet the bearers of this process (i.e. not those who have it, but those who are it) are *individuals* (i.e. closed, self-centered, unambiguously distinct beings) ... Here lies an ultimate, metaphysically problematic condition of life: that it is boundless continuity and, at the same time, boundary-determined ego<sup>40,41</sup>.

A theist would embrace Simmel's 1909 statement, that 'the will of God - is constantly at work to preserve our existence', a statement unable to be 'disproved' so that there is more-life<sup>42</sup>. The continuous stream in which we participate until we die originates from a transcendent creator, not only a metaphysical concept that humans may grasp. To God's will at work, a Christian might add God's love at work, as expressed in the life of Jesus, the Christ and in the movement of the Holy Spirit available to all who open themselves to it.

Simmel is careful in defining 'Religion' as a form, in which life is expressed, to be distinguished from its origins in 'the human soul'. As Ivan Varga notes, 'While Simmel considered religiosity as a subjective "irreducible and fundamental disposition" of human beings, he knew that religions institutionalise it'<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Vandenberghe (2010. p.5-32). Frédéric Vandenberghe discusses immanence and transcendence in Simmel's sociology of religion. Vandenberghe is an extremely sympathetic scholar of Simmel.

<sup>39</sup> Simmel (*Lebensanschauung*, originally published in 1918).

<sup>40</sup> Parentheses and italics in the cited text.

<sup>41</sup> Simmel (2010. p.9).

<sup>42</sup> Simmel (1997a. p.4).

<sup>43</sup> Varga (2007. p.150).

Religion as a form is an abstraction. A person's religiosity may become 'concretised' in the manifestation of a particular religion and spiritual practices. Spiritual practices as such may be common to many religious institutions (e.g. contemplative prayer, hymn singing, scripture reading in Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam). A person may seek a religion to satisfy their religiosity but may not rest until they find a social institution that promotes a religion or spiritual practice in a way to which they feel able to commit emotionally, intellectually, socially and probably financially. As a social form a religion offers an individual and communities an ongoing interpretative framework for making sense of, and practicing a way of being in, the world. That is in contrast to a faith invested in one's own powers, the powers of one's own family, tribe, political party or legal entity such as a nation state. Simmel recognised that the same interior sources of religiosity may be invested also or alternatively in those social forms.

I suggest, following Simmel, but from a critical realist perspective, that the underlying mechanism and cause of the interviewees', and all religious seeking, is an inner prompting in human beings to understand the world because of the necessity of finding one's place in it. That leads some into seeking a religious form in which that prompting may be expressed and satisfied. The intensity of their religiosity and their predisposition to seek meaning for their lives and express practical devotion to that meaning may vary at different times in response to personal histories, events and circumstances. As an attribute of all individual human beings rather than an attribute of religion, religions or religious denominations, it is one whose development will be affected by the society in which an individual is embedded. As José Casanova argues, following Talal Asad, European secularism is a dominant ideology and

generalized world view<sup>44</sup> that is skeptical about, if not hostile to a religious frame for understanding the world. Secularism's impact on the expression of individuals' religiosity is therefore culturally inhibiting but unpredictably so with respect to particular individuals.

Simmel anticipated the interviewees' social and cultural backgrounds but I qualify Simmel's assertion that mysticism is 'the last refuge for religious individuals who cannot free themselves from all transcendental forms'. It is difficult to argue that all individuals who find contemplating an interior or exterior image of a transcendental form of Buddha, Krishna or Christ, are intellectually stalled because of their contemplation of a transcendental form. It is the case, however, that traditional religious beliefs and belief in the Bible as a historical and factual record have been undermined by the claims of science, the theory of evolution, much humanities and social science scholarship and biblical criticism. That partly explains the decline in people's attachment to the main religious institutions since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and is part of the argument advanced by Steve Bruce explaining secularization<sup>45</sup>. Bruce predicts a continuing decline of religion as a result of 'modernity' and such factors as 'the replacement of a specifically religious consciousness ... by an empirical, rational, instrumental orientation'<sup>46</sup>. An empirical orientation values knowledge that arises from the measurement of observable phenomena and which can be put to use; it devalues religious propositions not 'scientifically' supported. He echoes Simmel's explanation for the decline of religion.

Simmel himself disagrees, however, that religion is *necessarily* undermined by empirical science. He argues that there are categorically different ways of perceiving

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<sup>44</sup> Casanova (2003. p.23).

<sup>45</sup> Bruce (2011).

<sup>46</sup> Bruce (2011. p.2).

the world and to make any sense of the world a frame for viewing and understanding the world is necessary. Empirical science is just one way. Olli Pyyhtinen, a contemporary Simmel scholar, notes that:

Simmel regards different cultural forms such as science, art, religion, and economy as not competing with, let alone being capable of refuting, one another. Rather, each provides one perspective to reality that is not annullable or correctable from the viewpoint of any other form<sup>47</sup>.

Quakers do not require a belief in the Bible as a historical and factual record. They have, historically (as described in Chapter 1) believed that the Spirit that inspired the Scriptures is the Spirit that may inspire all human beings<sup>48</sup>. Simmel's view is that through 'imperceptible gradations' there is a realisation in human beings of an objective God<sup>49,50</sup> whose essential attribute is held to be love:

... ultimately and essentially God is "love itself;" he is the ultimate object of faith and longing, of hope and dependence; ... these passions, objectless from the earthly point of view, radiate into the infinite, we call their object – and the absolute toward which they radiate – "God"... even though 'the question of the existence of this object and its believed attributes remains indeterminate'<sup>51</sup>.

Simmel acknowledges the indeterminacy of the existence of God and God's attributes. There is no indeterminacy about the fact of human passions. They 'radiate into the infinite, we call their object', and towards an object called "God" 'whose essential attribute is held to be love'. God's own existence and attributes cannot be

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<sup>47</sup> Pyyhtinen (2010. p.46).

<sup>48</sup> Ch.1 p.

<sup>49</sup> Simmel (2015. p.54).

<sup>50</sup> Georg Simmel's *View of life* republished in 2015, consists of four essays first published in 1918,. They are his final work. Donald Levine and Daniel Silver in their introduction to them write that in these essays he presents a coherent vision of the world. It covers 'a set of core issues that beat like a pulse through his corpus' (2015.p.ix). These issues are the 'genesis, structure, and transcendence of social and cultural forms, together with the nature of authentic individuality' (2015. p.x). Levine and Silver then comment 'Postmodernists and critical theorists intent on preserving Simmel's image as an impressionistic, unsystematic essayist wandering through the boulevards of science have naturally been averse to the notion that one coherent vision of the world unifies Simmel's work as a whole' (2015. p.x). That is a view supported by Elizabeth Goodstein (2017), Gregor Fitzi (2019) and others to whom Fitzi refers. Fitzi is the editor of *Simmel studies*.

<sup>51</sup> Simmel (2015, p.54-55).

determined by the rules and methods of scientific measurement. God's existence is a matter of faith as is a belief that empirical science is a sufficient way for making sense of being human. For those who have faith in, and who claim experience of, a transcendent Divine, God is not a projection of a fantasy, but immanent in the reality of the physical world of all human beings.

Ann Taves's phrase 'Experiences deemed religious'<sup>52,53</sup> is helpful here. 'Deeming' is the result of defining an experience as religious. Taves<sup>54</sup> notes that memory, reflection and one's own personal and cultural history all play a part in the process of recollecting, interpreting and re-interpreting the meaning of what one has experienced. There is no necessary finality to the meaning of what one has experienced. In another article, '*Experience as event*'<sup>55</sup>, Ann Taves and Egil Esprem focus on a 'segment' of experiencing as constituting a 'religious experience'. It is an abstraction from the continuous flow of human experiencing with a beginning and end to be analysed and reflected upon<sup>56</sup>. The event may be defined as a religious or spiritual experience as a person chooses. They then distinguish religious experiences according to whether they were the result of intended or unintended events, which may be internally generated or externally generated<sup>57</sup>. An intended event would include participation in a religious activity which may or may not result in a participant conceptualising that to be a religious experience. Andrew in his

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<sup>52</sup> Taves (2009. p.22)

<sup>53</sup> Ann Taves approaches religious experience within the framework of Religious Studies and the psychology of religion. She does not seem to be concerned with the ontological status of transcendence but with how experience is formed using naturalistic methodologies (2009.p.xiv). Archer approaches transcendence as a critical realist and sociologist who is concerned with the ontological status of transcendence and the implication of that status for social theory and the 'human agency – social structure' relationship.

<sup>54</sup> Taves (2009 p.88).

<sup>55</sup> Taves and Esprem (2017).

<sup>56</sup> Taves and Esprem (2017).

<sup>57</sup> Taves and Esprem (2017. p.8; see also p.39 for a classification of event types).

interview for this research said he did not have religious experiences but did reflect on the life of Jesus. He also said he found himself on his feet ministering in Meeting. Going to Meeting is intended, thinking religious thoughts may be intentional or unintentional, but finding oneself ministering is unintended. Shirley defined herself as a non-theist but noted that in Meeting for Worship there was often a distinct segment of heightened awareness of a feeling she valued as special. Unintended events include events outside an explicitly religious setting such as Phillip's intense mystical experience in his car and Andrea's Near Death Experience in her home. In this research engaging in a religious practice as well as heightened spiritual or religious feelings, intended or unintended, are considered religious experiences.

Varga writes of 'the important distinction' Simmel makes between faith and belief:

The existence of God can be believed as plausible, like believing in the atomic structure of matter'. Faith, however, "implies a spiritual relationship to Him, an emotional dedication, an orientation of life toward Him"<sup>58,59</sup>

This distinction helps to explain how an affective act of faith in the reality of God has consequences for the person who makes it. It has satisfied an intuition of, and a longing for, a connection to a higher order, a transcendent source for the orientation of one's life. An individual's purely cognitive beliefs, on the other hand, are always revisable or replaceable. Whereas an apprehended transcendent Divine is understood as an eternal reality, an individual knows that their days are numbered. Their connections with other human beings are subject to temporality.

Of the twelve interviewees, even those who did not identify as Christian, spoke of their experience of God, Christ or a Higher Power or their need of Quaker worship, the experience of which altered the routines of their lives. A challenge to The

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<sup>58</sup> Simmel (1995. p.166).

<sup>59</sup> Varga (2007. p.153).

Society's cohesion arises however, in social interactions in Quaker worship from the copresence of members, as distinct from attenders, who deny the reality of a transcendent Divinity that interacts with humanity. The argument that spiritual and religious experiences are **only** preferred interpretations of what has been experienced, I suggest, undermines the theological underpinning of the beliefs of *bona fide* Quakers<sup>60</sup> and the religious foundation of The Society itself.

### **Empirical support for Simmel's view of religion: Attachment theory**

Simmel died before empirically based work gave rise to 'attachment theory'. That points to infants, and therefore human beings, possessing:

an innate psychobiological system ... which motivates them to seek proximity to supportive others (attachment figures) as a means of protecting themselves from physical and psychological threats while promoting affect regulation, greater well-being, and increasing self-efficacy<sup>61</sup>).

The 'innate psychobiological system' is an unwilled given, identified through observation, analysis and interpretation. Psychobiological theory explains how human beings are programmed to respond to that need in their babies organismically drawn to an attachment hopeful of giving or receiving love and comfort. Granqvist et al. argue that attachment to religion and to God function like other psychological attachments. 'Protestant Christianity' [of which Pentecostalism is and Quakerism, at least originally and traditionally are examples] 'have at their core a belief in a personal God with whom adherents have some kind of personal, interactive relationship'; and central to that is "love"<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> i.e. those who have agreed with the fundamental elements of being a Quaker as presented in *QF&P* 11.01.

<sup>61</sup> Granqvist, P., Mikulincer, M. and Shaver, P.R. (2020. p.175). This is a review article relating religion to attachment theory.

<sup>62</sup> Granqvist, Mikulincer and Shaver (2020. p.177).



Agape is a particular kind of love to do with self-giving, letting-be and non-possessive love<sup>63</sup>. Agapic capacity is said by Christians to have been embodied in the singular example of the historical Jesus, by whose Spirit many human beings claimed to have been touched<sup>64 65</sup>.

It is a matter of choice in meaning-making whether an adult conceptualises their experiencing of love as arising in humanity from the actions of a Divine Creator who determined the complex nature of human beings and the living world. They may choose to believe that human love is only a psychobiological accident of non-determined evolutionary processes.

The family and society into which one is born and grows influences through talk and the social interactions it provides, and through educational and religious opportunities they make use of, how a person interprets their experiencing of the world. Association with others confirms or disconfirms a person's faith and value system. Social interactions may lead to the constitution of a spiritual and/or religious identity, even in the face of society's secularisation. Scientific endeavours and knowledge and religious engagements and convictions are not incompatible e.g. as in modern times the Quaker astrophysicists Arthur Eddington and Jocelyn Burnell, the Quaker crystallographer Kathleen Lonsdale, and the Quaker geologist and archaeologist Arthur Raistrick exemplify<sup>66</sup>, and Simmel asserted.

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<sup>63</sup> Macquarie (1966. p.278).

<sup>64</sup> Macquarie (1966. p.311).

<sup>65</sup> Other kinds of love have been identified e.g. erotic, friendship, family as discussed by C.S. Lewis in *The four loves*. See <https://www.cslewis.com/four-types-of-love/> Accessed 30/11/2023.

<sup>66</sup> Cantor (2013). For Arthur Raistrick See entry under Arthur Raistrick in [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur\\_Raistrick](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Raistrick) Accessed 08/04/2024

## Social belonging and commitment to membership

As we saw in Chapter 3, a Quaker Meeting's non-doctrinal theology, the Meeting for Worship itself, a sense of community and social activism attracted the interviewees at their first Meetings. They were the necessary conditions to bring about involvement with The Society. They were not sufficient to bring about membership. 4 of the 12 interviewees waited 14+ years before applying for membership. Complex feelings around social belonging, attachments and acceptance were involved.

To explain the complexity of the concept 'social belonging', Gabriele Pollini synthesised the work of a number of sociologists, including Simmel, in her essay on 'Social belonging'<sup>67</sup>. She defined 'social belonging' as referring 'to the state in which an individual, by assuming a role, is characterised by inclusion in the social collectivity'<sup>68</sup>. In relation to Quakers that would begin formally when an attender agrees to be listed. That may then be followed by membership, which signals a readiness to be fully included and to contribute to the running of the Meeting.

Pollini describes a four-stage sequence of increasing social belonging: 'attachment, loyalty, solidarity, and a sense of affinity or "we-feeling"<sup>69</sup>. She discusses attachment, drawing on psychoanalytic concepts, as 'a form of investment' and as 'emotional energy directed at a social object'<sup>70</sup>. 'Sacred attachment' is one form of attachment identified by Edward A. Shils, to which Pollini refers as:

grounded in beliefs and therefore also in notions of truth, justice, goodness, and beauty. It mainly but not exclusively includes cultural conformity and a consensus on beliefs, although it gives rise to a social community<sup>71</sup>.

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<sup>67</sup> Pollini (2001).

<sup>68</sup> Pollini (2001).

<sup>69</sup> Pollini (2001).

<sup>70</sup> Pollini (2001).

<sup>71</sup> Pollini (2001).

That definition resonates with the concerns of Quakers, bearing in mind that cultural conformity to the value of theological diversity is a 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century Quaker orthodoxy<sup>72</sup>: ‘Our diversity invites us to speak what we know to be true in our lives and learn from others’<sup>73</sup>. As an attachment continues so does the emotional energy invested, in expectation of ‘continuing gratification’<sup>74</sup>. The investment of emotional capital in ‘the social object’ which is ‘the Meeting’ increases. A person hopes for a gain but risks a loss of ‘spiritual and social optimism’ should their effort in associating fail<sup>75</sup>. That risk is greater for some. A feature of the 14+ year group was their experience of difficult or broken attachments in their lives. Members of this group blamed God for the loss of parents to illness, spoke of fraught relationships with their mothers, experienced broken relationships with partners, and three of the four had experienced geographical dislocations. They differed from the 91% of attenders who cease attending completely<sup>76</sup>. Loyalty had developed with shared commitments to Quaker Testimonies and/or shared participation in Meetings for Worship. As a result, ‘the social object of attachment’, Quakerism, became ‘the object of loyalty as well’<sup>77</sup>. Pollini, following Talcott Parsons, distinguished solidarity from loyalty, from which it developed. Solidarity is described as:

an institutionalized obligation such that whether the actor ‘feels like it’ or not, he is obligated to act in certain ways and risks the application of negative sanctions if he does not’<sup>78</sup>.

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<sup>72</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.121) Dandelion writes of ‘the paradoxical collective affirmation of belief in not having creeds’.

<sup>73</sup> *QF&P* (2013. 1.01).

<sup>74</sup> Pollini (2001).

<sup>75</sup> Pollini (2001).

<sup>76</sup> Chadkirk (2014. p.216)

<sup>77</sup> Pollini (2001).

<sup>78</sup> Pollini [quoting Parsons] (2001).

Solidarity is difficult to compel in a voluntary religious organisation. There is, however, an expectation that membership 'is an affirmation of what the meeting stands for and of your willingness to contribute to its life'<sup>79</sup>. Solidarity seems to have developed in all 12 interviewees speedily or after years of elapsed time.

*Quaker faith & practice*, writes of membership, in terms of expectations and commitments rather than solidarity, obligations and sanctions<sup>80</sup>. The Quaker emphasis is on ways 'that are right for the individual' and 'commitment appropriate to a member's means'<sup>81</sup>. Pollini, quoting Simmel, asserts that 'The modern form of belonging displays voluntary and autonomous, rather than coercive and heteronomous, belonging to a social circle or circles'<sup>82</sup>. That view reflects the interviewees' relationship to The Society.

The meaning of participation for a listed attender or member of The Society is also much more than 'an institutionalized obligation' ... 'of the role-expectation'<sup>83</sup>. It follows from a 'sacred attachment' but Quaker service will be greater or lesser during a person's life course. A young Quaker challenged by having to make their way in the world is in a different position to offer service from a Quaker retiree with a good pension and as much time for service as might be requested. Their sacred attachment, however, may be as strong as any other Quaker's. Matthew's experience of being asked to join the oversight team when still a young student was entirely positive. He appreciated being affirmed and trusted by his Meeting and his acceptance of the role strengthened his bond to Friends. Being nominated by others to play a role in The Society's organization is one of the ways in which bonds may be

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<sup>79</sup> *QF&P* 11.01

<sup>80</sup> *QF&P* 11.01

<sup>81</sup> *QF&P* 11.01.

<sup>82</sup> Pollini (2001).

<sup>83</sup> Pollini [quoting Parsons](2001).

strengthened and exemplifies how being a Quaker and asked to give service makes a difference to a person's life, faith and practice.

The final component of social belonging is the subjective sense an individual has as being part of the group which other group members confirm, the "we-feeling"<sup>84</sup>. That feeling also functions to maintain the three other components in the system of social belonging when they are under threat. Membership cannot command a 'we-feeling' but membership, and the ideology or theology it proclaims, can help carry an individual through the ups and downs of social relationships. Linda, Rosemary and Shirley, individuals taking more than 14 years to decide on membership, all described making their association with Quakers formal, 'like marriage'. Linda and Rosemary grew into a Quaker identity having had negative as well as positive experiences of Quaker Meetings and at a time of change in their lives. Shirley became a member only after encouragement and reassurance her non-theism would be no bar to her membership. Susan, exceptionally, self-identified as a Quaker almost from the beginning of her self-directed association with Friends aged 12, even though she did not apply for membership for 38 years. That may be explained by her sense of difference, not least her awareness of not being brought up as Christian. It was her Christian conversion experience that triggered her application. What Pollini does not offer is a theory of disassociation from the group, which the next Chapter of this thesis discusses. She does not consider other mechanisms that might explain both increasing attachment and eventual detachment from a group.

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<sup>84</sup> Pollini (2001).

Psychologically oriented accounts of underlying mechanisms complement the sociological to explain association and disassociation from a group. R.D. Laing, a psychiatrist and existentially-oriented psychotherapist, created a psychologically oriented theory derived from the work of Martin Buber, a philosopher and theologian<sup>85</sup>. This theory uses the concepts of 'confirmation' and 'disconfirmation' which directly affect a person's wellbeing. A person associating with a group who feels that their contribution and their personhood is confirmed by others in the group is more likely to remain in the group. A person more fearful of rejection will be more sensitive to the reactions of others. How an individual manages their feelings of confirmation or disconfirmation in their social interactions is an underlying mechanism that causes a person to remain or leave a freely chosen group.

Archer's reflexive theory is discussed in Chapter 2<sup>86</sup>. It implies that through their reflexive practices an individual can manage to achieve a *modus vivendi* for interacting with others in a freely chosen group (as distinct from the family into which one is born). A theory based on concepts from Simmel will be presented in Chapter 5 where Dandelion's analysis of dissociation from the group is discussed.

### **Social belonging: Conclusion**

Positive experiences of their local Meetings link the early 3-year joiners. The childhood experience of two of the three Quakers interviewed, perhaps surprisingly, did not lead to them proactively applying for membership: encouragement from others did. The third applied only after nearly forty years involvement, in crisis, and

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<sup>85</sup> Laing (1971. p.98) Laing suggests it is disconfirmation and the inability to detach from toxic relationships that underlies what is called schizophrenia. He quotes Martin Buber's papers published in *Psychiatry*. Buber was a Jewish philosopher of relationships, the author of *I and thou* and *Between man and man*. Where a person experiences disconfirmation in a group they believe they cannot leave, for whatever reason, illness is likely to follow.

<sup>86</sup> See the model presented in Chapter 2. A fractured reflexive will have difficulty in making a decision to join or leave a group.

encouraged by Quangelican friends. It was their reparative experiences of positive supportive social interactions in specific Local Meetings that overcame each of the 14+ year individuals' reluctance to apply for membership.

I suggest that the underlying mechanism which influences joining a group is the resolution of tensions between a need to be confirmed and valued by a group to which an individual has felt drawn and of good reputation and the fear of rejection by that group such that one's sense of self-worth becomes confirmed or disconfirmed<sup>87</sup>. Those tensions are stronger or weaker in individuals according to their life experiences.

### **Measuring religiosity and religion**

From the discussion on social belonging and joining a Quaker community this thesis turns to what surveys have shown about the community of the Religious Society of Friends. It will then discuss the difficulties statistical surveys administered by questionnaire have in representing the state of religion in a community.

### **The British Quaker Survey of 2013<sup>88</sup>.**

The British Quaker Survey of 2013 followed two previous Quaker surveys of 1990 and 2003 all administered or coordinated by Pink Dandelion.

The aims of the 2013 survey were directed at characterising British Quakerism through evidence of the beliefs of those associating with Quakers whether members or attenders. It had 4 aims:

To summarise the dominant beliefs and characteristics of British Quakers (Aim 1); to investigate the characteristics of those taking on clerking responsibilities

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<sup>87</sup> Laing (1971).

<sup>88</sup> Hampton (2014); Dandelion (2014).

(Aim 2)<sup>89</sup>; to do identify patterns of religious beliefs and practises among British Quakers (Aim 3); and to make temporal comparisons over three national surveys of British Quakers spanning 25 years (Aim 4). A questionnaire was developed and administered by local meetings. 649 responses were obtained<sup>90</sup>.

The Survey was piloted with options anticipating possible answers to be ticked or ranked in a Likert-type scale. Boxed but limited space was available for respondents to make additional comments. Care was taken to confirm, statistically, as representative of The Society, the validity of the distributed sample and questionnaire returns<sup>91</sup>.

Of the 649 respondents, 70% identified as members and 29% as attenders. 'The analysis revealed three distinct underlying classes'<sup>92</sup>: 'Traditional Quakers with Christian attitudes' (32%), 'Non-Theist Quakers' with an apparent lack of belief in God (18%)' and the majority group of 'Liberal Quakers' with less pronounced Christian beliefs (50%)<sup>93</sup>. 25 of the 454 respondents (nearly 6%) who were members did not identify themselves as Quakers for reasons not specified in the survey reports. 28/230 respondents identifying as non-theists<sup>94</sup> have also served as clerks of business meetings which, normatively<sup>95</sup>, have the purpose of seeking the will of God in the conduct of Quaker business.

The survey revealed a continuing decline since 1990 of participants professing traditional Christian beliefs. Dandelion had concluded, after the first 1990 survey, that the 'British Quaker Group' had become post-Christian because the majority of

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<sup>89</sup> Clerkship is also discussed in Chapter 6 where the qualities required are related to Archer's reflexive theory.

<sup>90</sup> Hampton (2014. p.7). The structure of the questionnaire influenced the construction of the interview schedule for this thesis (see Chapters 2 for the schedule).

<sup>91</sup> Hampton (2014. p.12-14); Dandelion (2014. p.137).

<sup>92</sup> Hampton (2014. p.7). The findings about Clerkship are considered in Chapter 7.

<sup>93</sup> Hampton (2014. p.8).

<sup>94</sup> Hampton (2014. p.32)

<sup>95</sup> QFP 3.02, 3.13



Friends did not attest to traditional Christian beliefs; they used a different framework in expressing their faith<sup>96</sup>. That trend seems confirmed. But is the description 'post-Christian' warranted?

Katherine Mellor challenged Dandelion's argument that The Society had become Post-Christian<sup>97</sup>. Mellor's questions about belief in God and whether one considered oneself Christian were qualified by permission 'to use your own definition'<sup>98</sup>. The British Quaker Surveys made no such qualification. They listed statements of traditional Christian beliefs to be ticked. Responses to Mellor's questionnaire led to her concluding that 'Fewer than 5% of those who took part in the [i.e. her] survey [863 persons compared with the 649 respondents of the 2013 Quaker survey] are clearly not Christian'. Mellor 'suggests that the majority of British Friends still considers Quakers to be Christian'<sup>99</sup>.

Both surveys invited supplementary comments, some explaining why no answer at all could be ticked. Dandelion observes that the question which asked, 'Do you believe in God?' offered three responses, 'Yes', 'No', and 'Not Sure.' He thought respondents may be cautious in answering because :

they may ask what those conducting the survey imagine by 'God' and would their response be understood? Secondly, even if they think that is the case, how will those reading the results understand what is meant by a 'Yes' or a 'No'<sup>100</sup>.

Respondents fear being misunderstood yet want to cooperate by responding. Mellor contends that the importance of truthfulness inhibits an unqualified assertion of

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<sup>96</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.120).

<sup>97</sup> Mellor (2009. p.1).

<sup>98</sup> Mellor (2009. Appendix 1).

<sup>99</sup> Mellor (2008. p.1).

<sup>100</sup> Dandelion (2014. p.138).

Christianity by individual Friends<sup>101</sup>. Quakers object to credal statements as criteria for their being Christian<sup>102</sup>.

Many who joined Friends as adults will have been dissatisfied with credal-based denominations<sup>103</sup> and their governance and ecclesiology. That seemed to be the case with the theists and non-theist interviewees in my research. The self-identifying Christians were more explicitly positive about traditional Quaker governance in the few comments about governance that were made. Quakers in Britain have never conformed to traditional Christian theologies with a creed to which all participants should subscribe. 17<sup>th</sup> century Quakers, who self-identified as Christian, were often considered less than Christian and persecuted for their non-conformity to the established version of Christianity<sup>104</sup>. If we combined the 2013 Quaker survey's traditionalists and Liberal Quakers with less pronounced Christian beliefs together, 82% of those surveyed could be said to be more or less Christian in their avowed beliefs.

A second observation is that Quaker surveys have not related respondents identifying as Christian with the length of time a person had been engaged with Quakers nor with their regularity as a Sunday worshipper. Four of the eight interviewees in my research who self-identified as Christian said they had become 'more' Christian after becoming members. Furthermore, there was no analysis as to how the responses of attenders, and the length of time they had been attending, affected the breakdown into the three classes e.g. members might be more explicitly Christian than attenders and attenders might more likely identify as non-theist. If it

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<sup>101</sup> Their understanding of what is Christian may be based on the Christian creeds they encountered in denominations to which they had once associated.

<sup>102</sup> Mellor (2010. p.75); Dandelion (2019. p.121).

<sup>103</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.120).

<sup>104</sup> Allen (2013. p.30).

were found on a large sample that members become more Christian the longer they associate with Quakers, then de-emphasising the Society's Christian character by describing it as post-Christian would need amending.

Dandelion discusses reasons for British Quaker eschewing credal statements:

'Religious experience is beyond linguistic codification and definition' and 'Credal statements demean, in their limited linguistic form, the depth of religious

experience<sup>105,106</sup>. Dandelion's observations underline the difficulty in using

questionnaires when a person's Quaker identity is hard to encapsulate in a non-discursive form. As with some of my interviewees, they find it difficult to assert a

belief in the Virgin birth, the Resurrection or Jesus as the Son of God. Nevertheless

they have a religious understanding of how the world might or ought to be. Biblical

stories with which they are acquainted resonate unpredictably in the consciousness

as they did with the avowedly non-theist interviewee<sup>107</sup> e.g. Thomas who doubted

Jesus' resurrection until he tested the evidence<sup>108</sup>. As we have seen, four facts or

trends stood out in the interviews I conducted which did not appear in the Quaker

surveys:

1. the extent of everyone's previous involvements with religion.
2. the increasing adherence to Christianity of most interviewees after associating with Friends<sup>109</sup>.
3. a tension between some of those who emphasised faith and spirituality and some of those who emphasised activism.
4. a tension between believers in a Divinity and non-theists.

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<sup>105</sup> Dandelion (2019, p.121).

<sup>106</sup> In addition to the Limitations of Language, four other sets of reasons were given under the headings: The Limitations of God's Word, The Limitations of Quakerism, The Exclusive Nature of Credal Statements and The Practical Points (Dandelion 2019, p.121)

<sup>107</sup> Shirley I.365-366

<sup>108</sup> John 20: 24-29.

<sup>109</sup> Susan, Trevor, Gillian, Caroline, Matthew and Andrew.

The tension between diverse theological commitments and social activism appeared in my interviews and is observed in the literature<sup>110</sup>. Thomas C. Kennedy overstates the case, however, when he remarks on the difference between those who ‘envision Quakerism as an agency for social change or a forum for radical idealism rather than a community of faithful Christians’<sup>111,112</sup>. Faithful Quakers may also be activist pacifists and socialists<sup>113</sup>, and/or Christian members of The Socialist Quaker Society<sup>114,115</sup>.

It may be better to describe The Society not as post-Christian but as one with a Christian tradition open to all who wish to share a belief in a transcendent God of love, peace and justice whose will Quakers try to discern. ‘Post-Christian’ may be a misleading qualifier of The Society’s mainstream and its culture and mission, though not of a significant number of its members.

### **A note on the difficulties of measuring religiosity and religion**

There is an extensive literature on religious surveys and attempts to measure and define religiosity and religious observance. Much of this literature is in support or criticism of secularisation theory.

Grace Davie identifies two categories of variables to be observed in measuring ‘religiousness’ in the European Values Study<sup>116</sup>. There are those ‘concerned with

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<sup>110</sup> E.g. Gillian and Rosemary’s comments. The argument of Martin Davie (1997) is discussed later in this chapter. See also the arguments and replies of the Quakers Derek Guiton (2015, 2017), a Christian, and David Boulton (2016), a non-theist. See Randazzo (2018) for a discussion on Quakers and non-theism.

<sup>111</sup> Thomas Kennedy traced changes before and after the first World War to Quaker theology and social attitudes. He seems disappointed that ‘Not only were Friends more ready to associate with unbelievers but a fair number of social and political militants, some of them without any attachment to Christianity, were drawn to Quakerism’ (2001. p.426.)

<sup>112</sup> Kennedy (2001. p.427).

<sup>113</sup> E.g. Caroline, and Andrew

<sup>114</sup> founded in 1898, now the Quaker Socialist Society <https://quakersocialists.org.uk/> Accessed 9/06/2021).

<sup>115</sup> Kennedy (2001. p.278).

<sup>116</sup> Davie (2015. p.20).

feelings, experience and the more numinous religious beliefs' and 'those which measure religious orthodoxy, ritual participation and institutional attachment'. Davie uses the term 'religiousness' for both categories. The first category are primarily subjectively experienced phenomena. Davie believes they are more likely to persist but might not be measured or measurable. The second category contains phenomena easier to measure as they have overtly measurable characteristics. Davie notes that although orthodox belief and church attendance are in measurable decline 'Between half and two-thirds of British people assent to 'belief in God' [and] 'touch base with the institutional churches at some point in their lives'. This observation contributed to Davie coining the concepts of 'believing but not belonging' and 'vicarious religion'. People may believe in God without belonging to religious institutions. Vicarious religion arises because a majority rely on an active minority to perform religion at rites of passage events e.g. births, marriages and deaths, where people bring their attention to important occasions in their personal lives. Davie also observes that vicarious religion also provides a focus for public grief, for example, at the death of Princess Diana. The extent of secularisation is, therefore, Davie claims, overestimated because the prevalence of faith is underestimated because under-measured <sup>117</sup>.

In comparing Davie's concept of religiousness and Simmel's religiosity, Simmel's concept of religiosity starts with individuals' subjectivities, especially 'awe' and 'love' as constituents of religiosity but not 'the more numinous religious beliefs' which are cognitive reflections on what has been experienced. Simmel asserts that that religiosity remains as an attribute of human being irrespective of their measurability. He recognised that traditional expressions of religious belief and traditional religious

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<sup>117</sup> Davie (2015).

forms and institutions were no longer meeting many people's needs to express their religiosity. They were expressed, if at all, in other ways e.g. in the love of the nation<sup>118</sup>.

Religiosity scales have been created to measure religion and religious belief in society. They bring empirical data to the secularisation debate. Stefan and Odilo Huber created a 'Centrality of Religiosity Scale' [CRS] to measure how big a part religion played in a person's life. It consists of five dimensions related to the expression of feelings and thoughts deemed religious: public practice, private practice, religious experience, ideology and intellectual. From a psychological perspective, the five core-dimensions can be seen as channels or modes in which personal religious constructs are shaped and activated. The activation of religious constructs in personality can be regarded as a valid measure of the degree of religiosity 'within' an individual. The integrated measure derived from applying the CRS offers a measure suitable also for interreligious studies i.e. which adherents of religions or denominations rate as more intensely religious. The CRS has been applied world-wide. It does not, however, explain why individual subjectivities of a particular tone, Simmel's characterisation of religiosity, come to be expressed in a religious form as distinct from another secular form e.g. non-religious or political. This criticism can be levelled at other instruments that assume spirituality or religiosity is expressed in overtly spiritual or religious forms which can be measured.

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<sup>118</sup> Robert Bellah wrote at the beginning of a reprint of his essay *Civil religion in America* 'I am convinced that every nation and every people come to some form or [sic. i.e. of] religious self-understanding whether the critics like it or not.' (Bellah. *Biblical Religion and Civil Religion in America* [http://hrr.hartsem.edu/Bellah/articles\\_5.htm](http://hrr.hartsem.edu/Bellah/articles_5.htm). Accessed 09/04/2024). As discussed above in this chapter Simmel had noted that one form of the expression of religiosity was of the relationship of 'the enthusiastic patriot to his country Simmel' (1997a p. 104).

The limitations of religious surveys within the sociology of religion framework have been highlighted by Erika Willander<sup>119</sup>. Willander has been influenced by Simmel's analysis of religiosity and religion<sup>120</sup> and is critical of the European Values Study<sup>121</sup>. The title and subtitle of her thesis are significant: *What Counts as Religion in Sociology? The Problem of Religiosity in Sociological Methodology*<sup>122</sup>. Measuring overt individual behaviour was seen by some sociologists as essential for assessing the right amount of "religion" in different parts of the world<sup>123</sup>. She is critical of these attempts. She also argues that attempts to measure 'spirituality' as Paul Heelas and Linda Whitehead did in Kendal<sup>124</sup>, are subject to the same kind of critique. What might be an indexed measure of 'spirituality' depends on assumptions in the researchers' definition of spirituality<sup>125</sup>.

As a complementary way to explore religious attitudes, Willander's own research undertook a statistical analysis of the language individuals used in their blogs as a basis to characterize individuals' involvement with religion and spirituality<sup>126</sup>. She identified themes through computer-based statistically derived word associations<sup>127</sup>.

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<sup>119</sup> The American sociologist of religion Robert Wuthnow (2015) has also published a well-received text on the problems of measuring religion. I have focused on Willander as she is one of those who has acknowledged the influence of Simmel's sociology of religion as well as offering an innovative technique for measuring religion.

<sup>120</sup> Willander (2014).

<sup>121</sup> 'Almost 50 years has passed since Glock and Stark operationalized 'Religion in Dimensions', and during this time their operationalization and the research practice it represents has been widely used. Examples of usage are the European survey study EVS (European Values Study) and the global survey study WVS (World Values Survey). The EVS and the WVS have used the same questions on religion ever since the first data-collection wave took place' (Willander, 2014. p.48).

<sup>122</sup> Willander (2014).

<sup>123</sup> Willander (2014. p.214).

<sup>124</sup> Heelas and Whitehead (2010).

<sup>125</sup> Willander (2014. p.214).

<sup>126</sup> Willander (2014. Ch.6.).

<sup>127</sup> As a different procedure from IPA's human-based semantic analysis that suggests a future research project: Human theme identification in religious texts as compared with computer-based statistical techniques.

Willander quotes extensively from Simmel's *Contribution to the Sociology of Religion*. She points out that

in line with Laermans' 2006<sup>128</sup> observation, Simmel's distinction between religion and religiosity has not been widely used in the sociology of religion ... and ... would differ from the current conventions in sociology of religion<sup>129</sup>.

Willander suggests that in Sweden 'there is as much 'religiosity' now as there ever was; it is only its relation to formal religion which might have changed'<sup>130</sup>. Where public religion is 'lacking the support or understanding of people' 'religion would almost be a hollow institution'<sup>131</sup>. That would seem to describe the contemporary situation at least in Sweden and Britain for the majority population. It is performed by many to satisfy a human need for the marking of important events. Faith as such is not required. Willander shows in her analysis of blogs that: 'The 'religion of past times' (e.g. Lutheran Christianity in Sweden) was perceived to be involuntary and paternalistic by the people interviewed'<sup>132</sup>. Willander's bloggers' wished to dissociate from what they understood to be that kind of conventional Christianity. Their comments show similarity to the interviewees' responses in my research<sup>133</sup>. Willander's conclusion from her research was that the new Swedish mainstream appeared to be expressing beliefs in "some sort of spirit or life force"<sup>134</sup>.

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<sup>128</sup> Rudi Laermans notes that 'Although Simmel was one of the co-founders of German sociology, for several decades the overviews of the intellectual history of sociology did not extensively discuss his main ideas. In more specific areas, such as the sociology of religion, the reception of his work was even rarer' (2006.p.480). Laermans goes on to say 'Simmel's sociology of religion is, with a willingly paradoxical formulation, first and foremost a sociology of religiosity. Religiosity is indeed the primary term, since there exists no particular religion without the different modes of religiosity that are coterminous with life in general' (2006. p.481.)

<sup>129</sup> Willander (2014. p.18).

<sup>130</sup> Willander (2014. p.234).

<sup>131</sup> Willander (2014. p.360) Willander warmly acknowledges the support Grace Davie has given her throughout the years of her work in the sociology of religion in the preliminary pages to her thesis..

<sup>132</sup> Willander (2014. p.220).

<sup>133</sup> The Christian Quakers Joy, Susan, Mathew and Andrew explicitly distanced themselves from fundamentalism in their interviews, as did the theists, Andrea and Linda. See Master Table C: Faith and belief and individual IPA analyses and transcripts by searching under 'fundamental'.

<sup>134</sup> Willander (2014, p.218).



In contrast to Willander, Steve Bruce and David Voas have argued that the secularization thesis has been vindicated. Surveys have shown a marked decline in religious behaviour in the last 30 years<sup>135</sup>. Even 'self-described' or 'self-assessed' religiosity has been surveyed and indicates a decline<sup>136</sup>. Simmel noticed the decline of religion more than a hundred years ago but argued that the religious impulse had been redirected, not suppressed<sup>137</sup>.

The impulse is not necessarily recognised as such, even by all Quakers. Michael J. Sheeran notes that in an interview with an elderly Friend, the Friend was:

'very strong in his assertion that "I have never spoken in meeting under the 'leading' of the Spirit. ... A little later he suggested: "It's funny; when I speak at meetings for worship, I always seem to just find myself on my feet." Ten minutes later, when the interviewer asked about the nature of a gathered meeting for worship, the Friend smiled and commented, "Well, it sure seems the group is present to what people call the Spirit."<sup>138</sup>.

In contrast to a survey, an interview can lead to the amendment of an initial assertion into recognising the possibility of its ontological opposite. Interviews offer the opportunity for a deeper reflection than surveys on personal experiencing and the meaning of an experience in a religious social context<sup>139</sup>. The question remains as to how valid and reliable is the processing of responses in any research to do with religious experience, whatever the research instrument. Deeming an experience as religious is an emotionally charged and intellectually complex issue. Surveys delivered impersonally would seem to have more difficulty than interviews in responding to that complexity.

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<sup>135</sup> Bruce and Voas (2023. p.3 of 13).

<sup>136</sup> Bruce and Voas (2023. p.3 and 7 of 13).

<sup>137</sup> Simmel (1997. p.20).

<sup>138</sup> Sheeran (1996. p.80).

<sup>139</sup> Sheeran (1996. p.80). Sheeran also recognised that longer interviews could produce ambiguous and contradictory responses

#### 4.4 Quaker Theology and Quaker diversity

And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, oh then, I heard a voice which said, 'There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition', and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy.<sup>140</sup>

Dandelion describes this quotation from George Fox's Journal dated 1647 presented in *Quaker faith & practice* as 'a radical and revolutionary experience'; it became 'foundational for the emerging Quaker movement and remained central even in its later, multiple and diverse forms'<sup>141</sup>. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the idea that Christ speaks to individuals became reformulated, probably to avoid an association with mental illness<sup>142</sup>. Nevertheless, the interviewees were entirely positive about Quaker theology. The statements of eleven interviewees pointed to their understanding of a God transcendent to the world and immanent within it enabling human beings to discern a God, whose will could be known. Self-identified Christians and theists I interviewed could speak positively of God and Christ. The nontheist could assert that The Trinity was 'a good explanation of something' and that love was 'a thing in its own right'. She just did not want to get 'bogged down ... into angels dancing on pins'<sup>143</sup>. There were no negative comments about Quaker theology.

#### Rufus Jones and modernist Quaker theology

In 1904, contemporary with Simmel, writing about 17th century Quakers, Rufus Jones, a Professor of Philosophy and birthright Quaker, wrote:

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<sup>140</sup> *QF&P* (2013. 19.02). This quotation originates in John L. Nickalls edition of *The journal of George Fox* (Fox, G., 1952) as do other George Fox quotations in this dissertation.

<sup>141</sup> Dandelion (2007. p.23).

<sup>142</sup> See Cook, C.C., 2019. *Hearing Voices, Demonic and Divine*. Taylor & Francis. Chris Cook is a retired NHS psychiatrist, Anglican priest and Professor in the Department of Theology & Religion, Durham University. See also his discussion at <https://www.sanctuarymentalhealth.org/2020/06/14/chris-cook-christians-hearing-voices/> Accessed 09/08/2021

<sup>143</sup> Ch 3. 3.25. Reflections on theological concepts.

Without much critical analysis they bounded to the conclusion that the infinite ocean of Divine Life had sent its tides into their narrow inlets, that this new power and illumination was the Eternal Christ come again to human consciousness. Much more important than this uncritical conviction was the actual, observable fact that this inward experience of theirs unified their lives, and produced verifiable results in character and action<sup>144</sup>.

Jones here downplays 17<sup>th</sup> century the significance of Quaker enthusiasm for their experience of 'new power and illumination' in their 'human consciousness' arising from what they took to be the Eternal Christ. Jones preferred to emphasise the positive effects of that 'inward experience' on 'character and action'. Most important for Jones was the way that the interior experience could lead to a more unified life, a changed-for-the-better character, and to pro-social action in the world. He is implying that an uncritical response to that experience could lead to a narrow understanding of the experience. Jones eschewed mystical ecstasy<sup>145</sup>, evangelical enthusiasm<sup>146</sup> and any association with supernaturalism<sup>147</sup>.

Some minimal awareness of Christianity is a prerequisite for interpreting an intense interior experience as related to Christ's speaking else Fox could not name his experience in the way he did<sup>148</sup>. It does not follow that a 21<sup>st</sup> century individual interprets their interior experiencing as an experience of the Eternal Christ: the individual comes to their own interpretation influenced by ideas available to them from within their own cultural milieu.

In the same chapter Jones writes:

The Inner Light is the doctrine that there is something Divine, "something of God," in the human soul. Five words are used indiscriminately to name this

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<sup>144</sup> Jones (1904. p.166).

<sup>145</sup> Jones (1904. p.152).

<sup>146</sup> Jones (1904. p.190).

<sup>147</sup> Jones (1904. p.244).

<sup>148</sup> Disbrey (1994). Disbrey devotes Chapter 6 of her book to discussing the experience of George Fox. See also discussion of Disbrey's work in the Literature review in Chapter 1 1.5.

Divine something: "The Light," "The Seed," "Christ within," "The Spirit," "That of God in you." This Divine Seed is in every person good or bad<sup>149</sup>.

Assertion of an Inner Light and its universal presence was what led Rufus Jones and the English Quaker John Wilhelm Rowntree, with whom he formed a friendship, to portray 'Quakerism as essentially mystical' giving 'primary authority to experience'<sup>150</sup>. Dandelion has argued that that 'still informs the kind of Quakerism most familiar in Europe'<sup>151</sup>.

### **The connotations of mysticism**

The emphases on Quakerism as 'essentially mystical' and on the unqualified authority of 'experience' is problematic if mysticism and intense religious experience are seen as esoteric phenomena experienced by a few – and that that kind of experience is a requirement for membership of The Society. Mark McIntosh, a Christian theologian, in his monograph on mystical theology<sup>152</sup>, supports an aspect of Karl Rahner's<sup>153</sup> theology, which affirms mysticism as 'a dimension of every human person's life ... which one can try to ignore'<sup>154</sup>. McIntosh notes that 'Unusual psychological states' may enable an individual 'to grasp in a dramatically personal and transformative way the very same transcendental consciousness that is the condition for everyone's experience of reality' but for him 'unusual' is not an essential attribute of mysticism<sup>155</sup>.

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<sup>149</sup> Jones (1904. p.168).

<sup>150</sup> Dandelion (2007. p.120).

<sup>151</sup> Dandelion (2007. p.121).

<sup>152</sup> McIntosh does not mention Quakers in this text nor his book on *Divine teaching* (2008).

<sup>153</sup> Karl Rahner was a Jesuit theologian, prominent at the second Vatican Council. He developed the concept of 'anonymous Christians' an idea resonating with the connotation of Quaker Robert Barclay's concept of the Catholic church (see next paragraph). See Karen Kilby's essay on Rahner in *Modern theologians* edited by David Ford with Rachel Muers. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Blackwell, 2005. p.92

<sup>154</sup> Rahner (1998. p.94).

<sup>155</sup> McIntosh (1998. p.94).

None of the interviewees in my research described themselves as mystics<sup>156</sup>, but some testified to unusually intense experiences understood as religious. 11 of the 12 interviewees spoke of sensing the Holy Spirit and the presence of Spirit or of God in Meeting but did not describe these events as mystical. Seven interviewees spoke of 'Leadings' in the sense of their feeling being led by a transcendent influence; six mentioned 'Inner Light' explicitly. The twelfth, the non-theist, spoke of Meeting for Worship ' by the time we get to the last 10 minutes I suddenly think "Aah!" Finally I've got there' (Shirley I.801-802). 'There' sounded like a place of peace and integration which being in Meeting for Worship could engender.

### **The Light: immanent and transcendent**

The Inner Light concept echoes the 1678 proposition by Robert Barclay included in the current and previous editions of *Quaker Faith & Practice*:

... heathens, Turks, Jews and all the several sorts of Christians, men and women of integrity and simplicity of heart, who ... are by the secret touches of this holy light in their souls enlivened and quickened, thereby secretly united to God<sup>157</sup>.

Those words seemed to explain my inchoate religiosity by affirming the presence in all human beings of what 17th century Quakers also called 'a seed', a concept connoting potential growth used in the following 1661 quotation of the Quaker Isaac Pennington:

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<sup>156</sup> The term may be used as an adjective, a noun and one form of it, mysticism, that which a mystic engages in, can be defined as 'a constellation of distinctive practices, discourses, texts, institutions, traditions, and experiences aimed at human transformation, variously defined' in the article on Mysticism by Jerome Gellman in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2018). An individual may be identified by others, if not themselves, as a mystic. But I believe anyone may have a mystical experience where a mystical experience is defined as an intense feeling of connectedness to a numinous reality they sense, or to God, but it is an experiencing event of time-limited intensity. Without being considered mystics, a religious congregation engaging in a liturgical event as a collective is also intending to bring itself and its members into a relationship with God, or God's Word, or what it and its members believe to be of sacred value.

<sup>157</sup> QF&P (2013. 27.05). First published in 1678 this extract was taken from Barclay, Robert (1886). Apology for the true Christian divinity. Prop 10... Glasgow: Murdoch. p.194-195.

Give over thine own willing, give over thy own running, give over thine own desiring to know or be anything and sink down to the seed which God sows in the heart, and let that grow in thee and be in thee and breathe in thee and act in thee; and thou shalt find by sweet experience that the Lord knows that and loves and owns that, and will lead it to the inheritance of Life, which is its portion<sup>158</sup>.

A choice is presented in this quotation: to follow one's own will or to let God's seed, sown in all people's hearts, grow in one's being and be led by it. Gerald May<sup>159</sup>, a psychiatrist, a Christian and conscientious objector<sup>160</sup>, writes that 'It is in silence that the delicate relationship between will and spirit presents itself most clearly to me'. It is in their 'reconciliation' that there may be 'hope for wholeness'<sup>161</sup>. Echoing Penington, May makes the distinction between *willingness and willfulness* and suggests it is willingness to follow the spirit that brings spiritual growth and health<sup>162</sup>. May<sup>163</sup>, Jones, and before him Barclay and Penington, are seeking to explain how it was possible, through asserting the awareness of Spirit, or the presence of a Divine Seed or Light in every human soul, for a person to interpret a distinctive **pre-verbal** immanent experience as a felt relationship to an exterior transcendental Divinity offered by that Divinity as an act of grace to humankind. It accounted for the human capacity to be receptive to what was held, in faith, to be a reality, to which many cultures give a name, in English, God.

Jones' concept of the Inner Light to which a person could and should attend, was intellectually and emotionally satisfying to many modernist Quakers. It was a response accounting for how what Simmel described as modernity's "empty longing

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<sup>158</sup> QF&P (26.70).

<sup>159</sup> May (1940-2005).

<sup>160</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerald\\_May](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerald_May) Accessed 7/03/2023.

<sup>161</sup> May (1982. vi).

<sup>162</sup> May (1982. p.1).

<sup>163</sup> See also appreciation of May by Dolores R. Leckey at [https://natcath.org/NCR\\_Online/archives2/2005b/050605/050605s.php](https://natcath.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2005b/050605/050605s.php)

after a definitive goal for existence as a whole” may be satisfied<sup>164</sup>. A person who attended to that Light, inspired by what they noticed, would find direction in their lives.

The British Society of Friends does not now require its members to interpret their experience in Christian terms but it does require ‘the understanding of divine guidance’<sup>165</sup>. McIntosh’s argument is that we might think ‘of the self as that which is called forth by the infinite giving of God’ but for McIntosh as a Christian theologian that was with a trinitarian understanding of the activity of God<sup>166,167</sup>. A person might, of course, fail to notice the Light or the Seed or the infinite giving of God, and may have no sense or belief in the existence of God at all. A British Quaker may not be persuaded by a theological account of the significance and meaning of individual experience nor of a Christian theological understanding of the unique event of Jesus and the meaning of his life.

Hugh Rock, associated with contemporary non-theism in Britain, advised ‘caution in referring to Quakerism as a mystical religion’<sup>168</sup>. He argued that Jones’ ‘adoption of mysticism served to resist the pressure, exerted by evangelicals, to adopt a doctrinal creed’<sup>169</sup>. ‘The idea that Quaker faith is based on mystical experience is a theological conjuring trick that Rufus Jones played on The Society at the turn of the nineteenth

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<sup>164</sup> Simmel (2004. p.363).

<sup>165</sup> QF&P (11.01).

<sup>166</sup> McIntosh (1998. p.236).

<sup>167</sup> ‘...the self only comes to know and love itself truly ... by being known and loved by God’ ... ‘It is not that there is a substance called ‘selfhood’...rather that the divine activity of being God, namely the infinite self-bestowal of the trinitarian persons one to another, is the eternal mutual activity of ‘selving’ which alone sustains particular identity. It is this activity that evokes human identity in the first place’ (McIntosh, 1998.p.238). For a Christian, this is the kind of underlying mechanism critical realists look for, and for which, Christian critical realists would argue, there is sufficient evidence in the world from which to infer God’s ontological being.

<sup>168</sup> Rock (2016. p.65).

<sup>169</sup> Rock (2016. p.50).

century'<sup>170</sup>. Such a viewpoint would doubt the founders of Quakerism's understanding of a reality, and the self-understanding of contemporary members of The Society, in which theirs and any person's condition could be spoken to by Christ Jesus, given that one understands 'spoken' or 'Christ Jesus', or 'the understanding of divine guidance'<sup>171</sup>, as words denoting concepts derived from a perception of a transcendent Divinity that is an ontological reality.

Helen Holt offered a detailed critique of Rock's argument. She argues that it ignored Jones' claim that God was not only immanent but also transcendent<sup>172</sup>. The Inner Light should be understood as describing an inherent relationship between God and humans<sup>173</sup>. Jones himself insisted he was not a humanist but a Christian. He saw Christ to be the fullest revelation of God breaking into the Universe. In Britain, Rock's approach, which dismisses the validity of metaphysical arguments, speaks to a minority of Quakers just as traditional Christocentric Quakerism (where Christocentric refers to those for whom the Jesus Christ of the Bible is a central and unique figure in their religious lives) speaks to another current minority.

### **From religiosity to Quaker witness**

Contemporary Quakers, as demonstrated in the interviewees, are as concerned with their 'experimental' or 'experiential' or 'existential' religion as 17th century Quakers were<sup>174</sup>. 17th century Quakers, however, shared their Christianity<sup>175</sup>. 21st century Quakers, Dandelion argues, have no unifying theology<sup>176</sup>.

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<sup>170</sup> Rock (2016. <https://nontheistquakers.files.wordpress.com/2017/03/where-do-nontheist-friends-stand-in-relation-to-the-quaker-christian-tradition.pdf> Accessed: 26/04/2021.)

<sup>171</sup> QF&P 11.01

<sup>172</sup> Holt (2019. p.306).

<sup>173</sup> Holt (2019. p.3).

<sup>174</sup> Endy jr. (1981. p.9).

<sup>175</sup> Moore (2013); Allen (2013).

<sup>176</sup> Dandelion (2007. p.184).



How individual Quakers actually develop their theology is complex. Individual Quakers decide how they bear witness to their religiosity, their faith and how their Quakerism is related to their lived lives. For Hampton and Dandelion<sup>177</sup> Quaker surveys provided statistical evidence of three Quaker dispositions: Traditional Quakers with Christian attitudes, Non-Theist Quakers with an apparent lack of belief in God and a majority group of Liberal Quakers with less pronounced Christian beliefs. Dandelion remarked that 'people may be drawn in (to Quakers) not only by the lack of religious dogma but by the lack of religion at all'<sup>178</sup>. He noticed that the non-theist group largely consisted 'of highly educated and white professionals' sharing 'a cultural affinity that has transcended a spiritual one'<sup>179</sup>. What has not been transcended by non-theists is their need to join a religious society.

Dandelion concluded The Society was post-Christian. As discussed above, Mellor<sup>180</sup> disagreed, arguing from her survey that within The Society there is a mainstream that is broadly Christian. As far as national groups listed on the Quakers in Britain website one may notice that there is no nationally recognised group purporting to represent a 'Quaker mainstream'<sup>181</sup> or 'Traditional Christian Quakers'. On the other hand there are two self-identifying groups officially recognised within The Society: The Universalist Group<sup>182</sup> and The Non-theist Network<sup>183</sup>. They have their own

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<sup>177</sup> Hampton (2014); Dandelion (2014)

<sup>178</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.134).

<sup>179</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.134).

<sup>180</sup> Mellor (2010). See also above under British Quaker Surveys.

<sup>181</sup> There is the 'Blog' on the Quakers in Britain website, operated by BYM, the charity, which might be considered representative of what is acceptable to that charity (<https://www.quaker.org.uk/blog> Accessed 6/03/2023), but not necessarily Friends in their different Area Meetings.

<sup>182</sup> <https://qug.org.uk/>

<sup>183</sup> <http://www.nontheist-quakers.org.uk/>

separate websites. They provide support to participants in The Society many of whom are unlikely to see themselves as part of a mainstream Christian core<sup>184</sup>.

Rhiannon Grant argued in 2020 that Quakerism is broadly and coherently liberal with a solid core<sup>185</sup>. Analysing different versions of *Quaker faith & practice* published by different Yearly Meetings and other sources<sup>186</sup>, Grant identifies a central core theme in Quaker Liberal theology as asserting there is:

ongoing and present direct access to a unified Divine, for all, resulting in guidance which has characteristic results for individuals and communities, following historical and Biblical patterns but also including new revelation<sup>187</sup>.

That argument is echoed as the first of ‘the fundamental elements of being a Quaker’ in the current edition of the British *Quaker faith & practice*: the understanding of divine guidance<sup>188</sup>. These fundamental elements are not promoted by BYM as fundamental elements of contemporary Quakerism on their website nor consistently asserted as criteria for membership by Area Meetings<sup>189</sup>. As evidence, the 2013 British Quaker Survey recorded that 18% of the membership are self-identified non-theist Quakers with no necessary belief in a Deity<sup>190</sup> and, therefore, we may infer, no necessary belief in Grant’s ‘direct access to a ‘unified Divine’. 28/230 respondents identifying as non-theists have also served as clerks of business meetings which,

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<sup>184</sup> There is a similarity to the Anglican church which has churches officially designated as Anglo-Catholic, evangelical and liberal, but not mainstream. Area Meetings and their Local Meetings might like to introduce designations as Christocentric, Non-theist and Liberal for some of their Meetings for Worship.

<sup>185</sup> Grant (2020)

<sup>186</sup> i.e. individual Quakers’ writings and the writings of academic theologians

<sup>187</sup> Grant (2020. p.84)

<sup>188</sup> *QF&P* 11.01

<sup>189</sup> See Gay Pilgrim’s characterisation of Quaker exclusivists, inclusivists and syncretists the literature review in Chapter 1 and the implication of those positions for membership decisions.

<sup>190</sup> The non-theist website describes non-theism and includes this quotation from David Boulton’s book *Godless for God’s sake*: ‘Nontheism ... is ...the absence of any belief in a deity or deities, in the existence of God (where ‘existence’ is understood in a realist, objective sense), and especially belief in one God as creator and supreme ruler (p.6)’. <https://nontheist-quakers.org.uk/fag/nontheism/> Accessed 11/12/2023

normatively, have the purpose of seeking the will of God in the conduct of Quaker business<sup>191</sup> <sup>192</sup>. Their appointment by Area Meetings contradicts the norm and confuses those who may be trying to adhere in their practice to the normative theology of Meeting for Worship as represented by *QF&P* 11.01. They would not, presumably, claim a faith or belief in a unified Divine.

The BYM (the charity) website offers, with a video, seven individuals' responses to what they believe, but no reference is made to *QF&P*'s statement as to what the fundamental elements of being a Quaker are. Rather their *Quakers in Britain* website states:

We don't offer neat creeds or doctrine. Instead, we try to help each other work out how we should live<sup>193</sup>.

The emphasis is ethical rather than theological. So whilst Grant's argument as to the coherence of a core to Quaker Liberal theology might stand, there are no fundamental elements of a Quaker faith, or a theological core, presented authoritatively on BYM's website. There seem to be no theological boundaries asserted by BYM only an assertion of trying 'to help each other work out how we should live'. There is no clear statement of how the 'we', the charity that speaks for and tries to promote the Religious Society of Friends, helps 'each other', or an individual who happens on or consults the website, to work out how they should live.

The non-theist interviewed in this research became a member because her experience of her Local Meeting for Worship, the qualities of the people she met there and encouragement to become a member met a need she recognised she had. Meeting for Worship was something she has come to depend upon. On the

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<sup>191</sup> Hampton (2014. p.32)

<sup>192</sup> *QF&P* 3.02

<sup>193</sup> <https://www.quaker.org.uk/faith/our-faith> Accessed 11/12/2023

other hand the lack of an assertion of the Book of Christian discipline's fundamental elements of being a Quaker e.g. 'the understanding of Divine guidance'<sup>194</sup> at Area Meetings, where applications for membership are considered, may be another one of the negative forces contributing to confusion in The Society's theological culture. Non-theists are not asked to subscribe to it (nor are theist or Christian Quakers necessarily and explicitly asked to subscribe to it). If they are not asserted, The Society might need to discern whether a new formulation of the fundamental elements of being a Quaker is needed if, indeed, they are not fundamental and non-theism and non-religion are acceptable to The Society. Non-theism as a theological position acceptable for membership disconfirms those who are theist or Christian, who might be attracted to The Society, with its Christian tradition and distinctive ecclesiology, precisely because The Society supports the possibility of discerning guidance from an other-than-human source.

As a result of his study of a Quaker meeting Peter Collins made a distinction between canonical, vernacular and prototypical Quakerism<sup>195</sup>. Canonical, Collins related to the unifying denominational Quaker theology and practices that there are in Britain i.e. The Society's acceptable theological positions and official procedures as presented in *Quaker faith & practice* and other, especially early, Quaker writings:

Canonical Quakerism presents us with a body of written texts which are both public and accessible. .... It has the authority of the corporate group and, I believe, has a strong normative impact on Friends, both individually and corporately. The iconic canonic text is the Book of Discipline, which represents, in a manner of speaking, 'a theology designed by committee'<sup>196</sup>.

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<sup>194</sup> *QF&P* 11.01

<sup>195</sup> Collins (1994. p.15. Now available on line at <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2059208115>.

<sup>196</sup> Collins (1994. p.17).

Collins notes that Quakers deny having a credal statement. He sees *Quaker faith & practice* as 'semi-credal'<sup>197</sup>.

Vernacular Quakerism related to the actual Quakerism encountered in Quaker Meetings<sup>198</sup>. It is where Quaker faith, practices, social interactions and community witness are expressed. It is where Quaker theological diversity as embodied in individual participants is experienced.

Prototypical Quakerism refers to the Quaker identity an individual has constructed or is in the process of constructing for themselves<sup>199</sup>. Prototypical Quakerism covers the content of an individual Friend's faith and beliefs as embodied and acted upon by that individual. It is visible in how they express their religiosity within and outside of Quakerism. This is an ongoing process as individuals live their Quaker commitment and interact with different kinds of Quaker and everyone else.

Recognising that there are different religious sensibilities that comprise Quaker theological diversity explains the difficulty Quakers have in presenting what Quakers believe to newcomers<sup>200 201</sup>. My interviewees came to Quakers in Britain dissatisfied with other religious forms for expressing their religiosity. They, for now, have satisfied, more or less<sup>202</sup>, their religious and spiritual yearnings, i.e. their religiosity in

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<sup>197</sup> *QF&P* is revised periodically. See the introduction to *QF&P* (2014. p.12) not available on-line. Collins used an earlier edition (1972) whose title then was *Christian Faith and Practice* published by what was then London Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends.

<sup>198</sup> Collins (1994. p.17).

<sup>199</sup> Collins (1994. p.19).

<sup>200</sup> Durham (2018).

<sup>201</sup> There is, however, a basic difference between versions of worldwide canonical Quakerism as reflected in the constitutions of two American-based organisations. There are those which are explicitly Christ-centred, represented by Friends United Meeting (FUM); and those represented by Friends General Conference (FGC), an association of local and regional Quaker organizations primarily in the United States and Canada, where Christianity is optional and Quaker spirituality and Divine guidance are emphasised.

<sup>202</sup> But note the experience discussed in the previous chapter of Quanglican Susan who joined after a Christian conversion experience with an Anglican priest, the involvement of Gillian with the Roman Catholic church, and Simon's concern that The Society could lose its distinctive character. The interviewees who sought spiritual satisfaction with Quakers having left other denominations could leave Quakers when their spiritual life ceases to be nourished by The Society.

their prototypical Quakerisms, their attachment to a Local Meeting and their various involvements with The Society.

An underlying mechanism here is that, through time, commitment to an association and the cultural goods that it offers, which would include its theology and ecclesiology, solidifies an attachment to a Local Meeting, Quakerism and The Society. Another mechanism affecting attachment is the mechanism of confirmation and disconfirmation. If a person does not feel valued in The Society, and especially in their Local Meeting, which is where the process of confirmation and disconfirmation takes place through social interaction, they are likely to leave the association<sup>203</sup>.

### **The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain as an opportunity to put faith into practice**

Interviewees have been involved with other denominations and with social activism before they engaged with Quakers. For some, that is where they first met Quakers. The explicit emphasis on integrating faith and practice and The Society's involvement with social activism generally were attractions of The Society mentioned by interviewees. What also followed their involvement with a Local meeting were invitations and opportunities to act in roles in the Society (see Chapter 3)<sup>204</sup>. The Society's non-hierarchical self-organisation was itself an element in its attraction for participants.

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<sup>203</sup> Note the empirical data in Chapter 3: how Andrea, Shirley, and Rosemary were reassured before joining and how Linda was disconfirmed in a Meeting but returned to one where she had felt safe, secure and supported. See next chapter for a more detailed discussion of how the mechanics of association and disassociation from the group may be operating in practice.

<sup>204</sup> Chapter 1 of this thesis provides an overview of The Society's organization. Chapters 4-8 of *QF&P* discuss in detail the organization of Local and Area Meetings and the centrally managed work of The Society.

As a predominantly self-managed religious society, a current operational challenge is seen as meeting the need to fill the roles that exist in relation to Quaker work at all its levels in the face of falling numbers and an ageing membership<sup>205</sup>. That is an operational challenge in addition to the strategic challenge of deciding what The Society stands for, how that should be promoted and how to attract new and retain existing participants.

### **The Simpler Meetings project**

BYM, the charity, has focused on, amongst its other aims, supporting Area and Local Meetings in the operational challenges they face. The charity set up a Simpler Meetings Project to find ways to reduce the administrative burden of operating a Meeting on participants. Suggestions included reducing the number of roles and reorganizing the work to be done<sup>206</sup>. More radical ways to tackle the problem have included sharing roles between Area Meetings and reducing the number of Area Meetings by integration e.g. Quakers in Wales and Southern Marches are now organized as a single charity and Area Meeting, integrating the four charities into one with one set of trustees<sup>207</sup>. Remedies have also included recruiting full- and part-time paid staff and paying for professional services, including recruitment services to hire paid senior staff<sup>208</sup>.

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<sup>205</sup> Why insufficient members are coming forward to serve in roles at Local and Area level and on central committees, as evidenced by continuing calls for members to put themselves forward (see the *Give time* page on the Quakers in Britain website), has not been formally investigated. It seems to have been assumed by BYM that that was because of an ageing and decreasing membership. Judith Frith's 2009 research into how Quakers use their time and on volunteering is discussed in the literature review of Chapter 1.

<sup>206</sup> Videos and documents have been produced to support simplification See <https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/support-for-meetings/simpler-meetings>.

<sup>207</sup> <https://www.quaker.org.uk/news-and-events/news/quakers-across-wales-cut-bureaucracy-to-realise-quaker-vision> Accessed 31/03/2023).

<sup>208</sup> e.g. as when a non-Quaker principal officer is appointed to lead the servicing of the charity 'Central England Quakers. See also the back page advertisement in *the Friend*, 11 February 2022.

'Simplification' is a non-trivial matter. Removal of structural components within an organisation redistributes and places extra responsibilities for work in existing, redefined or new integrated structural components. For example, the concentration of responsibilities for governance over integrated Area Meetings in legally accountable trustees of charities amplifies the weight of those responsibilities over a larger number of Local Meetings e.g. in relation to decisions to do with resourcing and funding the charity's activities, property management, health and safety requirements, safeguarding policies and employment policies. There is an ongoing need to ensure the implementation of procedures required by new government legislation e.g. to do with health and safety and safeguarding and for the oversight of the working of Local Meetings, including their financial management. Tasks such as trusteeship, finance, premises management, safeguarding and pastoral care become more burdensome in themselves and through their aggregation into fewer organisational units e.g. because of the number of activities and transactions that have to be monitored, recorded and audited.

In view of the added complexity of particular roles and in the absence of Quakers competent, available or willing to offer unpaid service to perform in a structurally simplified and integrated organization, a Quaker organisation may come to depend more on paid non-Quaker staff and more conventional management practices to manage and maintain its operations. A policy of simplification that leads to structural integration, and in effect, centralisation can then result in reducing Quakers' participation in Quaker collective discernment practices and the use of those practices in decision-making.



An underlying justification for this thinking is that reducing the burden of administration leaves people more time for spiritual matters<sup>209</sup>. That assumption undermines the principle that all work that needs to be done, whether or not for The Society, has a spiritual dimension. The pragmatic and secular thinking that separates administrative activities from spiritual activities undermines a characteristic of the Quaker way i.e. the spiritual dimension of all work<sup>210</sup>. A more realistic justification is that some tasks, owing to government legislation for charities have become too complex for untrained Friends to undertake e.g. the preparing of financial accounts and the management and implementation of safeguarding policies and practices. Whatever the justification, how change occurs and what changes are implemented will by definition affect the present social interactions and the developing character of The Society in terms of its structures, cultural system and the people who comprise its participants. This chapter now turns to these issues.

#### **4.5 The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain as a working organisation experiencing change<sup>211</sup>**

Chapter 1 described the mode of worship and structures that provided for The Society's governance. In brief, features which distinctly characterize The Society are listed in Figure 4.1.

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<sup>209</sup> 'The Simpler Meetings project has been finding and sharing ways that Quaker meetings can be easier to run, and less of a burden for Quaker role holders. The aim is to spend less time on 'doing' Quakers, releasing more time for 'being' Quakers – for our witness in the world, spiritual nurture, outreach and building our Quaker communities'. <https://www.quaker.org.uk/communities/quaker-community/simpler-meetings> Accessed 13/03/2024.

<sup>210</sup> Work and economic affairs are discussed in *QF&P* 23.53-23.70.

<sup>211</sup> See Chapter 1 for a general description of The Society's structure and a more detailed one in Chapter 3 of *Quaker faith & practice*.

### **Features distinctly characterising The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain**

1. Possibility for all to hear and discern God's will in the present.
2. Silent, mainly unprogrammed worship, with oral ministry offered when a participant is prompted to minister<sup>212</sup>.
3. A mainly non-hierarchical organisation, self-managed and dependent on the unpaid service of The Society's participants appointed to roles for time-limited periods.
4. Voteless decision-making by the widest possible participation of entitled members in Meetings for Worship for business<sup>213</sup>.
5. The absence of a separated clergy with clerical qualifications.
6. Centrally managed work, headed by the Recording Clerk, with paid full and part-time staff, organised conventionally in departments with a line management hierarchy and with collaborative oversight of this work undertaken by members of The Society giving time-limited unpaid service on central committees<sup>214</sup>.

Figure 4.1 Features distinctly characterising The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain

In the next sections it will be suggested that The Society's 'distinctive' functioning is now breaking down. The 'double culture' that Dandelion identified as once supporting that functioning is no longer so functional. I discuss also Dandelion's

<sup>212</sup> Canonically the promptings are considered from the Spirit and unwilled by the person prompted

<sup>213</sup> Local Meeting and Area Meeting members are eligible to participate in church affairs in their Local and Area Meetings for Worship for business. All members are eligible in Yearly Meeting in session.

<sup>214</sup> There are 4 standing committees, serviced by staff who undertake The Society's main 'good works': Quaker Life Central Committee; Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee; Quaker Committee for Christian & Interfaith Relations; Quaker World Relations Committee. These committees are answerable through BYM trustees to Yearly Meeting.

general theory of internal secularisation and suggest a further explanation for the breakdown of The Society's distinctive character. I suggest that problems with the double culture and a process of internal secularisation are reasons for the initial enthusiasm of new participants waning through time and for members disaffiliating from The Society.

#### **4.5.1 The contribution of Pink Dandelion's sociology**

Dandelion's work initially focused on how The Society functions in the condition of its theological diversity<sup>215</sup>. Subsequently he has addressed how The Society is secularising internally in the face of secularisation in the wider society<sup>216</sup>.

#### **The Quaker Double-Culture**

Dandelion defined the Quaker double-culture as 'a permissive approach to belief content and a conformist and conservative 'behavioural creed' .... The behavioural creed, the way in which Quakers are religious ... acts as the social glue'<sup>217</sup>. He suggested they were inversely related<sup>218</sup>.

Dandelion echoes Simmel's view of Quakers in the 19th century, reflected in

Simmel's comment that

in the assemblies of worship, each person may act like a preacher and may say whatever he likes whenever he likes. On the other hand, the congregation watches over personal affairs such as marriage, and these cannot occur without the permission of a committee that is appointed to investigate each case. Thus, the Quakers are individual only in collective matters, and in individual matters, they are socially regulated<sup>219</sup>.

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<sup>215</sup> Dandelion (1996).

<sup>216</sup> Dandelion (2019).

<sup>217</sup> Dandelion (2007. p.137; 2019. p.122).

<sup>218</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.122).

<sup>219</sup> Simmel (1972. p.258). Also quoted in Dandelion, 2019. p.123. This may be compared with the practices of other denominations, such as the Roman Catholics and the Anglicans, where a priest may insist on conditions before consenting to a church wedding.

Dandelion and Simmel both identify theological permissiveness as a characteristic of Quakerism and both identify social regulation as a means of achieving cohesion to restrain permissiveness's centrifugal social effects. Each of these features of the double culture will now be examined<sup>220</sup>.

### **Theological permissiveness and theological diversity: A coherent stance?**

Dandelion's treatment of theological permissiveness in contemporary Quakerism draws on Martin Davie's characterization of the modernist Liberal Quaker project<sup>221,222</sup>. That includes the statements that 'Experience was primary', 'that faith needed to be relevant to the age' 'that Quakers were to be open to 'new Light', 'that new revelation had an automatic authority over old revelation', and that 'God's Truth was revealed to humanity gradually over time'<sup>223</sup>. Revelation is understood as continuous and based on experience. Quakers seeking to express their religiosity then also discover, according to Dandelion, that seeking is expected to continue. As discussed earlier, Dandelion has come to describe the British Quaker way as post-Christian<sup>224</sup>. Martin Davie argued, however, that Liberal Quakerism 'remained on the whole an explicitly Christian form of theology in which Christ was given a central place' until the 1960's. Only then did it 'become highly diverse'<sup>225</sup>.

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<sup>220</sup> The social regulations Simmel refers to were relaxed after 1860: endogamy was abolished in 1860 and strictures on dress and speech were dropped in 1861 (Dandelion (2007. p.112) . Social regulation in the 20th century came to be effected, Dandelion argued, by the specific constituents of a behavioural creed (Dandelion (2019. p.122)).

<sup>221</sup> Dandelion (2019).

<sup>222</sup> It is the development of the modernist Liberal Quaker project which is described in Thomas C. Kennedy's *British Quakerism 1860-1920: the transformation of a religious community*.

<sup>223</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.118).

<sup>224</sup> Dandelion (1996).

<sup>225</sup> Davie (1997. p.268).

Davie's argument drew on an analysis of selected Swarthmore lectures and essays by prominent Friends. Swarthmore lectures, inaugurated in 1908, with, officially a 'two-fold purpose' as presented in the preface to published Swarthmore lectures:

First, to interpret further to the members of The Society of Friends their message and mission, secondly, to bring before the public the spirit, the aims and fundamental principles of Friends. The lecturer alone is responsible for any opinions expressed<sup>226</sup>.

The last sentence of the preface above is a disassociating statement included in prefaces to the Swarthmore lecture from 1935. The additional sentence is a confusing qualification, given the preface's stated purposes of the lecture<sup>227</sup>. It gave the lecturer a degree of intellectual freedom but also freed the lecture's commissioners from defining what was meant by 'fundamental principles' and drawing boundaries around the lecture's permissible content. The title of the 1935 lecture by William E. Wilson was *Our response to God*<sup>228</sup>. Its argument was assertively Christocentric:

Only Christ within, Who is the power and wisdom of God, can change men. Personal surrender to Him is then our first need and duty<sup>229</sup>.

The previous Swarthmore 1934 Lecture was by George Barker Jeffery, a mathematical physicist and Vice-President of the Royal Society from 1938 to 1940. Its title was *Christ yesterday and to-day*. Jeffery emphasised the difference between

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<sup>226</sup> The preface is quoted as in Janet Scott's 1980 Swarthmore lecture 'What canst thou say?' (1980. p.[iii]) to which Davie devotes a chapter. The preface explains that The Swarthmore Lecture is overseen and supported by the Swarthmore Lecture Committee appointed by the trustees of Woodbrooke, formerly called Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, then simply Woodbrooke. It was a Quaker College in Birmingham. The College is now closed to the public but Woodbrooke as an organisation continues to offer courses and on-line learning to do with Quakerism without a fixed physical base (<https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/woodbrooke-centre-statement-feb-23/> Accessed 3/01/2023).

<sup>227</sup> The actual origins of the disclaimer would be an interesting research topic.

<sup>228</sup> Wilson (1935). For a complete list of Swarthmore lectures see the list under *Swarthmore lecture* in Wikipedia.

<sup>229</sup> Wilson (1935. p.84)

‘the Jesus of the past and the Christ of the present’<sup>230</sup>. He declared his personal position in the final chapter where he discussed the difference between the physical world and the spiritual world and argued that both are understandable<sup>231</sup>. The difficulty of The Society’s members accommodating traditional theologically Christocentric and scientifically-influenced approaches to Quaker theology may have precipitated the disclaimer. There was a choice to be made: the lecture’s commissioners could accept possible controversy in the discernment of what were ‘the fundamental principles of Friends’ by supporting the lecturer’s content or to add a disclaimer so that responsibility for its content was the lecturer’s alone. In 1948, even with that disclaimer, the planned Swarthmore lecture, to be given by Edmond Privat, a Swiss Quaker, history professor and Esperantist, was thought too liberal by some Friends and was not recognised as a Swarthmore lecture<sup>232</sup>. A compromise was found in that the lecture was delivered as ‘a talk’<sup>233</sup>.

Ideas about what was acceptable Quaker theology and what were Quaker fundamental principles had been in conflict in The Society both before World War I and after World War II<sup>234</sup>. Davie argues that a minority of radical Quakers, prominent in The Society, were given the opportunity of Swarthmore lectures. He believes they had been able to move The Society away from its Christian tradition drawing on two principles central to pre-1960’s Christian-oriented Liberal Quakerism. ‘The first

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<sup>230</sup> Jeffery (1934. p.14)

<sup>231</sup> Jeffery (1934. p.55; p.57)

<sup>232</sup> Anthony Manousos in his 2010 article on Howard Brinton in *Quaker Theology* refers to this event. ‘Privat was in fact allowed to give a talk, entitled “The Clash of Loyalties,” at London Yearly Meeting in 1948, but it was not considered a Swarthmore Lecture. There was no Swarthmore Lecture that year, the only time it was ever cancelled’ (<https://quakertheology.org/howard-brinton-impact-of-ecumenism-on-friends/> accessed 20/12/2023).

<sup>233</sup> Raduzzo’s article Quakers and non-theism points to the scientist Arthur Stanley Eddington’s 1929 Swarthmore lecture Science and the unseen world as an earlier Swarthmore lecture as being influential in the development of non-theist thought. That then had not resulted in a disclaimer to the original Swarthmore preface.

<sup>234</sup> Kennedy (2001).

principle was that Quakerism should adapt itself to the contemporary development of thought' ... and ... 'the second principle was intellectual tolerance'<sup>235</sup>. He argues that these principles were used to justify a departure both from upholding the mainstream Quaker Christian tradition and from the 'spirit' of early Quakerism. Prominent Quakers have, in Davie's view, mistakenly asserted 'that British Quaker theology since 1895 has really been in agreement with the thought of early Quakers'<sup>236</sup>. They then have taken the mainstream in a direction they wanted to take it.

Davie quotes George Gorman, a senior manager at Friends House concerned with the spiritual life of The Society through the Committees for which he had responsibility<sup>237</sup> from the 1940's. Davie argues that Gorman departs from Liberal and 17<sup>th</sup> century Quakerism's belief that we can experience God directly<sup>238</sup>. Gorman writes that there is 'only human experience which we choose to interpret religiously'<sup>239</sup>. Davie argues that 'God is not less than personal and is capable of entering into personal relationship with us'<sup>240</sup>. Gorman fails to make a sufficient distinction between human and Divine love<sup>241</sup>. Gorman's position that 'there is only human experience' also undermines the possibility of an interaction with God involving God's contact with us and God's responses to us, which humans perceive

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<sup>235</sup> Davie (1997. p.268).

<sup>236</sup> Davie (1997. p.270).

<sup>237</sup> In the 1940s George Gorman served as Clerk of what was then Young Friends Central Committee, now Young Friends General Meeting. He moved on to work for Friends Home Service and became its General Secretary in 1952. He worked in that role until his retirement in 1981. By then the department had become Quaker Home Service and it has since become Quaker Life (<https://ggmf.weebly.com/> Accessed 22/07/21). The other Quakers Davie refers to are Janet Scott, Lorna Marsden, Tim Miles and Alec Lea.

<sup>238</sup> Davie (1997. p.160). This is the 1973 Swarthmore Lecture that has the same disclaimer in its preface that Janet Scott's 1980's preface has.

<sup>239</sup> Gorman (1973. p.60; 1997. p.164)

<sup>240</sup> Davie (1997. p.165).

<sup>241</sup> see Gorman, 1973. p.67.

and interpret, and that that perception facilitates the human discernment of God's will.

Gorman's position is, from a critical realist's point of view, too solipsistically inclined. A person's experience is internally interpreted experience of phenomena that may exist beyond their skin in a world we share. What in truth and in fact exists is an ontological question and not only a matter of human interior experience. There are different ways to understand the experience of love given and of love received. We may choose to interpret our experience of love, for example, reductively, as an internal psychological or biological reaction of the brain, as an evolutionary tool, or as the product of a relational connection. Alternatively we may understand love as an ontological feature of the world originating from a suprahuman<sup>242</sup> creative source, capable of communicating with us. Inferences about what does or does not exist as things and processes in the world which humans may experience and give names to, for many point to the reality of a Divinity as the ultimate source of all being. For some critical realists that Divinity transcends the worldly phenomena it has somehow created and that sustains the world: God, as creator, is responsible for the underlying mechanisms that support the reality in which humans exist and about whose workings we may gain an understanding<sup>243</sup>.

Davie also points to Tim Miles' proposal, not a Swarthmore lecture, in *Towards universalism*<sup>244</sup> that The Society should 'cease to be a specifically Christian body

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<sup>242</sup> Not superhuman

<sup>243</sup> Not all critical realists are theistically inclined as are Archer, Collier and Porpora (2004). See Gironi (2012) The Theological Hijacking of Realism: Critical Realism in 'Science and Religion'. *Journal of Critical realism*, 11(1), pp.40-75.

<sup>244</sup> Miles (1985). Published by the Quaker Universalist Group Freely available to download from the Quaker Universalist Group website: <https://qug.org.uk/pamphlets-2/pamphlet-07/> Accessed 13/04/2023



and instead move to a more universalist position'<sup>245,246</sup>. A discrete universalist position, whilst acknowledging the many ways in which religiosity may be expressed, by definition relativises the traditional Quaker way<sup>247</sup> which presumes the existence of God in some way immanent in everyone.

Davie does not notice, however, that early Quakers themselves departed from the mainstream Christian tradition. That tradition in England in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was threatened by, to give three examples of 17<sup>th</sup> century Quaker theology, radical Quaker characteristics:

1. The primacy of what Robert Barclay described in 1678 as 'Immediate revelation', that is 'the testimony of the Spirit... alone by which the true knowledge of God hath been, is, and can be only revealed' which 'it is very probable that many ... Christians will oppose... being wholly unacquainted with the movings and actings of God's Spirit upon their hearts'<sup>248,249</sup>.
2. The rejection of the Bible as the direct voice of God 'because they [i.e. the Scriptures] are only a declaration of the fountain, and not the fountain itself, therefore as they are not to be esteemed the principal ground of all truth and knowledge, nor yet the adequate primary rule of faith and manners'<sup>250</sup>.

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<sup>245</sup> Davie (1997. p.176).

<sup>246</sup> Professor Tim Miles, [a Quaker] ... was a pioneer of the study of dyslexia, known internationally for his contributions to the field over more than 50 years of research (Guardian obituary: <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2009/jan/07/tim-miles-obituary> Accessed 11/08/2021.) See also Miles (1985). Towards universalism <https://qug.org.uk/pamphlets-2/pamphlet-07/> Accessed 11/08/2021

<sup>247</sup> *QF&P* 11.01

<sup>248</sup> Barclay (1886. p.11).

<sup>249</sup> Robert Barclay's Apologia was first published in Latin in 1676 and in English in 1678. See also Dean Freiday's translation in modern English of Barclay's Apology (Barclay, 1991). Barclay himself came from an aristocratic background, was a university educated at the Roman Catholic Scot's College in Paris (see Freiday's biographical note in his translation of Barclay (Barclay, 1991. p.xiii). I quote above from the 1886 edition as that would have been accessible to conservative Quakers and the Quakers of Kennedy's British Quakerism 1860-1920 alike.

<sup>250</sup> Barclay (1886. p.46).

3. The rejection of a need for official registration of clergy. True ministers of the gospel are ordained 'by the light or gift of God' without 'human commission'<sup>251</sup>.

The authority of Scriptures was qualified but not ignored. George Fox said that the challenge was to read the Scriptures 'aright'<sup>252</sup>. For Fox and Barclay, a paid and trained clergy, such as Anglican and Catholic priests or Presbyterian or Baptist ministers, were no guarantee of an 'aright' reading in the present, which had to be 'by the light or gift of God'. That proposition challenged the social order of 17th century Britain and was a reason for the persecution of Quakers<sup>253</sup>.

Gorman and Davie implicitly challenge the contemporary Quaker canon. Gorman circumscribes the possibilities of human experience by doubting the independence of God's guidance: that is only a product of human experience. Davie, dismayed by the decreasing emphasis on the role of Christ and the Christian tradition within The Society, would seem to wish to see the Christian tradition explicitly reasserted in its canon. Both positions would involve a modification to the current statement of the fundamental elements of being a Quaker<sup>254</sup>.

The interpretative flexibility of the modernist liberal project was positive in its effect on membership numbers until recent times. The Society could contain what Davie identifies as conservative, liberal and radical Quakerism<sup>255</sup>. James Chadkirk's statistical analysis into patterns of membership shows membership growing in the 1870s, the time Kennedy points to its institutional and cultural transformation<sup>256</sup>. It

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<sup>251</sup> Barclay (1886. p.193).

<sup>252</sup> Fox (1952. p.33).

<sup>253</sup> Moore (2013. p.19).

<sup>254</sup> QF&P (11.01).

<sup>255</sup> Davie (1997. p.203).

<sup>256</sup> Kennedy (2001).

seems to have been boosted by the pacifist stance of London Yearly Meeting (the predecessor of Britain Yearly Meeting) at the time of and after the first World War, and during the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmaments Aldermaston marches in the late 1950's and 1960's during the Vietnam war. But membership peaked in 1975 and has been declining since then<sup>257</sup>. Davie thinks that that might be because of The Society's readiness to accept and contain 'extreme theological diversity'<sup>258</sup> and for de-emphasising its Christian tradition.

A current example of The Society's confusion about the role of Christianity within it, in those who were present to do the discerning, was the change of title of The Society's book of discipline from *Christian faith and practice in the experience of The Society of Friends* (1960) to *Quaker faith & practice* (1994). Simultaneously a new subtitle was accepted and printed at the bottom of the title page beginning: *The book of Christian discipline of the Yearly Meeting*. Replacing 'Christian' by 'Quaker' in the title proper deemphasises the Christian tradition but the new subtitle emphasises 'Christian discipline'. The agreed wording of the title and subtitle suggests a compromise so that the word 'Christian' could be retained on the cover and on the title page of the document as a means of achieving a degree of unity between Christian and non-Christian Quakers for the new publication. The discernment seems confused. Indeed, *QF&P* includes a text stating compromises in Meetings for Worship for business should be resisted<sup>259</sup>. The agreed wording demonstrates both ambivalence towards the role of Christianity in The Society and a hope that the changes would satisfy all who identified as Quakers and those who also identified as Christian. Dandelion notes that there were 105 resignations from The Society in

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<sup>257</sup> Chadkirk (2014. p.57 fig.4.2; p.59).

<sup>258</sup> Davie (1997. p.267).

<sup>259</sup> QF&P (2.90).

1995, the year after the title changed but that it was unclear what prompted them<sup>260</sup>.

Without the collation and discussion of reasons for resignations, something BYM and AMs do not do or do not make public, reasons for resignation are speculations<sup>261</sup>.

Kathleen Slack in her Swarthmore lecture of 1967<sup>262</sup>, said:

Were Friends to become a body any number of whom claimed to be in no way Christian or failed to share any of the historic testimonies of The Society, it would be so weakened that it would be no longer able to maintain any corporate life. It is extremely easy to underestimate the tensions and conflicts that can, indeed, do result from strongly held differences of belief in one body<sup>263</sup>.

In 2022 it may be argued that Slack's 1967 warning of the consequences for The Society of trying to contain strongly held differences of belief has been ignored. On the other hand, The Society can choose to live with theological confusion rather like the grit in the oyster because a large majority are prepared to work with theological contradictions and value the presence of those with whom they have theological differences. Living with acknowledged theological contradictions would be a distinctive characteristic for The Society to promote. But without upholding a specifically theistic faith, in which the possibility of receiving God's guidance was affirmed, The Society's continuation as The *Religious* (my italics) Society of Friends as distinct from, say, The Spiritual Society of Friends (UK), would be misleading. The purpose of The Society *could* be recast as a place for spiritual seeking embracing all spiritual and religious traditions and practices. Criteria for membership *could* be adjusted. A rationale for a new name *could* be established. Membership *could* be open to seekers after truth whether or not a theistic faith was involved. But many existing members might want to preserve what are the currently stated fundamental

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<sup>260</sup> Dandelion (2002. p.227).

<sup>261</sup> I discuss Dandelion's paper on disassociation from The Society in the next chapter

<sup>262</sup> The preface shares the same disclaimer as George Gorman's Swarthmore lecture.

<sup>263</sup> Slack (1967. p.55).

elements of being a Quaker. A split could occur – as many splits have occurred amongst Quakers in the USA<sup>264</sup>. The Religious Society might review or consistently apply the existing ‘fundamental elements of being a Quaker’ as stated in *QF&P* 11.01. 11.01 might even be used as a test for a member self-reviewing, or reviewing with other Quakers, the meaning of their membership. The interviewee Matthew suggested such a reconfirmation of Quaker commitment in his interview should be formalised as part of being a member. Limiting theological diversity by excluding from full membership, but not participation, those who do not believe in the possibility of receiving God’s guidance, would clarify what Quakers believe. To do so could achieve greater cohesion within The Society at the cost of theological permissiveness. Davie’s 1997 suggestion that ‘British Quakers might want to consider whether the current lack of clarity is a sign of healthy open-minded pluralism, or simply of theological confusion?’<sup>265</sup> seems well advised.

### **The behavioural creed**

Neither Dandelion nor Plüss alluded to the contribution that explicit agreement by membership applicants to the definitions of the fundamental elements of being a Quaker in *QF&P* 11.01 might make when discussing the behavioural creed or socialisation in The Society as an association without a doctrine.

Dandelion notes that his conceptualisation of the behavioural creed as a complement to theological permissiveness fits with that of Caroline Plüss’s work on non-doctrinal religion in which socialisation centres on ‘an interiorised and shared

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<sup>264</sup> Gay Pilgrim suggested that the three categories of Friends she identified as Exclusivist, Inclusivist and Syncretist might split the existing Society into three different Yearly Meetings. The Spiritual Society of Friends would be the name for the Syncretists (Pilgrim, 2003. p.156). Pilgrim’s work is described in the literature review in Chapter 1. Dandelion describes the splits in Quakerism in Chapter 2 and Chapter 6 of his *An introduction to Quakerism* (2007).

<sup>265</sup> Davie (1997. p.275).

definition of group behaviour rather than shared beliefs'<sup>266</sup>. Plüss argued that behavioural control and conditioning were used in Quaker communities as the Quaker means of creating cohesion within The Society<sup>267</sup>. They included: 'the provision and withdrawal of acceptance, affection and reciprocity', 'the cognitive molding of novices' behaviour ... [using] ... a variety of highly inter-subjective, nonauthoritative and changing explanations of institutional conduct', 'the use of 'restricted' codes of communication' protecting 'group unity because it makes novices unsure of how their intended behaviour fits with institutional conduct ....[and]... encourages novices to self-censor their behaviour' and finally, 'emphasizing silence in religious activities [which] directs interested novices towards acquiring characteristics that are necessary for the successful implementation of institutional conduct'<sup>268</sup>.

Reading this list of behavioural modification techniques one might wonder why anyone other than individuals accustomed to behavioural conditioning of that kind would want to associate with The Society. Research might establish that such behavioural modification techniques are characteristic of demographically restricted associations. It demonstrates how the power of the confirmation/disconfirmation mechanism may be exercised.

Dandelion argues that in the absence of the authority of scripture and tradition and an agreed theological creed, the need for control of social interactions in Quaker Meetings requires that 'Rules around speech and silence in worship' must be learnt<sup>269</sup>. He identifies orthopraxy and orthoherence as features that contribute to

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<sup>266</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.122).

<sup>267</sup> Plüss (2007).

<sup>268</sup> Plüss (2007. p.269).

<sup>269</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.125).

The Society's social functioning. 'Orthopraxy' is used as a basis for Liberal Quaker commitment and membership. By orthopraxy he refers to worshiping practice established 350 years ago<sup>270</sup>. He thinks Liberal Quakers 'do not feel ... that demeans the experience of worship, undermines progressive revelation or leads to complacency'<sup>271</sup>. He asserts that passages on practice that form part of the Yearly Meeting book of discipline are prescriptive rather than permissive<sup>272,273</sup>. He also suggests that Liberal Quakers do not seem to be concerned if that 'excludes those outside the group or alienates those within'<sup>274</sup>. Subsequently he argues that 'Orthopraxy accommodates heterodoxy and creates coherence in a group without an orthodoxy'<sup>275</sup>.

That claim for the accommodation of a heterodoxy which creates coherence follows Dandelion's statement suggesting Liberal Quakers' indifference to those whom heterodoxy excludes or alienates. He identifies a dominant interest group, 'Liberal Quakers', who are determining the existence of the double culture which Dandelion sees as enabling The Society to function.

Dandelion identifies 'orthocredence' as another aspect of the double culture. He argues that 'Liberal Quakers operate an *orthocredence* (italics in original), a conformist approach to how beliefs are held'<sup>276</sup>. 'The prescription of seeking as the normative mode of belief ... makes Liberal Quakerism less permissive than it first appears'<sup>277</sup>. That 'is the key difference between these [Liberal] Quakers and the

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<sup>270</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.122).

<sup>271</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.122).

<sup>272</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.122).

<sup>273</sup> Refer again to QF&P 11.01 re. the fundamental elements of being a Quaker: 'the manner of corporate worship and the ordering of the meeting's business.

<sup>274</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.122).

<sup>275</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.127).

<sup>276</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.128).

<sup>277</sup> Dandelion (2019, p.128).

whole of the rest of Quakerism, worldwide today and historically'<sup>278</sup>. Beliefs an individual holds must be held provisionally or partially. Quaker orthodoxy includes the idea that whatever is currently believed is believed with absolute provisionality until new revelation. It is a way of being religious which is, for Dandelion, the way of the 'absolute perhaps', a way where whatever religious truth may be found and spoken is qualified as 'perhaps' true<sup>279</sup>.

Dandelion writes that the double-culture 'underpins the way in which silence has masked and accommodated the pluralisation of belief within British Quakerism and other Liberal Quaker groups in the last 50 years'<sup>280</sup>. He has argued since 1996 that it amounts to a 'culture of silence'<sup>281</sup>. If that, alongside a culture of the absolute perhaps, comprise the normal Quaker way, Quakers who self-identify as Christian or who have a theistic faith, could therefore feel they are being silenced if not marginalised<sup>282</sup>. I see the inhibition of faith in a transcendent or mystical dimension to everyday life and its expression as having weakened 'the social glue' within a Local Meeting and consequently within The Society as a whole. It is one of the destructive forces affecting The Society from within.

Dandelion has, however, noticed 'shifting markers' of Quakerism which modify his earlier beliefs<sup>283</sup>. He sees Liberal Quakerism as 'highly adaptable'<sup>284</sup> and that this adaptability has enabled change. He recognises that there has been experimentation in the form of all-age worship and semi-programmed worship 'in some Local

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<sup>278</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.128).

<sup>279</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.127). Simmel acknowledged the indeterminacy of the existence of God and God's attributes from a philosophical perspective (Simmel. 2015. p.54-55). See also earlier discussion of Simmel and God above.

<sup>280</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.124).

<sup>281</sup> Dandelion (1996. p.256; 2019. p.124).

<sup>282</sup> as letters in the Friend suggest See Letter by Roger Hill (12 May 2023), letters by Jeanette Lock and Geoffrey Johnson (26 May 2023) and Margaret Sadler (9 June 2023).

<sup>283</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.131).

<sup>284</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.131).



Meetings'. To those innovations may be added the introduction of Experiment with Light groups and an international network promoting Experiment with Light<sup>285</sup>. In his view, 'The creation of coherence has ... shifted from orthopraxis to orthocredence, a normative approach to the credibility of belief, if not belief content'<sup>286</sup>: that is to say, beliefs should be held provisionally, as the 'absolute perhaps'<sup>287</sup>. Whilst innovation in practice facilitates new expressions of faith, the culture of orthocredence and the 'absolute perhaps' of belief, comprise destructive forces. They allow members to accept a position of scepticism and multiple interpretations with regards the existing statement of the fundamental elements of being a Quaker.

Dandelion's explanation of change blurs the distinction between coherence and cohesion. Coherence relates to the propositions that constitute participants' beliefs. One may talk about the coherence of a community where the community shares a set of coherent beliefs. Coherent and non-contradictory beliefs contribute to social cohesion. Cohesion, however, relates to the strength of the bonds between those within an association and how those bonds are maintained and nurtured. But we have seen that The Society consists of participants who do not share fundamental beliefs. That difficulty is managed specifically through orthocredence.

Orthocredence's function is the avoidance of a destructive conflict between those holding different beliefs. Positively, it is an affirmation of theological openness. A shift to orthocredence it is a shift in favour of the culture of the 'absolute perhaps' of any truth about God's existence and God's relationship to the world. Negatively, orthocredence is about the avoidance of The Society and its worshipping groups at

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<sup>285</sup> Lampen (2008). See also The Experiment with Light website (<https://experiment-with-light.org.uk/about/>) Accessed 20/12/2023 and Meads (2011) also discussed in the literature review in Chapter 1.

<sup>286</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.131).

<sup>287</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.127).

Local, Area and national level having to assert a theological boundary between what is and what is not acceptable Quaker theology.

How orthodoxy might be stemming the numerical decline of attenders and members or increasing The Society's attraction for those seeking a spiritual or religious home is unclear. Although the intention of orthodoxy is to preserve social cohesion by avoiding conflict over participants' beliefs, that approach has shown no sign of reversing falling numbers. It may leave those religious seekers who arrive at a Local Meeting looking to satisfy or express their religiosity bemused that the group cannot say what it believes. Of course, The Society could decide to celebrate the theological uncertainties and the optionality of a belief in a Divinity whose will could be discerned in private and in collective worship. How the explicit celebration of theological uncertainty and contradiction might affect Meetings for Worship, including those where church affairs and business are concerned, creatively or destructively, and The Society's capacity for recruiting and retaining participants, would be an interesting action research project: Area Meetings could facilitate an experiment with different types of Meeting for Worship and worship activity held at the Local Meeting level at local Meeting Houses e.g. Christocentric, theist and non-theist, unprogrammed and programmed Meetings, and Meetings incorporating the Experiment with Light. Experimenting with forms of worship reflects a relaxation of orthopraxis. That provides new ways for religiosity to be expressed and new opportunities to participate in The Society. Relaxing orthopraxis as a defence against innovation might serve to attract and retain participants in The Society and even generate social cohesion. It would reflect a recognition that differences how individuals want to express their religiosity requires different

responses from within a religious society. Orthopraxis, however, is not an alternative to theological coherence.

I argue that the underlying logic of the double culture has been more a conflict aversion rather than a conflict management, let alone conflict resolution mechanism. The Society's Area Meetings have supported permissiveness of belief by not asserting fundamental elements of being a Quaker set out in the canonical *Book of discipline* (i.e. *Quaker faith & practice*). Through an emergent behavioural creed, participants in Quaker meetings have then tried to avert conflict arising from contradictory theological convictions and resisting more radical experimentation with different forms of worship.

The question remains whether what are currently declared canonically as the fundamental elements of being a Quaker are to be asserted, revised or treated as optional within The Society.

### **Secularisation and internal secularisation**

In this section and its subsections I focus primarily on Dandelion's explanation for internal secularisation within The Society and Dandelion's general theory of internal secularisation<sup>288</sup>. I will suggest that internal secularisation along with the culture of silence and the double culture contribute to the loss of enthusiasm of once enthusiastic attenders and members and to the decline in participation within The Society.

Secularisation is one of the reasons that has been offered for a decline in membership and for participants leaving The Society<sup>289</sup>. Dandelion, observed that

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<sup>288</sup> Dandelion (2019).

<sup>289</sup> Hampton (2014. p.8).

secular theorists have claimed about liberal religion (and Dandelion sees The Society as currently a ‘ Liberal’ incarnation of British Quakerism <sup>290</sup>) that:

permissiveness undermines its [i.e. liberal religion’s] ability to transmit its beliefs clearly and recruit. Groups with distinctive belief systems and which oppose dominant value systems are expected to survive longer’<sup>291</sup>.

That extract invited a consideration as to whether the Society’s decline was related to its current Liberal incarnation’. Specifically, were internal factors rather than external secular factors contributing to its numerical decline. Was ‘permissiveness’ undermining the distinctiveness of the Quaker belief system or was permissiveness The Society’s distinctive characteristic? Was The Society failing to oppose dominant value systems or was it upholding and ‘embodying’ its own?

### **Dandelion, the cultivation of conformity and internal secularisation**

In 2007, Dandelion concluded his *An Introduction to Quakerism* by considering The Society’s future prospects<sup>292</sup>. He noted the sharp decline of The Society’s membership in Britain since the 1990s but remained optimistic. He thought that new popular engagement might arise from the advent of on-line meetings<sup>293</sup>. He also thought that converts with ‘no prior religious affiliation’ might continue to be attracted because the denomination appears serious and makes demands on its participants. Seriousness and demands are normally characteristics of more conservative religions which seem more able to resist secularisation. British Quakerism was both liberal and demanding of its members<sup>294</sup> <sup>295</sup>. Dandelion noted that ‘recruitment

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<sup>290</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.117)

<sup>291</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.31).

<sup>292</sup> Dandelion (2007. p.247).

<sup>293</sup> Dandelion (2007. p.247).

<sup>294</sup> Dandelion (2007. p.248).

<sup>295</sup> Demanding because members, not paid clergy, are responsible for the conduct of Meetings for Worship and The Society’s governance.

remains high at 90% of all participants'<sup>296</sup> and that 'clarity around orthopraxy and orthocredence might be operating to stem the tide of secularisation'<sup>297</sup>. His optimism in 2019 is not supported by the continuing decline in the actual numbers of members and attenders recorded in the Tabular Statement<sup>298</sup>.

Quaker seriousness and demands made on British Quakers arise from Quaker theology, form of worship and ecclesiology. Participants themselves provide the religious input to The Society's Meetings for Worship. Unpaid members who were Elders ensured its 'right ordering'. The lack of religious dogma was an attraction to those unattracted by traditional churches and their creeds and their membership requirements. Quaker ecclesiology also makes demands on members. The Society has been primarily self-organised depending on unpaid service for its Local and Area Meetings where worship is held and membership is managed. In relation to national activities, Judy Frith<sup>299</sup>, argued in 2009 that the opportunities to serve on The Society's central committees has helped generate a national network of friendships between Friends that strengthens the bonds that had sustained The Society.

Meeting the need for service at all levels of The Society has become, however, increasingly challenging because of the 'failure to attract enough new participants'<sup>300</sup> Existing members have also been released from membership on their own initiative (see Figure 4.2 below).

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<sup>296</sup> i.e. Most participants in The Society are recruits to it rather than birthright members.

<sup>297</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.136).

<sup>298</sup> Britain Yearly Meeting (2022).

<sup>299</sup> Frith (2009). See discussion of her work in Chapter 1.

<sup>300</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.136). That failure has not been formally researched.

	Year 2022	Year 2021	Year 2020
Members released on their own initiative	125	88	87

Figure 4.2 Members released on their own initiative (Tabular statements, 2021-2023)

More chose to leave in 2022 than in previous years. Dandelion offered an analysis why members resigned their membership in 2002<sup>301</sup>, but there has been no other published research exploring why members choose to leave and attenders cease attending<sup>302</sup>.

In order to fill positions for the conduct of the centralised work of The Society and also some positions for Area Meetings, non-Quakers have been recruited<sup>303</sup>.

Dandelion does not discuss the impact of these decisions but these full-time and part-time appointments are a symptom of internal secularisation<sup>304</sup>. Dandelion does, however, offer a theoretical analysis to explain internal secularisation.

Dandelion discussed ‘the inter-relationship between religious groups and wider society’ asserting that ‘religious groups change in relation to societal norms potentially to the point of undergoing processes of ‘internal secularisation’ within secular and secularist cultures’<sup>305</sup>.

Later, Dandelion writes:

<sup>301</sup>Dandelion (2002). Discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>302</sup> Dandelion has not discussed J.C.W. Chadkirk’s finding that the majority (91%) of attenders did not remain participants (Chadkirk, 2014. p.216) in his recent 2019 monograph, *The cultivation of conformity* (2019).

<sup>303</sup> i.e. those who are neither members nor attenders of a Quaker Meeting. Advertisements in the Friend do not specify the need to be associated with the Society as a requirement for the promotion of Quakerism. See advertisements in the Friend 9th September 2022 for two Local Development Workers and other advertisements not requiring previous involvement with Quakerism: 10th March 2023 for a Team Leader Children and Youth Development; 3rd February 2023 for a Parliamentary Engagement Officer (Scotland).

<sup>304</sup> Chapter 1 described how the central work of The Society is organised conventionally with a management hierarchy and heads of department. Central England Quakers has employed a Principal Officer and other staff to manage the administration of its Area Meeting.

<sup>305</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.1).

Religious groups and participants are continually making choices about how they relate to wider culture and to state regulation. These choices can be cast in terms of accommodation or resistance<sup>306</sup>.

I agree with Dandelion that ‘accommodation or resistance’ frame the choice about how The Society and its participants may relate to the wider culture and to state regulation<sup>307</sup>. Dandelion does not discuss the responsibility for making those choices. I argue they are deliberate choices by those in a position to make them as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Dandelion’s focuses on linguistic culture and then accommodation theory as an explanation for internal secularisation. He identifies two elements of ‘internal secularisation ... expressed linguistically’ to support his general theory: ‘Individualism/subjectivisation and de-theologisation’<sup>308</sup>.

### **Individualism/subjectivisation**

Dandelion argues that the historic synthesis of moral values and religious faith no longer holds in a secular society. ‘The option of un-tethering moral values from faith has led to a wider range of points of entry into the group’<sup>309</sup>. Montemaggi’s research<sup>310</sup> and mine suggest that new entrants come to Quaker groups with more rather than less religious knowledge<sup>311</sup>. Their faith and their values cannot be assumed to be untethered. Most have experienced participation and membership in other religious groups which require attendance at induction programmes and confessions of faith before they had experienced full membership.

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<sup>306</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.137).

<sup>307</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.137).

<sup>308</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.144).

<sup>309</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.144). Although QF&P relates the Quaker testimonies to their underpinning theology, BYM makes no reference to that spiritual source when presenting them on BYM’s website.

<sup>310</sup> Discussed in the literature review in Chapter 1.

<sup>311</sup> Montemaggi (2018b. p.4).

Dandelion is right, however, in noting that an individualistic interpretation of Quakerism is encouraged by default. Quakers are not required to receive any systematic induction to the faith and practice of Quakers nor the basis for Quaker values. Furthermore there is no agreement about what newcomers 'should' know about Quakerism. Applicants for membership may be encouraged and choose to attend a study programme for attenders<sup>312</sup> but they are not required to do so as a condition of membership. That is a lack which, Dandelion has indicated 'has encouraged individual interpretation of liturgy and practice'<sup>313</sup>. Should they attend a Quaker Quest programme<sup>314</sup>, they learnt only whatever happened to be presented on Quaker faith and practice. Dandelion says that in one Quaker's Meeting's enquirer's programme individualism was presented as 'normative'. A Quaker taking part was told 'not to say what Quakers believed, only what he as an individual believed, should he be asked a theological question'<sup>315</sup>.

An attender on a Quaker induction programme, a manifestation of vernacular Quakerism, may have been told little about canonical Quakerism as reflected in Chapters 10 and 11 of *QF&P* to do with belonging to a Quaker meeting and membership. Only by chance would they have heard and explored statements in Quaker language about Quaker theology e.g. that the Inner or Inward Light proceeds from God, that that is not the same as listening to one's personal conscience, that that is to be distinguished from the faculty of reason and that it is not about affirming the priority of your light and my light, but of the Light of God<sup>316</sup>. The relevance and

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<sup>312</sup> E.g. Quaker Quest or weekend workshops at centers owned by The Society. Quaker Quest is an outreach programme discussed in Chapter 1. Two of the twelve interviewees engaged in induction programmes: Andrea attended a locally arranged programme; Shirley attended Quaker Quest.

<sup>313</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.144).

<sup>314</sup> Quaker Quest is the name given to a structured induction programme given by locally based Quakers. It is not part of BYM, the charity.

<sup>315</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.144).

<sup>316</sup> *QF&P* (26.61, 26.63, 26.65).



importance of those concepts to individual and collective discernment may not have been explained. Montemaggi reported that in her research into new Quakers 'none of the respondents or interviewees mention business meetings specifically'<sup>317</sup>. Yet if the people who come to a Quaker induction programme are those who have been unconvinced by other denominations, they could be presumed to be interested in what makes the Quaker denomination distinctive in its theology and governance.

There are also no canonical procedures by which an individual becomes a member:

Variety and flexibility in procedures are needed to reflect individual and local circumstances. Each area meeting will develop one or more of such procedures<sup>318</sup>.

The lack of a requirement for newcomers to receive Quaker education and the lack of suggested qualifying periods or membership procedures before membership may be granted, seem likely to be factors in undermining the coherence of Quakerism and social cohesion within The Society: new and existing members will have variable amounts of knowledge about Quaker faith and practice<sup>319</sup>. The absence of an induction programme that can present a coherent account of a distinctive Quaker theology and the meaning of the fundamental elements of being a Quaker as presented in *QF&P* 11.01 means members cannot assume a common awareness and understanding of core Quaker concepts. Some members are, as Dandelion remarks, 'modern Liberal Quakers without a God or without a God with a will'<sup>320</sup>. That, however, is a marker of The Society's accommodation to secularism rather than a marker of individualism/subjectivisation.

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<sup>317</sup> Montemaggi (2018. p. 17)

<sup>318</sup> *QF&P* (11.04).

<sup>319</sup> The Vibrancy in Meetings, discussed below at 4.6, noticed that lack as a current need in Meetings.

<sup>320</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.127).

I would, however, suggest that Dandelion's linking of individualism with subjectivisation<sup>321</sup> as factors in internal secularisation is not necessarily ungodly. An individual may see that it is in their best interest to bring their own subjective reality into relationship with the Divine and that a subjective act of faith was necessary for that to happen. Ben Pink Dandelion<sup>322</sup>, writing in his Swarthmore lecture *Open for transformation*, says 'We know we can encounter the Divine directly ... [and that] We find that intimacy with the Divine transforms us and our approach to the rest of humanity'<sup>323</sup>. Intimacy with the Divine requires an individual's trust in the existence of the Divine. Faith involves trust<sup>324</sup>. That act requires a step beyond an intellectual decision based on argument and an objective sifting of the evidence that 'there almost certainly is a God'<sup>325</sup>. The Quaker L. Hugh Doncaster asserts that 'This central affirmation, that the Light of the Christ-like God shines in every person implies that knowledge of God is both subjective and objective'<sup>326</sup>. The insights of others are part of the evidence for 'our affirmation' which is an individual's act of faith<sup>327</sup>. An act of faith is a rejection of secularism and, for Quakers, whether Christian or theist, an assertion of an individual's willingness to try to live a Spirit-directed life. An individual's continuing attention to the Light within and the Light in others becomes a factor in how one lives one's life. When what the language of Light refers to and, indeed, any of the fundamental elements of being a Quaker, are rejected by a person accepted into membership, that would be a factor in the internal secularisation of The Society. An important insight of Quaker theology fails to be

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<sup>321</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.144).

<sup>322</sup> Ben Pink Dandelion, rather than Pink Dandelion, is the name Dandelion uses for texts he authors for a wider audience.

<sup>323</sup> Dandelion (2014a. p.3).

<sup>324</sup> Williams (2007).

<sup>325</sup> Ward (2008).

<sup>326</sup> QF&P (2013. 26.65).

<sup>327</sup> QF&P (2013. 26.65).

upheld by the Area Meeting that does the accepting and the social cohesiveness of Quaker Meetings is undermined.

Dandelion states as a fact that 'Religious identity becomes personalized, even bespoke, part of a commodified religious language or religious marketplace'<sup>328</sup>. I argue that the interviewees for this research developed their own understanding of Quakerism and that rejecting other religious paths encountered in the market place contributed to their understanding. An individual's own religiosity is the origin of their interest in religion. If Quakerism begins to satisfy, a prototypical, or bespoke, Quaker identity is created out of a Quaker encounter which followed all previous religious encounters and experiences they deemed spiritual. That prototypical religious identity cannot but be influenced by the vernacular Quakerism individuals meet in their first and subsequent interactions with others in Quaker settings and with their engagement with canonical Quakerism. Those interactions contribute to the 'we-feeling' that can develop as a result of identifying as Quaker and feeling confirmed as a Quaker. It can also snap when a person feels disconfirmed.

In developing their prototypical Quakerism, two of my interviewees reported attending an induction programme. Eleven referred to *Quaker faith & practice* and to the Quaker Business Method which they encountered in their Local meetings<sup>329</sup>. Six referred to the theology of Light in their interviews. Five referred to the Quaker phrase 'that of God in everyone'<sup>330</sup>. What they learnt about Quakerism was primarily from their presence at the Meetings they happened to attend. No one said anything about Quaker information leaflets or the Quakers in Britain website which might be

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<sup>328</sup> Dandelion (2019, p.144).

<sup>329</sup> Phillip, who clearly knew about Quaker theology and the Quaker Business Method did not mention *Quaker faith & practice* explicitly in his interview.

<sup>330</sup> See Appendix 4 for two tables identifying topics in Quaker theology and Quaker structures and processes spoken of in the interviews.

expected to offer some useful support to their Quaker lives. One can speculate that most of Chadkirk's 91% attenders who stopped attending<sup>331</sup> never experienced Meetings for Worship whose impact had moved my interviewees to continue their association or grasped its theology.

For all my interviewees', experiences of Quaker worship and Quaker meetings raised their curiosity and interest. They became members because they found a congenial Local Quaker Meeting offering an experience that satisfied their religiosity. and offered a counter to secular understandings and interactions with the world<sup>332</sup>.

### **De-theologisation**

Dandelion identifies the process of de-theologisation as the second element in the process of internal secularisation:

the process of rationalisation or de-theologisation is about changing the linguistic assumptions and linguistic expression of faith ... about the decline in explicitly religious language within faith descriptions and explanations ... about the portrayal of morality and ethics in rational rather than religious terms and of history in terms of human decision-making rather than providence'<sup>333</sup>.

De-theologisation is not an accident. Linguistic assumptions are changed by interested people concerned with how and what of a denomination's theology should be expressed. Those who make and approve the change in linguistic assumptions believe, or hope, that new linguistic formulations will be more effective than the previous linguistic formulations. Those with authority within BYM, the charity charged with promoting Quakerism, have on their website and in hard copy form, chosen the language and the content for presenting Quakerism there. Those choices have led

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<sup>331</sup> Chadkirk (2014. p.216).

<sup>332</sup> Three interviewees reported dissatisfaction with Local Meetings they had attended (Linda, Joy, and Rosemary), but not the one they currently attended.

<sup>333</sup> Dandelion (2019. p. 144).

to de-theologising distinct features of Quaker faith and practice and are a symptom of internal secularisation within BYM.

Firstly, the material on the official website makes little reference to God. In 2021<sup>334</sup> the Quaker saying ‘that there is that of God in everyone’ was prominently displayed on the faith page of the charity’s website<sup>335</sup>. No explanations or implications of that assertion were offered. The first sentence of the introduction to *Quaker faith & practice* is: ‘As Friends we commit ourselves to a way of worship which allows God to teach and transform us’. Quakers claim the possibility of personal transformation from an interiorised experience of what some name as God, Christ or the Holy Spirit. That would have helped clarify the implications of the assertion although some members of The Society might use different language to describe an interior spiritual event they cannot name or explain and some do not want to use traditional theological language at all to describe their Quakerism. In fact, in 2024<sup>336</sup> the radical statement ‘there is that of God in everyone’, as of 17/02/2024, has been removed by BYM. That was an unannounced decision of the charity which controls and maintains the website, not the church, which is the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain<sup>337</sup>.

Secondly, examining the page in 2021<sup>338</sup> revealed that the word ‘God’ was used once and ‘Spirit’ not at all. There is no mention of George Fox’s phrase, quoted in *Quaker faith & practice* in a preamble to 19.19, the section headed *A guided people*,

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<sup>334</sup> In October 2021 when I explored the website.

<sup>335</sup> <https://www.quaker.org.uk/about-quakers/our-faith> (Accessed 11/10/2021). This statement has now apparently been deleted, further evidence of internal secularisation by the charity BYM.

<sup>336</sup> An earlier version of this chapter referred to this quotation as it was used on the *Quakers in Britain* website in 2021 (Accessed 11/10/2021). In checking my reference I came across its omission: <https://www.quaker.org.uk/faith/our-faith> Accessed 17/02/2024.

<sup>337</sup> See Chapter 1 1.4 Authority and the centrally managed work of Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM), the charity. This distinction between the charity and the church is discussed further in this and subsequent chapters.

<sup>338</sup> <https://www.quaker.org.uk/about-quakers/our-faith/how-quakers-worship> (Accessed: 5/10/2021)

that 'Christ has come to teach his people himself'. The preamble continues: 'From this teaching comes Quaker faith and practice'. Those who decided on the contents of the website<sup>339</sup>, did not think that that foundational idea of Quakerism was important enough for communicating and explaining on the website. That omission is a further example of de-theologising the presentation of Quakerism by the staff of the charity. I note that the wider membership of The Society have no (current) official responsibility for the official public presentation of Quakerism<sup>340</sup>.

Thirdly, quoting from that same electronic page on *How Quakers worship* is written:

In the quiet we look for a sense of connection. This might be a connection with those around us, with our deepest selves, or perhaps with God'<sup>341</sup>.

In that sentence, God is presented as the third option for connection in worship. In a video, the presentation of various speakers' views shows that many views about worship and God are acceptable to Quakers. There is an assertion by one speaker 'that we are all connected to the same thing in that silence', but not what they think that thing may be, or is. There are statements suggesting that going to Meeting for

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<sup>339</sup> The complexity of Quaker organisation means there are several loci for authority regarding organisational statements (*Quaker faith & practice*, 2013. 3.27). A recent change were the arrangements for publications by the central body, the BYM charity. At one time Quaker Life Central Committee were responsible for materials that presented Quakerism to the outside world. This Committee consisted of members nominated by other members to give unpaid service. That responsibility was relocated to the paid staff at Friends House. My arguments point to paid employees who may or may not be Quakers presenting Quakerism in ways they, ultimately, have decided are appropriate – an example of internal secularisation and decision-making by BYM staff.

<sup>340</sup> Two bodies that might have been involved were Quaker Life Central Committee and Quaker Life Representative Council. Quaker Life Central Committee's work 'is **to help** nurture and support Quaker communities and is delivered under the following areas: Worship & spirituality, Community, Governance, Active values, Collaboration, Quakers being known and understood. Quaker Life Representative Council is intended as a two-way channel of communication provides for education, inspiration and consultation, bringing local Friends closer to national work and vice versa' (<https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/our-structures/quaker-life-central-committee> Accessed 7/04/2023). See also *Quaker faith & practice* 8.08 and 8.09. Neither of these bodies have an official involvement in the vetting of the charity's promotional materials.

<sup>341</sup> <https://www.quaker.org.uk/about-quakers/our-faith/how-quakers-worship> (Accessed: 5/10/2021)

Worship is an experience worth having but there is no statement from the canon i.e.

*QF&P* that:

Worship is our response to an awareness of God. We can worship alone, but when we join with others in expectant waiting we may discover a deeper sense of God's presence. We seek a gathered stillness in our meetings for worship so that all may feel the power of God's love drawing us together and leading us<sup>342</sup>.

In worship we enter with reverence into communion with God and respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Come to meeting for worship with heart and mind prepared. Yield yourself and all your outward concerns to God's guidance so that you may find 'the evil weakening in you and the good raised up'<sup>343</sup>.

The above statements are more helpful in conveying the normative purpose of Quaker worship and Meeting for Worship to those wanting to know something about how Quakers worship, Quaker theology and the Quaker way than the de-theologised statements that have been presented.

There seems to have been a choice or assumption about the intended audience of the *Quakers in Britain* website (and other outreach materials) that seems at odds with what is known from surveys about those who might seek information about the Quaker way and choose to go to a Quaker Meeting for the first time<sup>344</sup>. They are those with a non-trivial interest in religion, normally a Christian background, and often previously attached to churches.

The conclusion is that the promotion of Quaker faith on The Quakers in Britain website is one based on an attempt to appeal to non-Quakers but by playing down the distinctive characteristics of Quakerism. Perhaps it is hoped that emphasising Quakerism's friendliness to all will appeal to an assumed secularised audience who should not be confronted with theological language for fear of frightening them away.

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<sup>342</sup> QF&P (1.02.8)

<sup>343</sup> QF&P (1.02.9).

<sup>344</sup> e.g. Montemaggi (2018. p.7).

Dandelion, in supporting his arguments to illustrate the decline of linguistic assumptions and expressions within The Society, chooses the terms ‘sin, salvation, God etc.’ as further evidence<sup>345</sup>. He does not however, choose Quaker words denoting concepts with religious meanings<sup>346</sup> – such as Light and Concern, or ‘Meeting for Worship’ and ‘Clerk’, Eldership and Oversight<sup>347</sup>, which are used in the conduct of Quaker affairs. They have not been secularised but are descriptive of basic features of what is distinctive in Quaker theology and ecclesiology.

Not including the word ‘Light’ in his sample of theological terms is surprising. Its frequency in the index to *QF&P*<sup>348</sup> implies its theological importance within the Quaker world. The fact that ‘Light’ as a Quaker religious concept has to some extent been de-theologised by choice of the BYM trustees would, however, add to Dandelion’s argument. Penelope Cummins<sup>349</sup> describes BYM Trustees in 2013 approving and defending the decision by the company, wholly owned by BYM, to name the Large Meeting House within Friends’ House ‘The Light’<sup>350</sup> for use in a marketing strategy for commercial lettings. That is a profane use of the term and another contribution to the internal secularisation process.

Dandelion’s explanation of de-theologisation draws on the insights into the causes of secularisation by various philosophers, sociologists of religion and scholars of

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<sup>345</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.145).

<sup>346</sup> There are glossaries of Quaker terms which have been published and some are available online e.g.

*Quaker terms* published by Central England Quakers (<https://centralenglandquakers.org.uk/about-quakers/quaker-terms/> Accessed 4/01/2023

<sup>347</sup> At the 2022 Yearly Meeting, it was decided to end the use of the word Overseer to refer to the ‘pastoral role’ in Quaker Meetings because of its relationship to slavery. The term oversight is still used e.g. in North West London Area Meeting. Some object to ‘pastoral’ because of its link with clerical authority, not to say sheep.

<sup>348</sup> There are more than fifty entries for ‘Light’ in the index to the printed version of *Quaker faith & practice* (2013).

<sup>349</sup> Cummins (2020. p.273). Cummins’ work is discussed further below in this chapter.

<sup>350</sup> Cummins (2019. p.313; 2020. p.273).



linguistics and on accommodation theory. He quotes Charles Taylor's term 'disenfleshed'<sup>351</sup>. Taylor is making the point that religion and worship have become rationalised activities rather than embodied practices witnessing to a faith. Although it may be the case that some who minister in a Quaker Meeting are simply voicing opinions or telling stories, uninfluenced by Quaker discipline, I would point to the interviewees, all of whom have ministered and most of whom describe their ministry as, in a bodily sense, inspired rather than self-willed. The words they use are a response to that inspiration, which in traditional Quaker theology would be interpreted as a leading of the Spirit<sup>352</sup>. Dandelion, who does notice that some Quakers apparently still quake when they minister, may be underestimating the number of Quakers who, without claiming a mystical experience, are experiencing in Meetings for Worship the mysterious promptings that result in enfleshed speech<sup>353</sup>.

Dandelion believes that 'Mysticism is seen by participants as a concept rather than a reality, with few British Quakers claiming a personal encounter with God'<sup>354</sup>.

Dandelion's assertion needs elaboration. Many British Quakers may treat mysticism as a concept rather than a reality and deny a personal encounter with God when participating in certain types of conversation or ticking boxes in surveys; others do not. The Society, moreover, testifies through its Yearly Meeting's main publication that the human experience of the promptings of love and truth in human hearts comes from God. In addition to 'true' ministry in Meeting understood as a prompting of The Spirit, the first of the Quaker *'Advices and queries'* that 'the promptings of love and truth in your hearts' are to be trusted 'as the leadings of God whose Light shows

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<sup>351</sup> Dandelion (2019. p. 146).

<sup>352</sup> QF&P (2013. e.g., 2.55-2.73; 10.05).

<sup>353</sup> Dandelion (2019. p. 146).

<sup>354</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.145).

us our darkness and brings us to new life'<sup>355</sup>. The secular world may not interpret the promptings of love and truth in one's heart as coming from a transcendent source also immanent in humankind but it is the first 'Advice' of *Quaker faith & practice*.

Dandelion points to the British Quaker survey that reports that " 'thinking' was the highest ranked activity within Meeting for Worship"<sup>356</sup>. The significance of that ranking is unclear. The question they are responding to is '*What kind of activity best describes what you usually do in Meeting for Worship?*'<sup>357</sup>. Thirteen possible answers are suggested and more than one may be ticked. It is difficult to ascertain quite what a person is signifying when they tick off 'thinking': other responses may additionally be ticked as 'best' describing what they do in Meeting. The adults whom I interviewed experience Meeting as not simply a place in which to exercise thinking and secular rationality. They have all been inspired to minister. Some, including the non-theist, specifically spoke of the value of hearing others' ministry and of their Meeting's effect on them,.

Finally, Dandelion concludes after a discussion headed 'Agency and accommodation' :

that the cultivation of conformity is rooted in popular and local religious expression. In other words, people are describing their religious expression in secular terms ... either because their 'faith' is indeed secular ... or in order to minimise dissimilarity with wider culture. This latter mechanism is known as 'accommodation theory' and has been attributed to the desire to maximise

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<sup>355</sup> *QF&P 1.02*. Chapter 1 of *QF&P* is published and distributed widely and freely as a separate booklet called *Advices & queries*. They 'are intended for use in our meetings, for private devotion and reflection, as a challenge and inspiration to us as Friends in our personal lives and in our life as a religious community, and as a concise expression of our faith and practice readily available to enquirers and to the wider world' (*Advices & queries*, 2008. p.24).

<sup>356</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.146).

<sup>357</sup> *British Quaker Survey 2013* (2013). The reference refers to the questionnaires used to conduct the survey.

social integration and thus to maximise positive reception, evaluation and response<sup>358</sup>.

The majority of those who choose to participate in Meetings of the Religious Society of Friends come as individuals resisting the dominating culture of a secular Sunday. Their participation is a counter-cultural religious activity. I question the explanatory power of accommodation theory to explain internal secularisation in the context of Quaker Meetings. The concepts referred to by Quaker religious terms support the discussion of religious issues in the context of Quaker theology and ecclesiology and Quaker community life e.g. the terms 'Light' 'ministry', 'concern', 'clerk', and also Jesus and Christ.

Within a Quaker community there may be a fear in some Christian Friends of giving offence to those participants who have difficulty with the word God in Meetings. They may also be a fear of disconfirmatory responses by more secular-oriented and non-theist participants. That does not mean Christian and theist Friends are being internally secularised. Quakers might well be motivated to 'maximise positive reception, evaluation and response', and be cautious when using religious language with non-Quakers. In communicating with the outside world, that would explain why de-theologised language is used by BYM staff to explain Quakerism on the *Quakers in Britain* website.

Based on his linguistic observations, Dandelion speaks of 'The lack of explicit religiosity within British Quakerism'<sup>359</sup>. The lack of explicit religious language in and the de-theologisation of promotional literature is a feature of BYM's strategy for the

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<sup>358</sup>Dandelion (2019. p.149), referring to Giles, H. Coupland, J. and Coupland, N. (1991). Accommodation theory: communication, context and consequence IN Giles, H. Coupland, J. and Coupland, N. (eds). Contexts of accommodation: developments in applied sociolinguistics. Cambridge University Press, p.1-68.

<sup>359</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.136).

promotion of Quakerism rather than a lack within British Quakerism. Following Simmel's distinction between religiosity and religion it is religiosity, an attribute of human beings, which gives rise to religious terms and religious organisations in the first place. Without them the foundation of a religion and the persistence of a religious organisation such as The Society would be impossible. An underpinning argument of this thesis is that an individual's religiosity needs to find both a language and a form for its expression; and it needs confirmation in community. Those who discover Quakerism and remain Quakers find a suitable form and local community for their religiosity's expression.

For religious Quakers there are continuing disturbing debates within The Society about the appropriateness of religious language in Quakerism evidenced in letters to *the Friend*<sup>360</sup>. Letters were published questioning the phrase 'Meeting for Worship'<sup>361</sup> and the use of religious language<sup>362</sup>. Controversy over the phrase 'Meeting for Worship' recurred in 2022<sup>363</sup>, with some Friends advocating truncating the phrase Meeting for Worship to 'Meeting'. Some Friends also have difficulties with the word 'God'<sup>364</sup>. In response, Richard Pashley's letter in *the Friend* of the 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2022 asks:

How likely is it that we can be a coherent faith community if we minimise our theocratic origins in order to attract those who are unlikely to be in unity with the Quaker concept of worship, based as it is on 'the belief that we can recognise the will of God through the discipline of silent waiting'<sup>365</sup>.

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<sup>360</sup> *the Friend* is based in Britain and is published weekly. It is independent of Britain Yearly Meeting and is owned by *the Friend* Publications Ltd. Its purpose is the propagating the religious teaching of that Society and of promoting interest in its work although it is not an official publication of The Society or BYM (<https://thefriend.org/page/about-the-friend> Accessed 5/01/2022).

<sup>361</sup> 14<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

<sup>362</sup> 28<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

<sup>363</sup> Letters 8<sup>th</sup> July, 19<sup>th</sup> August, 2<sup>nd</sup> September.

<sup>364</sup> Durham (2011. p.17); Grant (2019).

<sup>365</sup> QF&P (3.02).

There are clearly those with different points of view within The Society. In terms of cohesion and attraction, a person who interprets their own religious or spiritual experience as indicative of the reality of God is hardly encouraged to engage with The Society and Friends if they think the words they use to describe and express their religiosity are problematic to some members; and more so when they encounter arguments questioning the reality of what they have understood to be their own transcendental experience. Accommodation theory, like orthodoxy and the behavioural creed, are theories developed to describe behaviour that is not non-conformist but conflict averse. Craig Barnett has commented in a document published by *the Friend* that:

The current trajectory of Liberal Quakerism is towards a secular friendly society, which has replaced any spiritual content with a vague concept of Quaker 'values' that are almost indistinguishable from the background liberal middle-class culture. With nothing deeper to offer people who are genuinely seeking a path of spiritual transformation, such a Quakerism would no longer have any distinctive identity or any reason to exist<sup>366.367</sup>.

Barnett would oppose this trend as those would who share Barnett's view. They form a particular interest group within The Society. For them the distinctive identity of Quakerism is important because they are 'genuinely seeking a path of spiritual transformation' and not a path of accommodation to secularisation.

### **Dandelion's General Theory of Internal Secularisation**

Dandelion defines internal secularisation as 'the way in which a religious group loses an explicit religious identity'. That occurs, he argues, as a result of the dynamics of

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<sup>366</sup> Barnett (2017. p.36-37).

<sup>367</sup> Recent issues of *the Friend* include letters reasserting the interests of Christian Quakers. See footnote 178.

'the relationship between religious groups and wider culture [which] can become turbulent at any point in time'<sup>368</sup>. He continues:

neither 'religious groups' nor 'wider society' (sic.) are single or static entities: religious groups comprise organisational and popular elements and 'wider society' can be divided into the State and popular culture. Each of these four elements is in constant negotiation with the others to define the nature of the relationship between any religious group and its host culture. Degrees of assimilation are dependent on the position of each of these elements<sup>369</sup>.

Dandelion is arguing that negotiations between four elements conceptualised as the organisational and popular elements of religion on the one hand and the State and popular culture on the other determine the extent to which a religious organisation changes and becomes more or less assimilated to secular society and secular ways.

That analytical model obscures the fact that an individual may be a member simultaneously of each of those four 'elements' in which they are pursuing their own interests and whose personal, charismatic or role authority in the group would be a factor in the group's decision-making. Dandelion's 'entities' and 'elements' consist of individual human beings with their own ideas, prototypical faiths and interests.

'Constant negotiations' are not simply between Dandelion's four elements but also within each element. They are between individuals with different degrees of influence, role authority and power. In relation to Quakers, a participant in their local Meeting i.e. the popular element, may have an unpaid contributory role within all other elements of Dandelion's model e.g. as a BYM and/or and Area Meeting trustee, as a clerk, a paid member of staff, as a magistrate, as a trade unionist<sup>370</sup>. In

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<sup>368</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.1)

<sup>369</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.1).

<sup>370</sup> A participant in the work of The Society may also have a role in the State e.g. as a Member of Parliament, magistrate or civil servant; and as a citizen they are necessarily a participant in the makeup of 'popular' culture. In any role, an individual may pursue what they see as their own interest or the interest of some good that is not necessarily in their own immediate interest e.g. an increase or decrease in funding or taxation which affects their own budget and wellbeing.

any of these roles and in any of the elements an individual may or may not be in alignment with others whether or not they understand their experience and their decision-making as having any connection with the Divine. Within The Society, Dandelion then suggests that rather than further assimilation to secular culture 'there could be a return to Quaker Christian orthodoxy... [and] British Quakerism could in theory revert to a less pluralistic theological disposition'<sup>371</sup>. Dandelion does not indicate how that might happen. Dandelion's analytical framework is silent on issues to do with governance, power, authority, command and decision over Quaker resources and policy-making.

Internal secularisation is a form of change that affects the present and is the outcome of social interactions between different groups within The Society. Archer's social theory presented in Chapter 2 offers a theory of change that explains how change occurs through the social interactions of individuals associated with overlapping vested and ideational interests groups and with different degrees of influence and power within the organisation in which they operate. It is those interactions that lead to unpredictable future organisational changes. That theory is applied in Chapter 6 of this thesis to offer another way of thinking about the future of The Society. Those within The Society whose decisions contribute to the current process of internal secularisation are not members of discrete 'organisational or popular elements' of The Society. They are those in the role of trustees. As trustees they have legal backing for any lawful decisions they take for the charity. That does not avoid conflict within The Society. It can generate conflict between groups with

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<sup>371</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.156).

different views as how The Society should conduct its business. That fact is discussed in the next section.

#### 4.5.2 The research findings of Penelope Cummins and other evidence for internal secularisation in the Religious Society of Friends

Penelope Cummins has shown in case studies<sup>372</sup> how executive decision-making has moved from the 'Yearly Meeting in Session' and 'Meeting for Sufferings', the representatives of 'popular religion'<sup>373</sup> in The Society, to the Trustees<sup>374</sup> of the BYM Charity, and to the Agenda Committee of Yearly Meeting, parts of the 'organisational element'. Decision-making is coming to follow secular decision-making practices by small groups who make recommendations or take decisions directly. She notes that:

While legally, the trustees are answerable to the Charity Commission for the stewardship of the assets of BYM, they are not necessarily required to make strategic decisions - only to endorse or reject them ... Indeed, the Charity Commission lists 'failure to engage stakeholders in strategic decisions' as one of the shortcomings of which trustee boards may be deemed culpable<sup>375,376</sup>.

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<sup>372</sup> Cummins (2019; 2020). Two case studies are presented in a journal article (2019). Five case studies are presented in her PhD Thesis: *The impact of secularisation on British Quaker ecclesiology* (2020).

<sup>373</sup> 'Popular' because all members have a right to participate in Yearly Meeting or may be nominated for and accept unpaid service as representatives on Meeting for Sufferings and on BYM's central committees. The 'organisational' element consists of nominated unpaid members responsible for centrally organised events such as the Agenda Committee for Yearly Meeting and individuals appointed to a salaried post who are employees of the organisation e.g. the senior management team known as 'Management Meeting', who are also ex officio members of Meeting for Sufferings. (QF&P 7.05). Other ex officio members of Meeting for Sufferings are BYM Trustees (who are appointed by Yearly Meeting in session after being nominated by the Central Appointments Committee, and other representatives of other central committees (QF&P 7.05 <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/passage/7-05/> Accessed 6/01/2022).

<sup>374</sup> Trustees' legal responsibilities are determined by law. Nevertheless they are also listed in QF&P in 15.03-15.11 where 15.03 states:

The law may assume that authority for determining action passes to the trustees and the meeting may choose to do this. However, under Gospel Order, the ultimate authority will still lie with the gathered meeting (<https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/15/> Accessed 23/12/2023).

<sup>375</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/its-your-decision-charity-trustees-and-decision-making/its-your-decision-charity-trustees-and-decision-making>. Document accessed by Cummins on 12/07/16. Membership Charities are also discussed in the following document: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/284722/rs7text.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/284722/rs7text.pdf). Both documents accessed: 17/08/21.

<sup>376</sup> Cummins (2019. p.309).



Cummins provides evidence of trustee boards acting without wider consultation or collective discernment beyond their own group e.g. renaming the Large Meeting House as 'The Light' as discussed above. Cummins argues that what was described as a refurbishment of the Large Meeting House was in fact a major redevelopment and commercially motivated name change. Neither Meeting for Sufferings nor Yearly Meeting in session were initially alerted about a local conservation body's<sup>377</sup> reservations about the refurbishment proposal nor about the full cost implications for The Society<sup>378</sup>.

There was not opportunity to challenge a misleading response from the clerk of trustees, who stated that the refurbishment was necessary to maintain income from lettings, but who failed to mention that the Friends House Hospitality Company had repeatedly explained to trustees that the cost of the proposed scale of refurbishment and alterations could never be recovered from the lettings revenue<sup>379</sup>.

Cummins' doctoral thesis<sup>380</sup> discusses further case studies as other evidence of executive decision-making and internal secularisation. Her concerns were to do with how controversial matters were handled. Cummins presents evidence of attempted censorship of conservative viewpoints to avoid cultural sensitivities and hurt to gay members of The Society in 2008<sup>381</sup>. When the matter then came to the notice of Yearly Meeting in session it was then discussed.

In 2009, Yearly Meeting was concerned with discerning whether to support legalisation of same-sex marriage. Cummins quotes examples of people who changed their mind in favour of the proposal during a profound collective worship

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<sup>377</sup> Cummins (2019. p.268).

<sup>378</sup> Cummins (2019. p.270).

<sup>379</sup> Cummins (2019. p.267).

<sup>380</sup> Cummins doctoral thesis (2020) (see <https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/11117/> or [https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as\\_sdt=0%2C5&q=cummins%2C+penelope&btnG](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=cummins%2C+penelope&btnG) Accessed 16/08/2021 .

<sup>381</sup> Cummins (2020. p.194)..

event which discerned the rightness of the decision<sup>382</sup>. Cummins, however, presents the evidence that the ‘decision can also be seen as one which was heavily managed and crafted, and which was announced to the world before it had actually been concluded’<sup>383</sup>. She writes:

like almost all of the other decisions to be made in recent years, had been presented as the only possible way forward, either implicitly or in position papers read aloud to the Meeting<sup>384</sup>.

Another example of management acting in pursuit of its aims was the decision to revise the current edition of *Quaker faith & practice*. The proposal for revision was introduced at the 2014 Yearly Meeting and became the main theme of the 2018 Yearly Meeting<sup>385</sup>. Cummins writes:

this time around it would not be easy to ignore the division, creatively glossed over in the 1994 revision, between those Friends who, together with the majority of Quakers around the world, would express their membership of the Religious Society of Friends in terms of ‘God language’ and Christianity; and those who would describe themselves as ‘nontheists’<sup>386</sup>.

Cummins argues that:

the considerable backroom planning associated with this item, and its management in the Yearly Meeting sessions, provides an illustration of how far removed the Yearly Meeting was in 2014 from being able to exert any real influence over the actions initiated by the Recording Clerk and trustees<sup>387</sup>.

Working from published documents Cummins’ contention is that the centralisation of Quaker decision-making in matters of strategic significance, though begun before, has gathered apace since the introduction of a small body of trustees. That shift of

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<sup>382</sup> Cummins (2020. p.196).

<sup>383</sup> Cummins (2020. p.197). ‘The BYM Press Office and the Recording Clerk had spent a long evening briefing the media, and ... were shocked that the BBC had broken the embargo on a too early announcement before it had been ratified by the Yearly Meeting’.

<sup>384</sup> Cummins (2020. p.210)

<sup>385</sup> Cummins (2020. p.210; p.219)

<sup>386</sup> Cummins (2020. p.211)

<sup>387</sup> Cummins (2020. p.210)

pace, according to Cummins, was initiated by the way BYM trustees interpreted their role as they responded to Charity Commission requirements following the 2006 Charity Act<sup>388</sup>. That has had ‘unintended consequences’<sup>389</sup>.

One example of an unintended consequence Cummins discusses is that ‘the trustees and the Recording Clerk’ have emphasised a distinction between ‘the church and the charity’ as two distinct entities<sup>390</sup>. That distinction emphasises the legal definition of the name ‘Britain Yearly Meeting’ as a government-recognised and authorised charity. The charity has legal responsibilities for the proper management of the central work of the Religious Society of Friends and its finances. Cummins points out that the central work of The Society is, however, the work of the faith group, the church, as a whole. It arises from the activities and financial legacies of past members and from current members’ financial contributions. They put their faith into practice through service within The Society for the benefit of the outside world<sup>391</sup>.

Much of that service is in the form of committee work. Paul Parker, The Recording Clerk, in a blog, questions whether committee work is a good use of members’ time:

At a national level, around five hundred Friends are engaged with the governance of the centrally-managed work of Britain Yearly Meeting – is sitting in committee meetings the best use of their gifts, or are there new and creative ways for their willingness to serve to be expressed?<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> Chapter 1 of this thesis discusses the current organisational structure of The Society. It shows how the specification of the roles of trustees, Meeting for Sufferings and Yearly Meeting in Session can give rise to misunderstandings, and conflicts in relation to decision-making within The Society.

<sup>389</sup> Cummins (2020, p.329).

<sup>390</sup> Cummins (2020, p.318).

<sup>391</sup> Cummins (2020, p.318).

<sup>392</sup> <https://www.quaker.org.uk/blog/our-faith-our-community-a-reality-check-for-2020> (Accessed 17/08/2021).

The answer by Cummins and others such as Judith Frith<sup>393</sup>, would be ‘Yes!’ to both parts. That national work contributes to cohesion in The Society. Parker presents a false dichotomy. Committee work is a place where people meet, problems are solved, creative dialogue may happen, friendships made, and new avenues for service may open. Cummins points to the symbolic and practical importance of committee work, which goes beyond any instrumental or technical role:

The meetings of Sufferings and the other central committees – if they have a useful and relevant agenda, and if the committees have the power, within the organisation of The Society of Friends to make meaningful decisions – are not simply meetings of volunteers<sup>394</sup> or interest groups, they are meetings of the church at work; at work both with reference to the deliberations and their content, and also as representatives of the church community, from different parts of the country, weaving The Society together both geographically and in their shared task of prayerfully seeking unity in their understanding of ‘the will of God’ about their decisions, and thus the shared activity of living the Kingdom of God into existence<sup>395</sup>.

The members are not simply secular ‘volunteers’, to use the Recording Clerk’s term. The full value of their service to the Society and its cohesion, as Cummins observes, is unrecognised if it is thought by the Recording Clerk and others that they are wasting their gifts on committees to do with the central work<sup>396</sup>. The term ‘volunteers’ is also used on the Quakers in Britain web page describing the structure of the organisation. It states that volunteers do ‘most of our work’<sup>397</sup>. Cummins argues that the term discounts the fact that theirs is service arising from faith and is central to their identity as Quakers and, some may think, central to the quality and effectiveness of the central work. Quakers bring their faith and their experience to

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<sup>393</sup> Frith (2009) Frith writes of the importance of the national network of friendships in her thesis, especially Chapter 7. See summary discussion of Frith’s work in the literature review Chapter 1 1.5.

<sup>394</sup> Ben Pink Dandelion made this point in his 2014 Swarthmore Lecture Open for transformation addressed to the membership of The Society: ‘We need to remember that we are not ‘volunteers’ but all part of a priesthood serving God through our church, the community of believers’ (2014. p.72).

<sup>395</sup> Cummins (2020. p.290).

<sup>396</sup> Cummins (2020. p.165; p.289. See also directly the Recording Clerk’s blog <https://quaker.org.uk/blog/our-faith-our-community-a-reality-check-for-2020> Accessed 19/10/2021).

<sup>397</sup> <https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/our-structures> (Accessed 19/10/2021).

their service. Shared faith is what lends coherence to The Society's thinking and, as a result of collaborative working and social relationships, creates social cohesion. They do not add substantially, compared with paid staff, to the costs of the organisation. From a sociological perspective Frith's thesis pointed to the important function giving service had in both enriching the quality of life of those who found time to give service and in contributing locally and nationally to the building and maintenance of The Society's (and the wider society's) social capital:

Groups of Quakers meet either frequently or occasionally, in large or small numbers and throughout the country ... Repeated engagement in this nationally networked Quaker community built firm friendships and deepened commitment to The Society<sup>398</sup>.

Given the demographics of The Society as evidenced by the Quaker surveys discussed above, most who serve on committees will have had experience of professional paid work in complex organisations. Members are likely to have served in different responsible roles outside and inside The Society. Members are therefore unlikely to appreciate being marginalised in decision-making concerning the areas of the centralised managed work with which they are involved.

A recent example of concern about centralised decision-making, arising after Cummins' publications, is reflected in minutes and statements in Area Meetings and the Clerks of Quaker Peace and Social Witness Programme Sub-Committees and Groups. They expressed a formal concern regarding the re-allocation of resources arising from 30% cuts imposed by trustees on the work of Quaker Peace and Social Witness in 2021<sup>399</sup>. The extent of the overall budget cuts, and the proportion to be

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<sup>398</sup> Frith (2009, p.1).

<sup>399</sup> E.g. Minute 7:2 of Staffordshire Special Area Meeting: 7 June 2021. Future Strategy: Central work; East Cheshire AM (received 8/04/21): Minute 21.03.10 Restructuring within BYM – Towards a Simpler Church; Statement of Concern From QPSW's [Quaker Peace and Social Witness] programme sub-committees and groups 18.2.21.

borne by the work of each of the central committees, was the result of the discernment of BYM trustees. Trustees may have taken advice and consulted with Management Meeting<sup>400</sup>, but they did not come to their decision in a collaborative discernment with others who are also ‘stakeholders’ in the decision. There is a difference between trustees discerning *with* others and *for* others. The trustees were functioning legally as if they were secular Board of Directors whose responsibilities, according to the Institute of Directors, are ‘collectively directing the companies’ affairs’<sup>401</sup>.

The Charity Commission’s guidance for trustees is that trustees ‘**should** take responsibility for setting the charity’s strategic aims and direction, and agreeing appropriate future plans’ not that they ‘**must**’, a distinction the Charity Commission explicitly makes in its guidance to trustees<sup>402</sup>. Trustees, however, **must** make sure they comply with the charity’s governing document<sup>403</sup>. This document has been modified several times since the introduction of BYM trustees but it does not preclude the wider membership’s participation in active decision-making<sup>404</sup>. The current edition of that document says nothing about ‘setting the charity’s strategic aims and direction, and agreeing appropriate future plans’. It does say trustees have a duty to ‘approve annually an operational plan and budget for the forthcoming year’<sup>405</sup>. The trustees have a choice as to how to handle that process of approval. They might involve others in their discernment, i.e. those committees which oversee

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<sup>400</sup> Management Meeting consists of the Recording Clerk and other senior staff appointed by BYM trustees (QF&P 8.22).

<sup>401</sup> <https://www.iod.com/services/information-and-advice/resources-and-factsheets/details/What-is-the-role-of-the-board> (Accessed 22/09/2021).

<sup>402</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-cc3/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-what-you-need-to-do#s7> (Accessed 22/09/2021).

<sup>403</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-cc3/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-what-you-need-to-do#s7> (Accessed 22/09/2021).

<sup>404</sup> <https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/governing-document-august-2021> (Accessed 13/04/2024)

<sup>405</sup> <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/passage/8-17/> (Accessed 22/09/2021).

the implementation of operational plans and who could comment on the strategic implications of operational decisions. If budget cuts are necessary it is desirable, ethically, that the implications for those affected are thought through with them. Meeting for Sufferings, which includes trustees and Management Meeting might have had final oversight of the operational plan and the budget exercising a responsibility to comment and refer back for modification if that were discerned in their Meeting for Worship<sup>406</sup>. Cummins refers to Peter Drucker and Robert Monks<sup>407</sup> who:

point out that the institution of trustees does not as such necessarily add to the effective governance of an organisation, but their existence can distance other stakeholders from effective engagement in decision-making<sup>408</sup>.

In other words, the effect of trustees' choices can be to loosen those bonds that contribute to the cohesiveness of a Society of which they are trustees; or to strengthen them should they involve other organisational units of The Society. The behaviour of the BYM trustees in association with the senior management team of BYM in relation to budgetary cuts resulted in a conflict affecting relationships between and within organisational units of the Religious Society of Friends. The Society's cohesion was put under strain.

Cummins refers to a letter to *the Friend* by Gerald Drewett<sup>409</sup> in 2006. Drewett questioned how trustees might affect and fundamentally change the theologically determined form of the Religious Society of Friends. He asked whether Quakers

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<sup>406</sup> The membership of Meeting for Sufferings is detailed in *QF&P* at <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/7/> Accessed 3/01/2023.

<sup>407</sup> Peter F. Drucker, 'The Bored Board', *Toward the Next Economics, and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), pp. 107–122 (First published *The Wharton Magazine*, Fall, 1976)); Robert A. G. Monks, *Governance at a Crossroads: A Personal Perspective*, *International Journal of Disclosure and Governance*, 8:1 (2011), pp. 62–76.

<sup>408</sup> Cummins (2020. p.301).

<sup>409</sup> Drewett, G. 2006. *the Friend*. 13 January . p.7

realised how seriously they were modifying ‘three hundred years of organic development of the responsibility of all members for The Society (known in Biblical terms as the priesthood of all believers)’. Had they lost sight of the testimony to equality<sup>410</sup>? Drewett concluded:

The religious society of Friends is the last vestige of institutional religious nonconformity in this country, but it is going fast and faster down the slippery slope of creeping conformity to the world, and it doesn’t recognise it<sup>411</sup>.

Drewett and Cummins are concerned that the ordinary membership and members who are trustees might forget that central to Quaker organisational forms is the belief that every Quaker has a responsibility<sup>412</sup> to contribute to the conduct of The Society’s affairs through the Quaker collective discernment process. That is so with respect to the work of their Local Meetings, their Area Meetings, Central Committees of BYM and of Yearly Meeting. Even if they are not prompted to speak, members in their respective Meetings for Worship for Business contribute in that heterotopic space to the silent waiting on the Lord in worship until all that is to be discerned seems to have been heard. *Quaker faith & practice 3.09* states that

our business method depends on the widest possible participation by our members. Friends may be appointed to attend area and general meetings in order to ensure that enough Friends will be present but this does not excuse or prevent others from being there<sup>413</sup>.

Trustees’ legal authority and obligations and accountability to the Charities Commission does not entail their setting aside Friends’ tradition of collective discernment, for example, when it comes to discerning how significant interrelated

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<sup>410</sup> Paraphrased by Cummins (2020. p.241).

<sup>411</sup> Drewett (13 January 2006. *The Friend*. p.7). Sandys expresses similar concerns in her collection of articles originally published in *the Friend* (2015. p.58) discussed in the Literature review Ch.1 1.5.

<sup>412</sup> Again, part of the fundamental elements of being a Quaker *QF&P* 11.01

<sup>413</sup> ‘All members are entitled to attend their local, area and general meetings, which are the units of Britain Yearly Meeting’s regional organisation, and Yearly Meeting itself. You are encouraged to do so as regularly as you are able, because our business method depends on the widest possible participation by our members’. <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/3/> Accessed 25/01/2024.



policy, budgetary and financial matters should be handled. Cummins provides evidence that that tradition is being set aside.

Cummins quotes the economist Douglas W. Allen's<sup>414</sup> observation that 'the organisation of a church is not independent of its theology... Allen posits that when the doctrinal structure of a religious group fails to match the organisational form, the church fails'<sup>415</sup>. If Allen is right and Cummins' argument holds, the way that authority has been exercised by trustees limiting participation in collective discernment in major decisions to do with its work proposed by the Recording Clerk and Management Meeting is resulting in The Society experiencing a contradiction between its theology and its organisation. Changes to decision-making practices within BYM have reduced collaborative discernment in matters affecting the work of those giving service. That has reduced opportunities for contributing to and reinforcing The Society's cohesion. It is unclear whether that has also contributed to the difficulties in finding suitable members to give service as 'volunteers'<sup>416</sup>.

Cummins identifies 'shifts towards secularisation' in the conclusions to her thesis<sup>417</sup>. The first was 'The normalization of plurality of belief' as against 'the framework of traditional Christianity and a lived, shared, responsibility for the wellbeing of one's neighbour locally and in the wider world'. That particular statement might be overstated. The 'plurality of belief' need not be unlimited where BYM and Area Meetings assert that which is distinctive about Quakerism. It is not known how many Area Meetings have set aside 'the fundamental elements of being a Quaker' as

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<sup>414</sup> Allen, D.W., 1995. Order in the church: A property rights approach. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 27(1), pp.97-117.

<sup>415</sup> Cummins (2019. p.304).

<sup>416</sup> It is also unclear how far reliance on Zoom Meetings during and post-Covid may have affected the membership's willingness to volunteer for committee work, bearing in mind their over-60's profile.

<sup>417</sup> Cummins (2020. p.320).

presented in *QF&P* 11.01 when considering membership applications. The Society, to date through the existing *Quaker faith & practice* acknowledges its Christian tradition and understanding of discipleship<sup>418</sup>.

Cummins argues that her thesis illustrates:

Bruce and Wilson's description of secularisation as including 'the replacement of a specifically religious consciousness ... by an empirical, rational, instrumental orientation' in relation to its internal organisation and strategic decisions; and 'the displacement, in matters of [organisational] behaviour, of religious rules and principles by demands that accord with strictly technical criteria'<sup>419</sup>.

It is part of the argument of this thesis that although there is evidence of that occurring within The Society and especially within BYM, the charity, it is not a necessary state of affairs and there is evidence that the majority of members still self-identify as Christian. The application of Simmelian and Archerian concepts and models in the next and following chapters provide an alternative way of identifying and making sense of the forces, both destructive and restorative, that are to be seen at work in The Society that will affect its future as a religious society.

#### **4.6 The Vibrancy in Meetings initiative<sup>420</sup>**

Dandelion does not discuss the role of participants' willingness or unwillingness to give service to The Society as evidence of the strength of its social glue and vibrancy. It may be recalled that service is a fundamental element of being a Quaker<sup>421</sup>. As a response to the problem of finding suitable nominations, a Simpler

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<sup>418</sup> *QF&P* (11.01).

<sup>419</sup> Cummins (2020. p.321).

<sup>420</sup> This project succeeded the 'The Simpler Meetings' project discussed above. Its purpose was to find and share ways for Quaker meetings to be easier to manage and less of a burden for Quaker role holders. A collection of videos and documents from the Simpler Meetings Project and explanations as to how meetings can benefit can be found at (<https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/support-for-meetings/simpler-meetings> Accessed 9/01/2023). Both projects were intended to operationalise The Society's aim, through BYM's management, to give more time 'for our witness in the world, spiritual nurture, outreach and building our Quaker communities'.

<sup>421</sup> *QF&P* (11.01).

Meetings project had been BYM's solution, discussed above. Current policy is to encourage 'vibrancy', through employing 'Local Development Workers' to support Local and Area Meetings.

'Vibrancy' began as a three-year pilot programme that aimed:

to enable local and area Quaker meetings to become more strong, confident, connected and sustainable. The programme is run by Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) and Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre (Woodbrooke) and provides four development workers located in four pilot regions across Britain<sup>422</sup>.

The Vibrancy initiative was taken by BYM senior management and supported by the trustees of BYM, who agreed funding from BYM legacies, and by the trustees of Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre<sup>423</sup> whose staff would be asked to cooperate. This was a top-down charity-initiated rather than bottom-up church-initiated programme.

The programme was located within the Recording Clerk's office.<sup>424</sup> Four locally-based 'Local Development Workers' (LDWs) were employed part-time and managed by a part-time national coordinator. Although 'local' appears in the title of the posts, LDWs were associated with regional groupings of Area Meetings. They covered Scotland, Yorkshire, East Midlands and South West England. The programme ran between March 2016 and December 2019. It was hoped that the programme would 'contribute to a vibrant yearly meeting'<sup>425</sup>.

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<sup>422</sup> Anstey and Cupitt (2017. p.2).

<sup>423</sup> The trustees of the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre agreed a change of name so that no reference is now made to its Quaker roots. It began representing itself to the public as 'Woodbrooke' – a further instance of internal secularisation. In 2023 the decision was taken by Woodbrooke trustees to close the centre and hand it back to the Bournville Village Trust, the ultimate owners. The centre was judged to be financially unsustainable. (<https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/woodbrooke-centre-statement-feb-23/#:~:text=The%20sad%20news%20that%20the,part%20of%20our%20spiritual%20development>. Accessed 13/02/2024.

<sup>424</sup> Information about the early organisation of the project and its evaluation was kindly provided by Rachel Matthews, the manager of the project during a Zoom conversation 5<sup>th</sup> April 2022.

<sup>425</sup> Cupitt and Willis (2019. p.i).

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations Charities Evaluation Services programme was contracted early on to evaluate the programme and test the viability of and learn from this initiative<sup>426</sup>. The qualitative evaluation reported in the Executive Summary that most benefits for Meetings were in the areas of community, Quaker discipline, including handling conflicts within a Meeting, and collaboration with other groups<sup>427</sup>. It concluded that ‘Vibrancy is a successful programme, well received by the Friends it has supported, and bringing about significant outcomes for the meetings with which it has worked’<sup>428</sup>. Almost all (96%, n=130) of survey respondents rated the support ‘excellent’ (68%) or ‘good’ (28%) with nobody rating it as ‘very poor’<sup>429</sup>. There are, however, some specific aspects of the evaluation warranting comment and seem to weaken the validity of the conclusion.

Many appreciated benefiting from LDWs listening and facilitating skills<sup>430</sup>. One reason for the high approval rating could be that its beneficiaries received help at no cost to themselves at the point of receiving that help (cf. National Health Service).

The evaluation noted that ‘Further work is needed to ensure the Vibrancy team becomes – and feels – more integrated within BYM and Woodbrooke teams’<sup>431</sup>.

Difficulties were reported in the process of involving Woodbrooke and BYM staff in the work that needs to be done. One reason given was ‘because of lack of capacity in the two organisations or the nature of the support offered’<sup>432</sup>. The Vibrancy team, Woodbrooke and BYM staff did not know and had to discover what might be wanted of them and what they could offer at the point of programme implementation.

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<sup>426</sup> Cupitt and Willis (2019).

<sup>427</sup> Cupitt and Willis (2019. p.iii).

<sup>428</sup> Cupitt and Willis (2019. p.vi).

<sup>429</sup> Cupitt and Willis (2019. p.14).

<sup>430</sup> Cupitt and Willis (2019. p.17).

<sup>431</sup> Cupitt and Willis (2019 p.v.).

<sup>432</sup> Cupitt and Willis (2019. p.ii).

An inference can be made for the reason for a lack of initial integration is that insufficient time was given for pre-implementation collaboration. That lack could be attributed to the internal secularisation trend within BYM favouring top-down, secular and directive, management practices which are more impatient of delay than Quaker processes which involve collaborative discernment. One may speculate whether Quaker methods such as threshing meetings<sup>433</sup> and collective discernment involving stakeholders i.e. the intended beneficiaries, the paid vibrancy staff from BYM and Woodbrooke staff might have improved collaboration, communication and integration.

Secondly, although it was noted that joint working between Vibrancy, BYM and Woodbrooke has been increasing, it was also noted that 'Vibrancy staff are now delivering much of the direct support work to Friends themselves, rather than simply 'signposting' to BYM and Woodbrooke'<sup>434</sup>. That was not an intended outcome. It affected the workload of the LDWs and, by implication, the involvement of BYM and Woodbrooke staff.

That it was not an intended outcome might not matter if there were unexpected benefits without negative unexpected consequences. Several Friends in the regions who were involved with LDWs, however, 'were concerned that the development workers were spread too thinly across large regions [and that] they might wear themselves out in the role, or at the least be unable to provide in-depth support'<sup>435</sup>.

In other words, it was questioned whether LDWs could actually sustain the work they began. Nevertheless, looking forward, 'staff respondents from across Vibrancy, BYM

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<sup>433</sup> 'This term currently denotes a meeting at which a variety of different, and sometimes controversial, opinions can be openly, and sometimes forcefully, expressed, often in order to defuse a situation before a later meeting for worship for business'. (*QF&P* 12.26)

<sup>434</sup> Cupitt and Willis (2019. p.i).

<sup>435</sup> Cupitt and Willis (2019. p.ii).

and Woodbrooke talked with excitement about the potential for more future working<sup>436</sup>.

Thirdly, 'According to BYM monitoring data, there is no evidence as yet that Vibrancy has affected overall statistics on diversity, member or attender numbers or meeting attendance levels'<sup>437</sup>. The report goes on to say that it is possible the lack of evidence is because of 'these changes having not happened yet'. The finding does not detract from the fact that, according to verbal feedback, the Vibrancy project has made a positive difference to individual Quakers and the existing participants of Meetings that received it.

Fourthly, recommendations for continuing beyond the pilot were made by the evaluators. They cover aspects of staffing and delivery, and the underlying philosophy of the programme. The question was asked whether locally-based, skilled Friends offering unpaid service might appropriately complement the work of paid development staff<sup>438</sup>. Their equal involvement in Quaker discernment and decision-making would signal they had an equal stake in the success of those projects. That would support the reality and projection of The Society's vibrancy<sup>439</sup>. Willing local unpaid service from participants in Meetings and their collaborative ownership of the project with LDWs is, I would argue, the only way to finance and embed LDWs into the structures that uphold The Society. In that respect any emphasis on the charity-church distinction in managing and operating the project is unhelpful. It would not be helpful if LDWs were seen as agents of the central organisation/charity whose agenda clashes with the Meetings they are supporting.

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<sup>436</sup> Cupitt and Willis (2019. p.v).

<sup>437</sup> Cupitt and Willis (2019. p.iv).

<sup>438</sup> Cupitt and Willis (2019. p.vi).

<sup>439</sup> Cupitt and Willis (2019. p.vi).

The evaluators thought the current theory of change<sup>440</sup> on which the vibrancy project was based needed a deep review. As Vibrancy has changed and evolved, the underlying theory may need to follow suit. A practical theory that guides how to achieve 'vibrancy' in The Society would be helpful. A particular recommendation was that 'Any new programme should have an extensive internal planning and communications phase prior to the work starting'<sup>441</sup>. It is unclear whether that happened.

A particular learning from the project was that there was 'considerable need around the basics of Quakerism, meetings and processes' and that 'a new programme should address that focus'<sup>442</sup>. A BYM staff member said:

We've been assuming local and area meetings' basic capacity ... in terms of spiritual groundedness and community, and we've been offering to add to that through our support, but the Vibrancy staff are telling us that we need to start from that first place and build those basics<sup>443</sup>.

That comment points to a communications gap between the charity and the church leading to incorrect assumptions about Local Meetings. It also points to a lack of understanding in those who participate in Quaker meetings (the church) of the basics of Quaker theology and processes. The evaluators' comments reinforce comments above about the need for an induction programme for attenders prior to their applying for membership. The evaluation also pointed to a lack of confidence and/or

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<sup>440</sup> The theory of change for this project was developed from the six elements in *Our Faith in the Future* a statement agreed by Meeting for Sufferings in 2015 intended to focus the work at all levels of The Society. The elements consisted of six themes offering 'a simple and clear point of reference, a touchstone for Friends in Britain Yearly Meeting to consult'. They describe a future where 1. Meeting for worship is the bedrock of living as a Quaker. 2. Quaker communities are loving, inclusive and all-age. 3. All Friends understand and live by Quaker discipline 4. Quakers work collaboratively. 5. Quakers are well known and widely understood. 6. We let our lives speak. (<https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/meeting-for-sufferings/our-faith-in-the-future> Accessed 02/04/2022). Vibrancy was intended to promote those elements.

<sup>441</sup> Cupitt and Willis (2019. p.vii).

<sup>442</sup> Cupitt and Willis (2019. p.vii).

<sup>443</sup> Cupitt and Willis (2019. p.55).

understanding in those who held roles in Quaker communities regarding Quaker processes and how to operate them. That would suggest that more accessible inreach programmes are needed for members and attenders who are nominated for service.

Although some Local Development Workers are in membership, others are not and are not required to have previously associated with Quakers. That is following a trend in BYM the charity, where previous knowledge of Quakerism, let alone participation in a Quaker Meeting, is not a requirement for posts BYM advertises – another secularising trend<sup>444</sup>.

The evaluation led the trustees deciding to budget for and recruit 14 LDWs across the country managed by a national coordinator, all still part-time<sup>445</sup>. Financial constraints, however, reduced LDW's hours<sup>446</sup>. A new ‘ “Britain Yearly Meeting and Woodbrooke Integrated Strategy for Supporting Quaker Communities” [sitting] underneath the LDW programme ... under the care of Quaker Life Central Committee, with links to Woodbrooke's governance structures,’ has been approved by Meeting for Sufferings<sup>447</sup>. The senior management initiative that instituted LDWs was passed on to Quaker Life staff and ‘volunteers’ at the national level. Although that now re-involves representatives of ‘popular religion’ it is not clear whether or how the evaluators’ criticisms have been addressed other than by a change in the locus of responsibility for the programme. Their comments on communication

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<sup>444</sup> See advertisements in *the Friend* 9<sup>th</sup> September 2022 for two Local Development Workers and other advertisements not requiring previous involvement with Quakerism: 10<sup>th</sup> March 2023 for a Team Leader Children and Youth Development; 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2023 for a Parliamentary Engagement Officer (Scotland).

<sup>445</sup> Cupitt and Willis (2019. p.i).

<sup>446</sup> Reported in Zoom conversation with Rachel Matthews, who is manager of the national implementation of LDWs (Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> April 2022).

<sup>447</sup> <https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/information-members-mfs-april-2020> (Accessed 02/04/2022).



underline problems of cohesion between different parts of The Society and those employed by it.

#### **4.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter reviewed the results of the thematic analysis in the four main sections of this analytical review: Religiosity and religion, Quaker theology, The Religious Society of Friends as a society undergoing change, and Secularisation and internal secularisation. Religiosity as conceptualised by Simmel offers an explanation of an individual's engagement with religion. His argument that 'intellectually advanced' persons are drawn to mysticism is supported by the educational backgrounds of the interviewees for this research and their reasons for their attraction to Quaker theology. It was also noted that their route to The Society was often triggered by memories of and unexpected encounters with Quakers after becoming dissatisfied with other religious affiliations.

Quaker surveys provided statistical data showing the homogeneity of participants' class, ethnic and educational backgrounds. They also reported the diversity of Quaker beliefs. Quaker diversity, often celebrated by Quakers, was, however, theological not demographic. They reported the fact of declining numbers and a membership whose average age was 64<sup>448</sup> and probably rising. The limitation of surveys were noted and the value of person-to-person interviews for qualitative research in studying religiosity was illustrated.

The social glue that was provided by what Dandelion called The Society's 'double culture' was not preventing its numerical decline. The double culture may have

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<sup>448</sup> This figure is given by Dandelion (2014). See Chapter 1 and footnote on the first page of Chapter 1. The tabular statement does not report the average age of The Society's participants or new members.

inhibited debate within The Society as to what it meant to be a Quaker. Although there was a canonical definition of the fundamental elements of being a Quaker, it did not seem to be consistently asserted in Area Meeting membership procedures. Martin Davie's argument that extreme theological diversity had developed within Quakerism and presented a challenge to the character of The Society was discussed. There was an ongoing debate over the place for Christianity, non-theism and the use of religious language in The Society.

Dandelion's general theory of internal secularisation, which used The Society as a study example, was then examined. The fact of internal secularisation within The Society, especially the role of detheologisation of the language used in the promotion of the Quaker way, was supported with reference to materials about Quaker faith on the *Quakers in Britain* website. Dandelion's framework for understanding the dynamics of internal secularisation was questioned. It was argued that decisions by BYM trustees and the senior staff of BYM were one cause of internal secularisation; another cause was Area Meetings' attitude to membership, and specially a failure to assert the fundamental elements of being a Quaker. Dandelion suggested that a reversal of internal secularisation was possible but did not say how that might come about.

Cummins' work suggested that the impact of Charity Law on the organisational structure of The Society was the external force that was contributing to The Society's internal secularisation. That law placed in trustees the legal responsibility for the lawful workings of The Society e.g. ensuring prudent budgeting, strategic planning and property management and that their decision-making was in The Society's best interests. Cummins argued, with case study evidence, that the way trustees and senior management used their executive and managerial powers was diminishing

the authority of other organisational units in The Society. It was noted that that was not congruent with the principle that the Quaker Business Method depended on the widest possible participation of its members. A consequence of the distinction between the charity and the church made in BYM's governing document and emphasised by the Recording Clerk could be further undermining The Society's cohesiveness.

BYM's top-down initiation of policies and projects under the banners first of 'Simplification' and then 'Vibrancy in Meetings' were critically discussed. They occurred at the same time as participation in The Society was declining and the average age of its membership increasing. Simplification of organisation structures led to centralising work in fewer organisational units rather than reducing its quantity. Government legislation also increased the complexity in managing the Society's operations, for example in Health and Safety and Safeguarding. The Society's work seemed to require more paid and professional staff for its management and operations in the charities responsible for its governance and operations as fewer members and attenders were coming forward or available to give service. The Vibrancy project was evaluated and rated a success but examination of the evaluation text weakened that conclusion. The project was reassigned from the Recording Clerk's office to Quaker Life and became part of BYM's and Woodbrooke's Integrated Strategy for Supporting Local Communities across The Society. As yet the project has not resulted in diversifying the membership's demographic nor has it reversed a decline in participation. In the short term, the work of The Society's central work, including the work of LDWs, undertaken by BYM, has been affected by budget cuts. It may be further affected by the recent closure of

Woodbrooke as a geographical location for Quaker study and training in Quaker roles<sup>449</sup>.

The next chapter begins by taking stock of where this research has led. It then looks in more detail at Dandelion's research as to why members leave The Society, making use of Simmel's concepts of sociation and exchange.

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<sup>449</sup> Woodbrooke's planned closure was announced in 2022 (<https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/shaping-woodbrookes-future-statement-july-2022>). It closed on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023. <https://thefriend.org/article/woodbrooke-closes> Accessed 13/04/2024.

## CHAPTER 5: ASSOCIATION AND DISASSOCIATION FROM THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

### 5.1 Introduction and summary of findings and the thesis argument so far

This chapter begins with a summary of the research findings so far. I then present Simmel's understanding of how a society is formed and how it persists. Using Simmel's concepts of sociation (*Vergesellschaftung*) and exchange (*Wechselwirkung*), I examine Dandelion's article on disaffiliation from The Society<sup>1</sup> with attention to the reasons given by his interviewees for their disaffiliation. I shall offer an alternative explanation for his empirical findings in line with Simmelian concepts and the approach of Margaret Archer to organisational change presented in chapter 2.

The analysis of the interviews reported in Chapter 3 identified features of The Society that had attracted the interviewees to membership. The analysis also identified aspects of The Society about which interviewees had made critical comments. Chapter 4 explored those findings. Simmel's concept of religiosity and his sociology of religion were used to elaborate on the underlying attractions of Quakerism. Simmel's comments on mystical religion's appeal to well-educated individuals were supported by the Quaker demographic. All interviewees were positive about the difference Quakerism had made to their lives. Most noted Quakerism's contrast with the clergy-led religious organisations with which they had previously associated. All had had experience of other Christian religious denominations and some of other religions before applying for membership to The

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<sup>1</sup> Dandelion (2002)

Society. All used Christian concepts or could comment on Christian concepts in their account of their own religious journeys and religious positions.

The wide variations in elapsed time before interviewees applied for membership pointed to issues related to social inclusion and the importance of the quality of their social interactions within local Meetings. Those who joined earliest seemed most enthusiastic about Quaker worship. Those who joined after 14+ years were more sensitive to their differences from their Local Meeting however much they appreciated the form of Quaker worship.

Some interviewees' critical comments had been to do with the balance between spiritual witness and social activism. Some had to do with Quakerism's middle classness and lack of social diversity. Some were to do with the lack of the effective promotion of Quakerism and some were associated with the need for The Society to maintain a distinctive religious identity. One comment was made about 'the bureaucracy of Friends House' by the oldest interviewee who had served The Society in many capacities.

It was subsequent to the interviews and engaging in the analytical review of Chapter 4 that I perceived the paradox of interviewees' enthusiasm and The Society's declining membership. Dandelion's theory of a Quaker double culture no longer seemed sufficient to explain the contemporary social dynamics in The Society's functioning. I suggested that the double culture was more a strategy for conflict aversion than conflict resolution when interactions within The Society became challenging<sup>2</sup>. Dandelion's publication on internal secularisation in 2019 revisited his concept of a double culture and offered a general theory of internal secularisation

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<sup>2</sup> See also the literature review in Chapter 1 1.5 reporting research on conflict in The Society.

using British Quakerism as a case study to develop his account of contemporary British Quakerism. I then considered whether and how internal secularisation could be a factor in The Society's declining participation and membership and suggested that it did. Internal secularisation would be a factor additional to but distinguishable from the wider society's continuing secularisation as argued by Steve Bruce<sup>3</sup> and by him with David Boas<sup>4</sup>. Dandelion, quoting Bruce, had noted, that those denominations that maintained a distinctive religious character seemed to retain and even increase participation in their activities. I identified actions within The Society that undermined its distinctive religious character. Its theology was being underpromoted by BYM<sup>5</sup>, the charity and its statement of the fundamental elements of being a Quaker were not being asserted by Area Meetings. I then turned to Cummins' work in 2019 and 2020. Cummins saw the decision-making practices of Trustees and Senior Management allowed by Charity Law as symptoms of internal secularisation. She argued they were counter to The Society's traditional more inclusive modes of decision-making and more in line with secular hierarchical management practices. Cummins quoted the economist Douglas W. Allen's<sup>6</sup> observation that:

the organisation of a church is not independent of its theology... Allen posits that when the doctrinal structure of a religious group fails to match the organisational form, the church fails'<sup>7</sup>.

Cummins's case studies and her analysis of them and my analysis of BYM's Simpler Meetings and Vibrancy in Meetings projects were examples of top-down initiative

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce (2011).

<sup>4</sup> Bruce and Voas (2023). Secularisation as such was also discussed in Dandelion (2019) and Cummins (2020).

<sup>5</sup> E.g. the omission of the Quaker saying 'there is that of God in everyone' in 2024 from the Faith page.

<sup>6</sup> Allen, D.W., 1995. Order in the church: A property rights approach. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 27(1), pp.97-117.

<sup>7</sup> Cummins (2019. p.304).

taking by management rather than the results of widely discerned decisions as to how Quakerism might better be organised and promoted. Their actual effectiveness as solutions was also questioned. The challenges to The Society's traditional distinctive religious identity, for and against, were further evidenced by letters to *the Friend*.

The interviewees' critical comments now took on greater weight for me. I recognise that no interviewees used the terms 'ecclesiology' or 'governance' as Cummins had used them. I had not had those concepts in mind at the time of the interviews, nor the concept of internal secularisation. It was The Society's declining membership and the publication of Dandelion and Cummins' discussions on internal secularisation that led me to the paradox of my interviewees' commitment and enthusiasm and the fact of decreasing participation in the work of The Society. What seems to be the case is that within The Society traditional Quaker theology, ecclesiology and governance were being questioned and sometimes ignored. The Society's social glue was degrading and membership was declining.

In the next sections I shall turn to the fact of members' disassociation from the Society and Dandelion's explanation of why disaffiliation happens<sup>8</sup>. I begin by considering why individuals sociate in the first place. Simmel's theory of sociation and exchange offers an explanation for the underlying processes of society formation, persistence and decline.

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<sup>8</sup> Dandelion (2002). Dandelion uses the term disaffiliation rather than disassociation for when members resign their membership.



## 5.2 Simmel, the persistence of societies and the concepts of sociation (*Vergesellschaftung*) and exchange (*Wechselwirkung*).

Simmel asked how society was possible, of what was it constituted<sup>9</sup> and how particular societies, or groups, such as religious groups, persisted<sup>10</sup>. He identified:

formations of a religious sort whose sociological structure makes it impossible for them to support a large membership ... where the subjective experience of immediate rapport with Christ constitutes the real cohesion of the community<sup>11,12</sup>.

That quotation described Quakers at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Contemporary Quakers are still a small religious formation. Some still understand an experience of Christ or of God or of Spirit as the subjective experience that is a reason for their membership. But the tabular statement points to a Society not persisting.

Membership of the yearly meeting at the end of 2022 was 11,491 (11,828 in 2021), a decrease of 337. During the year 157 came into membership. The membership of 170 adults was terminated and area meetings recorded 285 deaths. Attenders The number of recorded adult attenders was 6,049 (6,479 in 2021) and there were 899 children not in membership (1,006 in 2021)<sup>13</sup>.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and perhaps until the mid-or- later-20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>14</sup>, 'rapport with Christ' was the basis to create cohesion in their association. That phrase no longer suffices as the basis for describing cohesion within The Society. The first element of being a Quaker is still, canonically, theistic: 'the understanding of God's guidance'; but declaring oneself as a Christian is not required<sup>15</sup>. The claimed subjective

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<sup>9</sup> Simmel (1910). Also available in Donald Levine's edited selection of Simmel's works *On individuality and social forms*, University of Chicago Press, 1971

<sup>10</sup> Simmel (1898).

<sup>11</sup> Simmel (1950 [1902]. p.89).

<sup>12</sup> First published in *The American journal of sociology* as *The number of members as determining the sociological form of the group*. Translated by Albion W. Small. n.1 July 1902 p.1-46; n.2 September 1902 p.158-196. This essay was also translated from the German by Kurt H. Wolff (1950).

<sup>13</sup> Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain. (2023). <chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnnibpcajpcgclcfndmkaj/https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/tabular-statement-2023> Accessed 10/01/2024.

<sup>14</sup> See discussion of Martin Davie's work in the previous chapter and note the change of title from *Christian faith and practice* to *Quaker faith & practice* in 1994.

<sup>15</sup> QF&P (11.01).

experience and/or intellectual understanding of a Divine reality was a common feature of eleven of the twelve interviewees but only eight self-identified as Christian. So how is The Society still possible and how does it persist? What binds its participants?

### **Sociation and exchange/reciprocal interaction**

Two fundamental concepts Simmel used to explain the formation and persistence of any society are *Vergesellschaftung* and *Wechselwirkung*:

***Vergesellschaftung*** literally means 'becoming-society' or 'becoming-social', often translated as 'sociation'<sup>16</sup>. Sociation describes the act of associating, of individuals becoming and remaining a group for purposes they share. The term 'Sociation' emphasises the process that takes place in relating as an individual from the outside and then from within, to an association or group. The different purposes, forms of sociating and of social interaction within groups were central to what Simmel thought sociology, as an emerging discipline, should focus upon<sup>17</sup>. There were specific reasons for sociation. The form of an association was connected to those reasons. The reasons were themselves the result of human drives and purposes and their acceptance, if not preference, for an association's particular form of organisation for particular purposes e.g. for security, for earning a living, for religious observation. Religiosity would be the basis for a religious association.

***Wechselwirkung***, Goodstein translated as 'reciprocal interaction'. Simmel wrote:

I attain a new concept of sociology by dividing the forms of association from the contents, that is, from the drives, purposes, content matter which only become

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<sup>16</sup> Goodstein (2017. p.66); Lawrence (1976. p.9).

<sup>17</sup> Goodstein (2017. p.66); Lawrence (1976. p.18); Levine (1971. p.97).

social when taken up by the reciprocal interactions [*Wechselwirkungen*] between individuals'<sup>18</sup>.

Simmel saw a society existing as a result of reciprocal interactions arising from individual needs. Reciprocal interactions between individuals generate a particular social form<sup>19</sup>. A critical distinction was the relationship between two individuals, the dyad, and between triads and larger groups which creates complexity<sup>20</sup>. Simmel then distinguishes forms of sociation and social interaction from the human drives and purposes the forms satisfy. Sociological research should show how far a form satisfies or fails to satisfy the human drives and purposes for which an association was formed<sup>21,22</sup>.

Simmel observed that the form of an association, and therefore the association itself, to survive, had to withstand destructive forces<sup>23</sup>. Simmel argued that, whether an association, or any network of associations, is intended to be permanent or temporary, the individuals who are associating and their form of association will be affected by destructive and preservative social forces affecting their relations and desire to relate. Destructive and preservative forces will originate from outside and within the association or network of associations. Provided valued reciprocal interaction is maintained between individuals who constitute the association and

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<sup>18</sup> Goodstein (2017. p.66).

<sup>19</sup> Goodstein (2017. p.84).

<sup>20</sup> Simmel (1950. p.138).

<sup>21</sup> Simmel's sociological interest in social entities and processes predates critical realism's concern with distinguishing the real from the actual and empirical. Both *Vergesellschaftung* and *Wechselwirkung* refer to basic and underlying mechanisms of social formation. They are the kinds of mechanism critical realists look to identify as underlying empirical reality. They are 'the real' that generates a possible set of temporal actualities, differentiated from the singular empirical reality that an observer may observe.

<sup>22</sup> Goodstein (2017. p.67).

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter 2, 2.3 for a full extract from the first part of Simmel's three part discussion on The persistence of groups in the *American Journal of Sociology* (1898).

maintain the network, cohesion will be maintained and the association or network will persist.

In relation to participants seeking to satisfy their religiosity in Quaker Meetings, destructive forces would include those forces undermining the religious basis of The Society, the convictions of its participants and its governance e.g. those forces that are antipathetic to religious belief. They include atheism, and the forces of secularisation, including a state's secular demands on organisations within its jurisdiction. Secularisation undermines an individual's readiness to interpret their own experiencing and an organisation's own decision-making, in spiritual or religious terms e.g. Quaker discernment perceived as a process underpinned by receptivity to divine guidance. Those not yet associating with Quakers who believe their experience may be understood in that way may be drawn to Quakers if they understand that that is what Quakers uphold. If one does not believe one has experienced, or that there is, a transcendent other, there is little motivation to associate with others who do - other than for non-religious reasons. External forces undermining faith, and the non-religious reasons for wanting to associate with Quakers, however, are not the main focus of this research. The focus is on internal destructive, preservative and regenerative forces that are impacting Quaker faith and practices.

Destructive, preservative and regenerative processes may arise within and between any combination of the component parts of the structure of a complex organisation such as the Religious Society of Friends and the charities and groups responsible for its governance e.g. Area Meetings, AM Trustees, BYM Trustees and its Standing Committees and Sub-Committees, Yearly Meeting in session, Meeting for Sufferings, and the paid staff responsible for the operations of The Society.

### 5.3 The Religious Society of Friends: Becoming and persisting

The consequences of sociation and the exchanges that create and maintain their sociation are differences made to the actuality of a person's life. The question the concept of reciprocal interaction raises in this research is whether the religiosity of the interviewees and other participants in The Society are fulfilled by the kinds of social interaction offered by and experienced in formal settings The Society supports e.g. Meetings for Worship, Quaker groups<sup>24</sup> and Quaker committees. Members and attenders who remain participants in The Society are satisfying their religiosity and their prototypical Quakerism<sup>25</sup> through their interactions with The Society. Those who have left became, and those thinking of leaving are becoming, dissatisfied with the exchange. Their time spent with The Society has lost or is losing its value. Their prototypical Quakerism is no longer satisfying their religiosity.

Simmel argued that 'every interaction is properly viewed as a kind of exchange'<sup>26</sup>. 'The meaning of exchange, moreover, is that the sum of values is greater afterward than it was before'<sup>27</sup>. Applying this argument it follows that becoming and being a Friend involves exchanges through social interactions between the individual, others in The Society and the formal association that is The Society. All hope to gain value from their exchanges. As a result of acceptance into membership the individual has given a commitment to The Society on the basis of what The Society is offering the individual. In a self-governing religious society like the Quakers, without a paid

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<sup>24</sup> A full list of Quaker national groups may be found on the Quakers in Britain website at <https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/quaker-groups> Accessed 7/01/2023. Young adult Quaker activities are described at <https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/young-adult-quakers> Accessed 7/01/2023. There are also ad hoc groups within Local and Area Meetings e.g. Bible study, book groups, retreats, children's activities, Experiment with Light groups.

<sup>25</sup> See Chapter 4 where prototypical Quakerism is discussed in the section 'From religiosity to Quaker witness'.

<sup>26</sup> Simmel (1971. p.43).

<sup>27</sup> Simmel (1971. p.44).

clergy, what The Society requires explicitly of its members is their time, knowledge, experience and willingness to engage with and take responsibility for The Society's activities<sup>28</sup>. Individuals hope that their religiosity will be satisfied through a commitment to and participation in The Society's activities. That involves, according to their abilities, participation at Meeting for Worship, readiness for service to The Society and a financial contribution to The Society's maintenance within their financial means<sup>29</sup>. In other words, the parties to the interaction are expected to give to the other something they possess that the other values. They are not concrete objects but mutually satisfying social interactions that preserve The Society. All parties hope their lives will be made more valuable as a result; all risk disappointment should mutual expectations not be fulfilled. Listed attenders may feel different degrees of commitment and have lesser obligations yet many, though not obliged to, still give as much service as a member by accepting nomination to certain roles and make financial contributions. Persisting as a Friend or attender continues until a time may be reached when the exchanges occasioned by social interactions within The Society no longer feel of value. Conflicts, affirmation or disconfirmation with peers in The Society, whether at Local or national level, may weaken or strengthen the process of sociation within The Society. Depending on how conflicts and differences are handled, they may be resolved and maintain or even strengthen a person's continuing attachment to Quaker theology and worship<sup>30</sup>. Simmel observes that:

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<sup>28</sup> *QF&P* (11.01)

<sup>29</sup> *QF&P* (11.01).

<sup>30</sup> As was the experience of Linda, Rosemary and Shirley.

Conflict is thus designed to resolve divergent dualisms; it is a way of achieving some kind of unity, even if it be through the annihilation of one of the conflicting parties<sup>31</sup>.

Individual members who feel their viewpoint no longer matters or feel disconfirmed are likely to terminate their membership and attenders their attendership.

#### **5.4 Dandelion and disaffiliation from The Society**

Dandelion explored, through interviews, the reasons why sixteen Quakers left The Society<sup>32</sup>. All his interviewees had been involved with Friends for at least five years and six for longer than twenty years<sup>33</sup>. These former Quakers were not flitters. 'Many talked of strong experiences of 'homecoming' on first attending Quaker Meeting'<sup>34</sup>.

##### **5.4.1 Categories of Leavers and reasons for leaving**

Dandelion identified three categories of leavers: 1) those who are 'deconvicted of their Quakerism'; 2) 'those who leave because the group, not they, has lost its Quaker way ..... in its over-eagerness to adopt new and inappropriate revelation'; 3) those who leave because the group 'is tardy in keeping up with God'<sup>35</sup>. Dandelion then classifies six types of disaffected leavers relating the three reasons for leaving with dissatisfaction with what he labels as the 'Practice' or the 'Belief' aspect of the Quaker double culture he has described. Practice is inferred to be shorthand for 'the conservative and conformist attitudes towards procedural or behavioural deviation

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<sup>31</sup> Simmel (1955. p.14).

<sup>32</sup> Dandelion (2002) also reports there were resignations 'in 1994, following the adoption of a new and controversial 'book of discipline" i.e. Faith and Practice, which is currently being revised again. There were 138 in 1994, and 105 in 1995, but it cannot be determined to what extent that new edition was the cause of those resignations. As Dandelion says, 'it is difficult to discern who resigned on what grounds' (2002. p.216). The more general point is that they ceased to value their participation in The Society. It would be interesting to have known what drew those who left The Society to The Society in the first place. That information is confidentially held by Area Meetings in the reports that the appointed 'visitors' make to Area Meetings as part of the Area Meetings' membership procedures.

<sup>33</sup> Simmel (2002. p.226).

<sup>34</sup> Simmel (2002. p.226).

<sup>35</sup> Dandelion (2002. p.217).

within the 'Meeting House' or, more shortly the 'behavioural creed'<sup>36</sup>. That is one side of the double culture. Belief is inferred to be shorthand for 'Permissiveness towards patterns of belief'<sup>37</sup>, the other side of the double culture.

The difficulty with that classification is that the 'Practice' heading elides procedural reasons with behavioural. Procedural reasons are related to the operations of a structural unit e.g. how Meetings for Worship are operated, or meant to operate. Behavioural reasons are related to social interactions within a structural unit. The quality of social interactions depends on the behaviour of those responsible in organisational roles for the processing of the units' business and on the behaviour of the other participants involved in the conduct of Quaker affairs. Disaffection may be with Quaker procedures or with Quaker behaviours or with both. I have therefore organised the reasons given by members of the three groups for leaving The Society into three tables for an alternative analysis of the reasons for leaving as shown below.

### **The Deconvicted Group**

The deconvicted group 'talk of Quakers in the third person' and look for a new group to join<sup>38</sup>. The kinds of reason given for their decision to leave are listed in Figure 5.1:

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<sup>36</sup> Dandelion (2002. p.219).

<sup>37</sup> Dandelion (2002. p.218).

<sup>38</sup> Dandelion (2002. p.218).



### Reasons 'the deconvincing group' leave

1. Lack of interest in their Local Meeting in 'peace and social issues'
2. 'Not putting ourselves out is not following Jesus' i.e. the primary attachment is to Jesus and following Jesus leads them out of The Society
3. Poor practice of the Quaker business method with a suggestion 'that there was a pre-decided view and that only certain participants were allowed to speak'
4. 'I don't like the feeling now in Friends that you are expected to take up certain attitudes'
5. 'Friends are empty of content ... belief *is* important'
6. 'If I knew then what I know now, I wouldn't have joined'<sup>39</sup>

Figure 5.1 Reasons the deconvincing group leave

Dandelion identified the first three reasons as Practice reasons and the second three as Belief reasons. A different perspective identifies all but the third reason as to do with ideas and values. Following Archer<sup>40</sup>, ideas and values belong to the realm of the cultural system on which members of a group draw, not 'Practice' as defined by Dandelion. Practice as such is constrained by structures and procedures. The power of the different ideational interest groups within a Meeting would determine the valency given to the different ideas circulating in the Meeting. A cause for individuals leaving in this group was related to the fact that certain ideas were not felt to be

<sup>39</sup> Dandelion (2002. p.220).

<sup>40</sup> See Chapter 2. Archer makes the distinction between the cultural system, the structural system, and their relationship to social interactions. The cultural system and the structural systems constrain social interactions in different ways. It is in social interactions that the vested interests and ideational commitments of individuals (actors in a society) draw on the cultural system and structural systems (structures and procedures) of their society to uphold their place and justify/pursue their interests within the societies to which they belong.

supported or valued. Another cause was the assumption that conformity to certain attitudes, held by an influential ideational interest group, was required.

The third reason in the list relates to the conduct of the Quaker business method. That is part of the structural system. What was expressed was dissatisfaction with the way the business method was being operated by role-holders, not the method itself. An individual's understanding of what is required of them in their role as well as their character affects how they operate a procedure. That is a major factor in their interactions with others<sup>41</sup>. One leaver concluded that the Yearly Meeting was being operated 'like any other organisation'<sup>42</sup> and was not true to its theological underpinning.

The causes of individuals' deconvincement might be related not so much to the Quakerism they understood they were joining but two aspects of the vernacular Quakerism they encountered after years of membership: the ideational and the procedural. A dissonance grew between ideas they held and the lack of support for those ideas compared with the support for other ideas in their Meeting; and a discontent with the behaviour of role-holders in operating procedures. Their need for a different organisational environment in which to express their spiritually-based social activism or their Christian-oriented spirituality became too strong to resist.

**The Group of Those who have been Left**, 'leave because the group, not they, has lost its Quaker way, ... in its over-eagerness to adopt new and inappropriate revelation'. New decisions brought into question the 'fit' between their own Quakerism and that of the new dominant corporate narrative<sup>43</sup>. Dandelion identified

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<sup>41</sup> e.g., Cummins (2019. p.309).

<sup>42</sup> Dandelion (2002. p.219).

<sup>43</sup> Dandelion (2002. p.217).

'the key items in this category were the perceptions of decline in the depth of worship and the operation of the 'business method'. Some reasons are listed in Figure 5.2.

**Reasons 'those who have been left' give for leaving**

1. 'Only two Friends appeared able to come with heart and mind prepared ... there was a sleepy attitude'
2. Business meetings were 'disturbing and depressing'
3. There was no spiritual depth anymore
4. 'Things went sour at Friends House ... people became very worldly ... the philosophy seems to be going the wrong way'
5. One felt 'mentioning Jesus or Christ would not be approved of' in her Meeting
6. "There were more and more woolly thinkers and the peace testimony was watered down"
7. "I'm not anti-Buddhist," one interviewee reported in talking about the level of Buddhist Quakerism in her Meeting, "but it's not what Quakerism is".
8. Britain Yearly Meeting no longer observes the principles and ideals of Quakerism. I resigned because I have such a high regard for them<sup>44</sup>.

Figure 5.2 Reasons 'those who have been left' give for leaving

The reasons are similar to the first group although there seems to be more emphasis on dissatisfaction with other Friends' attitudes i.e. their lack of spiritual depth.

Leavers are upset with what they perceive as the devaluation of traditional Quaker theology and a changing theological culture at the Local Meeting level and at BYM.

Those in leadership roles in relation to the work of BYM are perceived by some in this group as using their structural power at the centre for steering The Society on a particular course that deemphasised traditional Quaker theology and practice. They

<sup>44</sup> Dandelion [interview notes] (2002. p.220-222).

became disaffected also because of the accommodation of ideas into The Society that were non-Christian such as Buddhist and non-theist.

**Leaving because of Friends' Tardiness in keeping up with God.** The third group leave because 'it (i.e. The Society or their Local Meeting), is tardy in keeping up with God'<sup>45</sup>. This group was interested in innovation following Divine leadings. Some suggestions were as in Figure 5.3 below:

**Leaving because The Society or their Local Meeting is tardy in keeping up with God**

1. "The Meeting needs a rabbi"
2. "They [the Quakers] are not taught and they don't want to learn"
3. "Friends are very good at doing good to other people but don't want poor people ... in Meeting ... they don't go out to get them" (interview notes)<sup>46</sup>

Figure 5.3 Leaving because The Society or their Local Meeting is tardy in keeping up with God

There were fewer individuals in this category. These examples relate to the need for inreach to support spiritual growth and learning and inreach and outreach to support diversity. The views express discontent with the cultural system and the social values of their fellow Quakers. Should they have received more support in confirming their concerns and addressing these issues in their Meetings they may not have left. Changes might have been necessary to implement them e.g. introducing Experiment with Light, themed or programmed Meetings for Worship, organising some religious education and class and racial awareness training.

Dandelion observed that a Meeting with which members of this third group associated was 'seemingly tardy in terms of its openness to 'new light', which he

<sup>45</sup> Dandelion (2002. p.217).

<sup>46</sup> Dandelion (2002. p.221).

thought was, in some sense, hypocritical<sup>47</sup>. New Light, if it might affect orthopraxy<sup>48</sup>, was less acceptable, in Dandelion's view, than new beliefs<sup>49</sup>.

#### 5.4.2 Some conclusions about leaving and leavers

Dandelion explains that those members 'most easily' released by their Meetings were 'the grieving Quaker who felt practice was not changing quickly enough' and 'the grieving Quaker who felt patterns of believing were moving too fast or in the wrong direction'<sup>50</sup>. He saw them as 'opposing ... the dominant trends of the double-culture i.e. permissive belief patterns and conservative practice'<sup>51</sup>. The leavers' reasons for leaving pointed to solutions which, if implemented would impact both sides of the double-culture e.g. limiting the range of beliefs that are acceptable; allowing innovation in the conduct of Meetings for Worship affecting orthopraxis; and encouraging more open and tolerating less inhibited discussion of theological issues affecting orthodoxy. These reasons would limit the 'perhaps' in the 'absolute perhaps' of how Friends believed and expressed themselves.

In fact, since that 2002 research, there has been experimentation in how Meetings for Worship may be conducted as Dandelion has shown<sup>52</sup> e.g. the development of semi-programmed Meetings such as those for all age worship, involving the children and young people of the Meeting actively; and programmed Meetings with a theme or prepared ministry, e.g. at Yearly Meetings at least since 2018<sup>53</sup>. Orthopraxis is not as rigid as it was. Modern Experiment with Light Groups, initiated in 1997 was an

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<sup>47</sup> Dandelion (2002. p.223).

<sup>48</sup> i.e. liturgical practices.

<sup>49</sup> *Advice and query* 1.02 asks Are you open to new light, from whatever source it may come? Do you approach new ideas with discernment? <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/?s=new+light> Accessed 07/01/2023.

<sup>50</sup> Dandelion (2002. p.223).

<sup>51</sup> Dandelion (2002.p.223).

<sup>52</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.129).

<sup>53</sup> Yearly Meetings have been experimenting with prepared ministry. See for example, the address by Lesley Richards ( <https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/ym2018-lesley-richards-revising-qfp-session-2> Accessed: 18/09/2021).

innovative or rediscovered Quaker procedure<sup>54</sup>. Meads, however, records that the innovation was also a source of conflict within some Meetings<sup>55</sup>.

Underlying the reasons for experimentation with practice is the dissatisfaction of some participants in some Meetings with the current state of Quaker worship in which the religiosity of a number of Quaker participants is, if not frustrated, seeking more spiritual depth and satisfaction<sup>56</sup>. One might speculate that in a different Local or Area Meeting, perhaps consisting of some of the interviewees of this research, the deconvicted group might not have become deconvicted. They may have encountered Friends who shared their concerns. Those with a Christian commitment might have enjoyed the fellowship of the interviewees with strong Christian beliefs. The deconvicted who wanted to take Spirit-led collectively discerned social action might not have felt marginalised if avowed social activists had been in their Meeting. The discomfort of Dandelion's interviewees who expressed their awareness of their conscious differences from what they took to be a Quaker norm and who left might have resonated with those interviewees in this research who differed from that norm e.g. those wanting to find ways to widen the social diversity of Quakers and those several interviewees who are or have been Clerks who are committed to the traditional operation of the Quaker Business Method. In short, those who left might not have left if linked with more opportunities for creative fellowship and social interaction with others in their Local and Area Meetings. If their religiosity and prototypical Quakerism could have been expressed and valued and not frustrated their sociation might have been actively maintained through satisfying exchanges with others.

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<sup>54</sup> Hosking (2008. p.5).

<sup>55</sup> Meads (2011. p.262).

<sup>56</sup> Meads (2011). Meads's thesis is discussed in the literature review in Chapter 1 1.5.

## 5.5 Chapter summary

Simmel's concepts of sociation (*Vergesellschaftung*), exchange (*Wechselwirkung*) and value were explained. Simmel argued that they are fundamental mechanisms that determine the existence of a society and then applied them to the Religious Society of Friends. A critical reading of Dandelion's study of disassociation from The Society was offered. Rather than Dandelion's dichotomous 'Practice' or 'Belief' aspect of the Quaker double culture he has described, procedural factors and the behaviour of those in authority were identified as discrete factors in addition to 'belief' (or ideational factors) in disaffiliation. Opportunities for more satisfying and supportive social interactions that could meet the needs of participants in Local and Area meetings might avoid disassociations from The Society. Simmel's concept of sociation (*Vergesellschaftung*) and his recognition of both external and internal forces that may be destructive or generative to a society implies the need for The Society to respond to both destructive and reinforcing forces that affect the bonds that hold Quakers together within The Society. More effective responses were needed to maintain cohesion so that members continued to value the exchange (*Wechselwirkung*) that arises from and was the initial basis for their association.

## CHAPTER 6: UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS IN BRITAIN<sup>1,2</sup>

### 6.1 Introduction and Overview

The previous chapter examined the reasons why a sample of Quakers, members of The Society for at least five years, had decided to disaffiliate from it. The initial value from their association had deteriorated for specific reasons<sup>3</sup>. Members' initial commitment had turned into disillusionment to do with the way The Society conducted its affairs. I suggested that that was partly to do with their not receiving support for their criticisms in their own Meetings. Interviewees for my research had criticisms similar to those who did leave but they did not say they felt unsupported within The Society. They were generally positive about the social interactions they were experiencing within The Society.

This chapter applies an integrative model derived from Archer's reflexive and social theories presented in Chapter 2 which pivots around 'Social Interactions'. It was developed in order to identify the factors involved in the formation of members' positive relationships to The Society and factors that constrain and enable social interactions within it. It gives rise to the argument that current social interactions are

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 2 discusses and describes Archer's reflexive and social theories and represents them as a model in an integrative diagram: figure 2.5.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 3 for a description of the empirical findings which are the evidence used to support the argument here; and Chapter 4 for an analytical discussion of those findings.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter 3 reported the experience of Rosemary who was persuaded by an Elder that the Meeting needed her when she was unsure whether to remain. Rosemary had also remarked that in the Meeting in which she decided to become a member she felt 'held' unlike in a previous Meeting she had attended. In Linda's case it was to a previous Meeting in which she felt held that she returned dismayed by the behaviour of new members to the Meeting who were appointed to the oversight team. Joy did not continue at the first Meeting she went to, but remained in the second in which she felt welcomed. The non-theist Shirley was encouraged into membership by a members of the oversight team of her predominantly Christocentric Meeting. Chapter 4 noted that increasing numbers of members were being released from The Society on their own initiative.



strained a result of stresses caused by a lack of integration in The Society's existing cultural and structural systems. It is suggested that they are leading to a dilution of the Society's distinctive theology and governance practices and the process of internal secularisation discussed in Chapter 4.

The application of the model in Part 1 of this chapter develops an understanding of how interviewees come to engage in social interactions within The Society. In Part 2 the model is used to explore how a lack of integration within the Society's cultural and structural systems are affecting social interactions.

The resultant analysis points to lack of integration and the theological and organisational confusion within The Society which might be contributing to The Society's numerical decline.

## **Part 1: From Reflexivity to Social Interaction**

### **6.2 The internal conversation: dominant and secondary modes of reflexivity**

Archer suggested that the three modes of reflexivity, communicative, autonomous and meta-reflexivity, characterise internal conversations. They are '*practised by all of us some of the time*' but in one of her 'small, stratified' research samples that, 'the vast majority (over 93 per cent) were shown to have '*a dominant mode*'<sup>4</sup>.

#### **Meta-reflexivity as the dominant mode of Quaker reflexivity**

The 'meta-reflexives' are distinctive because their commitment to an ultimate concern partakes of dedication to a vocational ideal ... The systematic rejection of society's 'sticks and carrots' left them free to engage in societal critique

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<sup>4</sup> Archer (2012. p.12). Italics in the original. A fourth form, fractured reflexivity, was a disabling condition that can be temporary or longer lasting. It is a condition in which an individual is unable to complete internal conversations, make decisions and carry through courses of action. Some participants in The Society, as in Britain as a whole, experience periods of fractured reflexivity. Four of my interviewees reported dislocations from families or periods of suffering in childhood and/or as adults and would seem to have experienced periods of fractured reflexivity.

because their *subversive* (italics in the original) stance meant that they personally absorbed the costs of actively promoting alternative values<sup>5</sup>.

The interviewees demonstrated a commitment to vocational ideals in their choice of work e.g. education, health and social work, civil service, work in national or local voluntary agencies. Through actions and words they indicated dissatisfaction with the status quo in society, and often in their own work place. Four interviewees left<sup>6</sup> secure professional positions prematurely, with a degree of discontent with the policies or practices of the organisations for which they had worked, two of whom specifically to pursue other chosen pro-social goals they would otherwise not have had time for. Of the three interviewees remaining in full time employment, one was a trained art therapist working with children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, the second working in an organisation concerned with prison reform, and the third with a community organisation improving the local environment. All three could point to what Archer calls 'volatile biographies'<sup>7</sup> a characteristic of meta-reflexives. Their discontent or the attraction of new pastures in which to use their gifts, resulted in geographical and/or occupational relocations, not motivated by financial gain but by a desire for greater vocational satisfaction. All three continued to offer service to The Society and other social agencies.

The Quaker way has an external and internal dimension supporting meta-reflexivity.

*Advices & Queries*<sup>8</sup> urge self-monitoring<sup>9</sup>, with particular advices and queries

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<sup>5</sup> Archer (2003. p.351).

<sup>6</sup> Trevor, Susan, Andrew, Phillip.

<sup>7</sup> Archer (2003. p.350).

<sup>8</sup> *Advices & queries* constitute Chapter 1 of *Quaker faith & practice* and are also published as a separate pamphlet. It is distributed freely in Meeting Houses and in enquirers' packs from Britain Yearly Meeting at Friends House, Euston.

<sup>9</sup> Archer states that 'all acts of self-monitoring are acts of 'meta-reflexivity' (2003. p.256). *Advices and queries* is also the first chapter of *Quaker faith & practice*. Although separately published as a pamphlet, I refer to the text as printed in *Quaker faith & practice* to emphasise its canonical authority as part of *The book of Christian discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain* which is the subtitle of QF&P.

advising or querying how one's life is being or should be led<sup>10</sup>. Membership of The Society is seen as discipleship'<sup>11</sup>. Discipleship implies an external referent from which an individual learns and may be transformed as the first of the *Advices and queries* asserts:

As Friends we commit ourselves to a way of worship which allows God to teach and transform us. We have found corporately that the Spirit, if rightly followed, will lead us into truth, unity and love: all our testimonies grow from this leading<sup>12</sup>.

A commitment to consider external inputs is a dimension of meta-reflexivity distinguishing it from autonomous reflexivity where 'the life of their minds is a private domain'<sup>13</sup>. The external dimension also includes the consequences of social interactions within Quaker and other contexts. Social interactions generate the material for both affective and cognitive inputs for processing in internal conversations. Affective inputs are to do with what one feels about those social interactions e.g. confirmation or disconfirmation, joy, indifference or anger. The cognitive inputs fuel the conversation about one's faith, what one believes about one's experience and relationship with a transcendent Divinity and the decisions to be made about how to live one's life and practice one's faith.

The internal theologically-based dimension for Quakers is constituted of the 'promptings of love and truth in your hearts':

Trust them as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> e.g., QF&P (2013. 1.27-28).

<sup>11</sup> QF&P (2013. 11.01).

<sup>12</sup> QF&P (2013. 1.01).

<sup>13</sup> Archer (2003. p.210).

<sup>14</sup> QF&P (2013. 1.01).

The felt senses of love and truth are embodied in an individual and are to be trusted 'as the leadings of God'. They should be followed because their transcendent<sup>15</sup> origin endows them with special significance. They are not to be dismissed as products of self-will. They may be acted out in the external world.

The external dimension supporting the meta-reflexive tendency is also encouraged, for example, by the advice that although the laws of the state should be respected

let your first loyalty be to God's purposes. If you feel impelled by strong conviction to break the law, search your conscience deeply. Ask your meeting for the prayerful support which will give you strength as a right way becomes clear<sup>16</sup>.

Quakers' first loyalty is to God's purposes as discerned for oneself, for one's society and for humankind. The individual's conscience is to be tested with others in their Meeting if they have a concern which might lead them to break the law. This long-standing Quaker viewpoint echoes Edward Burrough's words of 1661:

... if anything be commanded of us by the present authority, which is not according to equity, justice and a good conscience towards God ... we must in such cases obey God only and deny active obedience for conscience' sake, and patiently suffer what is inflicted upon us for such our disobedience to men<sup>17</sup>.

These injunctions promote metareflexive conversations with others to do with the state of society, what state authority commands and how to respond to that authority.

The meta-reflexive nature of The Society's theology and the form of its Meeting for Worship is what has appealed to the interviewees and is congruent with the kind of meta-reflective practice they engage in in their internal conversations.

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<sup>15</sup> In this example one may use either Simmel's or Archer's concept of transcendence, depending on whether the concept is seen as a characteristic urge for all human beings to move beyond their present state or an external 'voice' which triggers the concern for love and truth in all human beings to which an individual has the freedom to respond or not.

<sup>16</sup> QF&P (2013. 1.02.35).

<sup>17</sup> QF&P (2013. 23.86).

They lead to the creation of ideational interest groups within The Society. 'We must....obey God' when God's guidance is discerned. That position has been used by The Society to justify civil disobedience e.g. in relation to the Peace Testimony and climate change<sup>18</sup>. In other cases it has led to campaigns for change without having to break the law.

An example of an interest group within an Area Meeting asking for support from The Society as a whole, and getting it as a result of discernment in a Meeting for Worship is in relation to the law on assisted dying. North West London Area Meeting supported a change in the law<sup>19</sup>. A minute was passed to Meeting for Sufferings where it was considered, along with similar minutes passed to it from other Area Meetings. The matter is still being considered within The Society<sup>20</sup>.

Collective discernment where a change in law is on the agenda in a business meeting does not automatically lead to unity. Unity is a criterion that is understood within The Society as confirming the congruence of a discernment with God's will<sup>21</sup>. Coming to unity may take time for a meeting and The Society as a whole. For example, *Towards a Quaker view of sex* was published in 1963 by Friends Home Service Committee. It argued that the same criteria should be applied to heterosexual and homosexual relationships at a time when homosexual acts were criminalised. The interest group that published the 1963 text had some success, alongside other interest groups, both spiritual and secular when same sex acts between men aged over 21 were decriminalised. Not until 2009 was there

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<sup>18</sup> e.g., *Quaker Faith & Practice* (2013. 24.27); Quaker support for Extinction Rebellion <https://www.quaker.org.uk/news-and-events/news/climate-protests-offered-quaker-support>

<sup>19</sup> Personal knowledge as a NWLAM member. Apply to the Clerk of NWLAM for access to the minute. (<https://nwlondonquakers.org.uk/nwlam/>)

<sup>20</sup>(<https://www.quaker.org.uk/news-and-events/news/quakers-to-discuss-assisted-dying> Accessed 13/12/2021).

<sup>21</sup> QF&P (2013. 2.89-90).

agreement within Britain Yearly Meeting to support a campaign for new legislation enabling same sex marriage. Many members remained unhappy that The Society should support this change, as Michael Booth, BYM's church government adviser reports<sup>22</sup> but there is no evidence that they disassociated from The Society because of that. The campaign for a change in the law was eventually successful in 2013<sup>23</sup>.

It is difficult to say without further research whether stances on individual social and political issues are causing existing members to become so disenchanted with The Society and leave (as reported by Dandelion<sup>24</sup>); nor whether particular stances have attracted more new members than have left because of social and political stances The Society has taken. The Society's social witness was an attraction and noticed by all interviewees. The interviewees who had doubts about the Peace Testimony remained members. None expressed doubts about sexual equalities<sup>25</sup>. Given that societal critique is a characteristic of metareflexives, then The Society would be a hospitable place for those whose social critique derives from a spiritually or religiously based value system<sup>26</sup>. The primary mode of meta-reflexivity exhibited by the interviewees is congruent with the meta-reflexive character of Quakerism. But a secondary mode of reflexivity could also be identified which accords with Archer's reflexive theory.

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<sup>22</sup> (<https://www.quaker.org.uk/blog/quakers-and-same-sex-marriage> Accessed 3/12/2019).

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/same-sex-marriage-becomes-law> Accessed 31/01/2024.

<sup>24</sup> Discussed in the previous Chapter.

<sup>25</sup> The transgender issue of the 2020's was not so prominent at the time of the interviews.

<sup>26</sup> That is not to say that other groups do not contain those drawn to religiously-based critiques of aspects of modern society and government policies e.g. *Pax Christi* linked with the Roman Catholic church (<https://paxchristi.org.uk/about-us/about-pax-christi/> Accessed 22/01/2024; *Christians on the left*, which is linked with the Labour Party. (<https://www.christiansontheleft.org.uk/> Accessed 22/01/2024 .

### **Autonomous reflexivity as the secondary mode**

According to Archer, autonomous reflexives' 'inner deliberations are self-sufficient' and they 'take responsibility for themselves and for the conclusions drawn from their own interior deliberations'. They may take 'wrong directions' in their lives but they make 'self-directed corrections and self-monitored revisions'<sup>27</sup>. They are 'bearers of projects that were divergent from their original *milieux*<sup>28</sup>.

Turning to the interviewees<sup>29</sup>, Trevor agreed with his boss who described him as 'the cat who walked alone'. He liked to make his own mind up and do things his way in his time. He and Susan were explicitly not dependent on regular attendance at Meeting for Worship or their association with a particular Meeting for Worship for their sense of being Quaker or for the satisfaction of their religiosity. Trevor was drawn to Catholic spiritual practices at home and Susan became Quanglican. Susan spoke of her attachment to ethical and activist Quakerism rather than Meeting for Worship. She returned to a Meeting after a ten-year gap. Susan, from an extended Jewish family, some of whom, but not her own parents, had become Quakers, joined The Society only after a Christian conversion experience. She then identified as a Quanglican, having been befriended by other Quanglicans, and sought and received baptism and confirmation in the Church of England. Another interviewee (Gillian) was drawn to Catholic ritual, though not Catholic dogma and was a governor of a Catholic primary school. A third (Caroline), baptised and confirmed as a child, whose husband was an Anglican priest, participated in Anglican evensong. Three of the four interviewees doubted for 14+ years whether they could really belong to the Quaker

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<sup>27</sup> Archer (2003, p.210).

<sup>28</sup> Archer (2003, p.212).

<sup>29</sup> Chapter 3 and the appendices of Master Tables provides the empirical support for statements attributed to interviewees.

community (Susan being the fourth who doubted for 38 years). Two (Linda and Rosemary) denied being Christian whilst believing in God and the third (Shirley) held to their own non-theist position. Phillip, like Trevor, quick to join The Society, having experienced a Meeting for Worship having become disappointed with his Methodist church and after many years as a Methodist, emphasised his own non-conformity saying 'I'm a very independent person and therefore have always thought very independently. Not sure how other people's experience has affected me' but he never doubted that The Society was where he could assert his own Christian beliefs. Andrew, brought up a Quaker rejected Quakerism before returning because of his partner's interest. After having become a member, he became supportive, unusually for British Quakers, of programmed Meetings, as a result of his experience with evangelical American Quakers.

In all these cases, one can see a meta-reflexive's critique of their initial religious situation as well as an autonomous reflexive's individualism and idiosyncratic and prototypical way of being Quaker.

### **Communicative reflexivity as the secondary mode**

In comparison with the autonomous reflexives, three interviewees showed marked communicative reflexive characteristics as a secondary mode of relating. Unlike in the other interviews, friendship, deep conversation with others and group attachments were explicitly stated to be important to them. They appeared not to be so self-doubting as many core communicative reflexives were said to be. For them, 'the life of the mind and the life of the group was highly permeable and there was



regular two-way trafficking between them', which was a characteristic of communicative reflexives<sup>30</sup>.

All three were Clerks of Quaker Meetings and/or Quaker organisations.

One (Joy) spoke of her pleasure in listening to discussion and argument from when she was a teenager and of 'hugely supporting and inspiring friendships'. She was aware of God when she was alone and at Meeting for Worship and of a sense of the Spirit moving amongst us (Joy I. 439-441).

Another (Caroline) spoke of friendship. She was deeply affected when four really important people left her Meeting and 'It was, it was like [sighs], 'How can we survive as a meeting without all these loved people, you know' (Caroline I.972-974). She worships 'In silence with other people...with my Friends, capital F' (Caroline I.729).

The third (Matthew) said his identity as a Quaker is 'a large part of how I self-identify'. This identity was linked to 'the closeness and love and, and connection that was there in a Quaker meeting'. He referred to *Quaker faith & practice's* extracts illustrating the links between spirituality and community. He said specifically that, in spite of doubts, he was ready to accept the corporate line and corporate decisions (Matthew I.1688-1707).

These Friends also shared an affirmation, sometimes qualified, of their Christian identity. Joy 'wouldn't say' she 'wasn't a Christian' (Joy I.356-365). Caroline was comfortable calling herself a Christian (Caroline I.361). Matthew would 'self-describe at the Christian end of Quakerism' (Matthew I.485-489). All expressed their awareness of the Spirit in their lives.

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<sup>30</sup> Archer (2003. p.167).

Social activism was also integral to their Quakerism. They had engaged in social projects: e.g. Joy with the homeless, Caroline with families in difficulty and a long-standing peace vigil, Matthew with prisons. These observations may be thought to act as a qualification to Archer's generalisation that the 'comfortability' of communicative reflexives is 'inimical to an adventurous exposure to the outside world as it is to an inward withdrawal into solitude'<sup>31</sup>, but their communicative reflexivity is secondary to their meta-reflexivity.

### 6.2.1 Reflexivity and Clerking

The combination of a capacity for meta-reflexivity with communicative reflexivity as the secondary mode qualifies a person well for the role of clerk. The Nominations Committee of their Meetings recognised those three Friends had the qualities that make a clerk. 'The clerk needs to have a spiritual capacity for discernment and sensitivity to the meeting'<sup>32</sup>. A clerk, as clerk, should not be influenced by their personal agenda. Some issues will inevitably generate controversy, so that in the face of diverse points of view a predilection for communicative reflexivity become a desirable capacity for a clerk: they can listen to diversity, waiting for unity to emerge not forced by an inner urge to executive/autonomous direction of their Meetings.

Stephen Allen<sup>33</sup> sees the Quaker Business Method as a form of reflexivity that 'encourages individual unknowing and so can be understood as a means to achieve reflexivity'. 'Unknowing' is the pertinent term:

The right conduct of our meetings for church affairs depends upon all coming to them in an active, seeking spirit, not with minds already made up on a particular course of action, determined to push this through at all costs'<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> Archer (2003, p.209).

<sup>32</sup> QF&P (3.12).

<sup>33</sup> Allen (2016. p.7).

<sup>34</sup> QF&P (3.05).

Promoting the Quaker business method by writing for a management audience, Allen goes on to say that 'being open to proceeding in a practice of unknowing can inform a collective knowing' which for Quakers is underpinned by their having appreciation 'of a relatively undefined divine whole'<sup>35</sup>. The Society has depended on that appreciation for the conduct of its church affairs. An impatient desire for agreement, characteristic of an autonomous reflexive, if they were a clerk, would need suppressing. An agreed minute represents, in Allen's terms, 'a relational unity to which each person present is constituent but subordinate'<sup>36</sup>. In Quaker terms, the clerk facilitates the recording of a collective discernment of the will of God perceived as such by the Meeting. When no unity can be found the clerk accepts the fact and minutes it, perhaps with a summary of the conflicting views so that the matter might be reopened at a later Meeting.

Three interviewees who had served as clerks had characteristics associated with autonomous reflexives. Andrea had been 'materialistic and very ambitious' (Andrea I.40) before she started her journey to becoming a Friend. Subsequently she accepted nomination as clerk of a Local Meeting. Her comment on her clerkship was that

I didn't understand about the clerk being the servant of the meeting and I hadn't actually read it is, anywhere. [laughter]. I don't know how I managed to miss that bit out. So I just bossed everyone around. [Laughter] And it wasn't very successful at all (Andrea I.872-879).

Andrea may learn to be a Clerk in the future but she recognised that that role required attitudes and communication skills she would need to develop.

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<sup>35</sup> Allen (2016, p.11).

<sup>36</sup> Allen (2016, p.11).

Trevor retired to work on his own interests in community development.

Temperamentally, he recognised he was more an autonomous (the cat that walked alone) than communicative reflexive. His experience led him to say that he did not want that role again. Phillip, like Trevor, resigned a public service position in order to act on his leadings for ecumenical peace work. That leading 'dovetailed' with his faith and his commitment to The Society he had served for many years in clerking roles. His individualism and self-directedness, however, led to him vigorously upholding the right ordering of Meetings for Worship for Business.

These six examples together suggest Nominations Committees tasked with appointing clerks look for those for whom the capacity for friendship and communicative reflexivity are seen to be part of their disposition. Should a Meeting need to be and want to be reminded of the traditional 'right ordering' of church affairs, the strength of commitment to the right operation of the Quaker Business Method of a metareflexive/autonomous reflexive such as Phillip could meet a Meeting's need for the restoration of right ordering.

At a national level of The Society's organisation (and with respect to appointments in any organisation) Archer's reflexive theory has relevance. It points to the need for awareness of the reflexive characteristics of those in positions of national influence and authority. Their attitude towards participative decision-making<sup>37</sup> has implications for other Quakers giving service to BYM with regards participation in the collective discernment of planning and resource allocation affecting their service and the work it helps resource. Asserting trustees' authority has consequences as discussed in Chapter 4 and is a force for internal secularisation

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<sup>37</sup> NB QF&P 3.9 which asserts the Quaker business method is dependent on 'the widest possible participation of our members'.

### 6.3 Ultimate Concerns

The analysis of the interviews provides an indication of how important each individual's attachment to Friends has been for them. For some, their comments do suggest that Quakerism as they experience it is their ultimate concern, e.g. Andrea; for others Quakerism seems more a conditional concern e.g. Trevor (see below).

The following interview extracts, mainly from statements in the last part of the interviews, identify a collection of features of what has been valued about Quakerism and why they remain as members:

Well it's my whole life. And it's mainly what I do. And It's me [laugh] (Andrea I.1117. Theist).

There was nowhere else to go. (Trevor I.902-904. Christian).

It gives me a great sense of belonging of structure of safety and of security of...identity yes. it is sort of the highlight of my week really. Yes! (Linda I.1622-1626. Theist).

It's giving you that grounded feeling from which you can grow and change and that effects all of your life (Shirley I.1146-1151. Non-theist).

... you don't know what would have happened if I hadn't been in the Quakers. but I think that it has enabled me to, to follow my own path ... and yet I feel I belong somewhere (Gillian I.1822-1827. Christian).

I hope it's made my life more productive and more valuable to other people and to myself. I hope I live better because of it (Joy I.1112-1113. Christian)

... it was hard to make the decision to be a member. And it has made a difference. It's like marriage. You could say that you don't need to get married ... It comes at a price. You remind yourself that this is a rule you have accepted to live by. (Rosemary I.1961-1975. Theist).

The Quakerism, the discovery of Quakerism from age 12 and the meeting activity has been remarkably consistent. There hasn't been any periods where I said why did I bother being a Quaker. ... Yes, Quaker meeting has done a lot for me but ... the Anglican thing has been ... the thing that has stimulated the processes that I've been going through that included the decision to become a member (Susan I.2646-2678. Quanglican).

And then there is something about, the, the waiting, the waiting on the Spirit that goes on ... Wait to see, see what happens ... How are you going to be guided (Caroline I.788-791. Christian).

It's bound me in more. It's increased, I think it's probably increased my commitment not in a sort of very big overt way but in a more subtle and background way. ... And there are certain things where I will take the Quaker line ... because this is the corporate decision (Matthew I.1688-1707. Christian).

But the experience of membership, has been a transforming in a, in a sort of evolving rather than a sort of blinding revelatory way ... That's part of me. (Andrew I.2058-2063. Christian).

I am the person I am but being in the Quaker ethos has cemented that. In other words I am the person I am now because I found Quakers. But if I had struggled without them, or without the ethos that they provide, I don't know where I would be. But having become, having found Quakers and become a Quaker, that is absolutely fundamental to my life... I found Quakers, by the grace of God. And I'm very thankful for it. (Phillip I.1111-1118. Christian).

Abstracting from the above, the benefits commitment to Quakerism as *an* ultimate concern brought to individuals have been:

belonging; security; establishing an identity; a grounding promoting growth and change; finding usefulness for one's life through spiritually inspired activism; waiting on the Spirit for guidance; finding a religious form that integrates faith and practice in the actuality of life.

The comments reflect the positive effects of engaging with the Quaker way in the actuality of interviewees' lives.

#### **6.4 Primary Agent, Corporate Agent and Actor**

Archer's concepts of Primary Agent, Corporate Agent and Actor clarify the challenges to social interaction within Quaker Meetings. The 2013 Quaker survey<sup>38</sup> showed most Quakers surveyed to be white, well-educated, middle class retirees. They shared the social opportunities and social benefits that accrue to those with those characteristics. Their primary agency gave them the privileges of their birth and upbringing as actors in any social circle in which they participated. All interviewees were white. All had gained advantage through employment. Interviewees had been or were employed as lecturers, teachers, social workers,

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<sup>38</sup> Hampton (2014).

therapists or administrators, receiving the entitlements and accepting the obligations that acting in those positions in Corporate Agents conferred in addition to the benefits and drawbacks of their involuntary Primary Agency. Only one interviewee had said they had experienced redundancy and a period of unemployment.

The primary agency of three of the four interviewees who took at least 14 years, including the interviewee who had experienced unemployment, before applying for membership diverged from the white, educated English middle class who constitute the overwhelming membership<sup>39</sup>. The fourth recognised her non-theism differentiated her from what she described as her Christocentric Local Meeting but was quite aware of her primary agency. She was in her social activism working to redress inequalities.

Newcomers to a Friends Meeting whose primary agency is different from the overwhelming majority of their Local Meeting, can experience difficulties with inclusion. The Meeting's membership may be unused to interacting interpersonally as social equals with those who are thought or experienced to be different from themselves. Even individuals who have achieved upward social mobility and reduced aspects of their social difference from the Quaker norm, e.g. by educational effort and/or occupational choices, have not necessarily reduced their own sense of social difference arising from their primary agency<sup>40</sup>. An individual may fear for their

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<sup>39</sup> Issues of social inclusion for the three interviewees referred to here were identified in Chapter 3 and discussed further in Chapter 4.

<sup>40</sup> Our Faith in the Future (2018). (<https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/meeting-for-sufferings/our-faith-in-the-future> Accessed 01/01/2022). Inclusion was one of the themes of BYM's strategic plan, *Our faith in the future*. The plan was first approved in September 2015: BYM, the charity, provides no supporting materials with respect to inclusion. BYM's website states: 'There is no list of work tasks as that is the responsibility of other groups, meetings or central committees ... the text focuses on shared aims to give direction to our work.... each Quaker individual, meeting or committee [is left] free to discern where they are today and then decide on what actions they need to take to move their part of the yearly meeting towards this vision'.

psychological safety and for their relationship with their family/class/ethnicity of origin interacting with members of a Religious Society whose status and whose culture is so different from that of their family and primary agency. More thoughtful reflexivity and social education may be needed within The Society if its membership is to become more aware of its own social assumptions and prejudices and their effect on others whose social background is different from themselves.

### **6.5 *Modus Vivendi* (A way of being)**

The *modus vivendi* for an individual covers the practices an individual engages in to meet their needs for 'physical wellbeing, performative competence and social self-worth'<sup>41</sup>. These needs are met by acting in different social circles e.g. at work, at play, in religious groups. What has emerged from the interviews is that Quaker spirituality, Quaker social activism and belonging to a Quaker community all play a part in different degrees in engaging an individual's religiosity. They come to express their religiosity through Quakerism. They develop their own prototypical Quakerism and Quaker *modus vivendi* as they interact in a Quaker setting. The testimonies of the twelve interviewees also show how their encounter with Quakers and Quakerism has contributed to their well-being. The findings of Chapter 3 showed that almost all interviewees have occupied significant roles in The Society at local, area or national levels. Occupying those roles has provided opportunity for them to demonstrate and develop their performative competence. In Archer's model, performative competence

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It is helpful to point to the freely available materials on the American Friends General Conference website which include learning materials to support Quakers in responding to the challenge of being socially inclusive:

<https://www.fgcquaker.org/sites/default/files/attachments/Transforming%20Quaker%20Welcoming%20Poster%20-%20Greeting%20Newcomers%20.pdf> ;

[https://www.fgcquaker.org/sites/default/files/attachments/You%20Are%20Welcome%20Here\\_0.pdf](https://www.fgcquaker.org/sites/default/files/attachments/You%20Are%20Welcome%20Here_0.pdf)  
Accessed 03/01/2022.

<sup>41</sup> Archer (2003. p.148).



and self-worth are constitutive of an effective *modus vivendi*. From the perspective of Simmel's theory of association, an exchange has taken place to the benefit of the member and The Society. For the individual their gain in personal performative competence may be expected to transfer into other social circles in which they participate. Trevor, Shirley and Matthew reported using the Quaker Business Method in non-Quaker contexts in their work. Joy was appointed to a senior position in an Anglican organisation.

The good reputation of The Society is supported by these positive social interactions outside of The Society. Interviewees reported (Chapter 3) that before they went to their first Meeting it was their interactions with individual Quakers that had a part to play in bringing them to their first Meeting<sup>42</sup>. They are examples of individuals who have become enthusiastically committed to claiming and valuing their Quaker identities and their membership of The Society.

### **Part 1 Summary**

The analysis of the interviews of twelve Quakers showed a dominant meta-reflexive style. Within the organisation of the Religious Society of Friends, meta-reflexivity as a particular reflexive style is encouraged by its theology. Autonomous reflexive characteristics seemed the prevalent secondary style in most interviewees<sup>43</sup>. A communicative reflexive style was manifest in those interviewees who were successful clerks.

Their ultimate concerns led to the interviewees becoming participants/actors in The Society over different periods of time. Difficulties with social inclusion points to an

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<sup>42</sup> As reported in Chapter 3.

<sup>43</sup> One of Archer's texts (2007) is titled: *Making our way through the world: Human reflexivity and social mobility* argues that autonomous reflexivity is a dominant feature of contemporary British society.

underlying reason why some interviewees took so long before applying for membership. Archer's theories of reflexivity and agency helps to clarify the issues involved. The primary agency of three interviewees who took 14+ years before deciding to apply for membership differed from the British Quaker social and demographic norm. The nine other interviewees ostensibly belong to that norm. More thoughtful reflexivity seems to be needed within The Society if its aim to become more socially inclusive is to be achieved. It might be the case that the meta-reflexive religious style and liturgy of The Society in Britain appeals to a narrow demographic, not necessarily based on class or ethnicity but primarily distinguished by educational level.

Quakerism has generated wide-ranging activities and opportunities for participation through taking up roles in their Quaker Meetings and in national Quaker groups, and in social circles beyond The Society. That has enhanced their lives and Quakers' reputation.

## **Part 2: The Society's social environment**

### **6.6 Social interactions, interest groups and The Society's structural and cultural Systems**

'Given their pre-existence, structural and cultural emergents<sup>44</sup> shape the social environment to be inhabited'<sup>45</sup>.

The specific social environments to be inhabited in The Society consist of Trustees Meetings, Yearly Meeting in session, Meeting for Sufferings, Central Committees, Area and Local Meetings for Worship and other national and local Quaker groups. Those are The Society's structural emergents, i.e. structural units formed by The

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<sup>44</sup> The concept of 'Emergence' is central to critical realism and was discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>45</sup> Archer (2003. p.131).

Society's structural system in which social interactions take place whose purpose is the execution of The Society's work in furtherance of The Society's purpose. A cultural emergent is Yearly Meeting's approved document *Quaker faith & practice: the book of Christian discipline*, the core text within The Society for describing its theology and procedures,. *QF&P* includes descriptions of the functions and procedures of the main structural units within The Society, the roles that give effect to them, and their relationships to each other (*QFP* Chapters 3-9). Its first chapter includes *Advices and queries* and there are separate chapters that reflect its theology, its ethics and living faithfully as Quakers (*QFP* Chapters 2, 10-29). In chapter 11 on membership, there is a statement of the fundamental elements of being a Quaker<sup>46</sup>.

With regards to the statement of fundamental elements, it was suggested in Chapter 4 that it had not been consistently applied. No assumptions can therefore be made by members about the commitment of other members to those fundamental elements. An increase in the proportion of Quaker members professing non-theist and atheist viewpoints, who would question the ontological possibility of divine guidance and of individuals discerning or receiving it, and a decline in members with traditional Christian beliefs, was evidenced in the latest British Quaker survey of 2013.<sup>47</sup> This is a challenge to The Society's cultural integration. Area Meetings' lack of assertiveness in upholding the fundamental elements of being a Quaker at the decisive point of entry into membership of The Society may well be a significant factor leading to individuals disaffiliating. Accepting 'extreme theological diversity, to

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<sup>46</sup> *QF&P* 11.01.

<sup>47</sup> Dandelion (2014; Hampton, 2014). See Kate Mellor's discussion of this point in Chapter 4 of this thesis. Note also the findings within my small sample of interviewees in Chapter 3 indicating 8 of the 12 interviewees self-identifying as Christian.

use Davie's phrase<sup>48</sup>, may be a disintegrative factor in The Society's life i.e. a destructive force in social interactions. That is because of the discomfort it causes to existing members with a belief in God, Christianity or a Higher power with Whom each individual is connected as an ontological reality for them; and those members who do not believe in such a divinity. Irritation with non-theism was expressed by some interviewees in this research. In Dandelion's work 'a lack of spiritual depth' and non-traditional Quaker ideas, such as Buddhism, in their Meetings were given for leaving<sup>49</sup>. Further contemporary research is needed into disaffiliation to determine how significant a factor that discomfort may be for those who left and for any who are thinking of leaving their Meeting and The Society.

Legally, charities must have governing documents, another cultural emergent required by the state. The governing document determines how charities are run and where responsibility for their operations is placed. They provide the legal framework underpinning the structures which enable and constrain how Quakers put their faith into practice. The governing document of Britain Yearly Meeting, the charity<sup>50</sup> and of each Area Meeting, which are separate charities, are the statutory bases for The Society's governance. Governing documents must be written in a certain way<sup>51</sup>.

BYM's governing document was initially agreed by Yearly Meeting in session and has been subsequently amended. Whatever is agreed there has to be legally approved by the state or changed to conform to the state's requirements as interpreted by the Charity Commission. The Charity Commission regulates all

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<sup>48</sup> Davie (1997. p.267); see also Slack (1967. p.55).

<sup>49</sup> Dandelion (2002. p.221; p.222 ).

<sup>50</sup> Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society (2021) [Available for download at <https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/our-structures/britain-yearly-meeting-trustees-3> Accessed 6/07/2023].

<sup>51</sup> How to write your charity's governing document (CC22b) <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-write-your-charitys-governing-document> Accessed 01/02/2024.

charities on behalf of the state, whether or not the governing document is registered with it.

Area Meeting governing documents must initially be agreed by the specific Area Meeting in session and the document may need to be registered with The Charity Commission<sup>52</sup>. In effect The Religious Society of Friends is governed by a charity administering the central work, that is Britain Yearly Meeting, and by separate Area Meeting charities. Charities must have trustees.

The governing document specifies the object of the charity, the powers and duties of trustees and the appointment and composition of the trustee board. *QF&P* describes in more detail the functions and relationships between the organisational/structural units that comprise The Society and the different roles of its officers, including trustees.

BYM's governing document and a template governing document for Area Meetings approved by the Charity Commission and published online by BYM, the charity<sup>53</sup>, states that the use of *Quaker faith & practice* is for 'guidance' 'at all times' but not that trustees must follow it at all times. *QF&P* is not a legal document comparable to a governing document. Area Meeting governing documents are discussed later in this chapter.

Other cultural emergents in The Society are all those ideas, theological and secular, that underpin the structural arrangements that give expression to the charities'

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<sup>52</sup> See *Set up a charity* regarding rules for registration <https://www.gov.uk/setting-up-charity> Accessed 3/02/2024. Not all charities have to be registered but all charities must conform to the law.

<sup>53</sup> A model governing document for Area Meetings may be found and downloaded at <https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/quaker-roles/trustees> Accessed 1/06/2023. Each Area Meeting is responsible for finalising its own Governing document. See also Appendix 7 for a copy of this document and the governing documents of North West London and South East London Area Meetings.

'object' . They constitute, its cultural system<sup>54</sup>. Archer speaks of 'The myth of cultural integration' because in no society are all the ideas available for its participants to consider complementary. Contradictory ideas may contribute to conflict in a society when held by different vested interest groups<sup>55</sup>.

### **6.6.1 Vested and ideational interest groups within The Society**

Archer explains the linkage between individuals with roles and vested interests in the structural system and individuals with ideational attachments drawn from the cultural system, as follows:

[There is] a basic mechanism by which cultural factors find their way into the structural field ... Let any material interest group (call some groups 'dominant' by all means if their societal or sectional dominance can be demonstrated empirically) endorse any doctrine (theory, belief or ideology) for the advancement of those interests (that is their articulation, assertion, or legitimation), and that group is immediately plunged into its situational logic. Structural benefits may indeed ensue from ideational back-up but they have their cultural price and not one which is paid in a single instalment<sup>56</sup>.

Material interest groups are vested interest groups within an organisation whose interests are advanced or defended by their members. Paid staff and unpaid members giving service are interest groups with different vested interests. Paid staff receive gains from employment; individual members gain from the authority of their role in the structural system of the organisation. The same individuals who are paid or unpaid contributors to The Society also have their ideational, including theological, commitments. There will be those who are e.g. Christian, theist, Buddhist and atheist as well as having different ideas about how The Society should be organised and managed.

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<sup>54</sup> Archer (1996. xviii).

<sup>55</sup> Archer (1996. p.1)

<sup>56</sup> Archer (1996. p.284).

At any moment in time the structural components of The Society have constituted a more or less integrated structural system for carrying out The Society's purpose(s). They give rise to specific interest groups serving The Society. Some are paid such as Management Meeting and other staff paid to serve The Society (who may also be members or attenders), and unpaid members and attenders within The Society in roles such as trustees, clerks, participants in Meeting for Sufferings, central committee members, elders, oversight team members, and treasurers. Membership status is another way of defining vested interest groups e.g. members, listed attenders, unlisted attenders and newcomers.

To summarise: all structural components and all roles within them give rise to a vested interest as they carry degrees of authority, responsibility and status within The Society. All individual participants have ideational attachments drawn from the cultural system of The Society e.g. as self-defined Christian Quakers, theist Quakers and non-theist Quakers..

Archer states that ideas have a cultural price. Those in roles in structural units promote specific ideas, practices and modes of working in relation to The Society's affairs. They may find their proposals and themselves challenged by others within and outside of a structural unit causing conflict within and between structural units.

### **6.6.2 Structural and Cultural Integration**

Archer argues that a lack of integration between structural units and between an organisation's structural and cultural system may result, but do not necessarily result, in conflict<sup>57</sup>. For example theological diversity may be a creative and reinforcing factor in The Society's existence but extreme theological diversity and a

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<sup>57</sup> Archer (1995. p.183).

lack of theological boundaries may be destructive to it. Another example is that the role of trustees and Management Meeting in planning the work of The Society and the roles of Central Committees and of Meeting for Sufferings may prove mutually supportive or conflictual. Conflict is triggered by events and becomes manifest because of unclear boundaries and diverse ideas within groups. Proposals for change can become contested. Cummins described changes triggered by Charity Law<sup>58</sup> in Chapter 4 which resulted in emphasising the church/charity division in BYM's governing document. Some changes are brought about by the introduction of new structural units and new roles to be performed e.g. integrated Area Meetings, Local Development Workers<sup>59</sup>. Yet other changes may be changes in those occupying roles who have different ideas as to how a role should be performed<sup>60</sup>.

The lack of structural integration in The Society became clearly manifest during Yearly Meeting in session 28 April–1 May 2023 resulting in minutes 21 and 30 (Yearly Meeting 2023. Minutes). Minute 21 asks BYM trustees to consider 'what form a new committee structure would take' in order to simplify structures supporting the central work of The Society. Another minute recognised 'that a change in the relationship between Yearly Meeting, Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees, and Meeting for Sufferings<sup>61</sup> is needed to address the overlap in current roles and

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<sup>58</sup> Discussed in Chapter 4 which also discussed the upset caused by the effect of trustees' decisions to do with budgeting and their effects on the work of Central Committees and sub-committees.

<sup>59</sup> also discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>60</sup> See chapter 1 1.4 re. The Society's self-managed character and the Quaker tradition of unpaid role holders serving for a maximum period of time.

<sup>61</sup> Meeting for Sufferings is the standing representative body entrusted with the general care of matters affecting Britain Yearly Meeting, the church, and, in the intervals between Yearly Meetings, the making of decisions and the issuing of statements in the name of Britain Yearly Meeting. Within our church government it exercises discernment on priorities and receives regular interim reports for information and consultation on the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees' work. It has a part to play in developing a visionary and prophetic role for the whole yearly meeting and in fostering communication throughout the yearly meeting. (QF&P 7.02 <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/7/> Accessed 3/06/2023).



responsibilities'. It asked Meeting for Sufferings 'to bring to a future Yearly Meeting session proposals for what that change could look like'<sup>62</sup>.

Two different governance bodies (structural units) within The Society, trustees directly related to the BYM charity and Meeting for Sufferings directly related to The Society, which is the church, were asked to bring proposals for change in charity and church affairs. Proposed changes would affect the roles, responsibilities and powers of both. As it is also the case that BYM trustees and 'Management Meeting' are ex-officio members of the Meeting for Sufferings, the standing representative body of the church, Archer's comment about dominant groups and the cultural price that may be paid in instalments when there is a lack of integration between structures in a society is relevant to the situation described. The price is conflict and the time that will be needed by many to resolve that conflict between those representing the charity interest group and the church interest group. Archer's argument discussed in Chapter 2 is that a lack of integration will have, unpredictably, a morphostatic or morphogenetic effect on a society, depending on how social interactions between individuals and groups play out within a society's existing structures. Morphonecrosis is also a possible result<sup>63</sup>: Linda Murgatroyd raised the possibility that Meeting for Sufferings could be abolished by Yearly Meeting in session<sup>64</sup>.

### **Authority and decision-making in The Society**

Underlying causes for the lack of structural and cultural integration within The Society are now further highlighted and explained.

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<sup>62</sup> Yearly Meeting (2023. Minutes).

<sup>63</sup> Al-Almoudi and Latsis (2015).

<sup>64</sup> Murgatroyd (2023). Murgatroyd's essay on *The future of Quakers in Britain: holding spaces for The Spirit to act* was the prizewinning essay in a competition in 2010 (*The Friends Quarterly*. v.38 n.2 May 2010)i

## The Society's Governing Documents

The seven-page governing document of the Britain Yearly Meeting, agreed by Yearly Meeting in session and registered with the Charity Commission, opens with a set of definitions<sup>65</sup>. The first states:

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain refers to the church in England, Scotland, Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, including all its local meetings for worship and its constituent meetings for church affairs as well as all their work [referred to below as The Society]<sup>66</sup>.

The second definition defines the name 'Britain Yearly Meeting' with a restricted meaning:

Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) [Britain Yearly Meeting] refers to the centrally held and managed policy, property, employment and work of the charity constituted by this document.

The governing document creates a distinction by differentiating 'the church', consisting of members of The Society, from the charity, which is defined as Britain Yearly Meeting. That distinction was confirmed in a further revision of the governing document<sup>67</sup>. This BYM governing document states that trustees, appointed by Yearly Meeting in session are responsible for the charity's lawful governance. Trustees appoint the Recording Clerk, Assistant Recording Clerk, Treasurer and other senior staff who are responsible to Trustees<sup>68</sup>. Responsibility for other staff appointments is delegated to those senior staff.

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<sup>65</sup> (<https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/bym-governing-document-revised-min34-bym2014> Accessed 04/02/2022). The governing document is available by application to the Recording Clerk. The latest version is also available as a pdf file on a page of the Quakers in Britain website listing documents to do with Trusteeship. A copy of the version issued in 2014 is provided in Appendix 7 of this thesis.

<sup>66</sup> Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) (2014). <https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/bym-governing-document> (Accessed 24/01/2022).

<sup>67</sup> That revision is accessible from BYM's Quakers in Britain's website <https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/our-structures/britain-yearly-meeting-trustees-3> Accessed 3/06/2023.

<sup>68</sup> *Quaker Faith & Practice* 8.19,8.20, 8.21

The governing document directs trustees to *Quaker faith & practice*, published by the Yearly Meeting, 'at all times' for further 'guidance' on how they might act. That is the document, whose latest version is available online and which Quakers need to use to obtain up-to-date information on The Society's structures and procedures. *QF&P* states in *Chapter 8: The centrally managed work of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain* that:

Britain Yearly Meeting in session is the body with ultimate authority for church affairs for Quakers in Britain. The term 'Britain Yearly Meeting' refers also to the combined membership of the seventy or so area meetings that make up the Religious Society of Friends in Britain and it is used as well in its governing document to refer to the work carried out centrally on behalf of the membership<sup>69</sup>.

The first sentence states where ultimate authority lies but that is still unclear. There are three ways in which the phrase 'Britain Yearly Meeting' is used. Firstly 'Britain Yearly Meeting in session' refers to that assembly of Quakers that meets annually. In the governing document that assembly is called 'Yearly Meeting in session (Yearly Meeting) open to all members of The Society'. Secondly it refers to the total membership of the Religious Society of Friends whose membership is registered with Area Meetings. Thirdly it is a name reserved in the governing document of the charity for the name 'Britain Yearly Meeting'. 'Church affairs' is not defined in *Quaker faith & practice* nor is that term defined in the governing document.

Many might assume that 'Church affairs' refers to all the official activities of The Society. It does not. A significant legal and practical distinction is made in a subordinate clause: the phrase 'Britain Yearly Meeting' is to be associated with 'the work carried out centrally on behalf of the membership'. Whilst most church affairs are subject to the authority of Yearly Meeting in session and the Area Meetings that

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<sup>69</sup> QF&P (8.02). <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/8/> (Accessed 2/06/2023).

conduct them, the centrally managed work, headed by the Recording Clerk, is not. The Recording Clerk reports to the BYM trustees. It is they who are responsible for the centrally managed work. Further confusion is created where the governing document states:

Yearly Meeting in session is the final constitutional authority of The Society. All Friends have the right to attend and to take part in its deliberations and decisions<sup>70</sup>.

In *QF&P* Chapter 6 at 6.12 the qualifier ‘constitutional’ is also used in front of the term ‘authority’ in relation to the authority of Yearly Meeting. That differs from *QF&P* Chapter 8, concerned with the centrally managed work, which uses the term ‘ultimate authority’ at *QF&P* 8.02. ‘Constitutional’ qualifies authority whereas ultimate denotes ‘supreme’. The difference usages are confusing and significant and are not officially defined.

The document issued by the Charity Commission *The essential trustee*<sup>71</sup> states, addressing trustees, that to act in the charity’s best interests, that ‘You must do what you and your co-trustees (and no one else) decide will best enable the charity to carry out its purposes’<sup>72</sup> That ‘no one else’ decides, assigns the legal power of decision to trustees alone. Neither the Recording Clerk, who reports to trustees, nor trustees are legally obliged to involve others in their collective discernment in relation to the centrally managed work. That is the crux of the matter. An information booklet issued by the Charity Commission states:

All charity trustees should, therefore, decide together what activities the charity will undertake, and think about the resources it will need. Trustees of larger

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<sup>70</sup> Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) (2014). (Accessed 24/01/2022).

<sup>71</sup> Updated 3 May, 2018. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-cc3>) Accessed 29/01/2024.

<sup>72</sup> (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-cc3/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-what-you-need-to-do> Accessed 16/02/2020).

charities should take responsibility for setting the charity's strategic aims and direction, and agreeing appropriate future plans. Involving the charity's staff, volunteers and others with an interest in the charity in the planning process can be helpful<sup>73</sup>.

Involving others in trustees' decisions can be helpful but is not obligatory and in any case the responsibility for decisions is that of trustees alone<sup>74</sup>.

*Quaker faith & practice: Chapter 15* discusses trustees' responsibilities in general:

The law may assume that authority for determining action passes to the trustees and the meeting may choose to do this. However, under Gospel Order, the ultimate authority will still lie with the gathered meeting<sup>75,76</sup>.

Gospel Order is not part of the governing document. It has spiritual but no legal standing. The invocation of Gospel Order attempts to be integrative in asserting where ultimate authority 'still lies' but the governing document takes legal precedence. There, to repeat, it says trustees, are subject to the 'constitutional authority', not the 'ultimate authority' of Yearly Meeting in session. Yearly Meeting in session appoints trustees and could, therefore, in theory, call for a trustee to resign or be dismissed, but cannot legally *ultimately* decide what 'will best enable the charity to carry out its purposes' or what the 'best interests of the charity' are.

The extent to which *Quaker faith & practice*, the repository of Gospel Order, is followed by trustees is dependent on their judgement concerning its guidance and on their willingness to follow Gospel Order in relation to practising discernment in collaboration with others affected by their decisions. They may agree that the best

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<sup>73</sup> The Charity Commission

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/866947/CC3\\_feb20.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/866947/CC3_feb20.pdf). (Downloaded 18/01/22).

<sup>74</sup> Charity Commission. The essential trustee. Updated 3 May.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-cc3>  
Accessed 29/01/2024.

<sup>75</sup> The meaning of 'gathered meeting'<sup>75</sup> here refers both to Area Meetings for Worship and to Yearly Meeting in Session.

<sup>76</sup> QF&P (15.03). <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/15/> Accessed 17/01/2022).

interests of Quakers is that they follow Gospel Order, subject to decisions arrived at through wide participation in decision-making being lawful. They have not. This is the area in which conflicts between the trustees and the staff of the charity and the members of the church have developed.

Trustees have been given the legal authority to decide how and whom to involve in their decision-making. The legally endorsed approach might be appropriate for most charities but might not be so appropriate for decision-taking in the work of Quakers, at local, area and national level. The work of BYM includes:

organising and maintaining the whole of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain as responsive to the leadings of the Holy Spirit; this entails calling, briefing and running decision-making meetings with all the facilities necessary for them to work efficiently and effectively, and also conducting relations with other churches and faiths and ecumenical bodies<sup>77</sup>;

That work has been dependent on the service of members. All members are expected to give unpaid service as part of their Quaker witness as described in *QF&P*<sup>78</sup>, within their spiritual and physical capacity<sup>79</sup>, whether that service be great or small<sup>80</sup>. As discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis, Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees' reservation of certain decisions for themselves, though legally acceptable, downplays the fact that the central work of The Society is the work of the faith group as a whole<sup>81</sup>. It has been financed by the faith group through legacies, gifts and current giving by individuals associated with The Society and Local and Area Meetings. When those of 'the church' are not involved in the collective discernment to do with that work, disintegrative forces are generated within The Society. It will be recalled that Dandelion noted that disaffiliation from the Society was sometimes to

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<sup>77</sup> *QF&P* 8.22

<sup>78</sup> *QF&P* 11.01.

<sup>79</sup> *QF&P* 3.09

<sup>80</sup> *QF&P* 13.01

<sup>81</sup> Chapter 4 and Cummins (2020. p.318).

do with the way decisions at the centre were taken<sup>82</sup>. One may also recall the guidance of *QF&P* that ‘our business method depends on the widest possible participation by our members’<sup>83</sup>.

The unclear meanings of ‘ultimate’, and ‘constitutional’ in relation to the authority and power of Yearly Meeting in session and that of Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees, is evidence of confusion in important documentation. When the difference between the charity and the church is made, as in the governing document and the members of the church who give service to the centrally managed work are described as volunteers, the difference between staff paid by the charity and unpaid staff serving the charity is emphasised. That undermines Friends’ testimony to equality.

Cummins has also argued that the management of agendas before Yearly Meeting in session<sup>84</sup> within BYM has diminished the authority and influence of Yearly Meeting in Session and Meeting for Sufferings and therefore of individual members of church giving service. Cummins’ comment:

While legally, the trustees are answerable to the Charity Commission for the stewardship of the assets of BYM, they are not necessarily required to make strategic decisions - only to endorse or reject them<sup>85,86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> One may also recall the comments Phillip to beware of Friends House and of Diana Sandy concerning restructuring The Society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century discussed in the literature review in Chapter 1 (Sandy, 2017). She believed restructuring had profound effects on The Society.

<sup>83</sup> *QF&P* 3.09

<sup>84</sup> E.g. such that some matters are excluded from the agenda or insufficient time is allowed for discernment. Cummins argued ‘that the considerable backroom planning associated with this item [the proposal for the revision of *Faith & practice*], and its management in the Yearly Meeting sessions, provides an illustration of how far removed the Yearly Meeting was in 2014 from being able to exert any real influence over the actions initiated by the Recording Clerk and trustees (Cummins. 2020. p.210)

<sup>85</sup> Cummins (2019. p.309; 2020. p.247).

<sup>86</sup> Government guidance on the liability of charity trustees can be found in *Vicarious liability of a charity or its trustees* published by the Charity Commission for England and Wales ([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/591758/Vicarious\\_liability\\_of\\_a\\_charity\\_or\\_its\\_trustees.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/591758/Vicarious_liability_of_a_charity_or_its_trustees.pdf). Retrieved 5/12/2019

Trustees may choose to interpret their legal authority as requiring them to take strategic and operational decisions directly. On the other hand they may discern that, in the best interests of The Society, these decisions should be taken with maximum participation possible in the relevant committees of The Society because ‘our business method depends on the widest possible participation by our members’<sup>87</sup>. Trustees may or may not think, therefore, that their authority should be exercised minimally e.g. in relation to confirming or challenging the lawfulness of decisions taken in Meetings in which they may take part, and ensuring the probity and prudence of financial and budgeting decisions that Meetings approve and minute<sup>88</sup>.

Chris Willmore, Professor of Sustainability and Law at Bristol University, who delivers courses on ‘Being a Quaker Trustee’ writes in two e-mails to me relating to Area Meeting trustees and their relationship with Area Meetings that

When we run courses, we spend time talking about this and exploring that question of whether trustees’ duty to God or the state wins. That is an individual spiritual dilemma. My own view is my duty to God wins, trustees do as AM discerns and take the secular hit. But note that only applies if it is discerned view of AM<sup>89</sup>.

Willmore’s view relates to Area Meetings. Area Meeting trustees, who are normally members of that Area Meeting and had the opportunity to contribute to the discernment as members, should follow that discernment, but that ‘my duty to God wins’ over duty to the state. Willmore’s view is that the duty to follow God’s guidance as discerned by an Area Meeting in unity and minuted as such by the clerk, trumps a trustee’s duty to the state. The consequences that might be meted out by the state

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<sup>87</sup> QF&P 3.09

<sup>88</sup> There may also be issues of safeguarding that arise in Quaker meetings which require confidentiality and in those circumstances it would be right for a minimal number of individuals, in addition to trustees, to be involved in the discernment process ensuring procedures are properly followed in dealing with such issues.

<sup>89</sup> Personal e-mail communications December 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> 2019. Copies available



need to be accepted by the individual trustee: they need to 'take the secular hit'.

They could, of course, resign. Willmore did not refer to BYM trustees in our communication, but a similar argument applies with reference to BYM trustees' relationship with Meeting for Sufferings and Yearly Meeting in session.

**Confusion in The Society caused by the tensions between the appeal to secular and spiritual authorities: Summarising the argument so far**

The actual decisions taken by trustees on their own account may be seen to contradict *QF&P*'s 3.09's statement that 'our business method depends on the widest possible participation by our members'. The Meeting for Worship of Meeting for Sufferings, which includes the trustees and senior staff of BYM, provides that wider participation<sup>90</sup>.

The underlying cause of the current lack of integration of the cultural and structural systems within The Society arises because of two competing authority structures running through The Society: the secular law empowering trustees but also making them accountable and gathered Meetings discerning God's will with 'the widest possible participation by our members'<sup>91</sup>. Whilst charity law places responsibilities entirely on trustees for ensuring The Society's procedures conform to the law and specifically mentions responsibilities for strategic planning and budgets<sup>92</sup>, it does not specify how those responsibilities are to be carried out.

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<sup>90</sup> Meeting for Sufferings includes trustees and Management Meeting (*QF&P* 7.05). As discussed in chapter 4 e.g. the renaming of the Large Meeting House as 'The Light' for commercial gain ; b) resentment caused by the exclusion from discernment processes to do with the work of The Society of members who are giving service for that work notwithstanding the statement in *Quaker Faith & Practice* that 'our business method depends on the widest possible participation by our members' (*Quaker faith & practice* 3.09 <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/3/> Accessed 17/02/2022).

<sup>91</sup> *QF&P* 3.09 <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/3/> Accessed 27/01/2024.

<sup>92</sup> The Charity Commission [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/866947/CC3\\_feb20.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/866947/CC3_feb20.pdf). (Downloaded 18/01/22).

Traditionally the Quaker Business Method operating at local, area and national level has been an integrating factor in achieving unity by establishing how decisions should be made throughout The Society. *Quaker faith & practice* 15.02 online states:

As members of the Religious Society of Friends we are all called upon to exercise stewardship over The Society's resources. This is stewardship in its widest sense: ensuring that money and buildings are used wisely and well; that business decisions are taken in right ordering; that all within a meeting, both its members and its employees, are supported and helped to play a full role in The Society's affairs<sup>93</sup>.

That has been achieved by involving as many members of The Society as want to be involved in collective discernment and decision-making within the structural units in which they are entitled to participate<sup>94</sup>. Yet as Cummins has shown<sup>95</sup>, BYM trustees in collaboration with Management Meeting have determined and implemented some major decisions after following their own process of collective discernment. Trustees taking decisions about operational budgets to do with the central work of The Society has a strategic implication for that work affecting its future. Meeting for Sufferings according to *Quaker faith & practice* has a role in determining priorities:

Within our church government it exercises discernment on priorities and receives regular interim reports for information and consultation on the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees' work. It has a part to play in developing a visionary and prophetic role for the whole yearly meeting and in fostering communication throughout the yearly meeting<sup>96</sup>.

Although trustee decisions may be subsequently questioned by members in Yearly Meeting in session, Meeting for Sufferings and in other Meetings for Worship for Business at different levels of The Society, in practice reversing a decision or

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<sup>93</sup> QF&P 15.02. <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/15/> (Accessed 28/01/2020).

<sup>94</sup> QF&P 3.09. All members are entitled to attend their local, area and general meetings, which are the units of Britain Yearly Meeting's regional organisation, and Yearly Meeting itself. You are encouraged to do so as regularly as you are able, because our business method depends on the widest possible participation by our members <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/3/> Accessed 25/01/2024.

<sup>95</sup> Cummins (2019, 2020).

<sup>96</sup> QF&P (7.02) <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/7/> (Accessed 25/01/2022).

rejecting a recommendation supported by trustees is and will be difficult to achieve when trustees exercise their legal power and authority to reserve final decisions for themselves.

### **Area Meeting governing documents**

Each of the seventy or so Area Meetings operate according to their governing document. Just as Yearly Meeting trustees' may interpret their role and responsibilities in relation to committees concerned with the work of The Society, so Area Meeting trustees may interpret their relationship to their Area and Local Meetings according to the content of their governing documents.

It is not known how much significant variation there is between the governing documents of Area Meetings, but there is variation<sup>97</sup>. As an example significant differences exist between North West London Area Meeting's (NWLAM's) governing document (called its constitution), and South-East London Area Meeting's (SELAM's) governing document.

NWLAM's governing document<sup>98</sup> states explicitly that

North West London Area Quaker Meeting and its property shall be administered and managed in accordance with the provisions in this constitution. A full account of the governance of the Religious Society is given in the Book of Christian Discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain; the current edition is entitled Quaker Faith & Practice (London 2005). This constitution is a shortened version produced for the purposes of registering with the Charity Commission. If any confusion should arise between this document and Quaker Faith & Practice, Quaker Faith and Practice shall prevail.

Such a statement makes clear that where confusion may arise, the current edition of *Quaker faith & practice* should 'prevail'. It states explicitly that 'Trustees oversee the

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<sup>97</sup> As of 27/02/2022 I have found no research that explores the variations between Area Meeting governing documents. This is research waiting to be done.

<sup>98</sup> <https://nwlondonquakers.org.uk/nwlam/> Constitution. (Accessed 26/01/2022). Charity No 1134529.

implementation of the decisions of North West London Area Quaker Meeting and ensure that tasks are carried out effectively and correctly'. In other words, trustees follow the decisions of Area Meeting in session. There is no suggestion that trustees may carry out independent programmes of work. It states that trustees have an obligation to ensure that 'North West London Area Quaker Meeting complies with regulatory, statutory and legal requirements and implements good practice'. It also permits the clerk of Area Meeting to be a trustee unlike BYM's model document for Area Meetings<sup>99</sup>. It has seen no conflict of interest between the role of Area Meeting clerk and that of trustee. The emphasis in this governing document is on following The Society's book of discipline, *Quaker faith & practice*, the spiritual authority of Area Meeting, and on trustees' duty to ensure Area Meeting's compliance with law.

SELAM's governing document has a different emphasis<sup>100</sup>. It follows the model template document published on the Quakers in Britain website<sup>101</sup> controlled by BYM, the charity. In relation to *Quaker faith & practice*, it states, as does BYM's governing document, that 'Further guidance is contained in the Book of Christian Discipline of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain'. Unlike North West London Area's document it makes no statement about the Book of Christian Discipline's guidance taking precedence over the governing document in case of 'confusion' between them. The governing document, also unlike North West London Area's document, makes no statement that trustees should oversee the implementation of the decisions of the Area Meeting. A third difference is that it prohibits the clerk of Area Meeting from being a trustee but no reason is given. There

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<sup>99</sup> The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) In Britain. X Area Quaker Meeting. Governing Document.[Template governing document]. Downloaded from <https://www.quaker.org.uk/communities/quaker-processes/trustees#heading-1>. Accessed 25/01/2024.

<sup>100</sup> <https://www.selamquakers.org.uk/documents> (Accessed 26/01/2022).

<sup>101</sup> <https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/quaker-roles/trustees#heading-1> (Accessed 27/01/2022).

is no such statement of prohibition in *Quaker faith & practice*. In this respect, SELAM takes its lead from the template offered by Britain Yearly Meeting, the charity. The template seems concerned that governance would be compromised if the AM clerk were a trustee. SELAM trustees, unlike NWLAM trustees, following BYM's model template, also have the power 'To establish committees or working groups for carrying out agreed programmes of work' without reference to the Area or the Local Meetings in its area; and to allocate a budget for such work<sup>102</sup>. Thereby the document gives trustees an executive role and circumscribes the authority and budgetary control of the Area Meeting.

In common with North West London Area's constitution, trustees:

Shall ensure that an annual report and statement of accounts for SELAM (including the Meetings it contains) is prepared in compliance with current charities legislation [and that] The report and statement of accounts must be presented to Area Meeting in session for consideration and acceptance, not later than eight months after the end of the financial year.

SELAM's governing document does state that 'They shall also refer to the Area Meeting in session any major decisions such as those involving the acquisition, disposal or management of assets'. There is, therefore, a level of accountability to the Area Meeting, but much less than the trustees of NWLAM. With respect to a trustees' decision to initiate and pay for programmes of work independently of an Area Meeting's minute, or hire staff, accountability to the Area Meeting can be exercised by the Area Meeting only after the event of trustees taking action on their own discernment.

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<sup>102</sup> <https://www.selamquakers.org.uk/documents> 15 xiv, xv<sup>102</sup> and 18 ii (b). Accessed 26/01/22.

South-East London's governing document, as does BYM's governing document, emphasises the authority of a small group of Trustees, albeit Area-approved<sup>103</sup>, rather than that of the Area Meeting. It gives trustees the authority, sanctioned by the secular Charity Commission, to take initiatives by themselves, including the spending of money. The AM Treasurer 'so far as is practicable' is to be included as well as representatives of Local Meetings. There is no stated obligation to consult or involve other members in their Area and Local Meetings for Worship in a collaborative collective worship-based discernment. Trustees may decide on their own discernment to set up a working party to explore a concern trustees have; they may authorise payment for consultancy on some matter trustees alone have discerned is needed.

The two governing documents disagree on trustees' relationship with their Area Meeting and on the discretionary powers of trustees. SELAM's governing document, following Britain Yearly Meeting's template gives trustees the powers over and above the non-contentious issue of their powers arising from their legal responsibilities for ensuring compliance with charity law. It diminishes the authority of Area Meeting.

## **Part 2 Conclusions**

Archer argues that a lack of cultural and structural integration in an organisation is a harbinger of conflict and impending change<sup>104</sup>. In relation to the cultural system different non-exclusive ideational interest groups have been established within The

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<sup>103</sup> Area Meeting trustees are nominated by an Area Meeting Nominations committee and must then be approved by the Area Meeting in session. Similarly, BYM trustees are nominated by a Central Nominations Committee and must be approved by Yearly Meeting in Session. In both cases renomination is required after three years. A maximum of two renominations are allowed thereby capping service as a trustee for nine years. A further term of service is possible after a break of at least three years according to the template and SELAM's governing document. (Further details on trusteeship in Chapters 6, 8 and 15 of Quaker Faith & Practice).

<sup>104</sup> See Chapter 2 and Archer (1995. p.183).

Society representing different theological interests of different sizes. Those professing non-theism have increased and those professing traditional Christian beliefs have declined, but it has been argued that self-identifying Christians may still be<sup>105</sup> the largest grouping in a Society in which membership and participation has been in a steady decline. The non-assertion of the fundamental elements of being a Quaker, and specifically the first element that 'the understanding of divine guidance' has led to the accommodation of extreme theological diversity within The Society. That strains social interactions and social integration because of the lack of cultural integration. It also challenges the coherence of Quaker theology by upholding what are incompatible theological positions.

The Society has been inclined by secular law towards a process of internal secularisation in its governance by placing secular legal authority and responsibility for the work of The Society in the hands of small groups of trustees. This is affecting the structural integration of The Society at its centre in relation to the work of BYM and at Area Meeting level. Only those appointed to trustee roles may lawfully control that inclination. That control in relation to Quakers may be exercised by upholding The Society's traditional processes of collective discernment of God's will in Meetings for Worship with 'the widest possible participation by our members'<sup>106</sup>. thereby resisting internal secularisation. Trustees would intervene only to ensure that decisions were lawful and prudent and that the conduct of The Society's affairs regarding such issues as safeguarding and health and safety were in conformity with the law. That would uphold the spiritual authority of *QF&P* and the influence of church members. On the other hand, The Society, through Yearly Meeting in

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<sup>105</sup> See discussion in Chapter 4

<sup>106</sup> *QF&P* 3.09

session and Area Meetings could in the interests of what it perceives as practicality, efficiency and effectiveness, embrace the internal secularisation process where professional leadership and guidance is offered by a chief executive and professional paid staff with whom 'volunteers' cooperate, answerable to trustees appointed by Yearly Meeting in session. What is at stake is the relationship between the charity and the church, a relationship. Accountability to trustees rather than church members would end the traditional and distinctive Quaker approach to governance in which discernment with the widest possible participation of members has been considered an essential feature of the Quaker business method.

## 6.7 Chapter Summary

The integrative model presented in Chapter 2 that relates Archer's reflexive theory to her social theory through social interactions has been applied to The Society. It has been used to help explore and analyse the factors that enable and constrain social interactions within The Society. The Society's lack of integration is resulting in it undergoing cultural and structural changes at the same time as it has been experiencing a decline in participation.

Part 1 of this chapter drew on Archer's theory of reflexivity in the analysis of the empirical data generated by the interviews. Starting with her concept of the internal conversation, I argued that the interviewees and The Society as a whole could be characterised as meta-reflexive. The Society's faith and practice promoted a meta-reflexivity which was based on a faith in a transcendent reality. It connected with humankind through each individual's internal conversation through the promptings of love and truth 'as the leadings of God'. The current *Book of Christian discipline* specified some fundamental elements of being a Quaker, the first of which was '*The understanding of divine guidance*'. Other reflexive characteristics of individuals were



recognised as subdominant. In most interviewees I suggested that that was autonomous reflexivity. Communicative reflexivity was evident in the minority of interviewees who had been successful in the key Quaker role of clerk.

Interviewees' enthusiasm for Quakerism was illustrated by relating their words to Archer's concept of 'ultimate concern' which proceeded from their internal conversations. Individuals with those ultimate concerns led to the observation that the narrow demographic character of their primary agency presented challenges in social interacting with and understanding those from different primary agency backgrounds. That was also a challenge for those potential and actual attenders interested in Quakerism and members whose primary agency was different from the Quaker norm. It was suggested that it might be the case that the meta-reflexive religious style and liturgy of The Society in Britain appeals to a narrow demographic, not necessarily based on class or ethnicity but primarily distinguished by educational level.

Part 2 related Archer's social theory to features of The Society's structural and cultural systems. It supported Archer's hypothesis that a lack of integration of structural and cultural elements within a society may lead to conflict and change. The areas of conflict were to do with the exercise of the authority of BYM trustees and Management Meeting in relation to Yearly Meeting in session, Meeting for Sufferings and the central committees of The Society; and Area Meeting trustees in relation to Area Meetings. Matters were complicated by the lack of integration between BYM's governing document and Area Meeting governing documents and *Quaker faith & practice*. Legal authority was conferred on trustees and governing documents but spiritual authority lay with *Quaker faith & practice* which also contained the detailed descriptions of Quaker procedures for the conduct of church affairs. In addition the

terms 'constitutional authority' and 'ultimate authority' used in governing documents and *QF&P* were undefined in both documents and inconsistently used in *QF&P*.

Conflicts between structural elements of The Society have led to the formation of two committees which are to report on the future of the structural relationships within The Society at national level to do with the central work of The Society, one representing the church and the other BYM trustees. At the root of the problem was how trustees might use their legal authority in relation to the Society's business (church affairs).

The trustees body could choose to be proactive as a group or collaborative with the wider membership and existing Society structures, or mainly reactive i.e. ensuring that decisions made in Meetings for Worship for business, in which as members they would be expected to attend and contribute, were lawful and prudent; and that legal requirements which meetings of The Society were obliged to follow e.g. regarding Safeguarding procedures, Health and Safety requirements and financial accounting, were being followed. The above issues are issues affecting the structural integration of The Society. An additional issue for Area Meetings and their trustees was how were they (or were they?) to apply *QF&P*'s statement of the fundamental elements of being a Quaker. That had implications for the cultural integration of their Meetings.

Finally, this chapter, building on the previous chapters, has shown that an inclination towards internal secularisation has been set in train by charity law via the authority, responsibilities and powers it has vested in charity trustees and the prescription of governing documents.. Only trustees have the legal authority to reverse that inclination. The next final chapter summarises the chapters of this thesis, discusses their findings and presents this thesis's conclusions.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS

### 7.1 Chapter Outline

This chapter begins with a summary of the key findings of previous chapters followed by a discussion of those findings. I then outline the implications for scholarship of this thesis and make suggestions for further research.

#### Chapter 1: Introduction and context

The enthusiasm for Quakerism, as evidenced by 12 Quakers in 12 in-depth interviews, albeit with some specific reservations, was in contrast to the disillusionment of members who resign and attenders who cease participation as shown in the Tabular Statement<sup>1</sup>. Realizing this, I extended the research from theorising about the attractions of Quakerism and ways of being Quaker to include theorising about the decline in participation in the Religious Society of Friends. To contextualize the research the chapter included a brief introduction to Quakerism and its organization in Britain and a preliminary literature review on Quakerism in Britain. The review noted the decline of membership organisations generally, the secularisation debate and Dandelion's work on internal secularisation. Dandelion had commented that 'Groups with distinctive belief systems and which oppose dominant value systems are expected to survive longer'<sup>2</sup>. The analysis that the research design led to then noted how Quakers were becoming a less distinct group

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<sup>1</sup> This is an annual publication of statistics showing changes in The Society's membership and attenders. The latest consulted was the 2023 publication. (Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain. (2023) *Patterns of Membership Including the 2022 Tabular Statement compiled for Yearly Meeting, Compiled for Yearly Meeting, Friends House, London and online 28 April–1 May 2023 and additional session, 1 July 2023*. London: Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain. <https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/tabular-statement-2023>. Accessed 10/01/2024.

<sup>2</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.31). Dandelion's work is discussed critically in detail in Chapter 4 4.5.1.

as a result of decisions taken within The Society to do with upholding its theology and its governance. That finding led to the title of this thesis.

## **Chapter 2: Research design, methodology, and method**

This chapter explained my research design and analytical approach to this research. It was framed within critical realism, sociology, social theory and Quaker studies research. It used the methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and interviews as the initial method of data capture.

Subsequent primary source material consisted of data on disaffiliation from the Society<sup>3</sup> and other documentary material generated within the Religious Society of Friends. That material bore on differences within The Society's membership on matters of its fundamental theological orientation and governance.

I found concepts taken from the work of Georg Simmel to be analytically powerful for this research: religiosity, transcendence<sup>4</sup>, 'sociation' (Vergesellschaftung) and 'exchange' (Wechselwirkung)<sup>5</sup>. I was then drawn to the work of Margaret S. Archer by David L. Harvey who referred to both Simmel and Archer and presented transformational models of social activity<sup>6</sup>. Those models influenced my construction of an integrative model of Archer's reflexive and social theories (figure 2.5).

Archer and Simmel discussed transcendence as a factor in human activity. Both acknowledged the uncertainty of an ontological proof of God's existence. Archer, unlike Simmel, thought that that possible ontological existence should not be

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<sup>3</sup> Dandelion (2002)

<sup>4</sup> Simmel (1997). Simmel also referred to Quakers in his sociology (Simmel, 1950).

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence (1976); Goodstein (2017).

<sup>6</sup> Harvey (2002).

dismissed from academic sociological research. Transcendence was woven into this research's conceptual framework.

As far as I have been able to ascertain, critical realism, Simmelian and Archerian concepts and theories and the use of IPA, have not been combined previously to provide a framework and methodology for researching social interactions and organisational change in a religious group. The model could be used for the study of social interactions in other religious associations.

In this chapter I also discussed insider/outside research and offered reflections on my own involvement with this research as a Friend for more than fifty years.

### **Chapter 3: Empirical Findings: the faith and practice of the twelve interviewees**

Interview transcript extracts were arranged under thematic headings using the procedures of IPA for each interview into a single table per interview. The twelve tables were then integrated under thematic headings edited, as necessary, and assembled under the broad thematic headings of five Master Tables<sup>7</sup>. These were:

- A: Faith and Practice Pre-First Meeting for Worship
- B: From First Meeting for Worship to Membership
- C: Faith, Trust and Belief
- D: Practice Post-Membership
- E: Interviewees' Reflections on Quakers and Quakerism

The integration of individual tables of themes into Master Tables revealed commonalities and differences, convergencies and divergencies between the

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<sup>7</sup> See also Appendices 2-3.

interviewees' religious experiences and their journeys to becoming Quakers. There were significant findings arising out of the analysis of each table.

Table A showed that prior to their first Meeting for Worship all the interviewees had had a serious involvement with religion and religious groups, predominantly Christian. What triggered their going to their first Quaker Meeting as adults was their curiosity or a personal crisis. Most had also disaffiliated from earlier attachments to religious denominations. Those findings were subsequently supported in Francesca E. S. Montemaggi's research<sup>8</sup> concerning the religious backgrounds of new Quakers. The implications of the finding that those who come to Quakers do come from mainly Christian religious backgrounds is discussed in Chapter 4. The table also revealed that most interviewees had contact with a Quaker before attending their first Meeting for Worship. Three interviewees had experience of Meetings as children.

Table B showed that at their first Meeting for Worship all but one of the interviewees explicitly noted and appreciated the distinctive form of Quaker worship; and all but two reported appreciating the welcome they received. A significant finding of the second table was the variation in elapsed time between interviewees' first encounter with Friends and their decision to apply for membership. Six applied within three years of their first Meeting and four within two years; four interviewees applied after 14+ years as attenders. Elapsed time differences were to do with interviewees' own enthusiasm for the form and content of the Quakerism and the community they found in their Local Meeting or with their sense of difference from their Local Meeting's dominant demographic or religious characteristics.

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<sup>8</sup> Montemaggi (2018).

Table C on Faith, Trust and Belief included Quaker theology. Three distinctive groupings were identified: Christian, theist and non-theist. 8 Interviewees identified as Christian in my research of whom 5 reported becoming 'more' Christian after engagement with The Society. What was also revealed was the use of Christian concepts and recognition of Jesus and the Christ by two of the theists who denied being Christian and the openness to Christian ideas by the non-theist who had once been actively involved in a local United Reform Church. Her disillusionment with God grew with the experience of her father's Alzheimer's disease. She, a science teacher, also referred to 'doubting Thomas' and asserted her faith in empirical evidence and the possibility of scientific and social progress through human action.

Table D on Practice Post-Membership along with Table A on Faith and Practice Pre-First Meeting for Worship revealed that involvement in pro-social activities and work preceded contact with The Society. Associating with the Society was not correlated with their pro-social activities. What succeeded associating with The Society was participation more regularly in a Sunday Meeting for Worship and involvement in its organization. All but one of the interviewees accepted nomination to serve in specific roles including clerk, treasurer, elder or oversight team member in their Local and Area Meetings and/or on The Society's national committees. In fact, becoming a Friend changed the rhythm and content of the interviewees' lives.

Table E collated interviewees' reflections on their experience of Quakers and Quakerism into positive and negative comments. These were extracted mainly from the Master Tables and in some cases from the original interview transcripts.

There were few expressed reservations about Quakers and Quakerism in interviewees' reflections. Interviewees that expressed them spoke about an over-emphasis on activism and an under-emphasis on spiritual matters in their Meetings.

Reservations were also expressed about non-theism within The Society. Some regretted the lack of social diversity in The Society – it was too middle class. A concern was expressed that The Society might become too much of a club for nice people.

Some interviewees emphasised the Quaker Business Method as an important feature of The Society's decision-making processes. There was just one explicit comment I took to be about governance in The Society by one Christian Quaker. He spoke about being careful of the influence of 'Friends House'. I had not related those comments to the broader theme of governance. I did not ask questions or use the word 'governance' in the interviews.

After the analysis of the interviews I realised that the contrast between the enthusiasm of the interviewees and the continuing decline in participation in The Society needed to be explored in this research if the research was to be more than a theorisation of The Society's attractions and the ways of being Quaker.

#### **Chapter 4: Analytical review**

A thematic analysis of the interviews and the creation of the Master Tables of chapter 3 are the product of the first part of IPA's double hermeneutic. Chapter 4 contains the second part: analysis of and reflections on the data assembled in the Master Tables. I began the analytical review by reflecting on the Master Tables from a critical realist standpoint and asking 'What underlying mechanisms might account for the interviewees' enthusiasm for Quakerism?' During this time the publication of Dandelion's *The cultivation of conformity* (2019) and Cummins' work on the influence of charity law and governance in The Society (2019; 2020) influenced my thinking about The Society's numerical decline. I wondered whether and how internal



secularisation might be affecting The Society's culture and governance in negative ways.

In relation to Tables A and B, Georg Simmel's concept of religiosity and its relationship to religion became a central insight. The interviewees' seeking to satisfy their religiosity was the underlying cause of their searching for a way to satisfy their spiritual and religious yearnings. Simmel argued that religiosity is a feature of being human but more pronounced in some human beings and hardly present in others. Religiosity was the origin of religion as human beings sought to make sense of the human predicament and express their spiritual yearnings in specific religious forms such as Christianity. Clearly the Quaker way satisfied most interviewees' religiosity but for some, with reservations. One of the interviewees was also involved with Anglicanism and defined themselves as a Quangelican. Another, married to an Anglican vicar, also enjoyed participation in the Anglican liturgy, especially in the evensong service. A third interviewee attended Roman Catholic services and appreciated the ritual involved and a fourth drew on Roman Catholic theology in their private contemplative practice.

The great variation in lapsed time between their first Meeting for Worship and membership, between 6 months and 38 years, was affected by issues to do with mechanisms of social inclusion. Clearly some interviewees were wary of a commitment to membership and formal inclusion in their Local Meeting and The Society. Applying for membership had a significant subjective meaning for them at the time they did apply. The demographic background of three of the four whose elapsed time was more than 14 years was different from the Quaker statistical norm. Bowlby's psychobiological attachment theory as applied to religion and R.D.Laing's concepts of confirmation and disconfirmation pointed to psychological factors that

play an important part in decisions to join and remain or leave a religious group.

Simmel's explanation of why the religiosity of 'intellectually advanced' persons were drawn to mysticism, and thus to some fundamental concepts in Quaker theology, correlated with the higher education and middle class family backgrounds of most interviewees as it does with Quakers in general, as shown in British Quaker surveys.

The mechanisms of psychological attachment and social inclusion would seem to explain why those attenders who become members of The Society in Britain are mainly of the same white well-educated middle class background of the Local Meeting with which they associated and the Area Meeting to which applications for membership are made.

This chapter then discussed and offered a critique of contemporary approaches to the study and measurement of religiosity and religion. That further illustrated the relevance of Simmel's distinction between religiosity and religion. Religiosity accounted for interviewees' seeking a form in which to express their religiosity.

Religious activities in established denominations were generally taken as a measure of religiosity rather than a measure of the religious denomination's effectiveness with which it satisfied that religiosity. That argument impacts our understanding of secularisation. Non-denominational ways in which religiosity might be expressed were generally ignored in academic research. Simmel argued that religion was not necessarily the form in which religiosity was expressed. That distinction was also made and demonstrated in Erika Willander's contemporary research which explored the religiosity of those not counted in surveys of religious observance and which drew on Simmel's work <sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Willander (2014).

Table C identified distinctive features of Quaker theology that had attracted the interviewees e.g. Quaker theology's experiential emphasis, the unmediated relationship with God, the concept of Inner Light, the presence of Spirit and the assertion of something of God in each person. These features of Quakerism were attractive and affirmative of the interviewees' own religious sensibilities, satisfying their religiosity when they encountered a Quaker Meeting for Worship. I then argued how they were related to a form of mysticism not only as understood and promoted by the Quaker Rufus Jones but also to mysticism as a dimension of everyday life as argued by the Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner and the Anglican theologian Mark A. McIntosh.

Differences of belief among Quakers in Britain as revealed in my interviews and in British Quaker surveys arose from individuals' different religiosities and from their interpretations of their own spiritual and experiences they deemed religious; they were congruent with what Quakerism supported. I noted that some of my interviewees also spoke of becoming more Christian through time after their association with Quakerism. The interview findings supported Mellor's<sup>10</sup> questioning of Dandelion's characterization of The Society as post-Christian<sup>11</sup>. Following Mellor, I contrasted the 2013 BQS classification of Quakers as traditional, liberal and non-theist and my categorisation of Quakers as self-identifying Christian Quakers, theist Quakers and non-theist Quakers.

The findings of Table D showed how involved interviewees were in the organisation of The Society and in other pro-social activities outside of The Society. In comparing Table D and Table A it was clarified that pro-social paid and unpaid contributions to

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<sup>10</sup> Mellor (2008, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Dandelion (1996, 2019. p.120).

society's betterment preceded becoming an attender and Quaker membership. The urge to contribute to society has a similar quality to that of religiosity: one that is expressed more in some individuals than in others and in different forms during a person's lifetime. Those with a strong sense of the need for society's betterment were inclined to join associations with that concern. Specific religious associations known for a commitment to social reform such as the Quakers attracted those who sought a spiritual path to support or complement their social activism.

I then went on to discuss The Society's functioning, bearing in mind the positive and negative comments about Quakers and Quakerism of Table E. Dandelion argued that what had helped The Society to function and survive was its double culture. That consisted of 'a permissive approach to belief content and a conformist and conservative 'behavioural creed'...., the way in which Quakers are religious ... acts as the social glue'<sup>12</sup>. I argued that the permissive approach to belief had led to an erosion of social glue. The boundary between Quaker and not-Quaker beliefs and ways had become blurred. Evidence that the behavioural creed was no longer so effective as a social glue was the fact of increasing numbers of members' resignations and the fact that fewer attenders were becoming members nor remaining long enough to be counted in the tabular statement. Furthermore when conflict broke out in Local Meetings because of Quakers' aversion to conflict, as Quaker studies research had shown, conflicts were not resolved. Participants left. The last section of this chapter discussed internal secularization. Dandelion noted that secularisation theorists argued that those denominations with distinctive characteristics, an explicit religious identity and which asked more of their

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<sup>12</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.122).

membership were less susceptible to internal secularisation. Dandelion defined internal secularisation as 'the way in which a religious group loses an explicit religious identity'<sup>13</sup>. This thesis argues that it is the explicit Quaker identity that is being lost through internal secularisation. Although agreeing with Dandelion's definition of internal secularisation, this thesis offered a critique of Dandelion's explanation for how internal secularisation is occurring and offered an alternative explanation. Decisions and actions taken within The Society by actors within The Society who have the authority to make them are leading to internal secularisation. That explanation is further supported by the analysis and arguments of chapters 5 and 6.

### **Chapter 5: Association and disassociation from the Religious Society of Friends**

Simmel identified an underlying mechanism of a human need for sociation and exchange (*Vergesellschaftung* and *Wechselwirkung*) which had to be satisfied for an association to survive and thrive. For a society to maintain itself, there needed to be activities which sustained social relations and which generated goods and value for the individual and the society. Simmelian concepts, including religiosity, were then used in a reanalysis of Dandelion's work on dissociation from The Society. Two main reasons for disassociation were identified. The first was that leavers had come to feel unsupported in their Local Meetings in their own religious convictions; the second was dissatisfaction with the conduct of the Quaker business method and therefore of Quaker business at local and national levels. The first was evidence that some felt The Society was becoming distinctly less religious. The second was that

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<sup>13</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.1).

the Society's governance, decision-making and use of the Quaker business method was becoming less inclusive and more directed by a dominant group.

### **Chapter 6: Applying an integrative model of Archer's reflexive and social theories to Quakers and the Religious Society of Friends**

Chapter 6 applied the integrative model described in Chapter 2 of this thesis (figure 2.5) which revealed its analytical power. The reflexive theory component suggested interviewees were primarily meta-reflexive with the majority having a secondary mode of autonomous reflexivity and a minority with a secondary mode of communicative reflexivity. It was argued that The Society itself encouraged personal metareflexivity in its theology and its practices. That led to the suggestion that reflexive styles should be a factor when considering nominations to societal roles, especially clerks. Clerks should be primarily inclined to meta-reflexivity with an inclination for communicative reflexivity.

Social interactions in Quaker spaces such as Meetings for Worship generate reflections in the form of cognitive reflective practices and affective relational experiences that are fed back into an individual's internal conversations. Internal conversations affect an individual's *modus vivendi* in their social interactions within The Society, via an individual's ultimate concerns and their confidence and capabilities as a social actor in Quaker spaces.

A Quaker's participation in the social interactions themselves are enabled and constrained by the cultural and structural systems that facilitate them i.e. the ideas and propositions Quakers entertain, the organisational structures and decision-making procedures and the written and unwritten rules of social behaviour that enable and constrain social interactions in Quaker spaces. It was suggested that the Society's distinct meta-reflexive theological character and liturgies (in Britain, its

normal mode of worship supplemented by e.g, Experiment with Light, all age worship) and its traditional method of governance, its narrow demographic, but high educational level in particular, were attractions in themselves but obstacles to its aspiration for greater social inclusivity.

Archer's social theory identifies a lack of cultural and structural systems integration as likely to leading to change when the feedback from the social interactions of groups and individuals within it are challenging to those systems and an organisation's future. That is happening within The society, borne out by the presence of current tensions and conflicts within The Society e.g. between the charity and the church, trustees and Meeting for Sufferings, and from the consequences of falling participation. It was suggested that although they were to some extent due to secularisation in the wider society they were also to do with decisions by actors within BYM and Area Meetings leading to internal secularisation within The Society. The lack of integration has been exposed by internal conflict between interest groups but Archer points out in her morphogenetic theory that the actual changes that might follow the lack of integration are unforecastable. They depended on the outcome of social interactions of actors with different degrees of authority and power deriving from their structurally based powers; and on the persuasiveness of their ideas drawn for the society's cultural system. The outcomes will either reinforce or change the cultural and structural systems currently dominant in a society's functioning. Morphonecrosis was also possible.

It is at the point of social interactions and internal conversations that transcendence impacts human processes. That is the case whether the urge to transcend the present was understood as a description of the human urge to reach beyond the present and to make progress through science and rational decision-making or

whether it is understood as arising from the promptings of love and truth in the hearts of human beings and their desire to do on earth the will of a transcendent God who is the origin of those promptings. The latter understanding of transcendence does not exclude the information provided by the former but the former may discount the latter. Social interactions become less satisfying and even fractious when members of the Society differ on the fundamental elements of being a Quaker.

## **7.2 Discussion**

This discussion reflects first on the research design and methodology described in Chapter 2 and then the findings presented in Chapters 3-6 and presented above.

The critical realist design for this research led me to search for the underlying causes for the attractions of Quakerism and the design was just as useful when the research was extended to explore the underlying causes of disaffiliation from The Society<sup>14</sup>.

As qualitative research, I identified themes from the different individual statements indicating the attractiveness of Quakerism, reservations they had about, or reasons for individuals' disaffiliation from, the Society.

Following critical realist principles I recognise that how people think and speak of their relationships and attachments depends on the actuality of their lives at the time. In this research that actuality includes the state of their existing relationships to Quakers and Quakerism.

The integration of concepts from Georg Simmel's work on transcendence, religion and society and Margaret S. Archer's critical realist work on transcendence, reflexivity and social theory provided a conceptual framework for the analysis of the empirical data. Archer's reflexive and social theories, rooted in critical realism, were

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<sup>14</sup> Dandelion (2002)



integrated into an original model<sup>15</sup>. That model provided for a systematic analysis of the current state of The Society in Chapter 6. Archer and her co-authors' claim for the legitimacy of treating transcendence and the ontological possibility of a transcendent Divinity seriously in sociological research<sup>16</sup> was also explored for its usefulness within the context of the model.

Critical realism's double hermeneutic was consonant with the double hermeneutic of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the methodology used to extract themes from the interviews and organise the interview data<sup>17</sup>. The linking of critical realism with IPA as described in Chapter 2 provided a design and methodology that was effective in this research as evidenced by its findings. It could be used in researching the social dynamics of other religiously oriented groups and voluntary organisations.

The findings of my interviews alongside the findings of Dandelion's interviews were contributory primary source material for discussing The Society's attraction and its numerical decline. Other primary source material were the governing documents and materials produced from within The Society illustrating or commenting upon its theology, governance and practices. This qualitative study identified many reasons for individuals being attracted to and disaffiliating from The Society. Interviews with participants who left the Society more recently could test further the findings of this research.

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<sup>15</sup> Chapter 2: Figure 2.5

<sup>16</sup> 'the question of God's existence is indeed susceptible of rational debate ... and has an ontologically objective answer – even if we cannot say definitively what the answer is' (Archer, Collier and Porpora. 2004. p.1). Archer argues for the admission of transcendence into social science research in Chapter 5 of that publication.

<sup>17</sup> Chapter 2 2.6.

The evidence in this research supported Simmel's definition and understanding of religiosity: a feature of being human, stronger in some and weaker in others, which led to religious and non-religious attachments<sup>18</sup>. The concepts of sociation and exchange<sup>19</sup> provided an explanation why individuals might attach and then detach from a group according to their valuation of the attachment. Simmel's analysis fitted with critical realism's objective to describe the underlying mechanisms (the real) that generate empirical data (the empirically contingent). A need to satisfy their religiosity was inferred from the empirical data as the mechanism underlying the interviewees' search for a religion and a religious denomination to commit to. That commitment gave meaning and value to their lives. Eleven of the twelve interviewees testified to their Christian or theist beliefs and all twelve to the ways in which their attachment to Quakerism had positively affected them. They were similar to most interviewees in Quaker research surveys who had disaffiliated from other religious groups and denominations in the past. As Simmel argued, a member's continuing affiliation to an association depends on the value for them of their attachment.

Simmel also argued that religion and religious institutions were a product of human reflection and organisation. The ontological existence of God and the truth of a religion was ultimately a matter of faith based on inferences from experiencing life rather than provable by the methods of contemporary science. When a religious institution's theology, governance and religious practices were meeting an individuals' perceived spiritual and religious needs, which followed from their religiosity and experience of life, the institution flourished, else it did not. What

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<sup>18</sup>. 'We may well need to realise that religiosity is a particular being a functional quality of humanity ...which entirely determines some individuals and exists only in rudimentary form in others' (Simmel, 1997a. p.5). Discussed in detail in Chapter 4

<sup>19</sup> As discussed in Chapter 5.

happens in Quaker spaces that enables and constrains social interaction is what creates the value and reason for a person's initial and continuing attachment to The Society.

Simmel's theory of religiosity is refined and complemented by Archer's reflexive theory which comprises the upper part of my integrated model. The first element of that model is Archer's concept of the internal conversation. The dominant reflexive process in the individual Quakers interviewed and that was promoted by Quaker theology and procedures was meta-reflexive. Meta-reflexivity correlates with the idea that being a Quaker is a form of discipleship within a broadly Christian perspective<sup>20</sup>. Meta-reflexivity and discipleship are related to Simmel's concept of religiosity. Religiosity seeks a form, i.e. a religion and a human institution, in which to express itself<sup>21</sup>.

Subdominant modes of reflexivity were also shown to be present in the interviewees. The main subdominant mode was that of autonomous reflexivity. That correlated with an individualistic approach to life. An individualistic approach was congruent with Quaker theology's emphasis on the possibility of the individual's unmediated<sup>22</sup> personal relationship with God. Meta-reflexivity qualifies the self-driven approach of the autonomous reflective by encouraging external ideals and discipleship to an ideal, an ideal that may be of a religious and/or political nature. The linkage of meta-reflexivity and autonomous reflexivity provides an interior force to pursue a relationship with the Divine and to seek the world's betterment.

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<sup>20</sup> *QF&P* 11.01 'Membership is still seen as a discipleship, a discipline within a broadly Christian perspective and our Quaker tradition, where the way we live is as important as the beliefs we affirm. Like all discipleships, membership has its elements of commitment and responsibility but it is also about joy and celebration. Membership is for those who feel at home and in the right place within the Quaker community'. That passage goes on to state the fundamental elements of being a Quaker.

<sup>21</sup> Levine (1971); Simmel (1971. p.351); Simmel (1997. p.101)

<sup>22</sup> i.e. not dependent on mediation from a priest or leadership from a professional minister.

Meta-reflexivity linked with communicative reflexivity as the sub-dominant was characteristic of a minority of Friends. Communicative reflexives were interested in friendship. They often depended on talking with friends to develop and confirm their own opinions, unlike autonomous reflexives. That inclination fitted with the requirements for the role of clerk in The Society. Clerks need to want to listen carefully to the different voices in the community in facilitating Meetings for Worship for business and deciding on policies and the use of the Meeting's resources. Listening helped a Meeting to come to unity with a clerk's agreed minute encapsulating a Meeting's discernment on a matter of business.

Archer's reflexive theory can therefore be helpful to Quaker nomination committees when discerning the suitability of individuals for particular roles within The Society e.g. as a clerk, as a treasurer, a leader of a new initiative or a member of the oversight team; and also in other organisations where different kinds of reflexivity may be considered relevant for particular roles.

Archer's reflexive concepts threw light on how an individual develops a *modus vivendi* for social interacting within a particular organisation. Simmel's suggestion is that an individual's personal development and their *modus vivendi* are developed from their participating in different social circles<sup>23</sup>. Simmel's concept of religiosity relates also to Archer's concept of ultimate concern, the outcome of internal conversations, from which follows their choice and attachment to a religious association as an ultimate concern. Those concepts provide for an explanation why some individuals seek an external religious form in which to express their interior need to make sense of their human existence.

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<sup>23</sup> Simmel (1971. p.251).

Simmel and Archer also examined the concept of transcendence. Simmel offers a secular<sup>24</sup> and Archer, with colleagues, defends a religious concept of transcendence<sup>25</sup>. Simmel neither denied nor affirmed God's existence. He did consider how life choices were made. In Simmel's essay *The Law of the Individual* the concepts of 'Actuality' and of 'The Ought', are proposed and described as metaphysical categories whose interactions within an individual determine their choices<sup>26</sup>. Actuality is a category denoting the immediate form in which one experiences life. The Ought is a category consisting of all the possibilities for how one might act; they include ethical and unethical actions. For a believer whose theology is panentheistic, the Divine is immanent in the actuality of life. For a spiritual or religious person what one ought to do is circumscribed by religious ethics. Archer's concept of the internal conversation refines what happens in consciousness when deciding how to live: the internal conversation of the individual arises from experiencing the actuality of life and making choices about what next to do and how next to act. It is in reflecting on one's actuality in one's internal conversation that the possibilities of what one 'ought' to do take place and ultimate concerns are articulated. It is there that one might perceive Divine guidance.

Archer used the example of St. Theresa's internal conversation 'as a challenge to social theory'. Social theory traditionally eschews explanations that invoke Divine intervention or the reality of religious experience as a cause or motivation for human events<sup>27</sup>. Theresa's motivation was to attend to her and her other religious sisters'

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<sup>24</sup> Simmel (2010).

<sup>25</sup> Archer, M.S., Collier, A. and Porpora, D.V. (2004) co-authored *Transcendence: critical realism and God*.

<sup>26</sup> Simmel (2015. p.99-154)

<sup>27</sup> Archer (2004. p.138). In Chapter 10 of that text Archer discusses the religious experience of St. Theresa. She argues that it should be taken seriously and not excluded out of hand. 'Methodological individualism gives no house-room to any form of divine agency' and 'individual dispositions are 'the terminus of an explanation'', not the asserted reality of religious experience. 'Socio-centrism of

experience of their relationship with God and live a particular kind of religious life.

Archer writes that:

As third persons, believers and unbelievers are in the same position *vis à vis* Teresa's experiences. We can all understand the grounding in the Christian tradition and we can all understand their public outworkings, but none of us can share her own inscapes<sup>28</sup>.

We can understand Theresa's discipleship and love for Jesus. But we can't actually experience the very texture of what has happened in her internal conversation. We cannot adjudicate on whether or not the God of revelation is actually present in internal conversations i.e. in her and others' relationship with the God of revelation which was real for them<sup>29</sup>; but we can be empathically perceptive of another's experiencing. For Theresa God had been incarnate in Jesus and she expressed her love of God in Jesus and deemed her experiencing as an experience of love from God. That was her religious experience. It was that that led her to develop a new religious order as an ultimate concern. Archer argued that that claim of religious experiencing cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to social theory; and that it clearly lead to social action. That was true of George Fox as well<sup>30</sup>.

For a Quaker with 'an understanding of divine guidance'<sup>31</sup> what one ought to do and how to act is related to what one believes about the kind of guidance that characterises Divine guidance in one's internal conversation. A key aspect of discerning God's will is to be able to distinguish, and to believe that one can distinguish through reflection and prayer, whether what one discerns in one's interior

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collectivism is even more inhospitable to the transcendental', because an individual like 'Theresa is an epiphenomenon of her times and circumstances. These shaping social forces are more important than she is' (p.139).

<sup>28</sup> Archer (2004. p.152).

<sup>29</sup> Archer (2004. p.147).

<sup>30</sup> Disbrey (1994. Ch.6)

<sup>31</sup> *QF&P* 11.01

consciousness is a product of one's own will, the demands of one's own ego or a revelation of God's will. An individual may also call on their Local Meeting for specific help in their discernment<sup>32</sup>.

Recognition that one is being guided by The Spirit can take place within an individual's internal conversation alone or in group social interactions in the Quaker community of a gathered Meeting for Worship<sup>33 34 35</sup>. For Simmel transcendence is about the process in the life of individuals that moves them beyond what is given to them in their lives and to explore their understanding of the world beyond what is originally given to their senses<sup>36</sup>. That is also a product of reflexivity and the internal conversation. Human beings choose opportunities to transcend their given situation, conceptualising and actualising new possibilities.

Archer's and Simmel's differing treatments of transcendence clarify a split in the ideas and practice of contemporary Quakers when coming together to make decisions in the context of a Meeting for Worship for business i.e. in one of the forms for social interaction that The Society provides. Some believe in trying to discern God's will but non-theists do not. Simmel's metaphysical concepts of Actuality and Ought bring the two together. Both believers and non-believers are gripped by trying to find a way forward in the actuality of life, and they may find themselves united with what decisions come to be agreed. They are not united in their own underlying

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<sup>32</sup> *QF&P* 13.08

<sup>33</sup> Ashworth (2006).

<sup>34</sup> 'Paul interprets what happened to him not just as a personal transformation but a new and universal act of God bringing the same possibility of a human intimacy with God to others' (Ashworth, 2006. xiii.) Ashworth 'points to the task of listening and discernment in Christian communities but also highlights the fact that, for Paul, the empowerment from the word of God only came alive once individuals had gone through a life-changing transformation' (2006. p.232). St. Theresa and George Fox would be examples of experiencing life-changing transformations; but so would countless ordinary people who experience religious transformations.

<sup>35</sup> *QF&P* 2.88. Fendall, Wood and Bishop (2007).

<sup>36</sup> Simmel discussed the impact of the inventions of the telescope and microscope in creating a transformational understanding of where human beings stand in relation to the cosmos (2010. p.4).

presuppositions used in the discernment for decision-making. Their communal unity and the strength of the bonds of association are therefore qualified. For those Quakers who believe in God or a Higher Power, like all but one of the interviewees, that belief was a core element of their Quakerism. There are consequences when that is not a core element for all. Without that shared belief, some Quaker groups are inhibited from a corporate witness to the world about the possibility of discerning Divine guidance for every individual because some Quakers are known not to share that belief. To do so would contradict the Quaker testimony to truth<sup>37</sup>. This fundamental difference in presuppositions affects the present coherence of The Society's theology and the cohesion of Quaker communities and the promotion of a clear Quaker message.

Dandelion writes about 'the plight of liberal religion' in his review of secularisation theory<sup>38</sup>. He sees Quakerism as an example of liberal religion<sup>39</sup>. He notes theorists have claimed that:

permissiveness undermines its [i.e. liberal religion's] ability to transmit its beliefs clearly and recruit. Groups with distinctive belief systems and which oppose dominant value systems are expected to survive longer<sup>40</sup>.

The question arises: What might be reducing the chances of The Religious of Society's survival?

The findings of the previous chapters led to conclusions suggesting a lack of coherence in contemporary Quaker theology and a lack of cohesion in the Quaker community.

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<sup>37</sup> See Chapter 1 for the Quaker testimonies

<sup>38</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.31).

<sup>39</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.117).

<sup>40</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.31).



Firstly, Area Meetings may no longer be united in considering any of the fundamental elements of being a Quaker described in *Quaker faith & practice* as fundamental.

The findings of British Quaker surveys illustrate the extreme religious diversity within The Society, including non-theism and atheism, even among clerks<sup>41</sup>. It can be inferred that applicants and/or existing members do not have to agree with the first of the fundamental elements of being a Quaker: 'the understanding of divine guidance'.

Secondly, Quakers' conflict aversion may be a non-religious reason why fundamental elements are not being asserted<sup>42</sup>. Area meetings are free to adapt their own procedures 'to reflect individual and local circumstances'<sup>43</sup>. Some do not want to say 'No' to applicants whom they would like to accept into membership when others recommend them. An applicant's interest in religion, enjoyment of Meeting for Worship and the community of the Local Meeting they have engaged with over an acceptable period of time seems to be sufficient for an Area Meeting to agree membership for applicants<sup>44</sup>.

Thirdly, *Quaker faith & practice* requires no formal Quaker education or instruction in the theology and religious practices underlying Quaker faith and practices before membership is considered by Area Meetings. Members cannot assume a common understanding of any fundamental liturgical practices e.g. the meaning of worship; the purpose of and justification for ministry; the importance of nomination committee members meeting 'in a spirit of worship' and the responses expected or hoped for of nominees<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> Hampton (2014).

<sup>42</sup> Discussed in the literature review in chapter 1: Kline (2002); Robson (2005); Meads (2011).

<sup>43</sup> *QF&P* 11.04

<sup>44</sup> Anecdotal evidence and personal observation.

<sup>45</sup> *QF&P* 3.24 especially b and f. and 11.01

The above are signs of a liberal attitude to belief and membership within The Society. They weaken its distinctive belief system and practices. The assertion in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that each person may have an unmediated relation and direct experience of the Divine through the promptings of love and truth in one's heart is a radical rather than liberal assertion about reality and about each person's relationship with the Divine<sup>46</sup>. That radical assertion is undermined by secularisation and internal secularisation. As a result, Quaker communities have come to accommodate Quakers who hold contradictory propositions e.g. those who do believe in the possibility of 'the understanding of divine guidance'<sup>47</sup> and those who do not<sup>48</sup>.

In Chapter 4 the stark instance of internal secularisation was exemplified by a recent change on the *Quakers in Britain website* when I noticed in February 2024 the radical statement 'there is that of God in everyone', had been removed. That is a decision of the charity, BYM, which controls and maintains the website, not the church, which is the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain.

Pursuing the above argument further, it seems that BYM, charged in its governing document with sustaining the church and the faith of The Society by

organising and maintaining the whole of the Society as responsive to the leadings of the Holy Spirit' [and] 'seeking to know the right way forward [discerning] the will of God as expressed in the sense of the meeting'<sup>49</sup>

does not perceive a contradiction between that purpose and its practice. It is an example of the institutional power of a particularly powerful group able to influence

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<sup>46</sup> QF&P 1.01-1.02

<sup>47</sup> QF&P 11.01

<sup>48</sup> Dandelion writes 'For those modern Liberal Quakers without a God or without a God with a will, this formula becomes anachronistic' (2019. p.127).

<sup>49</sup> Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). Governing document. <https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/governing-document-august-2021> Accessed 1/03/2024.

the promotion and representation of Quakerism. It also reflects a contradiction between its promotion strategy and its governing document. It can be understood as a decision taken in good faith by an interest group (BYM charity's paid staff) in the face of The Society's declining numbers and the wider society's secularisation to attract those averse to God-language. But it is a choice unlikely to have been taken in unity in any British Local Meeting for Worship (the church), given the number of self-identifying Christian Quakers in the Society.

Archer argues that a lack of cultural and structural integration becomes a focus and a cause for change within a society<sup>50</sup>. The cracks between and within the parts that do not create serious conflict when things are running smoothly (and may energise theological conversation within a Local Meeting) can become a source of rupture when church affairs are not running smoothly and The Society's members are aware of its numerical decline. In trying to repair the cracks, the society changes. Change is reflected in the changes to a society's cultural and structural systems. Changes will be the product of social interactions of different interest groups within The Society based on their authority and power of influence. Groups will use arguments and the powers they can wield drawn from the existing cultural and structural systems<sup>51</sup>. As charities, the legal powers are with trustees.

The findings of the analyses presented in Chapters 4-6 of this thesis and this discussion show the consequences of a lack of cultural and systems integration within the Society of Friends. I shall discuss aspects of the cultural system first and then of the structural system..

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<sup>50</sup> Archer (1995; 1996)

<sup>51</sup> As Archer's realist and cultural theories of change and her morphogenetic theory articulate.

Two cultural emergents that are fundamental to the government and culture of The Society do not complement each other. The first are the governing documents which apply to Area Meetings and BYM; the second is *Quaker faith & practice*. Legally, governing documents take precedence over *Quaker faith & practice* as a source for determining where authority and responsibility for governance ultimately lies. Yet *QF&P* states in Chapter 15 concerning trustees' responsibilities:

The law may assume that authority for determining action passes to the trustees and the meeting may choose to do this. However, under Gospel Order, the ultimate authority will still lie with the gathered meeting<sup>52</sup>.

The Society's governing documents currently emphasise the difference between the charity for which the governing document has been constructed and approved, and the church, which prioritises Gospel Order. The charity consists of its trustees and employees supplemented by 'volunteers'; the church consists of its members and attenders. BYM uses the secular term 'volunteers' in relation to their contribution. Service is the term *QF&P*, uses to describe acting in roles and on committees of their Area and Local Meetings and on BYM's central committees. Without that service The Society, at central, area and local levels, would cease to function. The term 'service' within Quakerism has a spiritual connotation and is offered to a participant in The Society in Meetings for Worship as a result of their nomination. The term 'volunteer' has a secular and wilful connotation.

Chapter 4 described conflicts which arose when initiatives and decisions were taken by the trustees and staff of BYM to do with budgeting, strategic planning and resource allocation, which they are legally entitled to do<sup>53</sup>. These decisions affected their volunteers, the ordinary members of the church giving service, but without their

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<sup>52</sup> *QF&P* 15.03. ( <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/15/> Accessed 22/02/2024)

<sup>53</sup> with some exceptions stated in specific governing documents.

participation in the discernment. Evidence that members giving service on central committees have been upset by some of those decisions was given in Chapter 4. It is unclear whether there were other consequences to their involvement in The Society such as withdrawing their service or disaffiliating from The Society.

The lack of integration and the potential for conflict could be reduced without setting aside the trustees' legal responsibility for ensuring the lawfulness and financial prudence of decisions taken. Governing documents could state that the best interests of the church and the charity should normally be served by decision-making being undertaken with the widest possible participation of The Society's members in the discernment of all important matters affecting the work of the Society in accordance with *QF&P*<sup>54</sup>. Participation could include trustees, staff and members of the church directly affected by those decisions. Such an approach would help to unify the principles of governance underscoring both the governing documents of Area Meetings, BYM's governing document and *Quaker faith & practice*'s guidance on the use of the Quaker business method.

A second issue to be resolved in relation to The Society's cultural system is the matter of defining and asserting the fundamental elements of being a Quaker. If they are to be asserted as criteria for the acceptance into membership, *QF&P* would need to make that explicit such that Area Meetings apply them and ensure applicants are fully aware of them. Alternatively a new formulation would be needed to include those who could not agree with the current formulation. Some would already be members. As the first of the elements stands<sup>55</sup>, the fact that it is not being asserted

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<sup>54</sup> *QF&P* 3.09

<sup>55</sup> 'The understanding of divine guidance' *QF&P* 11.01

undermines the normative assumption that all in a Meeting for Worship for business have:

... the same expectation that God's guidance can be discerned if we are truly listening together and to each other, and are not blinkered by preconceived opinions<sup>56</sup>.

The underlying principle for an association to be cohesive, arising from Simmel's exchange theory, is that applicants for membership of an association know what an association is for, what is expected of them as members as well as what they may expect in their interactions with each other<sup>57</sup>. In the absence of formal programmes of induction into the Quaker way, an applicant's local meeting, in conjunction with their Area Meeting, in support of societal cohesion, may need to confirm an applicant has sufficient knowledge and understanding of what belonging to a Quaker meeting entails and that they subscribe to the fundamental elements of being a Quaker. That could be a prescribed element of the membership procedures as actually presented in *Quaker faith & practice*<sup>58</sup>. Area Meetings might also wish to confirm that that discussion has taken place before further processing an application. They might also wish to confirm that a nominee for a clerking position also understands and agrees with the fundamental elements of being a Quaker in view of The British Quaker Survey of 2013 reporting that 28 non-theists were acting as clerks of business meetings<sup>59</sup>.

A third cultural systems issue relates to the promotion of Quakerism. Interviewees for this research remarked on the need for its better promotion. Failure to transmit its distinctive belief systems clearly is considered to undermine a religious

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<sup>56</sup> QF&P 3.02

<sup>57</sup> See Chapter 5

<sup>58</sup> QF&P Ch. 10 is about *Belonging to a Quaker community* and Ch. 11. Is about *Membership*.

<sup>59</sup> Hampton (2014. p.32).

denomination's capacity to resist secularisation<sup>60</sup>. Those likely to discover Quakers and Quakerism, according to Montemaggi's research<sup>61</sup> and this research, are those who have already developed an interest in religion through previous religious attachments and want to know about Quakerism. They may be seeking to learn about the Quaker way from an official source such as the *Quakers in Britain* website and BYM's promotional leaflets. There, what is considered distinctive to the Quaker way needs to be clearly proclaimed and explained. If newcomers encounter Quaker promotional materials online or in hard copy whose language is de-theologised and too informally presented, what is distinctive about Quaker faith and practice remains unclear<sup>62</sup>. The lack of theological clarity in the materials about Quaker faith and worship I described in Chapter 4, I suggest, is a symptom of The Society's internal secularisation. BYM's promotional materials generally downplay Quakerism's distinctive religious character in de-theologised language.

Governing documents and *Quaker faith & practice* emerge from decisions taken in Meetings for Worship within The Society. Trustees' decisions taken in their own group Meetings for Worship for business have legal authority because of the authority, powers and responsibilities given to trustees by charity law within The Society. How trustees interpret those responsibilities has the greatest impact in relation to the structural elements they are responsible for e.g. Area Meetings, Britain Yearly Meeting, and their constituent Meetings and groups. Even though they are appointed for periods initially determined via the Meetings for Worship for church affairs<sup>63</sup> specified in the governing documents of the Quaker associations and

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<sup>60</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.31)

<sup>61</sup> Montemaggi (2018b)

<sup>62</sup> De-theologisation of BYM's promotional materials was discussed in Chapter 4 under the heading 'De-theologisation'.

<sup>63</sup> Informally called Business Meetings or Meetings for Worship for business

groups for which they are trustees, they alone, by law, are responsible for the decisions they take. There arises a potential for conflict within the Society's structural elements and its decision-making procedures. Trustees may see their role as proactive or reactive in their interventions. They have a choice. As members they have the right to participate with others in discerning and deciding in Meetings for Worship matters to do with policy, planning, finance and property, only asserting their legal authority if decisions might be taken that would be unlawful or imprudent. They may of course make suggestions or recommendations to and in Meetings for Worship but the law does not require trustees to impose them except where illegality or imprudence are involved. Alternatively trustees may simply consult those they wish to consult with. They are not obliged to act on the minutes of Yearly Meeting in session or an Area Meeting.

A lack of integration as a cause of problems within The Society was noted in 1978 in *Quaker faith & practice* even before 21<sup>st</sup> century charity laws complicated the workings of The Society. The extract below is the 1978 extract repeated in the current version of *Quaker faith & practice*:

The relationship between area meetings, Meeting for Sufferings and Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees and committees is delicate and complex.

If there is sometimes tension in the relationships this is not necessarily unhealthy. It is unhealthy when a matter is shunted from one body to another because a group of Friends lack the spiritual energy and courage to wrestle with a matter which they know may result in uncomfortable plain speaking to a fellow member whose concern, however deeply held, is not shared by the meeting. It is equally unhealthy when any individual or meeting is preoccupied with status, with 'getting things through', with efforts to predetermine how another body shall act. We can only be delivered from these dangers by a constant relearning of the nature of true concern<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> QF&P 4.20 (<https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/4/> Accessed 20/02/2024).



The solution to the problem in 1978 was an assertion of the need for relearning what is the traditional Quaker theological concept of ‘concern’<sup>65</sup>. In 2023, it might be that the need for relearning is Gospel Order as manifest in *Quaker faith & practice’s* statements on the practice of the Quaker business method<sup>66</sup>. The spiritual power of the Quaker business method depends on how the method is approached and used. Members should face a problem without being ‘preoccupied with status or with ‘getting things through’, or with efforts to predetermine how another body shall act’. In 2023, the establishment of two committees by Yearly Meeting in session to explore relationships between trustees and Meeting for Sufferings and between trustees and central committees was discussed in Chapter 6<sup>67</sup>. The decision for two rather than one committee exploring The Society’s structures and their relationship is problematic. It suggests a decline in The Society’s confidence in its use of the Quaker business method in seeking unity and coordination between different parts of The Society. It illustrates the lack of integration between The Society’s structural parts: Meeting for Sufferings, which includes the trustees and the senior staff of BYM and reports to Yearly Meeting in session and acts for Yearly Meeting when it is not in session; and BYM’s central committees, which are appointed by Meeting for Sufferings but with terms of reference agreed by trustees, serviced by BYM staff and reporting to trustees. Trustees and Meeting for Sufferings’ duties of oversight and priority setting overlap and therefore can clash as discussed in Chapter 4. If trustees claim priority over Sufferings their claim is supported by law.

Trustees’ structural benefits arise because they have legally supported structural power. When they use their structural power to assert their policy proposals in the

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<sup>65</sup> *QF&P* 13.02.

<sup>66</sup> *QF&P* 3.04-3.06.

<sup>67</sup> The remits of the two committees were discussed in Chapter 6

absence of unity around their viewpoint, ordinary members can argue that a fundamental testimony of The Society, that of equality<sup>68</sup> and the Quaker business method are undermined.

Positive and negative comments from the interviews and the work on internal secularisation by Dandelion and the work of Cummins on the impact of charity law on The Society's governance prompted the expansion of the research question. If The Society had such good things to offer, why did the efforts of those involved in outreach and inreach activities such as Quaker Quest and the Vibrancy project, had The Society's numerical decline not been arrested<sup>69</sup>? An evaluation by the NCVO Charities Evaluation Services of the Vibrancy project<sup>70</sup> exploring how The Society's Meetings may be re-energised, found that there was 'considerable need around the basics of Quakerism, meetings and processes' and 'a new programme should address that focus'<sup>71</sup>. Given the NCVO findings apply, as well as the arguments in this discussion, there is a problem for The Society. The basics of Quakerism are not being asserted nor communicated even to members of The Society, let alone attenders and applicants for membership.

In summary, the discussion has claimed that the research design and methodology of this research and the integrative model constructed for the analysis of the research findings have proven effective as a means of researching and analysing the current state of The Society. Stresses within and challenges for The Society have been exposed by examining The Society's cultural and structural systems and its governance and functioning. Archer's social theory predicts a lack of cultural and

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<sup>68</sup> See Chapter 1 concerning The Society's testimonies.

<sup>69</sup> Chadkirk (2015); Britain Yearly Meeting (2021, 2022, 2023).

<sup>70</sup> The Vibrancy project discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>71</sup> Cupitt and Willis (2019. p.vii).

systems integration will eventually result in organisational change. The changes within the Religious Society of Friends that are made to its structural systems may result from the social interaction of equals in the process of discerning the way forward in the Society's existing structural systems; or they may be made by those with the legal responsibility and the power to implement them, those in the role of trustees, with more or less participation and agreement of The Society's membership.

It is not possible to predict whether specific cultural and structural changes will stem numerical decline nor how the process of implementation will affect the desired outcome. It has been argued that decisions taken in the last few years by BYM's trustees and management and within Area Meetings have been those which have amounted to a process of internal secularisation. That process has led to a lack of theological coherence and social cohesion and to confusion within The Society. It has not reversed the decline in participation in The Society's activities.

### **7.3 Organisational challenges that follow**

The Society and those who participate in its activities as unpaid participants giving service and/or as paid staff and in whatever roles they are serving at local, area, regional and national level face organisational challenges requiring responses:

- A decision needs to be made as to whether the criteria for membership, as defined by the existing statement on the fundamental elements of being a Quaker<sup>72</sup>, should be applied consistently or modified so they reflect the criteria that are in use. If they are to be amended, how should amendments be legitimised? Who should be involved in their legitimisation?

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<sup>72</sup> QF&P (11.01).

- Should certain roles concerned with maintaining the procedures and upholding the theology of The Society be reserved 'for members only'? Four roles come under that category: Trustees, Clerks, Elders and Nominations Committee members. Those roles have specific responsibility for upholding The Society's spiritual life and organisational procedures. How should those roles be filled and what criteria should be used in appointing individuals to them? Currently only members are appointed to those roles.
- The relationship between trustees and the Quaker charities for which they have responsibilities need clarification to improve structural integration within The Society. Are trustees to understand that the best interests of the Quaker charity for which they are trustees are served by their acting as equals with The Society's membership but with the added legal responsibility for ensuring lawful, timely and prudent decision-making within those structures? Alternatively should their legal responsibilities be interpreted as requiring them to be the appointed actors in the planning, policy making and budgeting of their charities, subject to the rubrics of the governing document and the Charity Commission's guidance for trustees? There is a related need to clarify the relationship between the content of the governing documents of the charities involved in the governance of The Society and the content of *Quaker faith & practice*, not least with regards their definitions of 'constitutional authority' and 'ultimate authority'.
- Is a formulation of The Society's theology required which underpins a statement as to the fundamental elements of being a Quaker? It is that statement that should promote the integration of The Society's cultural and structural systems and its inreach and outreach activities. That would ensure

the basics of Quakerism is understood by members and those who would participate in The Society's activities.

Responses to the first challenge would determine what boundaries The Society wants to maintain around membership and what the rights and obligations of membership are. It should follow a discussion of the consequences of abolishing boundaries between members and non-members within The Society.

Responses to the second challenge presupposes that membership is still a feature of The Society which its existing members want to uphold. Given that they do, then the specified roles within The Society may need to be reserved for members only. Those roles determine how The Society's governing document and *Quaker faith & practice*, are to be used in practice.

Responses to the third challenge would enhance the structural integration of The Society by clarifying the role of trustees in relation to members acting in other structural elements of The Society. Differing ideas about the role of different structural elements within The Society have emerged which are consuming of members' time and are a source of conflict. Establishing and agreeing how trustees, as a structural element, should normally relate to other structural elements would avoid confusion and conflict.

Responses to the fourth challenge would decide whether The Society remains a Religious Society and, if so, in what sense it is a religious society. It might decide its purpose is to provide spaces for mutual support for the spiritual journeying of any who come to a Meeting without any presuppositions as to whether or not participants are embracing any religious tradition or have a belief in God. The Christian tradition of The Society and the concept of discipleship and worship could be de-emphasised

and The Society's name and the title and subtitle of *Quaker Faith & practice* adjusted.

What The Society decides would then affect the criteria for membership. It would enhance cultural and social integration in that those who participate in The Society would know it was a Society whose theology either had boundaries and intended to be theologically coherent or to what extent its spiritual tradition embraced contradictory theologies within its membership. Participants could expect its members to be 'open to new light, from whatever source it may come' (QF&P 1.02). Consequently, the Society would establish in what way its theology was or was not coherent; and how The Society achieved cohesion.

#### **7.4 The interviewees, the challenges: Some speculations**

It is speculative but interesting to relate these challenges to the twelve Quakers I interviewed and the evaluators of the Vibrancy Project.

The interviewees were curious or in crisis when they first decided to go to a Quaker Meeting on a Sunday morning. They became attracted to an experientially-based religious denomination about which most knew little. To have to make a decision about membership and to experience being visited as part of the application for membership procedure were remembered as significant events although for some not significant enough. A deeper level of discussion was expected. I cannot say whether they affirmed the basic elements of being a Quaker stated in 11.01 of *Quaker Faith and Practice* before they became members but eight would now say they were Christian and three that they were believers in God or a Higher Power. Reservations about non-theism were voiced by two of the self-identified Christian Quakers. For all the interviewees, the vernacular Quakerism the interviewees met

was a form that attracted their religiosity. It has helped maintain the energy needed to put their faith into practice within and outside of The Society. The willingness of all the interviewees to be interviewed for this research into how membership of The Society has affected them was evidence of a wish to affirm that their membership has been something about which they wished to testify in a positive way.

The evaluators of the Vibrancy Project pointed to a need for in responsible roles at local, area and national levels to determine how Society participants are grounded in the basic elements of being a Quaker. That assumes genuine agreement on what those basic elements are. With that agreement should follow a renewal of theological coherence, a restoration of social cohesion within The Society and a clarity about The Society's message for its present and future participants.

## 7.5 Final conclusions

The approach of this research has resulted in an analysis that supports the secularisation hypothesis that:

permissiveness undermines its [i.e. liberal religion's] ability to transmit its beliefs clearly and recruit. Groups with distinctive belief systems and which oppose dominant value systems are expected to survive longer<sup>73</sup>.

Simmel's concepts of religiosity, sociation and exchange, complemented by Archer's reflexive and social theories, help explain how societies persist or decline. They help explain why individuals join and leave religious societies and why religious associations survive or decline. Archer's critical realist based morphogenetic theory offers an explanation as to why and how societies change. Why they change is when a lack of effective cultural and structural systems integration affects the achievement of a society's purposes; 'how' they change is dependent on how variations in the ideation of the different interest groups involved, who as vested interest groups have different degrees of power, influence and

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<sup>73</sup> Dandelion (2019. p.31).

support, are played out in the social interactions between them. In the first instance, however, the social origin of those groups were a consequence of earlier groups sharing and promoting an understanding of a transcendent Divine articulated by individuals like St. Theresa of Avila and George Fox, and argued by established sociologists such as Margaret Archer and Pink Dandelion.

In relation to The Religious Society of Friend's, its continuing numerical decline suggested that the ties that held The Society together were losing their effectiveness. The social glue Dandelion had identified as the function of The Society's double culture, consisting of 'a permissive approach to belief and a conformist and conservative 'behavioural creed''<sup>74</sup>, was losing its effectiveness. That, coupled with a lack of cultural and structural systems integration within The Society was inviting change.

With regards cultural integration, theological diversity poses a challenge to some members of The Society e.g. for some of my interviewees, to the Quakers who wrote letters to *the Friend* quoted in this thesis and for specific theological reasons given for their disaffiliation by former members of The Society identified in Chapter 5. Within The Society are those who share a belief in the possibility of an unmediated relationship with a transcendent reality for which they use the word God, or Christ or Spirit, and faith in the possibility of discerning Divine guidance collectively. That has maintained religious groups such as the Carmelites and The Religious Society of Friends. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century surveys report an increasing numbers of participants in The Society, including members, who do not believe in a transcendent Divine with whom they may be in relationship.

Self-identifying Christians and theists who subscribe to *QF&P's* concept of membership as discipleship and its statement of the fundamental elements of being a Quaker share religious bonds of association not shared by those who reject those concepts. In the recent past, faith in the theology underpinning the Quaker business method and in its efficacy when used in

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<sup>74</sup> Dandelion (2019. P.122)



the context of properly conducted Meetings for Worship as described in *Quaker faith & practice*, contributed to bringing unity in the group, even around the decision not to make a decision. Within that context, a process of Discernment, Deliberation and Dedication<sup>75</sup> would be active in each individual's internal conversation simultaneously processing, as inputs, the social interactions of their Quaker Meeting. Simmel, differing from Archer and Dandelion who entertain the possibility of experiencing a transcendent God, would understand the individuals comprising a Meeting as bound by a metaphysical Ought determining what to do in the metaphysical Actuality of their current reality.

With regards structural integration UK charity law placed legal responsibility for the decisions and behaviour of The Society in the hands of the small groups of trustees of the charities responsible for The Society's governance i.e. the BYM charity and Area Meeting charities. That change upset the authority and powers of other structural units within The Society and some of The Society's participants. Some boards of trustees, rather than resisting assimilation to secular ways as far as the law allowed, have used their legal entitlement to take decisions on their own discernment undermining the statement in *Quaker faith & practice* that the Quaker business method, used to discern the will of God in the conduct of its business, depends 'on the widest possible participation by our members'. That has challenged The Society's testimony to equality. Some Area Meetings in their decisions about membership have failed to assert what *Quaker faith & practice*, specify as the fundamental elements of being a Quaker. That has led to the growth of extreme theological diversity e.g. as in the development of non-theism and a non-theist Quaker group within The Society.

The result for The Society is that a process of internal secularisation is underplaying the distinctive traditional theological and governance features of The Society. The Society has accommodated itself to contradictory theological propositions and to management practices comparable to secular charities. Its theology has become incoherent, its social ties have

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<sup>75</sup> See Chapter 2 2.5.1 p.105

become less cohesive. In spite of the initial enthusiasm of those who have come to participate in The Society, participation in The Society has been declining annually as internal secularisation has progressed within it.

## **7.6 Some suggestions for further research in relation to the Religious Society of Friends based on the discussion and findings of this thesis**

These suggestions combine a scholarly interest in the sociology of everyday religion and ecclesiology with a practical concern about the future of the Religious Society of Friends.

### **The fundamental elements of being a Quaker**

It would be helpful for a more complete understanding of The Society to gather and explore the views of different existing members and attenders on the fundamental elements of being a Quaker. This would help to establish whether any matters of faith or belief should determine membership of The Society. Negative attitudes were expressed to non-theism and universalism by some interviewees in this research. That raises the question as to how disturbing it is in ordinary Meetings for Worship and Meetings for Worship for business for members to worship with other members whose theological positions are contradictory. That has implications for how The Society promotes itself to those who might be interested in attending a Local Meeting for the first time. It could also help establish what members and attenders think about whether and what boundary should exist between membership and non-membership.

Various samples could be collected enabling various comparisons e.g. between those who normally attend Meetings for Worship on Sundays or other days; in person or by Zoom; comparisons between members and attenders; comparisons between rural and metropolitan Local Meetings.

### **Disaffiliation from The Society**

The last research undertaken into disaffiliation from The Society was by Dandelion in 2002. A contemporary project could explore the religiosity of those who have left The Society within the last five years and whether and how that was now being satisfied. Whereas Dandelion's research only covered members this research should attempt to cover former members and formerly listed attenders. Area Meeting and Local Meeting records would be used to identify those who might be willing to be interviewed or respond to an anonymised questionnaire. The results could test the extent theological diversity, governance, unsatisfactory social interactions, or social activism were reasons for disaffiliations.

### **A comparison of the governing documents of Area Meetings in the Religious Society of Friends**

The difference between the governing documents of North West London Area Meeting (NWLAM) and South East London Area Meeting (SELAM) was noted in this research. That pointed to NWLAM's modification of BYM's model document for the governance of Area Meetings, a document which SELAM had accepted. NWLAMs document asserted the primary authority of *Quaker faith & practice* where there might be confusion or contradictions between a governing document and *Quaker faith & practice*. NWLAM also refused to exclude its AM Clerk from being a trustee as the BYM model and SELAM's governing document explicitly do. NWLAM also asserted the trustees' duty to monitor the implementation of the Area Meeting's decisions. It would be interesting to compare other AM governing documents identifying differences affecting the relationship between trustees and Area Meetings and identifying and discovering and/or theorising the causes of difference in the specific cases.

The findings would throw light on the sources and extent of conflicts and tensions concerning decision-making currently playing out in The Society and the implications for the future governance of The Society.

### **Implications of this thesis for wider scholarship**

There are a number of areas of scholarship to which this research contributes.

These are discussed below.

#### **Lived religion**

The Quaker sociologist Peter Collins<sup>76</sup> distinguished between canonical, vernacular and prototypical religion (Chapter 4). A person's faith can be conceptualised as consisting of a synthesis of canonical, vernacular and idiosyncratic elements in varying proportions, subject to change and reinforcement. It is uniquely personal, a work in progress, an unrepeatable prototype. It exists as a result of their reflections and interpretations of what they have experienced and learnt. It will be affected as a result of further social interactions with others, further religious education and reading, and the actuality of their lives through time. That conceptualisation would seem to be a useful basis for approaching and researching the lived religions of individuals. Their lived religion is the outcome of how a person has come to express their religiosity, as defined by Simmel.

#### **Religiosity as a force resisting secularisation**

Georg Simmel distinguished between religiosity and religion (Chapters 2 and 4). What the interviews revealed was the seriousness of the interviewees' search for a religion in an actual congenial worshiping group with which to affiliate - one that satisfied their religiosity. Although there were times when some of the interviewees

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<sup>76</sup> Collins (1994).

were not attending or affiliated formally to any religious group or institution, the interviewees could not be characterised as individuals with a pick n' mix approach to religion to satisfy a consumerist urge. Disaffiliation and their detachment from a religious group was evidence of unsatisfied religiosity. They give some indication of what was found unacceptable in a religion or religious association and what spiritual and religious yearnings an individual is seeking to satisfy that remained unsatisfied. Further research into unsatisfied religiosity would contribute to a better understanding of how religious ideas and yearnings, including yearnings for a congenial religious community with which to associate, are still impacting contemporary individuals in their making sense of, and interacting with, their world.

**Studying the relationship between the individual and their religious associations with the methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Arising from applying Simmel's concepts of *Vergesellschaftung* (sociation or becoming social) and *Wechselwirkung* (exchange or reciprocal interaction), I have identified six analytical components which can be used separately or in combination to articulate further research into the relationship between individuals and their religious attachments. They are:

1. Identifying significant, including self-defined, attributes of individuals who seek to express their spiritual and/or religious yearnings.
2. Reasons given by individuals for relating to a religious association to which they see themselves as provisionally or firmly attached. (Some reasons will be to do with their own inclinations and some to do with the attributes of the association to which they are relating).
3. Spiritual journeying: individual's narratives of how they came to join a particular association (to include noticing, recording and explaining the length

of time from first involvement to becoming full participating members and any key events in their journey).

4. Individuals' accounts of their relationship to others within the association, including their relationship to those seen to be in authority.
5. The reasons individuals give for what keeps them currently related to their associations with special reference to the benefits received and contributions given arising from their relationship to a *religious* association.
6. Accounts of experiences deemed religious before and after involvement with their current religious association along with descriptions as to how individuals have been affected by their religious and other associations.

Studying each of these components reveals information relevant to understanding the role of religion in individual lives and in contemporary life. The methodology of IPA would support qualitative research in these areas. IPA provides a means of organising interview data thematically for further theoretical exploration and relating that exploration to the discourse domain in which a researcher participates.

### **The ontology and reflexive and social theories of Margaret S. Archer**

The distinction critical realist ontology makes between empirical, actual and real seem especially apt for sociologists of religion (See Chapter 2). The theories of Margaret S. Archer based on a critical realist ontology to do with transcendence, reflexivity and social theory were also a feature of this research. A relationship with a transcendent other claimed by an individual is not to be dismissed out of hand within sociology because it is said to be empirically unverifiable. In so far as an individual gives reasons for that claim and that claim leads to institutional affiliations and other social actions, whether or not there is a transcendent power that causes events in the empirical world, the reasons given for belief have causal power in the empirical

world through individual action. Their affiliations have further consequences for the maintenance of social capital and for social activism which may have political and legal consequences impacting the individual and the institutions with which they associate.

Archer's conceptual framework used in the thesis for studying the dynamics of social interaction and change in the Religious Society of Friends could be applied to other religious organisations<sup>77</sup>. Applying her conceptualisations and definitions of cultural system, structure, corporate agents, primary agents, actors, internal conversation and social interaction clarifies the phenomena to be studied in research focusing on religious institutions just as they were originally applied to secular institutions and activities<sup>78</sup>.

An integrated model based on Archer's reflexive and social theories has been effective in generating the analysis used in this research (Chapter 2 and 6). That analysis has pointed to cultural system contradictions and contentious social interactions between different interest groups within a society. The dissertation was able to establish challenges to be faced within Quakers arising from a lack of integration and contradictions in The Society's processes (see above in this chapter).

## **7.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has surveyed and discussed the key findings of the previous chapters. The results of the research have been shown to have relevance for a denomination, The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain. The findings have led to

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<sup>77</sup> As far as I could ascertain they had not been used in relation to British religious institutions when this research began. Her work has been used by a Norwegian scholar of religion in her MA (Hoel, 2010).

<sup>78</sup> Archer's first major studies were of the origins of educational systems e.g. *Social Origins of Educational Systems*, London: Sage, 1984.

identifying challenges The Society faces, suggestions for further research and indicating research implications for wider scholarship. That research might well include further evaluation of the theoretical and practical usefulness of the relevant work of Georg Simmel and Margaret S. Archer and the effectiveness of the integrated model used in this thesis.



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## **APPENDIX 1 PARTICIPATION INFORMATION PACK**

### **“How does your experience of membership in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) make a difference to your life, faith and practice?”**

Please consider letting me interview you to help me research that question.

I am exploring Friends' experience through interviewing two groups of Friends: those who joined more than 10 years ago and those who have been members for up to about 2 years (however long they have been attenders).

#### **Who am I?**

I joined Friends in 1966. In the last few years I completed Woodbrooke's Equipping for Ministry Course (January 2007). After retiring in 2006 from training librarians, Business IT specialists and finally counsellors at what is now the University of West London where I worked from 1976 (bar three years in industry), I completed an MA in Pastoral Theology at London University's Heythrop College (2012).

#### **Who is supporting the research?**

Birmingham University's Centre for Postgraduate Quaker Studies (CPQS), which is a joint venture between Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre and the School of Philosophy, Theology and Religion.

My supervisor is Professor Ben Pink Dandelion, the 2014 Swarthmore lecturer and author of several books on Quakers.

The research is self-funded and registered for a PhD. The provisional title of the study is: 'A comparative study of the religious beliefs and faith of Friends (Quakers) by conviction.'

Please take your time to read the following information and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like further



information. Take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

### **What is the purpose of the research?**

I want to explore links between faith and practice in individual Friends' lives and their understanding of those links. I am interested in how a Friend's life might be influenced over time before and after joining The Society of Friends.

The outcome will be a contribution to understanding contemporary Quaker faith and practice as embodied in those interviewed and to Religious Studies and Pastoral Theology.

### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you decide to participate in the research, I will ask you to sign a consent form to confirm that you have read and understood this information and that you are taking part on a voluntary basis. We will then agree a date when we can explore your experience. We will cover the circumstances of your joining, your faith and religious beliefs, whatever they are, your worship and prayer life if you have one, and how you understand your being a Quaker affects your day to day life. I anticipate that interviews will take about two hours during a morning, afternoon or evening. They will be recorded on a digital device for later transcription.

### **What are the disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

A possible risk involved in the research may be the experience or re-experiencing of painful or difficult emotions as you talk about your spiritual and everyday life and your membership of a Quaker meeting. You have complete control over what you say and you have no obligation to disclose anything that you do not feel comfortable discussing. The relevant Birmingham University ethics committee has reviewed and approved this proposal.

## Withdrawal

You may withdraw from the study at any time during or after the interview without needing to provide an explanation and up to 3 months after the interview. If you wish to stop during the interview the interview will immediately be brought to an end. The information you give will be kept confidential and I will remove any identifying information to protect your identity. My supervisor will not know your identity and he will not hear the recording although he may read the transcript.

Your data will be handled in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act (1998).

All of your information, including the digital recorder will be kept in a secured filing cabinet. The interview transcript will be kept in a separate place from any other identifying information. You will receive an interview number so your data will be recognised by both of us in case you wish to withdraw from the study and your information can then be destroyed.

We will discuss how you are feeling at the end of the interview and if you have any concerns or need further support then I can provide you with information about further resources. These would include my supervisor and other counselling support, not forgetting the pastoral support you might find useful from overseers or within your own meeting.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information and for your interest in this research.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns: Tel: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

**Recorded Interview: “How does your experience of membership in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) make a difference to your life, faith and practice?”**

Statement to be signed by the participant:

- I confirm that the researcher (John Shinebourne) has explained fully the nature of the project and the range of activities which I will be asked to undertake and that I have received an information sheet. I confirm that I have had adequate opportunity to ask questions about this project.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time up to three months after the interview.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I consent to the interview being recorded.
- I agree to the use of anonymised, non-attributed quotations being used in this research, including any books or articles that might be submitted for publication

Name.....

Date.....

John Shinebourne Tel: [REDACTED] email: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Supervisor: Professor Ben Pink Dandelion,

The Centre for Postgraduate Quaker Studies (CPQS).

Birmingham University.

Tel: [REDACTED]  
Email: [REDACTED]

**Recorded Interview: “How does your experience of membership in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) make a difference to your life, faith and practice?”**

Participants' Copy

Statement to be signed by the participant:

- I confirm that the researcher (John Shinebourne) has explained fully the nature of the project and the range of activities which I will be asked to undertake and that I have received an information sheet. I confirm that I have had adequate opportunity to ask questions about this project.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time up to three months after the interview.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I consent to the interview being recorded.
- I agree to the use of anonymised, non-attributed quotations being used in this research, including any books or articles that might be submitted for publication

Name.....

Date.....

John Shinebourne Tel: [REDACTED] email: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Supervisor: Professor Ben Pink Dandelion,

The Centre for Postgraduate Quaker Studies (CPQS).

Birmingham University.

Tel: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

**Recorded Interview: “How does your experience of membership in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) make a difference to your life, faith and practice?”**

Interview Debriefing

Thank you very much for allowing me to interview you and supporting my research.

The research would not be possible without your goodwill and generous gift of time and thought.

The purpose of this debriefing is to give you the opportunity, if you want, to discuss how you are feeling at the end of the interview and any concerns you have.

You might also like to offer feedback on the conduct of the interview, the questions asked and any other matter you think would contribute to the research.

I can also provide and link you with information about support that would be available to you concerning your experience of the interview. That could include my supervisor (see below) and pastoral support you might find useful from within Friends or Overseers and others in your own meeting. I also can point you to professional counselling resources in your area and London generally.

Withdrawal

You may withdraw from the study at any time up to three months after the interview without needing to provide any explanation. If you wish to stop during the interview then please indicate your wish to do so and the interview will immediately be terminated. The information you give will be kept confidential and I will remove any identifying information to protect your identity.

John Shinebourne

Tel: [REDACTED] email: [REDACTED]

## **APPENDIX 2 MASTER TABLE B WITH THEMES AND EXTRACTS**

This and the next appendix present one of the Master Tables with the extracts listed under each theme. I have abbreviated some of the extracts because of their length.

(All tables are available to view on request.)

### **Master Table B: From Going to Meeting for the First time to Becoming a Member**

#### **B1.1 Knowledge of Quakers prior to First Meeting for Worship**

I think I probably knew the guy on the oats package (Trevor I.37).

I was generally aware of the pacifist testimony. Probably not too much of the others (Trevor I.185). (Trevor I.191)

No I didn't know anything about them [Quakers] I thought it was [laugh] the porridge oats (Andrea I.492).

Oh yes my sister went to Quaker boarding school ... in Y in Z. So I did think to myself yes. So I did think to myself I think as a teenager if I was ever going to be religious again I would go to the Quakers (Linda I.593-599)

Because I just got such good vibes from the school and –s' experience of it. It's what she said about them. I mean there were some, getting back to the class [laughter] thing, there is a bit of a problem with most Quaker schools are very, you know ... but still yes they're very good (Linda I.603-606).

Just a little bit about peace and equality...and they did quite a lot of radical sort of work in the developing world (Linda I.626-630).

And then I don't know why really. I just wandered up here on Sunday; and thought I'll try it out. And see what it's like. I think one of the things I liked about with the first of

the two ministers is that we argued. And one of the things I didn't like with the next one was that what he said was how it was. And I did a bit of reading about Quakers and thought, you know, it's a thoughtful way of life that puts the responsibility on you. Which is hard. But but what I want. I don't like being, and maybe not a good reason, I don't like being told particularly what I should think (Shirley I.96-102).

Yes I went to this group and I met somebody there who was a Quaker and I knew had this once or twice with other people I knew immediately that we were meant to meet there was some reason why we had met but I didn't know anything about Quakers and I got talking to, her name is E. and... and she said she was a Quaker and I sort of said that was interesting what do they do? [Laughter.] And she said she said what she liked about it was the fact that nobody was telling you what to believe (Gillian I.54-60).

... blessed since I was at University to have my closest person, my closest friend who is Well actually now dealing with terminal cancer. Tricky. And she is adopted and grew up in a Quaker family ...I mean a big Quaker family and I know I loved that extended family now (Joy I.36-38)

I picked up little bits (about Quakers). Here and there or if I had seen something in the paper or seen something in a magazine, I'd have been more interested. But it was wasn't so much the history it was the here and now. It was the way of life. Pause. So, yes, I'd really from the first going to D... I started to have some very deep, detailed conversations with people (Joy I.252-255).

... my grandfather's best friend was a Quaker. I had met them when, when I was 11 and I knew what they stood for and I knew that he was a conscientious objector (Rosemary I.731-732).

I knew something about it. I was told about it by someone I met at, on a counselling training course (Rosemary I.58)

So I had the Quaker relatives, and I thought they talked to each other in a funny way because sometimes American Quakers use thee (Susan I.185-186).

When we visited our relatives, it was full of Quaker this and that and they were very heavily involved with different projects and activities which I always thought was great, but I thought, you know, Quakerism didn't actually, itself, mean anything to me until I started looking at age 12 and then, at age 12 I quickly dropped the research because I became fascinated with this direct, what I perceived to be a direct form of religion. And trying to work out what was religious about it. Like I say, I sort of figured it out. I also figured out I didn't want to be a member (Susan I.189-195).

my grandmother had kind of mentioned it (Quaker ancestors), but it hadn't impacted on me (Caroline I.82).

None of my family had been Quaker, I mean, my known family other than the family history. So there was all this kind of knowledge of Quakerism, of, of Quakers in the, in the sort of background. And I'd been an Anglican when I was a teenager (Caroline I.84-86).

And we, one of the things we did, we arranged a march between Greenham Common and Menwith Hill listening station in Yorkshire. ... And my job was finding the places where we could stay overnight. And, of course, a lot of those places were Quaker meeting houses. So that got sort of refreshed, the idea that there were such things as Quakers. ... And it turned out, which I'd only kind of vaguely new, but it turned out that I had masses of Quaker ancestors. (Caroline I.70-78)

She (Grandmother) took us occasionally several times from probably about the age



5 to about the age 8 or nine. But, and we didn't like it, unsurprisingly, but we did, she did also take us to the residential gatherings, the summer gatherings. And they were great. And they had amazing children's programs and we loved it. And we kept on wanting to go back whenever there was a new one. (Matthew I.59-62)

He (Father) decided to try, he wanted to try the Quakers. ... and started taking us all along. And it was all him. I don't think my mother had any particular views one way or another but she went along with him because, you know, wives did on those days (Andrew I.62-65)

There was one guy in particular who would, who was still living then who I'd met when I was first went to the meeting. I forgot to mention him ... who had been a, a conscientious objector in World War I. And, and had been sentenced to be shot. ... And, yes, that had a big, he had a big sort of, his story had a big impact on me... I would have been 10, I think. Yes. Nine or 10. (Andrew I.192-199).

I must have known there was a stronger connection between the Quaker way and peace work and international work than anything I'd experienced in Methodism.

Whereas I, I doubt whether I knew the traditional Quaker testimony on peace. It was something I was to discover. (Phillip I.77-80)

They (Quakers) conform to being nonconformist (Phillip I.91)

## **B1.2 The First Meeting for Worship**

### **B1.2.1 The Curious Group**

I was actually at the conference of the Christian Socialist Society in Canterbury. And I'd developed a or I'd been in a relationship with a young woman who wanted to go to a Quaker meeting. And I had a car and she didn't. So I gave her a lift, I think it's a fair summary to say that the relationship didn't work out but the experience of a Quaker meeting was quite dramatic. (Trevor I.14-17)

And I thought that this is something I should at least follow up. I'm not sure that I wouldn't describe myself as being sort of converted on the spot but I think it spoke to the discomfort that I'd felt all these services that were just filled with words. Silence seemed such a good idea. (Trevor I.57-59)

There was[ministry] yes. In fact I remember very vividly that somebody got up and quoted what's attributed to Teresa of Avila and quoted what's attributed 'God has no hands but ours'. That was actually something that struck me because I think something that you know the sense of you know we are called to do things in this world we don't just pray to God we have to do it ourselves (Trevor I.61-64).

We had to work out how we were going to meet up for practising (learning to play Squash) in between sessions. And the black woman who I had paired off with said well I can't come on Sunday morning because I go to Quaker meeting. And I said oh I've never been to a Quaker meeting can I come and see what it's like? Laugh. Quite extraordinary. (Andrea I.55-58)

And then I don't know why really. I just wandered up here (short walk from her home) on Sunday; and thought I'll try it out. And see what it's like, having had positive and negative experiences of other churches. (Shirley I.96-97)

I went to this group (the Teilhard de Chardin Society) and I met somebody there who

was a Quaker and I had this once or twice with other people I knew immediately that we were meant to meet there was some reason why we had met but I didn't know anything about Quakers ... and she said she was a Quaker and I sort of said that was interesting what do they do? [Laughter.] And she said she said what she liked about it was the fact that nobody was telling you what to believe (I.54-60). She said she went to ... Meeting which was up the road from me. So I said okay, can I come along and I did (Gillian I.62-66).

At the age of 12, in contact with Quaker relatives who lived a long way away, but with parents who were 'orthodox atheists' became interested in researching religion and visited church services. She then went of her own volition to the local Quaker Meeting (Susan I.27-33; 192-195) I went with a neighbour because I needed a ride...But she didn't have any influence...She was a Friend but she didn't have any influence...She just took me (Susan I.131-137).

After the Canterbury summer gathering with a group of friends on a Quaker meeting crawl round London to see which were best (Matthew I.65-66; 83-85);

And I went to Quaker camp which monthly meeting had every year which was a community. I went to that at least, I certainly went to it when I was at the end of the year when I did my PGCE because it was in the Swansea Valley. (Andrew I.253-255)

I never went to meeting in London or where I was, lived in Mill Hill for the first year and then I still don't really know where my nearest meeting would have been... I did go, probably when my father was at home and with my mum at Christmas I would have gone (Andrew I.181-184)

And, but yes it was her (new girl friend's) curiosity. And I suppose, yeah, I'd been living in ... for a few years without, again I think I might've once been at ... meeting

with a previous girlfriend who was also curious .... And that was just a one-off, you know. [Pause] But when I went with ... to ... Meeting, yes, she was very taken with it. And wanted to go again. Not necessarily, you know, this is for me and I, and I suppose I did too, you know. It was like that sort of cliché like coming back home or whatever. It was, they were very welcoming to us. (Andrew I.192-199)

And it was an invitation from the Quakers to go to a midweek evening meeting. Whether it was some special meeting in the year, I can't remember now, but I thought I would go. I have to say I was dissatisfied at that time with, with Methodism. Though I don't think I went with any necessary intentions of finding out, I didn't, what Quakers were about. I just went. I just knew that that was the form of worship I wanted. (Phillip I.30-34)

### **B1.2.2 The Crisis Resolvers**

Oh yes my sister went to Quaker boarding school .... So I did think to myself yes. So I did think to myself I think as a teenager if I was ever going to be religious again I would go to the Quakers (I.593-599)... And then I came back here when I was 25 and I had, you know. Again I didn't sort of really feel that I belonged but you you know, you can cope with that in London ... you can belong to the not belonging (Linda I.143-146).

I went as a result of an invitation. But built on much discussion prior to that (I.47-55). my closest friend ... grew up in a Quaker family .... I mean a big Quaker family and I know I loved that extended family now (I.36-40). So, yes when I went along to [... Meeting] I thought this is right. And then it was a time when there was a bit of a crisis in my life and I think it came at the right time (Joy I.90-93).

Because of principles of, I felt a kinship to it ... I knew something about it. I was told about it by someone I met at, on a counselling training course. (Rosemary I.58)

I went to my own local meeting [**John...** On your tod?] Yes! [**John...** on your own initiative?] Yes! (Rosemary I.61-65)

Yes. I felt I had been led, not to Quakers but to God ... And it didn't matter where I fitted so long as I found a place to fit. (Rosemary I.78-80)

I think I was in a very depressed place at the time. And I had tried the Brahma Kumaris and took and I'd worked with them for a few years on meditation. And I'd learned quite a lot about meditation and about sitting and waiting to listen. They became, as I got familiar with them I realised they were quite hierarchical so that that disillusioned me. (Rosemary I.636-639).

...something really dreadful happened ..., I've been through psychotherapy and all sorts of things in the past, but I just suddenly thought I shall go to Quaker meeting (Caroline I.94-97).

### **B1.3 Reported Experience of the First Meeting**

#### **B1.3.1 The Curious Group**

The experience of a Quaker Meeting was quite dramatic (Trevor I.17).

I came back to London and found out where my nearest Quaker meeting was which was actually very nearby where I was living at the time. In fact I could walk there quite comfortably. So I started attending (Trevor I.85-87).

... and I never looked back after that. I mean I felt immediately at home, big welcome (Andrea I.60).

What I did was almost in my first in Quakers was because experiential faith was such an important concept I took all the dogma that I'd ever been taught, all the creed all the the things in the book of common prayer I've forgotten what they're called and looked at each of them and said can I believe is this part of my experience and can I

believe it. And I threw out lots and lots of stuff. I sort of retained all the stuff that I felt I had experienced and that's and that became my faith. You know. Those became my beliefs. Laugh (Andrea I.841-846).

They had it all set up for attenders and they had special meetings that we could learn how to become a Quaker. I was given a book list and lots of help and sent off to an enquirers meeting and all the rest of it and I just knew that that was the place for me (Andrea I.61-63).

So I came up here and the it was around Christmas and a fantastic Friend called ... who's surname has now escaped me, he died just a few weeks later, but he stood up and gave this lovely Ministry about the Lord's prayer and said he'd really didn't like some bits of it and he felt it should be rewritten and and said what he thought. And it was exactly what I thought. I thought that's wonderful. I mean it was about not lead us not into temptation you know and it was why why should you not; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive others but actually I should like to be forgiven a little better than that! You know, those were the two bits he was arguing with (Shirley I.102-110).

That's that was my first Quaker meeting that was. I've been there ever since you know, Yes...1978. (Gillian I.62-66).

I found them very welcoming ... I didn't have a great experience but I discovered that the basic belief of Quakers is that the light of God is in everybody and but that basically I was already a Quaker in a sense. And you know I mean six months later I joined and became a member (Gillian I.68-72)

I did find it (the silence) almost tangible (Gillian I.273).

it's a collective feeling and it's a collective silence. Yes yes (Gillian I.277).

[Re. St Thérèse of Lisieux – an experience after attending their first Meeting for Worship]

Anyway I'd never heard of this Saint and I was sort of lead, I appeared to be led into the experience whereby I met two lots of people, who had sat in spiritualist circles, which is what some people call séances, and St Thérèse had come through mediums and given addresses, given talks and it was as if I was you know led to these two lots of people completely separate lots of people and I also had one or two experiences which connected with St Thérèse, who I'd never heard of. Anyway the upshot of all this was quite a long story. But the upshot of all this was that because I didn't I didn't ,you know, she was obviously very Christ orientated and I had I had an inspiration I had I came to an understanding about Christ and the Cross and all this sort of stuff, which has quite profoundly affected my thinking. One of the reasons I joined The Society of Friends was because I didn't have to be a Christian. And I didn't have to believe in the dying for our sins and all this stuff which I still don't believe in a way in a way it's sometimes interpreted but this experience gave me a completely new different insight into what he, what I believe he was about because basically to manifest the power of love. So I would say I would say I was a Christian now in that but not not in the sort of orthodox way. (Gillian I.328-341)

I quickly dropped the research (into religion) after going to the local Quaker Meeting because I became fascinated with this direct, what I perceived to be a direct form of religion. And trying to work out what was religious about it (Susan I.191-195).

So I thought I'm comfortable here I'm going to figure out what religion is because and I found it difficult to sit still so I thought and I thought this was good self-discipline [Laughter laughter] (Susan I.106-112)

Technically when I was a small child and I went with my grandmother's meeting. And that was boring. And you know, and they were just sitting there and they're not doing anything (Matthew I.56-57)

But it was after the 1999 Canterbury summer gathering that I went to my first meeting of my own volition (Matthew I.65-66).

Basically that, that had been, that summer gathering at Canterbury had been the best, the best of them all and I'd had such a good experience and felt so close to the other part, the other participants in the children's program and I was, and I was, and I was very sad to have lost everything that was there. And so I, and went to meeting to try to get some of it back. (Matthew-I.88-92)

It was something about the, the closeness and love and, and connection that was there in a Quaker meeting. (Matthew I.99-100)

But then, because we were exploring and seeing which of the ones in London was best and we did a certain amount of, sort of Quaker meeting crawl, over the course of a few months (Matthew I.83-85).

At that stage I think my experience of meeting was more individually focused... And I don't think it was so connected, I don't think it was very connected to the meeting at all. And in fact when I, when I was first going to Quakers I would [pause] I'd have quite a similar experience in every, in every meeting I went to even though I was going to lots of different meetings. And, and I was more, I, I was certainly more internally programmed, I suppose, because one of the things that had been, you know, advised to me at the, at the Canterbury gathering was the, you know, a way of, a way of resolving the whole problem of what do you, you know, what you do in meeting? How do you stop your thoughts running around with you? Would you



concentrate just, just start by concentrating on your breathing. Just, just notice what's happening there. And I do that and I was, and that would develop into sort of sending out my love to everyone, is the way I put it. And that was, and that would take, and that would take up, that would take up all the time and that would be fine (Matthew I.102-115).

the depth of the worship and how quickly and deeply I would settle into, into worship and was, was better and stronger there (Young Friends General Meeting) than in other, than in other Quaker meetings (Matthew I.350-352)

But when I went with ... to ... meeting, yes, she was very taken with it. And wanted to go again. Not necessarily, you know, this is for me and I, and I suppose I did too, you know. It was like that sort of cliché like coming back home or whatever. It was, they were very welcoming to us. (Andrew I.317-320)

I just knew that that was the form of worship I wanted. That suited my character. I just had no doubt about it. It was beautiful, absolutely beautiful. (Phillip I.33-35)

There was Ministry because, unbelievably, I ministered. (Phillip I.41)

I don't remember anything more of the meeting, except knowing that I felt absolutely at home... in the sense of, not with the people, whom, well, either I knew or didn't know but because the atmosphere was right. I wasn't being told what to do. So you see I am a real nonconformist [laugh]. (Phillip I.49-54)

### **B1.3.2 The Crisis Resolvers Group**

I went to various meetings in ... because I moved here about 25 years ago ... and I can't remember which is my first meeting (I.118-115). I don't think it was an extremely profound experience. But I did feel very, quite comfortable there. And I felt I was with the right people (Linda I.119-120).

And I thought, this is it ... it (an open day at a meeting) included a meeting for worship at the beginning and the end... And lots of speakers and discussion in between... I went as a result of an invitation. But built on much discussion prior to that (Joy I.47-55).

There was a bit of a crisis in my life and I think it came at the right time (Joy I.90-93).

**[John ...** you said this is what I like. Yes?.] I didn't even think like. It was a sort of recognition. Deeper than like. **[John... Yes. You were quite moved in that silence?]**

Oh Yes! Yes! And when Gerald Priestland, isn't it who talks about coming home, well it was like that for me. Very immediate. (Joy I.218-223)

It was the same as I would have felt as if I had gone anywhere for the first time. And I wasn't sure. And I was the outsider... you think everyone else there is a local and you're the only one who's never been in there before. And they're expecting something to happen on on a certain time and I won't be knowing... It was quite tense (Rosemary I.44-53).

it's got nothing to do with either a welcome or not a welcome. No! **[John... It had very little to do with the people there or nothing to do with the people there]** No!

**[John... Had it something to do with the silence that was created?]** Yes! **[John...**

Can you say more? You said a very positive yes then.] Yes I'd really got fed up with the Church of England and all this standing up and sitting down and praying and singing and distraction, distraction, distraction. You couldn't, you couldn't hear anything coming to you. From that. Not for me. It didn't, singing and standing up and down and the repetitive, you know, the creed and all, you know, the repetition. It, it didn't do it for me. And [pause] I I think I felt that some people are led in different directions. Mine (leading) was to listen and to see and to work on what was given to

me which was imagery. That, that was what I was supposed to work with (Rosemary I.569-585).

So I went to the Quaker meeting, and immediately liked it (Caroline) I.104)

### **B1.4 Becoming a Member**

#### The Curious Group

And I think fairly rapidly I came to the conclusion that this was the place I wanted to be. So I applied for membership (Trevor I.89-90)

I'm not one of those people who sort of trips around saying that I'll think about it. The sort of ten-year attender(Trevor I.96-97).

#### **The Visit**

It [The visit] seemed fairly straightforward (Trevor I.117).

If [the visit] had been a bit traumatic I think I would have remembered (Trevor I.126).

And people who had been attenders for a long time and really work for the meeting and so on there isn't any reason why they shouldn't be seen as Quakers. And I think a lot of people feel like that. I mean, to me my membership was tremendously important but there are lots of people who feel that just being an attender is sufficient (Andrea I.1038-1042).

#### **The Visit**

I was visited...I felt they didn't really understand me at all laughter. Or or I felt that they were inexperienced and did not know how to ask questions and weren't getting to the bottom of why I was pause and I was pause reluctant to tell them about my near death experience because pause there were lots of people in Quakers who felt that you should not talk about psychic experiences and you shouldn't you know that Quakers were here and now people who did things and you didn't think about the afterlife and so on (Andrea I.311-318).

I applied for membership last summer...and I think it came through in January this year... so some administrative hitches [Laughter] (Shirley I.32-36)

I had been coming for 15 years nearly 15 years at that point so I really felt that I absolutely had no right to complain [Laughter] (Shirley I.40-1).

The decision to apply was the important thing and it was because [of what] people had said I was confident that I would be accepted ... It was like living with someone for years and years and years and then for some reason going through a form of marriage. So it didn't really feel, it felt like a formality and therefore I didn't mind the wait at all (Shirley I.43-46).

I just wrote a short application (Shirley I.50)

### **The Visit**

We just sat and had some coffee together and a chat. They were people I knew... It was interesting exploring different people's approaches or feelings about being a Quaker where they were with the theists, non-theists and so on. I mean it was a very, it was very interesting. I enjoyed it (Shirley I.52-56).

Basically I was already a Quaker in a sense. And you know I mean six months later I joined and became a member (Gillian I.71-72).

Well personally not (no difference between members and attenders), but they (members) can do things. Well I suppose it's a sort of commitment but I find it very puzzling that I mean we have attenders in our and one particular one who has been coming for years and very much involved with the meeting and donates money to the meeting but she doesn't want to join. And I but I mean to all intents and purposes she is she is a member. You know so I think it's a bit a bit I think it's a bit a slightly artificial distinction I think in a way (Gillian I.93-97).

I tend to be a joiner you know I tend to join things. Well, the only thing I can think that it's I mean people it's like a marriage isn't it. You know, I mean people get married they, some people lived together for years it's ... and don't bother but they're still committed ... They're in a relationship you know (Gillian I.99-105).

I think you write a letter didn't you (to apply for membership)... Yes. Yes. It wasn't an essay... yes ... I don't think I would have gone into all the spiritualist bit though (Gillian I.405-411).

### **The visit**

That was very nice yes... I didn't feel I was being grilled no. I felt that it was, this is to make sure that I understood what I was going to get myself into... Yes. I don't remember any sort of any really searching questions. I mean it was such a long time ago now. I think somebody did ask if I believed in Christianity. But it didn't matter. [Laugh]. I didn't then ... I wasn't offended. I think I said that I thought Jesus was a good chap. [Laughter]. You know and that I believed in his teachings but I didn't believe in all that stuff. You know (Gillian I.419-428).

I'd never joined through all this time because of the continued reluctance to get involved in anything that was institutionalised (Susan I.879-880)

Yes I was already committed. I was a committed friend and I just didn't want to be a member (Susan I.888).

There was a very vicious, nasty attack that did almost kill me and one of the reasons for the attack was that I didn't fight back. And this was a Quaker thing (Susan I.893-894.).

When our son was born, was born I stopped going to meeting... Who sent me back? It was the priest I saw. I said my Quakerism has collapsed. I saw your boss on the telly. I want to find out about Christianity. [Laughter.] ... And I thought he was going to try and say come in and join us and worship with us but no, he said, go back to Quaker meeting. He said what I find is people normally retain their religious convictions, even if they've been damaged and you might find it very helpful. And of course, I went to Y Meeting and they are brilliant (Susan I.1021-1031).

But the other thing that happened at the end of that meeting was that he gave me a blessing. [Pause]. And that's where the shock happened. Quakers don't do priests.

Quakers don't do blessings. What was this? And it was unmistakable what this was...It really [pause] and so I staggered home after that (Susan I.1093-1097).

But what is this Christianity thing? And eventually I knew Aaah! Here's something interesting. What was I going to do? I'm Quaker. Quakers don't do liturgy, priests, prayers any of that stuff. Prayers, maybe but that's kind of Christian. What do I do? So I went looking for help. And I went to a lot of churches. I was drawn to them in the same way that CS Lewis was in the run-up to his conversion (Susan I.1116-1119).

So here was a couple in which she was Quaker and became Anglican and he was Anglican and became Quaker. To cut a long story short they're my godparents.

[Laughter laughter] Because I knew I had to get baptised ... And I thought, boy, it took me a while to take that on board. [They] were able to have theologies that successfully combined Quakerism with Anglicanism. I did eventually meet with ... and he went the other way. He started Quaker and became Anglican. ... (Susan I.1167-1187).

I knew I needed to become baptised and then, I thought, and I need to apply for membership in the religious society of friends. ... Now that I'm a grown-up too, and I hadn't been paying into schedule or anything, I had just been attending, so I thought that's not right. And I thought about it long and hard and I thought about the theology and I agreed with everything that ... said ..., I got baptised in the church, in the neighbourhood church Susan (I.1188-1196).

And it was the third happiest day of my life; after getting married and giving birth was being baptised. That was just the most beautiful service. Well, of course, I applied ... for membership, saying in the very first sentence I am applying for membership in the Religious Society of Friends and I'm preparing for baptism into the Church of

England. (Susan I.1203-1207).

### **The Visit**

But you know and then we had the visit and they came back with their report. They weren't sure at this point. ... But they did let me in. [Laughter]... They, I don't remember the exact words but I didn't get a yes you're welcome... They wanted to think about it or something like that. And I don't think I had a second visit... But it wasn't just taken for granted... And then eventually it happened between baptism, which was the 6th February... And Easter where I got confirmed. I didn't want baptism, confirmation at the same time. (Susan I.1211-1232).

I had a good overseer, who did, who did her job as she's meant to do in Faith and Practice and, and, you know, asked me had I considered. And it's something where I had, I'd been aware, yes, obviously completely aware of membership and it's something that, that I'd thought about, but never really sufficiently strongly. There wasn't a sufficiently strong, strong pull and so I think having that, that external impetus which forced, which forced me to respond to the question and, and say yes or no. Have I, have I going to be doing this? Was very helpful now (Matthew I.42-47).

I joined about, I joined six years after I started going (Matthew I.194).

You know, for example, I wouldn't have applied for membership when I did had I not been asked. And, then you could argue that that goes right into the whole issue of the, are our elders and overseers doing their sort of individualised pastoral and spiritual care (Matthew I.1632-1639)?

### **The Visit**

But also, I think that the, certainly my experience of having an interview was, it was absolutely fantastic and I kind of feel that everyone should be forced to have them as, like a Quaker MOT every five years because it's such a positive, is such a positive experience where you get to have a really, a really deep and open conversation. A somewhat vulnerable conversation about you and your spiritual journey and where you've got to. And have you got to a place which is a Quaker place? And, and it's great and it's, and I haven't had a conversation like it, or planned a conversation like that before or since (Matthew I.1456-1462)

...it was quite a gradual, you know we first went to ... meeting in 1989 and it took six years, you know. And it wasn't really my initiative. I would have probably been happy to carry on being an attender. I, I, it was more her idea because we jointly applied for membership and I'm not sure we really should have been allowed to. (Andrew I.423-426).

It (joining), it was an important step at the time. But I can't say, it was, that my sense of myself as a Quaker was dramatically altered by my becoming a member (Andrew I.460-461)

Well I think it was important because I was making a [pause] a decision and a commitment which I'm not very good at making. ... You know, I never had plans for what I wanted to do with my life or my career or anything. I just sort of mooched along and things happened. [Laughter] And so I suppose that's the same, it doesn't sound very exciting but, in a way that is how Quakerism happened to me. (Andrew I.465-470)

### **The Visit**

It, I think it was just a, it wasn't very challenging. I don't remember it being very challenging. And that's, I felt slightly, not exactly dissatisfied but slightly quizzical about what was the point of that, you know. After it or was it just a formality really. Somebody had to say that they'd had a chat with me about, or asked as they met with us together [pause]. It was all very sort of, it was all quite cosy and, and affirming and nobody disagreed with anybody about anything (Andrew I.481-485)

No I think he was pretty much like, it felt like it was pretty much on the nod. (Andrew I.494-495)

Within, within the, definitely within the year I was a member. I transferred my membership, I transferred my deed of covenant for giving. It, it was all very quickly, very remarkably quickly done. (Phillip I.56-58)

And basically Quakers have no shell. Even in membership, taking people into



membership, we are very careful not to create, I would not say create barriers, but create requirements. I remember one membership was rejected on a temporary basis. But otherwise, on the whole, that is true, virtually anybody can join us. And I, maybe we're a bit too easy sometimes. (Phillip I.1176-1180)

### **The Visit**

I had two men came to me from ... meeting. And my wife. We both moved at the same time...[a joint application/] Oh yes. Yes. Yes. We both left Methodism and moved into Quakerism ... We were both dissatisfied with the way we were. (Phillip I.60-65)

I can remember the two people who turned up. And the stress that one of them placed, because one was senior and the other was junior, on supporting what was then monthly meeting, in other words, you're not disappearing into this little corner called .... There is a monthly meeting, I do remember that stress. And I didn't have to give them any assurances, for instance, about my peaceful or peace inclinations, because I was already a convinced pacifist. So it was, a very amicable visit, and yes, all right, everything went smoothly. (Phillip I.69-73)

### **The Crisis Responders Group**

But the reason I became a member is slightly boring. I've always had a bit of a commitment problem or I feel I don't quite belong anywhere (Linda I.120-122).

there was a big gap in my attendance at meeting because ... I had a few more difficulties in life. (Linda I.159-164).

then in recent years actually since I moved here, I went to a very tiny meeting [-] and I did sort of become aware that actually being such a small meeting was a big strain on people. It was a big strain on the members (Linda I.173-176).

I didn't know that actually you could only be the clerk and the treasurer if you were a member (Linda I.180-181).

And also you're supposed to be in membership in order to attend to represent the meeting you're supposed to be a member to go to area meeting (Linda I.188-189).

I thought I felt a bit guilty about this really because I thought well you know I'm

getting all this you know from Quakers and I haven't sort of like should I be contributing something (Linda I.191-193).

Quakerism seems like such a commitment and there's so much work to do. So I did sort of think well, I have more time and I can think about things more but you know I did feel a bit guilty about this. Members you know, a bit of responsibility on members (Linda I.202-205).

I didn't have a sort of great sort of like what a wonderful organisation and I must join. There was no kind of like Damascus sort of light there was no oh you know like because I still don't quite understand the point of membership. I slightly don't understand the point of membership, you see, because you don't always see what the difference is. But then there are these little things and also for me it was a case of well, there is no reason why I shouldn't join (Linda I.211-216).

And it's (i.e. class) not a reason not to join (Linda I.230).

Yes and also because there wasn't a reason not to and also because I it seemed important to other people. So I wanted to give back to them (Linda I.252-253).

Or its (marriage) like very it's the kind of a stamp of very boring respectability so yes so but yes I have to say that it does feel a bit like what people tell me marriage is like in that it feels different and you feel more that you belong [pause]...and that actually it's like people see you different as well (Linda I.1405-1407)

That is another reason why I joined because when people, when you tell people you go to Quaker meeting or you say you are a Quaker they then don't understand that you're not in membership so it feels a bit hypocritical. And it's a bit like you got a sort of double image or something like even though I mean it doesn't matter that much to me how people in the meeting see me I suppose but I have this sort of level of

commitment inside to Quakerism that I suppose people only saw when I joined. So that's... Or they sort of thought, I felt they sort of saw me slightly differently (Linda I.1411-1419)

I've always been dedicated and being in the voluntary sector and I suppose I would actually try to be well it depends I'm not sure whether you join a Quaker [Meeting] because you've got Quaker values or the other way round (Linda I.1441-1443)

Not a huge difference. Because I've been an attender for such a long time and I felt very committed anyway (Linda I.1768-1769)

I thought actually well I'll give something back because I thought yes (Linda I.1776-1777).

### **The Visit**

I mean it (the visit) was, it was quite interesting because I don't ever talk about my much about my experience of being a Quaker and its partly because I've had all the enthusiasm and newness like years ago (Linda I.1794-1795).

Okay that would be [pause] 24 years ago ... that I became a member ... [and] 2 ½ years [after first meeting for worship] (Joy I.29-33).

**[John...** Why not stay an attender?] I'm not like that.[Laughter. Laughter... I'm a joiner... Yes. Yes. Why would I not? But, no, I felt led. And I I wanted to be fully informed about what I was joining. So I attended meeting for learning and I, people were kind enough to offer to meet me.

I picked up little bits (about Quakers). Here and there or if I had seen something in the paper or seen something in a magazine, I'd have been more interested. But it was wasn't so much the history it was the here and now. It was the way of life.

Pause. So, yes, I'd really from the first going to D... I started to have some very deep, detailed conversations with people (Joy I.252-255).

And the welcoming visit after that. And the person, one of the people who visited me had already invited me to her home and I, I knew her quite, you know, a bit... I just wrote a short letter... Not even a page. I didn't go into depth I just said I would like to be considered... we appoint two friends to welcome the person... They come round to your home if they would like to come. I've done that to people and in fact the two people who welcomed me also live near where we used to live in ... and they came round. And, and like I knew them anyway but it was here because we are welcoming you... Yes oh yes we do that (welcome the new member on a Sunday) as well (Joy I.894-914).

Because I was leaving. I was leaving .... I became a member over there... So, I got there in 95 and I left in 2005. And it was in 2005 that I became a member... I wanted to, to be part of that meeting. Because they had, they had held me... Yes and they had held me in a way that I could not find over here... It was a very small meeting. There were rented premises... Initially they were, wait, seven attenders... Very intimate (Rosemary I.658- 676)

And also all, when we got together because it was so small, and there was no premises, no premises problem, there was no away days to organise, there was no nothing to organise.,,... But our meeting didn't do much. Except we did courses. All the time. We'd meet every other Thursday in somebody's house and we we would do courses. We did Hearts and Minds Prepared. We did Quaker, all sorts of courses we'd get from Yearly Meeting... Yes. And we discussed things. We wouldn't, it wasn't, which is what it tends to be ... here more, a therapy session. It was definitely a spiritual experience sharing (Rosemary I.697-705).

Yes. And how people managed to integrate it into what was happening to them. It was much more about how they were integrating it into their life. Than how their life

was a problem (Rosemary I.707-708).

Yes it was hard to make the decision to be a member. And it has made a difference.

It's like marriage. You could say that, you don't need to get married. You love somebody, you get a mortgage together and you have kids. But that verbal social, sort of visible, social comment of actually commitment creates a promise, that you, of commitment that you think okay. It comes at a price. You remind yourself that this is a rule you have accepted to live by. Going to the business meeting, not going to the park instead, you know. Not going out for a family lunch because it's a business meeting. There are commitments that you think, oh I'd rather not have done that, but there are commitments. Being, and the more that you're on it and the more that you're, you think I'm going to do this, the clearer you are to following what your gifts are in your life, you know. Whether you are actually using your, the things you've been given, whether you are a writer or a painter or a musician or you're a mother stop maybe that's what your calling is. Or a nurse. I think that [pause] I think as well that what I have thought and that might just come with age, and contemplation' is that even in the people that appear not to be committing there, their gifts to the world, it may be that they are. I just can't understand it. I, I I'm not as judgemental, I'm much more a, fear comes with age, doesn't it Yes it was hard to make the decision to be a member. And it has made a difference. It's like marriage. You could say that, you don't need to get married. You love somebody, you get a mortgage together and you have kids. But that verbal social, sort of visible, social comment of actually commitment creates a promise, that you, of commitment that you think okay. It comes at a price. You remind yourself that this is a rule you have accepted to live by. Going to the business meeting, not going to the park instead, you know. Not going out for a family lunch because it's a business meeting. There are commitments

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Whether you are actually using your, the things you've been given, whether you are a writer or a painter or a musician or you're a mother stop maybe that's what your calling is. Or a nurse. I think that [pause] I think as well that what I have thought and that might just come with age, and contemplation' is that even in the people that appear not to be committing there, their gifts to the world, it may be that they are. I just can't understand it. I, I I'm not as judgemental, I'm much more a, fear comes with age, doesn't it (Yes it was hard to make the decision to be a member. And it has made a difference. It's like marriage. You could say that, you don't need to get married. You love somebody, you get a mortgage together and you have kids. But that verbal social, sort of visible, social comment of actually commitment creates a promise, that you, of commitment that you think okay. It comes at a price. You remind yourself that this is a rule you have accepted to live by. Going to the business meeting, not going to the park instead, you know. Not going out for a family lunch because it's a business meeting. There are commitments that you think, oh I'd rather not have done that, but there are commitments. Being, and the more that you're on it and the more that you're, you think I'm going to do this, the clearer you are to following what your gifts are in your life, you know. Whether you are actually using your, the things you've been given, whether you are a writer or a painter or a musician or you're a mother stop maybe that's what your calling is. Or a nurse. I think that [pause] I think as well that what I have thought and that might just come with age, and contemplation' is that even in the people that appear not to be committing there, their gifts to the world, it may be that they are. I just can't

understand it. I, I I'm not as judgemental, I'm much more a, fear comes with age, doesn't it? (Rosemary I.1961-1975)

### **The Visit**

*[John]* Did two people come and visit you to ask you about why you wanted to join?

Yes. *[John... ... Or was it just a small formality because you were already well-known there?]*. Yes... And also all, when we got together because it was so small, and there was no premises, no premises problem, there was no away days to organise, there was no nothing to organise. (Rosemary I.690-698)

I had a big prompt as to why I first went to meeting, but becoming a member just seemed to be the natural thing to do once I got to know people and felt at home in the meeting and learnt something about Quakerism other than what I did know during the two years, I think the two or three years between when I first went and when I joined. So during that time I learnt more about Quakerism and, and was absolutely sure it was for me. And I wanted to contribute to the life of the meeting. In a, you know, committed way (Caroline I.44-49).

I think it takes a bit of time to know what membership is. Doesn't it? You, you go as an attender and you know, you have these, whatever experiences you have, and I think, I, it was when people began to say to me Have you thought about *[laughter]* you know. Have you ... Yes, people did ask, yes. Not very many and not very insistently but it kind of sowed the seed. But then I began to understand how it works (Caroline I.174-179)

## APPENDIX 3: MASTER TABLE E

### Interviewees' Positive and Negative Reflections on Quakers and Quakerism

#### Positive and neutral reflections

##### Being a Quaker

I very much, I very much warm to the, to the description of Quakerism as primitive Christianity revived. ... I remember having to describe Quakers in, in sort of two minutes or 30 seconds as part of job interview once and I, and I sort of said it's people trying to live in a simple in and loving way of the first Christians (Trevor I.468-471)

If one's Quaker faith is really part of oneself it just infuses everything you do (Trevor I.811-812).

Well it's my whole life. And it's mainly what I do. And It's me [laugh] (Andrea I.1117).

It [Meeting] gives me a great sense of, despite me saying I don't feel I always belong it gives me a great sense of belonging of structure of safety and of security of...identity yes. You know like this is what life's about. That you know that yes it is sort of the highlight of my week really. Yes (Linda I.1622-1626).

I think basically, you know, at a sort of fundamental level it's (being a Quaker) a huge responsibility and a huge gift (Shirley I.1065-1066).

It's (being a Quaker) made me more thoughtful, certainly made me more accepting of myself and my shortcomings and therefore it's easier to try and do something about them. It's made me accept that [pause] even though I, experiences have meant that I really can't deal with some aspects of spirituality that's okay. I can, maybe I'll change and maybe I won't but, I think it's it's that kind of acceptance of yourself the way you are and [Pause] It's it's giving you that grounded feeling from which you can grow and change and that effects all of your life. [Laugh] (Shirley I.1146-1151).

Gosh. Pause. Pause. That's very difficult to say because you don't know what would have happened if I hadn't been in the Quakers. But, it's very difficult to come up with anything concrete but I think that it has enabled me to to follow my own path. I keep going on about this but it's been a a vehicle. Pause. It's given me the security I suppose I I find it's this very difficult to put into words to follow my own path and yet I feel I belong somewhere. I mean I can't say that you know I'd done this because I belong to the Quakers I might have done it anyway. (Gillian I.1822-1827)

Well it's not only about worship in meeting for worship. It's just worship in life. And it's about being open to the spirit... In everything I do. I'm not always. But I would want to be. Because my life would be the better for it (Joy I.725-729).



I hope it's made my life more productive and more valuable to other people and to myself. I hope I live better because of it (Joy I.1112-1113).

And the emphasis is very much on it's your activity not our activity that's going to make anything happen. If you are a Quaker it is down to you to be active... And we will support you. But don't say it's Quakers that are doing it. (Rosemary A31-39)

In every way. Totally...It's a rulebook to live by... Yes. It's a blueprint isn't it (Rosemary I.1878-1882)?

But I also found there (belonging to her first Meeting), something that I could understand and work with and agreed with. And so the commitment goes very deep and it hasn't, very little to do with, which meeting I go to (Susan I.2670-2672).

[My current Meeting] has been wonderful, yes. ... has helped from the sort of membership side and wanting to be part of this particular meeting [pause] more because I feel I'm with like-minded people. It's in my comfort zone. It's unprogrammed. It's the kind of Quakerism that, it's, it seems right for me. The action, doing stuff on [indistinct secrecy?] and refugees and stuff like that, it's all stuff, it's really important. It's great they're doing things. So yes Quaker meeting has done a lot for me but the underlying religious or spiritual level, I don't think much has changed (Susan I.2665-2674).

Why? Oh I'm a fixture. [Laughter] I'm a Quaker for life. (Caroline I.1089)

why I want to sort of maint, retain and maintain the Quaker, the Christian end of Quakers is because everything that Quakerism is started and came from Christian origins and foundations and insights. And it seems, and it seems appalling to, to, to throw those all away (Matthew I.482-484).

I think I've become more conservative as regards Quakerism and the nature and the, sort of, British Quakerism (Matthew I.1358-1359).

It's only more recently that I've had a more, a more sort of sense of a, of a, of a more important and passionate commitment.(Andrew I.472-473).

I think that that sense of, of integrating is something that I've, I have more of now (Andrew I.538-539).

But, as far as the Quaker thing was concerned I, I would, I wouldn't have been a Quaker if it hadn't been for his (father's) interest even though he had gone a very long way, really, from that (Andrew I.103-105).

I don't know how many, how much fewer friends there are than there were in the mid-90s but probably there's been a further drop-off in membership and attenders. So, I think that must be just related to the increasing secularisation and materialism of our society which sounds rather gloomy and pessimistic, but can't really get away from that as the sort of, kind of core of it. (Andrew I.1988-1992)

But it was Quakers that opened up the world for me. That world. By moving into the Quaker way. I couldn't be the person I am now except that I became a

Quaker, back in 1966 or 66, 67 something like that. No. 76 or 77. Mustn't extend it too far back. (Phillip I.656-658)

Yes. I am the person I am but being in the Quaker ethos has cemented that. In other words I am the person I am now because I found Quakers. But if I had struggled without them, or without the ethos that they provide, I don't know where I would be. But having become, having found Quakers and become a Quaker, that is absolutely fundamental to my life... While I've come this way. I found Quakers, by the grace of God. And I'm very thankful for it. (Phillip I.1111-1118)

### **Joining the Religious Society of Friends**

And I think fairly rapidly I came to the conclusion that this was the place I wanted to be. So I applied for membership (Trevor I.89-90)

and I never looked back after that (First Meeting for Worship). I mean I felt immediately at home, big welcome (Andrea I.60).

They had it all set up for attenders and they had special meetings that we could learn how to become a Quaker. I was given a book list and lots of help and sent off to an enquirers meeting and all the rest of it and I just knew that that was the place for me (Andrea I.61-63).

Well she was very feminist and she was very conscious of being able to be black and be accepted in Quakers and what she put over to me was that idea of acceptance by Quakers of all people and that there was that of God in everyone. That was what she believed and therefore black people or gay people or whatever can all be accepted. And at that time that was very important to me (Andrea I.162-165).

soon after I went to --- Meeting I confessed that I was gay and the reaction was absolutely wonderful and was completely accepted and you know this idea of being that of God even though I was gay you know became very strong (Andrea I.396-399).

Well it's (Quakers) my whole life. And it's mainly what I do. And It's me [laugh] (Andrea I.1117).

My first meeting was 23 years ago I think. Yes. 23, 25 years ago. And I came into membership last year (Linda I.75-76).

Yes and also because there wasn't a reason not to and also because I it seemed important to other people. So I wanted to give back to them (Linda I.252-253).

And it's (i.e. class) not a reason not to join (Linda I.230).

That is another reason why I joined because when people, when you tell people you go to Quaker meeting or you say you are a Quaker they then don't understand that you're not in membership so it feels a bit hypocritical. And it's a bit like you got a sort of double image or something like even though I mean it doesn't matter that much to me how people in the meeting see me I suppose

but I have this sort of level of commitment inside to Quakerism that I suppose people only saw when I joined. So that's... Or they sort of thought, I felt they sort of saw me slightly differently (Linda I.1411-1419)

I've always been dedicated and being in the voluntary sector and I suppose I would actually try to be well it depends I'm not sure whether you join a Quaker [Meeting] because you've got Quaker values or the other way round (Linda I.1441-1443)

I had been coming for 15 years nearly 15 years at that point so I really felt that I absolutely had no right to complain (about delays in processing the application) [Laughter] (Shirley I.40-1).

The decision to apply was the important thing and it was because [of what] people had said I was confident that I would be accepted ... It was like living with someone for years and years and years and then for some reason going through a form of marriage. So it didn't really feel, it felt like a formality and therefore I didn't mind the wait at all (Shirley I.43-46).

Basically I was already a Quaker in a sense. And you know I mean six months later I joined and became a member (Gillian I.71-72).

I tend to be a joiner you know I tend to join things. Well, the only thing I can think that it's I mean people it's like a marriage isn't it. You know, I mean people get married they, some people lived together for years it's ... and don't bother but they're still committed ... They're in a relationship you know (Gillian I.99-105).

**[John...** Why not stay an attender?] I'm not like that.[Laughter. Laughter... I'm a joiner... Yes. Yes. Why would I not? But, no, I felt led. And I wanted to be fully informed about what I was joining. So I attended meeting for learning and I, people were kind enough to offer to meet me (Joy I.241-242).

Because I was leaving. I was leaving [another country]... I became a member over there... So, I got there in 95 and I left in 2005. And it was in 2005 that I became a member... I wanted to, to be part of that meeting. Because they had, they had held me... Yes and they had held me in a way that I could not find over here... It was a very small meeting [Rosemary had previously attended a British Quaker Meeting]. There were rented premises... Initially they were, wait, seven attenders...Very intimate (Rosemary I.658- 676)

I had been attending meeting since the age of 12(1967c.) ... and I, I attended as a non-Christian because I felt that the testimonies were a good basis on which to build a moral framework. And being a young adolescent, well first of all it started with reading James Frazer The Golden Bough and observing empirically that religion was, had more in common than in difference in different cultures and across history, and it was still around. And it didn't follow the model I'd been raised on which was Orthodox atheism (Susan I.27-33).

my mother's side of the family became Quaker. Except for my mother (Susan I.61-62).

I knew I needed to become baptised and then, I thought, and I need to apply for membership in the Religious Society of Friends. Because I can no longer just

take a free ride from this organisation that has provided me with so much over the years. Just in the same way that the church provides us with ordination, Quakerism has provided me with something and I have not been living up to my responsibility. Now that I'm a grown-up too, and I hadn't been paying into schedule or anything, I had just been attending, so I thought that's not right. And I thought about it long and hard and I thought about the theology and I agreed with everything that [two Quaker friends] said and they, I got baptised in the church, in the neighbourhood church (Susan I.1188-1196).

And it was the third happiest day of my life; after getting married and giving birth was being baptised. That was just the most beautiful service. Well, of course, I applied ... for membership, saying in the very first sentence I am applying for membership in the Religious Society of Friends and I'm preparing for baptism into the Church of England. (Res8 I.1203-1207).

I had a big prompt as to why I first went to meeting, but becoming a member just seemed to be the natural thing to do once I got to know people and felt at home in the meeting and learnt something about Quakerism other than what I did know during the two years, I think the two or three years between when I first went and when I joined. So during that time I learnt more about Quakerism and, and was absolutely sure it was for me. And I wanted to contribute to the life of the meeting. In a, you know, committed way (Caroline I.44-49).

She (Grandmother) took us occasionally several times from probably about the age 5 to about the age 8 or nine. But, and we didn't like it, unsurprisingly, but we did, she did also take us to the residential gatherings, the summer gatherings. And they were great. And they had amazing children's programs and we loved it. And we kept on wanting to go back whenever there was a new one. (Matthew I.59-62)

My parents decided when we were born that they'd, sort of let us decide for ourselves. And neither of them were religious at the time (Matthew I.144-145).

I had a good overseer, who did, who did her job as she's meant to do in Faith and Practice and, and, you know, asked me had I considered. And it's something where I had, I'd been aware, yes, obviously completely aware of membership and it's something that, that I'd thought about, but never really sufficiently strongly. There wasn't a sufficiently strong, strong pull and so I think having that, that external impetus which forced, which forced me to respond to the question and, and say yes or no. Have I, have I going to be doing this? Was very helpful now (Matthew I.42-47).

the later part of the University, particularly my final, my fourth and final year at university and ... beyond that I associated quite heavily with Quakers ... [and] through that fourth year that I acquired my membership (Matthew I.245-251).

... it was quite a gradual, you know we first went to ... meeting I mean I went to ... meeting in 1989 and it took six years, you know. And it wasn't really my initiative. I would have probably been happy to carry on being an attender. I, I, it was more her idea because we jointly applied for membership and I'm not sure we really should have been allowed to. (Andrew I.423-426)

I don't think, it wasn't a massive decision for me. It was like, well I, I am kind of here already and, and in a way I always have been (Andrew I.439-440).

It (joining), it was an important step at the time. But I can't say, it was, that my sense of myself as a Quaker was dramatically altered by my becoming a member (Andrew I.460-461)

Well I think it was important because I was making a [pause] a decision and a commitment which I'm not very good at making. ... You know, I never had plans for what I wanted to do with my life or my career or anything. I just sort of mooched along and things happened. [Laughter] And so I suppose that's the same, it doesn't sound very exciting but, in a way that is how Quakerism happened to me. (Andrew I.465-470)

... there were highlights that were influential in me becoming, feeling part of Quakers but I wouldn't call, describe them as spiritual highlights. (Andrew I.502-503)

Yes I think it was the activism. (Andrew I.512)

Within, within the, definitely within the year I was a member. I transferred my membership, I transferred my deed of covenant for giving. It, it was all very quickly, very remarkably quickly done. (Phillip I.56-58)

## The Visit

It [The visit] seemed fairly straightforward (Trevor I.117).

Yes I mean it (the visit) was, it was quite interesting because I don't ever talk about my much about my experience of being a Quaker and its partly because I've had all the enthusiasm and newness like years ago (Linda I.1794-1795).

We just sat and had some coffee together and a chat. They were people I knew... It was interesting exploring different people's approaches or feelings about being a Quaker where they were with the theists, non-theists and so on. I mean it was a a very, it was very interesting. I enjoyed it (Res4 I.52-56).

That (the visit) was very nice yes... I didn't feel I was being grilled no. I felt that it was, this is to make sure that I understood what I was going to get myself into... Yes. I don't remember any sort of any really searching questions. I mean it was such a long time ago now. I think somebody did ask if I believed in Christianity. But it didn't matter. [Laugh]. I didn't then ... I wasn't offended. I think I said that I thought Jesus was a good chap. [Laughter]. You know and that I believed in his teachings but I didn't believe in all that stuff. You know (Gillian I.419-428).

And the welcoming visit after that. And the person, one of the people who visited me had already invited me to her home and I, I knew her quite, you know, a bit... I just wrote a short letter... Not even a page. I didn't go into depth I just said I would like to be considered... we appoint two friends to welcome the person... They come round to your home if they would like to come. I've done that to people and in fact the two people who welcomed me also live near

where we used to live in ... and they came round. And, and like I knew them anyway but it was here because we are welcoming you... Yes (Joy I.894-914).

Well, of course, I applied ... for membership, saying in the very first sentence I am applying for membership in the religious Society of Friends and I'm preparing for baptism into the Church of England. [Laughter. Laughter.] Explained myself in the letter in a short way and ... But you know and then we had the visit and they came back with their report. They weren't sure at this point. ... They wanted to think about it or something like that. And I don't think I had a second visit... But it wasn't just taken for granted... ... And so they had a discussion, and I guess they thought about it and thought well, X could do it and Y could do it too, well, why not, kind of thing. But it did take a while. And then eventually it happened between baptism, which was the 6th February... And Easter where I got confirmed. I didn't want baptism, confirmation at the same time. (Susan I.1204-1232).

But also, I think that the, certainly my experience of having an interview was, it was absolutely fantastic and I kind of feel that everyone should be forced to have them as, like a Quaker MOT every five years because it's such a positive, is such a positive experience where you get to have a really, a really deep and open conversation. A somewhat vulnerable conversation about you and your spiritual journey and where you've got to. And have you got to a place which is a Quaker place? And, and it's great and it's, and I haven't had a conversation like it, or planned a conversation like that before or since (Matthew I.1456-1462)

I can remember the two people who turned up. And the stress that one of them placed, because one was senior and the other was junior, on supporting what was then monthly meeting, in other words, you're not disappearing into this little corner called .... There is a monthly meeting, I do remember that stress. And I didn't have to give them any assurances, for instance, about my peaceful or peace inclinations, because I was already a convinced pacifist. So it was, a very amicable visit, and yes, all right, everything went smoothly. (Phillip I.69-73)

### **The meaning and institution of membership**

Or its (marriage) like very it's the kind of a stamp of very boring respectability so yes so but yes I have to say that it does feel a bit like what people tell me marriage is like in that it feels different and you feel more that you belong [pause]...and that actually it's like people see you different as well (Linda I.1405-1407)

Not a huge difference. Because I've been an attender for such a long time and I felt very committed anyway (Linda I.1768-1769)

I thought actually well I'll give something back because I thought yes (Linda I.1776-1777).

The decision to apply was the important thing and it was because [of what] people had said I was confident that I would be accepted so I didn't really it was like living with someone for years and years and years and then for some reason going through a form of marriage (Shirley I.43-45).

Well personally not (no difference between members and attenders), but they (members) can do things. Well I suppose it's a sort of commitment but I find it

very puzzling that I mean we have attenders in our and one particular one who has been coming for years and very much involved with the meeting and donates money to the meeting but she doesn't want to join. And I but I mean to all intents and purposes she is she is a member. You know so I think it's a bit a bit I think it's a bit a slightly artificial distinction I think in a way (Gillian I.93-97).

Yes it was hard to make the decision to be a member. And it has made a difference. It's like marriage. You could say that, you don't need to get married. You love somebody, you get a mortgage together and you have kids. But that verbal social, sort of visible, social comment of actually commitment creates a promise, that you, of commitment that you think okay (Rosemary I.786-789).

So in terms of your research, there is no significant change about membership except taking more responsibility towards the life of the meeting and [pause] my, my role in, in, you know the schedule and stuff like that. Sitting on committees and helping the society instead of just Quakerism. [Pause] And all of this stuff I did in W... and of this stuff absolutely could not have been done without the Quaker underpinning (Susan I.1656-1660).

I think it takes a bit of time to know what membership is. Doesn't it? You, you go as an attender and you know, you have these, whatever experiences you have, and I think, I, it was when people began to say to me Have you thought about [laughter] you know. Have you ... Yes, people did ask, yes. Not very many and not very insistently but it kind of sowed the seed. But then I began to understand how it works (Caroline I.174-179)

So when I was applying for membership, then, one of my housemates, who might have described herself as spiritual but not religious, was quizzing me very hard about, about membership. And why, if you believe in equality, do you have this, this idea, this whole thing of membership? And the reason I said she was pushing me so hard was because I didn't and I couldn't give her a satisfactory answer. And, and so I was very, and so I was sort of very much against, I became a member, but I thought that it would probably be better if you didn't have membership. If you didn't have that, that two-stage hierarchy. I mean and I and I, I saw membership itself very much as oh yes, I didn't, the one, the one story and line I was going to give you and the question hasn't come up, which is that, you know, I sometimes [indistinct] as how I would describe membership, acquiring membership and I would say it was the biggest non-event of my life. And I don't mean that in a particularly facetious way. It was that, you know, I was, I was there and I was at the area meeting when they were deciding and I went out the room while they were deciding and I came back in and they said yes you know, you know congratulations we are accepting you into membership. And I felt nothing. And I thought that was, that was just right. You know, that what, the important bit is this inward, is the inward experience, the inward connection and that this is just an outward, an outward sign of it. It's like, it's like the marriage. You're, you know, you're, it's an outward recognition of something that already exists. So I was, you know and so and so, given that that was, that was the key bit of being a member, then needing, needing a separate category, I wasn't all, you know, having this process, and this process with the possibility of, you know, the rejection by the group, being a, a, you know, that being an issue. And now I'm more comfortable with it (Matthew I.1357-1380).

What is the limit of membership? [Pause] I'm uneasy, myself, [pause] I'm in two bits with that one. One is the, the atheist thing. And, you know, if, if you are self-describing as, as, full on, full on atheist, not agnostic, not non-theist or that itself is a whole other issue (Matthew I.1424-1426)

then I worry that there is, I worry that there is a whole dimension to the nature of the Quaker, of Quakerism that you're not, you're not acknowledging or experiencing or ready to accept or accepting. (Matthew I.1428-1430)

I think that a minimum, at a minimum I'd kind of want [pause] I'd want a willingness to continue seeking. Continue seeking the, the God, the religious element (Matthew I.1472-1473).

Stuart Masters, put the, talked about Quakers and Christianity in terms that he thought that the minimum people needed to need is to, you know, recognise and accept that all the core Quaker insights came out of a Christian framework. Which I think is fine (Matthew I.1482-1484).

There is, I think there is the fact that the difference between being a member and an attender is, is continuing to decline. And I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing (Matthew I.1592-1593).

So ultimately, what you want, what you want to do is you want to make sure that the people who are doing it are good people and the right people to be doing it. And the best way to do that is by knowing the people. And that being a member is sort of, you know, a proxy for, for their being in good standing (Matthew I.1608-1611).

The actual experience of membership, I'd, or the event of becoming a member was not a, an earthshattering thing. But the experience of membership, has been a transforming in a, in a sort of evolving rather than a sort of blinding revelatory way. It's been, it's been a process of finding, finding myself as a Quaker, I suppose, and feeling confident enough to make that, make a commitment and, and own up to it. Own it, Sorry. Own up to it sounds like a bad thing [laughter]. Own it. Yes. That's part of me. (Andrew I.2058-2064)

And basically Quakers have no shell. Even in membership, taking people into membership, we are very careful not to create, I would not say create barriers, but create requirements. I remember one membership was rejected on a temporary basis. But otherwise, on the whole, that is true, virtually anybody can join us. And I, maybe we're a bit too easy sometimes. (Phillip I.1176-1180)

### **Quaker theological concepts**

Perhaps of all the attractions of Quakerism it's non-creedal and you don't have to sign up to 'I believe'. I sign up to 'I trust' (Trevor I.263-266).

and now with this with the beautiful simplicity of Quakerism I can just hold them in the Light (Andrea I.793-794).

The Quaker idea that there are evil deeds but that there are no evil people is tremendously important to me (Andrea I.679-680).



I discovered that the basic belief of Quakers is that the light of God is in everybody and, but that basically I was already a Quaker in a sense (Gillian I.70-71).

One of the things that drew me to Quakers was that our life is communion. That's the thing (Joy I.643-644).

But I find that the Quakers are in search of spiritual truth which I didn't find in Church of England (Rosemary I.643-653).

A connection for [pause] between me and the light source. To feed me to do work . Make the connections to be led and to be guided (Rosemary I.1572-1573).

Well it was the absence of the symbolism, the hierarchy, the liturgy, overt forms of what would you call it affiliation... There was no sense of affiliation. It was about a personal conscience. And about collective action. Action is the key. (Susan I.200-212)

the non-dogmatic element, the fact that, there is no requirements on what you, on what you have to do or believe. Although my thoughts on that have changed slightly (Matthew I.291-292).

And, actually one of the things that, that's really good, I think, about Quakerism is that all the bits fit together. There is a coherent, a coherent narrative and a coherent central idea to it all (Matthew I.1432-1433).

the idea is that the spirit, you know that, that God and the spirit sort of runs through all is there and is, and is the light and illumination and the origin, and the cause of what you are looking to and what you're looking to in all of these things. Which is why things like Quaker business meeting is not just, it's not, you're not even trying, really, to get the sense of the meeting. You're trying to, you're discerning the will of God in this matter (Matthew I.1435-1440).

simply because I'd entered into the period of doing nothing, as far as possible. Because doing nothing allows the Spirit to lead you. That's something I have learnt to my cost, [very moved] perhaps, but I know is a fact. (Phillip I.754-755)

### **Quaker Meeting for Worship (as liturgy)**

But what really struck me was that sense of listening instead of talking (Trevor I.55).

It's the listening to God. You know. It's actually listening to God and we're asking the ... question of what do you want me to do? It is not what you want me to believe it's not you want me to feel it's what you want me to do (Trevor I.372-374).

I think all the time being a Quaker is about trying to listen to God to be open to God (Trevor I.439) If you have read François de Sales' Call to devout life. He had a series of exercises and they always begin with 'put yourself in the presence of God'. And somebody wrote you'd be surprised how many manoeuvres you have to go through to do that. And I think worship is simply put yourself in the presence of God. And then let God get on with it. Pause. I

sometimes say that worship to me is I feel worship to me is in someways quite a passive thing. The active thing is putting yourself into the presence of God. That can be quite hard work. Laughter. But once you've got there you become passive you listen you hear you find out what God is saying. (Trevor I.454-462).

attending to the presence of God or attending to the presence of the Spirit is is what I really mean (Andrea I.786).

[In worship] I'm listening to the Holy Spirit and I'm discerning the Holy Spirit's will. And if I'm lead to minister that comes from a feeling of discernment and clarity. That is something I have got to do (Andrea I.773-777).

We are communing with each other, yes, yes...I think we are in communion with God, yes [in Meeting for Worship]...Yes. Yes. (Linda I.858-862).

I put it (Meeting) on a par with physical exercise you know I can like you know all I need in life is Quakerism and going to the gym (Linda I.1631-1632).

So I think that made me think actually it's not just something I do because it's Sunday and I potter up to meeting and I it is something I actually depend on.[Pause]...It's it's an opportunity to listen to other people who are coming from a similar ethos about what the world's about and how we should respond to that. It's the opportunity to reflect on that; with no intrusion other than something that is coming in the direction I want to travel (Shirley I.327-336).

I think what Quakers do in meeting...is the same sort of, is their type of communion if you like which is to do with, you know, a collective collectiveness, the collective worship together ... and you're tuning into to the spirit (Gillian I.689-692)

The presence, the sense of the, yes, the gathered meeting (Joy I.228).

Oh yes and listening to the ministry and learning. What it is that we do in meetings for worship. What what we're there for. What it's all about. You know (Joy I.260-261).

Well it's not only about worship in meeting for worship. It's just worship in life. And it's about being open to the spirit... In everything I do. I'm not always. But I would want to be. Because my life would be the better for it (Joy I.725-729).

A connection for [pause] between me and the light source. To feed me to do work . Make the connections to be led and to be guided (Rosemary I.1572-1573).

Well it was the absence of the symbolism, the hierarchy, the liturgy, overt forms of what would you call it affiliation...There was no sense of affiliation. It was about a personal conscience. And about collective action. Action is the key. (Susan I.200-212)

Well I don't experience God in the same way at Quaker meeting as I do at the Eucharist (Susan I.2036).

Well, in a Quaker meeting you have a collection of people whose understanding of faith is going to be highly individual ... And, and that's the stuff

that energises the activist in me. More than, say, Anglican worship. Where it's more, you know, focused at God and I guess in the meeting it's more focused at the world. (Susan I.2038-2064).

It's, it's, at least in my experience, because people are bringing together their own individual faith which is going to be wildly different (Susan I.2041-2042).

And that coming together with people with shared values is more, the worship side of it, is more recognising the holiness of that (Susan I.2057-2058).

Oh I'm, I'm committed. I'm not leaving. Whatever my not going to meeting is, it's not even all that important. In the grand scheme of things you know. In the 10 years I didn't go it didn't stop my belief or faith. Or my selecting for personal and social action what my priorities were. I think going to meeting is not what Quakerism is about. It's something that's, it helps but it's not to be confused with Quakerism (Shirley I.2609-2613).

[My current Meeting] has been wonderful, yes. ... has helped from the sort of membership side and wanting to be part of this particular meeting [pause] more because I feel I'm with like-minded people. It's in my comfort zone. It's unprogrammed. It's the kind of Quakerism that, it's, it seems right for me. The action, doing stuff on [indistinct secrecy?] and refugees and stuff like that, it's all stuff, it's really important. It's great they're doing things. So yes Quaker meeting has done a lot for me but the underlying religious or spiritual level, I don't think much has changed (Susan I.2665-2674).

They fulfil different means for me. The Quaker one does this. The Anglican does that. They are not incompatible. They work (Susan I.2148-2152).

(I worship) In silence with other people. With my Friends, capital F (Caroline I.729).

What do I worship? What do we collectively worship? ... I don't think I know the answer. I don't know an answer (Caroline I.736-744).

And then there is something about, the, the waiting, the waiting on the Spirit that goes on as well....Yes, I think so. I think waiting is a good word, I think, that kind of explains it somehow. Wait to see, see what happens, what develops what, what's important. How are you going to be guided (Caroline I.788-791).

meditation I see deeper and more individually focused and worship more outwardly focused. And I value the and I, and if you're in meeting I think you, you know, basically, you ought to be worshipping (Matthew I.124-126).

the depth of the worship and how quickly and deeply I would settle into, into worship and was, was better and stronger there (Young Friends General than in other, than in other Quaker meetings (Matthew I.350-352)

But I, I really like it, being , you know, just in meeting and exploring, it's, it's not just a sort of wanting to be part of a, a, not wanting to miss worship it's, it's sort of meeting Friends in other places, you know, as well [indistinct]. (Matthew.1603-1605).

there's also sometimes an element of trying to, to reach out to the, to the meeting and to the mentally, spiritually reach out and sort of feel the connection

in the circle and sometimes imagine Jesus in the middle .... But letting, letting that happen. I mean often, I'll, I'll be reflecting on the, on things that, on, on the Ministry that has already happened. And again it's, it's sort of the letting, the letting it flow but with that being a bit more of the focus. Occasionally, not very often, I might come with a particular question which is what I try to, sort of set my thoughts to and, and keep returning to (Matthew I.1058-1068).

I mean there is something about the, the quietness, the fact that I'm, that the other people are have something like the same reasons for being there. I couldn't really, I mean, I can, I can sort of sit in, in contemplation anywhere, I suppose, but it isn't the same, I wouldn't call that the same as being worshipping together with other people. [pause] So there's there. The there is, is not, not just the place but it's the, the company and the knowing or being able to make assumptions about why the other people are there. That we have a collective something we have a common purpose in being there. And waiting and listening. That we have some sort of shared understanding of what that means, what we are waiting and listening for, that we are waiting and we're looking for, seeking some kind of leading or return to a, a, grounded, grounded sort of grounded and, and elevated at the same time[laugh]. (Matthew I.1431-1440)

The, the style of worship. I think I'm just temperamentally inclined towards, towards the silence as the basis (Matthew I.291-291).

I'm there because [pause] its, that's something that I can do there, that I can experience there, that I can kind of connections I can make there, that I can't make easily, if at all, in other times and places (Andrew I.1425-1427).

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I wasn't being told what to do. So you see I am a real nonconformist [laugh]. (Phillip I.53-54)

So Quaker worship is what I needed.(Phillip I.56)

And I do my best to go into nothing. That's my understanding of allowing the Spirit to come forward. And of course an hour is something we are conditioned to. It's meaningless. It shouldn't be. But then it is. And that's how modern life is conducted. So, I need meeting for worship. What I found during my very active political time was I wasn't at meeting that frequently but I was worshipping

elsewhere and so it didn't matter. But I'm very aware that Sunday morning is important, very important. (Phillip I.871-876).

I would miss it. Why do I, no I would miss it. I would feel something is missing if I haven't been. (Phillip I.880).

I did it conscientiously for many years. Probably did it too conscientiously. It was hard work. But it's a marvellous thing to attend. You should attend sometimes for two or three years. Because it does connect you more to national Quakers, the Quaker way. (Phillip I.918-920)

### **Quaker Community**

Well she was very feminist and she was very conscious of being able to be black and be accepted in Quakers and what she put over to me was that idea of acceptance by Quakers of all people and that there was that of God in everyone. That was what she believed and therefore black people or gay people or whatever can all be accepted. And at that time that was very important to me (Andrea I.162-165).

I think one of the beautiful things about Quakerism is we actually have the most diverse range of belief but we still simply seem to be able to work together. And whereas I think some churches do get obsessed about what do people believe Quakers do seem to have this ability to say okay well not comfortable with that but we will get on and do things together (Trevor I.336-340).

So [a national Quaker group] .... was formed. And I joined up with real alacrity and I'm on the committee and everything now and really work hard for people to be able to talk about their experiences (Andrea I.318-320).

Being accepted. Being accepted no matter what. That there was that of God in everyone and then not having any dogma or any creed because I could have an experiential faith. And my experiences could be what I could believe in (Andrea I.484-486).

I feel that my meeting is like an extended family and that therefore they are nurturing me and looking after me. And I am growing up in the meeting. So my spiritual journey has been able to develop and I would really feel that my spiritual journey has only been able to develop since I had my near death experience and everything that came out of that and all the leadings of it (Andrea I.900-904).

It [Meeting] gives me a great sense of, despite me saying I don't feel I always belong it gives me a great sense of belonging of structure of safety and of security of...identity yes. You know like this is what life's about. That you know that yes it is sort of the highlight of my week really. Yes (Linda I.1622-1626).

Because my daughter also has well she's had a very troubled start in life and she's got like a lot out of Quakers. And she was particularly naughty when she was about 15 and 16 and I sent her too as many Quaker events as I could. And I think actually it worked (Linda I.193-196).

Quakerism seems like such a commitment and there's so much work to do. So I did sort of think well, I have more time and I can think about things more but you know I did feel a bit guilty about this. Members you know, a bit of responsibility on members (Linda I.202-205).

I suppose I have trust in the love of the meeting. Yes. [Pause] Of the safety of the meeting...Feeling safe and loved and supported (Linda I.778-782).

It's a thoughtful way of life that puts the responsibility on you. Which is hard. But but what I want. I don't like being, and maybe not a good reason, I don't like being told particularly what I should think (Shirley I.100-102).

I found them very welcoming (Gillian I.68).

I like belonging to a group where I can, I don't have to believe in a particular set of dogmas and I can, I can follow my own path and still and still I'm still in the group. Which I think is one of the things I like (Gillian I.136-138)

I think we are very lucky at D...Meeting actually... just the mixture of people and (John... a mixture of theistic and non-theist it friends?) Yes there are... Certainly there's a whole mixture of people... and experience of Quakers and life experience... And that's a theme that seems to happen throughout the time I've been there. I I can't think there's been a time when it's it can slightly change but it will always be very, it's always been very rich and valuable to me (Joy I.795-809).

We have a threads group in our meeting... What would you call it it might be called a house group. You know will split into three groups and will meet as suits the group... And the group I'm in we've been very lucky. We've had a very good long standing membership, you know attendance... And we will, we meet nearly every six weeks or so. And as well as sharing where we are, which could take a whole evening, we feel we like time to consider, you know, some spiritual reading so we been looking at Ben Pink Dandelion's lecture and and the questions connected with that (Joy I.837-847).

And the welcoming visit after that. And the person, one of the people who visited me had already invited me to her home and I, I knew her quite, you know, a bit... I just wrote a short letter... Not even a page. I didn't go into depth I just said I would like to be considered... we appoint two friends to welcome the person... They come round to your home if they would like to come. I've done that to people and in fact the two people who welcomed me also live near where we used to live in ... and they came round. And, and like I knew them anyway but it was here because we are welcoming you... Yes oh yes we do that (welcome the new member on a Sunday) as well (Joy I.894-914).

So yes, that's been a tremendous joy. The building and the garden. (Joy I.1060)

(Joy is) Friendship in the meeting. You know, like just to arrive and seeing that people know you. It's strange to say, I mean some people, we do know each other well, others we know the centre of each other, but we don't actually know (Joy I.1043-1045).

I do feel a family kinship with people of the same mindset... Within friends. Anywhere in the world I've been. Friends particularly have a similar mindset (Rosemary A1-6).

But that verbal social, sort of visible, social comment of actually commitment creates a promise, that you, of commitment that you think okay. It comes at a price. You remind yourself that this is a rule you have accepted to live by. Going to the business meeting, not going to the park instead, you know. Not going out for a family lunch because it's a business meeting. There are commitments that you think, oh I'd rather not have done that, but there are commitments. (Rosemary I.797-802)

It's, it's, at least in my experience, because people are bringing together their own individual faith which is going to be wildly different (Susan I.2041-2042).

And that coming together with people with shared values is more, the worship side of it, is more recognising the holiness of that (Susan I.2057-2058).

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Y has been wonderful, yes. So Y has helped from the sort of membership side and wanting to be part of this particular meeting [pause] more because I feel I'm with like-minded people. It's in my comfort zone. It's unprogrammed. It's the kind of Quakerism that, it's, it seems right for me. The action, doing stuff on [indistinct secrecy?] and refugees and stuff like that, it's all stuff, it's really important. It's great they're doing things. So yes Quaker meeting has done a lot for me but the underlying religious or spiritual level, I don't think much has changed (Susan I2674-2679).

Oh it's a brilliant meeting. It's a really good meeting. I mean it has its tensions of course, but which doesn't (Caroline I.240-241)?

And some of the joys are the children. They're just, you know, we have a lovely all age worship and the children are just, I, I just love the children there (Caroline I.984-985).

I think the other things that attracted me to, to the society, is the, is the community, was the, the community and the welcoming and the interest and the fact that there was a signif, particularly when I was starting out, there were a significant number of people, of much older people who didn't, who didn't talk down to me. Spoke to me as equal. That was good (Matthew I.310-313).

They wanted to know what I thought, what I felt. They were, they would ask me to do things. Yes, I mean, I was, I was, I you know, I was, I was appointed as an overseer myself age, sort of 6 or 8 months after I became a member. Which was, which was really good... And there was a, and there was a certain, there was a certain pride about being almost certainly one of the youngest overseers in the country. But there was a certain, but also there was a certain, I was pleased that they, that they, that they, that they recognised or thought there was

like there was that gift and that way of serving in quite, in quite a serious way. That was good (Matthew I.321-328).

But I, I really like it, being , you know, just in meeting and exploring, it's, it's not just a sort of wanting to be part of a, a, not wanting to miss worship it's, it's sort of meeting Friends in other places, you know, as well [indistinct]. (Matthew.1603-1605).

I suppose, it was probably getting involved with [pause] I was always quite involved with youth work with the Quakers because I'd, as a social worker and I got asked to do things and I, through the, we, having not gone to the Jordans camp I started going, when the kids were quite small, I started going to ... Quaker camp and that was, you know that was a great all age mixture of people. A community that happened. (Andrew I.599-603)

I can pinpoint, you know some particular experiences that brought things together. ...Well I think spending a month on the Quaker youth pilgrimage and being, even though I was supposed be a pilgrim leader, I was still I was a pilgrim. (Andrew I.253-257)

More important than, more and more and more important (identity as a Quaker). (Andrew I.1226)

I suppose I see what I, what I suppose appeals to Quakers about, for me, is that it's, it's rooted in the, in the, the, the culture that I've grown up in. That it's part of my identity, whereas to sort of to [pause] to adopt [pause] the beliefs of another culture would just probably seem unfamiliar. It feels as though I can get what I want from, from what is part of me already, if you like (Andrew I.1730-1733).

And the Quaker meeting was effectively the ... United Nations Association. So it was a new opening for me. And one that I moved into perfectly naturally. (Phillip I.269-270)

Quakers provide a very flexible spiritual home. Of course, in an institutional sense, there is the Church of England which is all often referred to as her having many faces and so on. But Quakers is the place for me. (Phillip I.428-430).

My own meeting, I'm happy about. It's a meeting that apparently in the 1950s was thinking of closing, like all meetings do because they're cyclical. I would call it reasonably thriving, because we get new people in. The only thing that bothers me is we don't get them in because we have found them. They have found us. The last two people that have come in, and have been in, two men, and have been in every week for two or three months now, came in to us simply because ... meeting had a table at a community Pride march. And they came to us, because they are living in ... They found, perhaps, what they want. But at least whether we are what they want, we are providing a present spiritual home for them. That's what Quakers did for me, except it became my permanent home. And, and I know the Quaker way has got so much to offer, if only people knew about it. So I, I am I'm wedded to outreach but I need to find companions on the way. It's not something you do by yourself. And I haven't found enough of those companions. (Phillip I.1128-1138)



## Differences between Meetings

every meeting that I've been to that I belong it was different. --- was wonderful meeting it was really alive and big. I don't think just because it was my first meeting it was really nurturing. There were some wonderful people in it. And people were also quite political they would get up and say I'm a socialist when they were ministering I mean being a green and being like Tony Benn -type of socialism is quite important to me. And so I was very much taken with that. And sort of put that together with Quakerism and then I moved to --- and went to --- meeting which was a tiny little meeting and really quite sleepy and not very active at all but I think I value that for being able to be contemplative and meditative in it and not really doing very much except develop a prayer life. And that that was valuable. And then when I first went to --- it was a bit posh and a bit not not not snobbish but really not at all working class and not at all interested in it has completely changed now. And so that was one of the reasons why some of us decided to break away and start --- and we did that for quite a long time (Andrea I.1055-1066).

So it's really it's really under the auspices of the Holy Spirit isn't it as to what what each meeting is offering and all meetings something different all offering something different (Andrea I.1081-1083).

then in recent years actually since I moved here, I went to a very tiny meeting [-] and I did sort of become aware that actually being such a small meeting was a big strain on people. It was a big strain on the members (Linda I.173-176).

So yes, so then after going to B..., at first I went to a meeting in C... because that was possibly slightly nearer... We used to live in D... But C... somehow didn't work for me. And I thought, oh well I might as well go to D.... And it just, that was it. As I walked in... That was twenty-four years ago (Joy I.108-115).

(An overseas English-speaking Meeting attending for 10 years) ... when we got together because it was so small, and there was no premises, no premises problem, there was no away days to organise, there was no nothing to organise. Yes. Who did stuff. But our meeting didn't do much. Except we did courses. All the time. We'd meet every other Thursday in somebody's house and we we would do courses. We did Hearts and Minds Prepared. We did Quaker, all sorts of courses we'd get from Yearly Meeting... Yes. And we discussed things. We wouldn't, it wasn't, which is what it tends to be over here more, a therapy session. It was definitely a spiritual experience sharing (Rosemary I.697-705).

the depth of the worship and how quickly and deeply I would settle into, into worship and was, was better and stronger there (Young Friends General Meeting than in other, than in other Quaker meetings (Matthew I.350-352)

### **Quaker social activism, including the Quaker testimonies**

Well obviously I was generally aware of the pacifist testimony. Probably not too much of the others. I was a pacifist before I was a Quaker because George MacLeod [founder of the Iona Community] was a pacifist and I think he strongly influenced me (Trevor I.173-174).

And in fact I joined peace the Pledge Union before I joined Quakers (Andrea I.498-499).

So my spiritual journey has been able to develop and I would really feel that my spiritual journey has only been able to develop since I had my near death experience and everything that came out of that and all the leadings of it. And and what I now believe as a result of the Quaker testimonies and so on (Andrea I.901-905)

I did all that [reading about Quakerism and the testimonies] in my earlier first enthusiastic 20s part. Yes (Linda I.640).

But having said that I generally think that the good outweighs the bad and the amazing thing that Quakers do around the world the amazing things they've done for me and my daughter. And for other people is like yes and they are human so you know they can get it wrong. And it's also, you know, bits of it are quite hard, pause, what I've just said about oversight you know and my friend and all that people are very busy and also people don't always want to interfere (Linda I.1690-1695).

I think it's a very progressive movement towards improving society. So prison reform, slavery, all of those sort of big things; but on a smaller scale things that happen locally which are to do with caring for each other, and caring for the community at large. So pause looking after caring for the homeless for example (Shirley I.386-389).

I'd read about them. I mean I didn't come up here with a [laughter] kind of what's going you know what's going on [J....what about peace?...] oh yes enormously important. [J....But you weren't particularly familiar with the testimonies] No. ...Well the peace testimony yes it's the whole, the whole approach to life of being one of doing your best to make things better. That the peace and social witness bit is probably the the part that I feel most comfortable with. (Shirley I.391-402)

the social, not the social, I mean, I mean having companionship, I mean, but that as well, but also the social conscience thing. I mean the thing of caring about the world and doing good and wanting to be active in the world and doing practical things I'm a practical person (J... It's faith and practice) Yes. Exactly. I find that very attractive about Quakers... not that other people don't do it as well but I think that that's something that I, I like about it (Gillian I.1797-1807).

Because of principles of, I felt a kinship to it (Rosemary I.56)

I felt that the testimonies were a good basis on which to build a moral framework (Susan I.29-30).

Yes. I knew about that (the testimonies) straight away, almost. Yes. (Caroline I.52-54).

Peace. Everyone puts that at the top of the list. And pacifists. And always have been. I mean, as far as, always as far as I can remember. I was a pacifist. So I have, I've, you know, I go on marches and I see myself as quite an activist (Caroline I.230-232).

If I had to say one which particularly at that time was predominant for me it would be, it would be the testimony to truth and integrity. And that was something that I, that I felt very strongly about and really, really tried to live out. ...Being honest. Not cheating. You know not cheating even when or generally not cheating even when there is no sort of severe negative consequence for me or anyone else... I remember how when you are a small child, when you're five or something, how strongly injustice hits you. And how outrageous, you know, how outrageous it is, you know, and it's not fair and it shouldn't be allowed to happen. And particularly, particularly sort of, I think, it was some years ago in my 20s, and I would, and I was trying to work out whether it, what the right course of action would be, I'd think, well what would I think as a five-year-old? Because actually it is extremely, it's extremely clear, it's extremely clear in black and white at that stage. You don't have the grey nuances. And I think, more often than not, when you get to very important, fundamental things then it's gen, it's generally a, a, a right and a wrong. I think that there is a right and a wrong way to proceed and to respond. And that and there are certain things where, particularly when you have to get into very long or complex justifications then you, you probably, you, then it feels a bit like you're trying to, to explain it away and to justify it to yourself (Matthew I.382-403).

The Quaker values (at the Quaker boarding school), I really, I really sort of absorbed them I think even though I wasn't going to call myself a Quaker or even a, you know, I certainly wasn't, I didn't think of myself as, as religious really. I didn't, I didn't. (Andrew I.124-127)

I think the, there was a whole sort of programme of exploration and study and, and consideration of, about rediscovering our social testimonies which I think was going on at that time. Although I can't be sure that it didn't start after I'd become, formally become a member, which certainly engaged me. And, and [pause] made me think well that, this is what [pause] this is who I, this is who I, this is who I want to be, yes. Yes. (Andrew I.565-569)

Well I remember going on a CND demonstration when I was only just started going to the meeting and that was, that was with [pause] I think I went on one with my dad but I also went on one with two youngish people in ... meeting one of whom was Diana Francis who gave the Swarthmore lecture this year. And her boyfriend at the time... And, and that was, you know, I remember the, I don't remember anything about, I remember the singing peace songs and all that stuff. (Andrew I.505-510)

[It was the activism that grabbed you.] Yes I think it was the activism. (Andrew I.511-512)

Faith in action. Yes, yes, yes... Living our, our beliefs and so on. (Andrew I.550-552)

I suppose, it was probably getting involved with [pause] I was always quite involved with youth work with the Quakers because I'd, as a social worker and I

got asked to do things and I, through the, we, having not gone to the Jordans camp I started going, when the kids were quite small, I started going to ... Quaker camp and that was, you know that was a great all age mixture of people. A community that happened. (Andrew I.599-603)

I was impressed by, Evangelical Friends I met (in the USA) who, who were more engaged and, in some ways, more, more radical and active in, in, in witnessing to ... To their social testimony than the liberal Quakers are. Though on the other hand there are also evangelical Quakers who are very socially conservative (Andrew I.949-953)

And I didn't have to give them any assurances, for instance, about my peaceful or peace inclinations, because I was already a convinced pacifist. (Phillip I.72-74)

I must have known there was a stronger connection between the Quaker way and peace work and international work than anything I'd experienced in Methodism. Whereas, I, I doubt whether I knew the traditional Quaker testimony on peace. It was something I was to discover. But I was both a peaceful person and somebody who had a simplicity in their make up in terms of how to live. (Phillip I.77-80)

I was not familiar with the society's testimonies. That was an opening, something that opened up for me as I moved across into a new form of worship.(Phillip I.280-281)

I, at, at one stage I had to give up my professional career and just become an independent ecumenical peace worker. (Phillip I.293-294)

So you can see why, the Quaker way, the Quaker ethos, the Quaker way of worship has been very important to me. It, I was an academically critical Christian as a Methodist. And that changed, when I moved into the Quaker ethos. But then I became so heavily involved in, if you like, Quaker testimony work, the practical work in the world that, that I knew I had more to say. But I had to wait until the peace movement subsided to allow my spiritual thoughts to develop. So that's, they developed. They were always there but they were never marshalled. I was always too busy. (Phillip I.594-600).

### **Remaining a member of the Religious Society of Friends**

the reason I'm sticking with Quakerism is that there is nowhere else to go (Trevor I.623-625).

I have almost got a sense of having come full circle. I can recognise elements of Catholicism in Quakerism (Trevor I.68-69).

Well it's my whole life. And it's mainly what I do. And It's me (Alison I.1117).

Well it gives me a great sense of, despite me saying I don't feel I always belong it gives me a great sense of belonging of structure of safety and of security of identity. Yes. You know like this is what life's about. That you know that yes it is sort of the highlight of my week really (Linda I.1621-1625).

I needed something where I'd got an anchor. And that ... This is it. Yes (Shirley I.319-323).

Yes I mean I love the bits in Faith and Practice about living adventurously and all those bits about how you should live (Shirley I.939-940).

Why have I stayed? Because I like the way Quakers do things. I, I like the, I do like the testimonies. I mean I'm not totally sold on the peace testimony and I'm not a total pacifist. It depends on the situation. I think, I think that there is peacemaking and there is pacifism ... but I think there there may be occasions where where as a last resort would be that you know I wouldn't say I was an absolute pacifist (Gillian I.114-119).

I stayed. I nearly changed. But I had a chat, a chat with ----. He's a lovely man. And he's also very much feels that the spiritual nurturing of the Meeting gets submerged in the politics. And I said to him at one point, a couple of years ago, I dropped away for a few months because I was taking on a lot of jobs. It was too difficult. And I said I stood up and I said I was going to drop away for a few months and I need to stand down from my jobs. And I've got these things happening in my life and I talked to him about it. And he said, have you ever, have you thought, have you thought that you are exactly what we need? Maybe this is your journey (Rosemary I.1798-1805).

Because it's the biggest group of like-minded people that I can find [pause] for support in terms of keeping going with what I do (Rosemary I.1872-1873).

Oh I'm, I'm committed. I'm not leaving. Whatever my not going to meeting is, it's not even all that important. In the grand scheme of things you know. In the 10 years I didn't go it didn't stop my belief or faith. Or my selecting for personal and social action what my priorities were. I think going to meeting is not what Quakerism is about. It's something that's, it helps but it's not to be confused with Quakerism (Susan I.2620-2618).

Oh I'm a fixture. [Laughter] I'm a Quaker for life (Caroline I.1089).

Part of it, part of it, part of it (Young Quakers stopping coming) is, is, is bureaucratic with the whole, you know, membership assigned to a geographical area and I mean I, I've changed my meeting two, at least three times. But it's a little bit of a fuss (Matthew I.1640-1643).

I have got an attachment to the society that would not want to see it wither away. But it depends what it is, what it is to become. I mean, if it, if it was to, for me if it was to become a kind of social club for people who want to be nice to each other and kind to the planet and, and, and not go to war and all the other things that sort of policy statements that Quakers agree to, that's not really, that wouldn't matter if it disappeared. Because other people can do that. I, I think, I think, I'd like to, I'd like to hang on to what I feel is unique to Quakers. Which I can't easily pin down as the last three hours or so have shown. So, so it does matter to me... But it may not, you know, if, so it matters to me that we hang on to that aspect of Quakerism, not necessarily all the other bits. If Quakerism had just become those that that sort of rather mushy thing, then I'd probably wouldn't want to be one myself any more, so. (Andrew I.2039-2045).

I've often, not often, but yes I have thought sometimes about where would I go after Quakers, if I became dissatisfied with Quakers. And the answer is, there is nowhere else to go except totally independent. But the Quaker ethos embraces you as a total independent, if that were to be. So, I don't have to worry about where I go, spiritually, or for my spiritual home. Quakers provide a very flexible spiritual home. Of course, in an institutional sense, there is the Church of England which is all often referred to as her having many faces and so on. But Quakers is the place for me. (Phillip I.424-430).

## **Negative reflection on Quakers and Quakerism including comments on why fewer Friends**

### **Being a Quaker**

We're not actually very good at getting our message over ... In some instances we are not totally clear what our message is (Trevor I.718-722).

So I think we ought to concentrate a bit on quality rather than quantity... if we worry too much about why whether the Society of Friends is declining, it may be that we are not trusting in God enough (Trevor I.729-732).

We recently had a bit hoo-hah about somebody becoming ... an Overseer. An Overseer. And she had she had had a mother in in a camp when she was a child because she is Austrian and and Jewish and she's a very spiritual person she's in her 80s and she's been a social worker. She was absolutely ideal to be an overseer and you know people objected because she wasn't a member. I think this was so silly (Andrea I.1022-1027).

Oh my God and like you know you've got to sort of have a marriage of the two. You've got to look after both the world and your inner self and ... you have to look after the spiritual side of the world as well. And I get very cross and impatient with Quakers that are either too spiritual because they just annoy me, I'm sorry, and I just give them a middle-class stamp or even an upper-middle-class stamp. And then, yeah, so I think you've got to have both and you've got to have a balance of both you've got to be in the world and you've got to think about the world's ... spiritual and emotional and sort of mental sort of needs (Linda I.737-745)

So yes some Quakers are very po-faced and convinced that they are right so I shouldn't really, you know, be apologising for anything (Linda I.1028-1030)

I always felt I didn't quite belong in Quakers. That they are too middle-class, too white and English although I liked them a great deal and felt comfortable there. It was not sort of quite me. (Linda I.153-155).

I think there's an awful lot of people who would respond very much to it. I don't think we ought to be evangelical but I do think we ought to be a bit more in your face about what we are. And and and the the history is hugely important and beautiful and but I sometimes think we get a little bit bogged down in it; and too tethered to it to be able to move forward... I'm thinking about ourselves as special because of them (early Quakers/ancestors) and we are not. [Laugh].

They were special because of them. Not us. We ought to be out there doing a bit more. Being a bit more in your face a bit I think (Shirley I.1099-1106).

I think sometimes people get the wrong impression about Friends... Well they think they're a bit dour and don't have any fun... I had that at work once. They didn't know I was a Quaker. I didn't discuss that sort of thing. And I can't remember how it came up now, I think it was something to do with Quaker oats or something I can't remember what it was now, and suddenly one of the chaps said [?] because I think those Quakers never have any fun. And I said I was a Quaker. Are you? [laugh]. Yes. Yes. They get the wrong idea (Gillian I.1748-1761).

(Fewer Friends now because) I think we're not known about enough... But I think it's making ourselves more visible without compromising our position on people finding us freely. I mean I've enjoyed being involved we did open Gardens this year and we do open house and we did do a Quaker quest which I was involved with and I enjoyed that (Joy I.1083-1087).

... but I think generally we just need to be able to say we're here. And see if that bears any fruit. I don't know whether it will not. And I think it's good that, you see people do know about us. When there are major incidents around the world and there is a Quaker statement people will often refer to that; that they know that that happened. But we do need, yes, we need to be more known (Joy I.1092-1096).

But I know internally now, when I say this is a problem, this is what we are doing wrong. They say, well they should read it up or they should join Quaker Quest. But I say they don't know about it. Well we advertise it. It's on our site. It's on that. I say it's not enough. (Rosemary I.996-999)

I think we have to be more honest. And face what people want for themselves. Not what they want to give to Quakers or give to Mormons or contribute money or any of that. You know, we all are searching for a deeper meaning (Rosemary I.1853-1855).

Part of it, part of it, part of it (Young Quakers stopping coming) is, is, is bureaucratic with the whole, you know, membership assigned to a geographical area and I mean I, I've changed my meeting two, at least three times. But it's a little bit of a fuss (Matthew I.1640-1643).

I think a significant part is the asking. Is asking. And we're not asking people. And this is both telling people about Quakers in the first place and I do know that things like Quaker Quest have seen, you know, meetings which have seen a number of people coming through via Quaker Quest. Not just say Friends House meeting but ones in other parts of London et cetera have seen increases. But also it's possible that part of it is around the asking them to be members (Matthew I.1632-1636).

I have got an attachment to the society that would not want to see it wither away. But it depends what it is, what it is to become. I mean, if it, if it was to, for me if it was to become a kind of social club for people who want to be nice to each other and kind to the planet and, and, and not go to war and all the other

things that sort of policy statements that Quakers agree to, that's not really, that wouldn't matter if it disappeared. Because other people can do that. I, I think, I think, I'd like to, I'd like to hang on to what I feel is unique to Quakers. Which I can't easily pin down as the last three hours or so have shown. So, so it does matter to me... But it may not, you know, if, so it matters to me that we hang on to that aspect of Quakerism, not necessarily all the other bits. If Quakerism had just become those that that sort of rather mushy thing, then I'd probably wouldn't want to be one myself any more, so. (Andrew I.2039-2045).

You know, I have a sort of ongoing dialogue with the people in the children and young people people's team at Friend's House about this. I'm sort of concerned that they don't think it's important to employ Quakers to those positions and, and that there are ways in which, they, the, the Quaker youth work they're doing could put more emphasis on the Quaker bit, rather than, as I see it than the main emphasis being 'we do youth work'. (Andrew I.1696-1700).

One has to be very careful about the, about becoming an institution. In a sense, there's always a sense in which Friends House bureaucracy has to be kept in place. And obviously, we do that with a very extensive committee network or committee, Quakers coming into be running committees and so on. Just something we've always got to be aware of. Not that I have anything against Friends house. I've done my service up there. And what I found in the last few years is I have not wanted to go to BYM. I remain a very independent person. I have, I don't miss not going, I suppose is what I'm saying. So local meeting and area meeting, but having the background of national Quakers is absolutely okay, you know. But my background is national ecumenism, interfaith ecumenism. (Phillip I.931-940)

### **Joining the Religious Society of Friends**

I applied for membership last summer...and I think it came through in January this year... so some administrative hitches [Laughter] (Shirley 4 I.32-36)

I'd never joined through all this time because of the continued reluctance to get involved in anything that was institutionalised (Susan I.879-880)

#### **The Visit [for membership]**

I felt they didn't really understand me at all [laughter]. Or or I felt that they were inexperienced and did not know how to ask questions and weren't getting to the bottom of why I was pause and I was pause reluctant to tell them about my near death experience because pause there were lots of people in Quakers who felt that you should not talk about psychic experiences and you shouldn't you know that Quakers were here and now people who did things and you didn't think about the afterlife and so on. (Andrea I.313-318)

It, I think it was just a, it wasn't very challenging. I don't remember it being very challenging. And that's, I felt slightly, not exactly dissatisfied but slightly quizzical about what was the point of that, you know. After it or was it just a formality really. Somebody had to say that they'd had a chat



with me about, or asked as they met with us together [pause]. It was all very sort of, it was all quite cosy and, and affirming and nobody disagreed with anybody about anything (Andrew I.481-485)

No I think he was pretty much like, it felt like it was pretty much on the nod. (Andrew I.494-495)

### **The meaning and institution of membership**

And people who had been attenders for a long time and really work for the meeting and so on there isn't any reason why they shouldn't be seen as Quakers. And I think a lot of people feel like that. I mean, to me my membership was tremendously important but there are lots of people who feel that just being an attender is sufficient (Andrea I.1038-1042).

There was no kind of like Damascus sort of light there was no oh you know, like, because I still don't quite understand the point of membership. I slightly don't understand the point of membership, you see, because you don't always see what the difference is (Linda I.212-215).

we've got several attenders who have been coming for ages and they are an important part of the meeting and I say to them, you know, we often say why, do, do think about becoming a member. Woah, they say, I'll get lots of jobs. So, so I say then well we will have to give attenders lots of jobs in that case. [Laughter. Laughter.] (Caroline I.1077-1080).

I think a significant part is the asking. Is asking. And we're not asking people. And this is both telling people about Quakers in the first place and I do know that things like Quaker Quest have seen, you know, meetings which have seen a number of people coming through via Quaker Quest. Not just say Friends House meeting but ones in other parts of London et cetera have seen increases. But also it's possible that part of it is around the asking them to be members (Matthew I.1632-1636).

And basically Quakers have no shell. Even in membership, taking people into membership, we are very careful not to create, I would not say create barriers, but create requirements. I remember one membership was rejected on a temporary basis. But otherwise, on the whole, that is true, virtually anybody can join us. And I, maybe we're a bit too easy sometimes. (Phillip I.1176-1180)

### **Meeting for Worship [as liturgy]**

And, and something about the collective expression. I mean, as sort of as Quakers not having song as part of Quaker worship is that is sad. (Andrew I.1068-1069)

...perhaps because people find it hard to, to talk about without just resorting to clichés that's why liberal, especially, don't, unprogrammed, don't do enough of

it. [Pause] And because they don't want to disagree [laughter]. (Andrew I.1114-1116)

To find meaning, apart from just sort of, I don't know, just sort of cause and effect type of meaning. [Pause pause] And I suppose, you know, this is where we always struggle, isn't it, or I think as Quakers we struggle we can't just sort of, well we can refer to all kinds of fairly sort of hackneyed forms of words that are familiar, but [pause] we, we can't just say, well this is what we are signing up to. Or, this, this is the program we're following with minor variations from each week. [Pause]. So [pause] although I'm doing, yes, and now I suppose, because, the fact that, the reason, the fact that I struggle with it probably makes me more, you know, susceptible [laugh] to ideas about, or we should have, we should try, we should try and give and help each other a bit more with this and, and not be so [pause] dogmatic about not having any, any kind of, kind of structure or program, that we could allow [pause] some kind of ways of, of, of helping us to focus on, on what we're there and, what we're doing there and why. Some leadings, that aren't, don't come out, that aren't are just expected to come out of thin air. Thin air being, you know... (Andrew I.1449-1460)

What should elders actively be doing if anything to, to ensure that spoken Ministry is appropriate. And that meeting is being rightly held. Because as soon as you start to articulate that [pause] I'm, I'm sure it used to be much easier in the old days, you know, there were almost, sort of, I have read, read a few sort of old tracts about what is the right holding of meeting for worship really, with quite detailed sort of, of advice about what Elders should, how elders should, what they should do, how they should intervene, what sort of things they should say to, by way of actually eldering somebody for misbehaviour or inappropriate Ministry. And we, we, we don't seem to sort of have any clear-cut guidance like that anymore, really. Or it's much less prescriptive. [Pause] And, and, and of course, you know it causes inordinate offence [laugh] if, if, if elders do directly intervene. (Andrew I.1523-1531)

Not so often at area meeting. Really. I, you know, especially if it's a long journey to get there and. I've kind of got, I've quite often have other, think of, of Sunday afternoon as time to do other things and, than go to meeting. Because our area meetings are always on, following on from meeting for worship and usually, lunch ... (Andrew I.1611-1614).

Often when I'm there it doesn't, doesn't grab me, enthuse me that much. But, I feel conflicted about it because I, I think it's important, an important thing and I don't want to see it, I can't see an alternative particularly to having area meeting, to having that layer of, of organisation. [pause] So, maybe I mean I did actually used to say, well, when I'm retired I'll get more involved in that sort of thing. [Laughter] But I'm retired and I haven't yet. So, but I suppose I, I think of myself as giving a service to the area meeting in other ways than personally attending all their meetings. (Andrew I.1620-1626)

And I know I shocked one meeting I stayed for their meeting for business and I said I didn't recognise it as a meeting for business. (Phillip I.889-894)

Area meeting has to be reminded occasionally, because the preliminary period of worship was getting shorter and shorter and on one occasion there was a, an advice read and Ministry was given all in the space of quarter of an hour. And,

they tried to start business and I said no. I've got to get this off my chest, my mind still hasn't settled. I'm not ready for business. My brain hasn't stopped working. It was only quarter an hour and it was virtually input and things did go back again after that change. In ours it became half an hour, from a quarter of an hour before the official working time, the official starting time. And that's been maintained. People obviously still arrive throughout that first quarter an hour, there is a good body of people there. And it's in the midst of that half hour that the meeting is formally started by reading names of representatives so people know who's there and then there's another quarter an hour worship. But [my] area meeting, shall I say in my terms, is pretty good. So I'm happy with it. There are still enough people who are traditional Quakers. (Phillip I.895-906)

### **Quaker community**

the other big secret was being psychic. And having all these strange experiences. And being really weird. And not being able to talk about that at all. And it was I mean I didn't wasn't able to talk about that until 2000 when the Quaker Fellowship of Afterlife Studies was formed. I mean that was really quite a long time to keep all that hidden. And to sort of fight against the fact that I wasn't mad and to convince people that I was that I was normal to to convince myself really that I was normal (Andrea I.409-414).

The idea of the afterlife is seems to be terribly alien to most Quakers. They they insist that you have to concentrate on the here and now and not not think about that. You know. I have it over and over again. They are quite happy to comfort people when they are bereaved but then they've got to move on. (Andrea I.952-955).

We recently had a bit hoo-hah about somebody becoming ... an Overseer. An Overseer. And she had she had had a mother in in a camp when she was a child because she is Austrian and and Jewish and she's a very spiritual person she's in her 80s and she's been a social worker. She was absolutely ideal to be an overseer and you know people objected because she wasn't a member. I think this was so silly (Andrea I.1022-1027).

Well I don't have sort of great spiritual insights or I couldn't waffle on forever like I don't want to slag off various Quaker groups like people who are Universalists could waffle on forever like I'm on the email list of the non-theist newsletter and they waffle on forever (Linda I.715-718).

Some Quakers are very much at the upper end of the upper-middle-class spectrum so yes so there is a sort of southern superiority and that I find difficult being Irish so...Yes, sense of entitlement. And then, you see, it doesn't go with notions of equality you see (Linda I.1684-1689)

Quakers just don't realise that (no social services without business), you know. But yes I get a bit fed up with Quakers who go on about the caring professions you know as if most of us don't care or we're not quite the ticket but that's just the thing I've got (Gillian I.947-949).

Well the thing that does slightly --- me off, laughter, I find it I find it quite difficult to talk about my beliefs with some Friends. I mean obviously people in the

Quaker Fellowship for Afterlife Studies and the Friends Fellowship of Healing people like that, we are on the same wavelength and I find it difficult talk about, particularly nontheists, you know, because there is this sort of atheistic sort of thing. I also find sometimes that Friends are really keen on the doing good bit and and they sort of forget about the spiritual contemplationy bit. And I do get a bit fed up with pacifists [laughter] to be absolutely honest. [laughter] You know, I mean this sort of banging on about it, you know. It's not really my my thing really. But on the whole I mean, I find them, Quakers are pretty tolerant, you know (Gillian I.1559-1567).

I don't feel that Quakers are very good at holding you. You know the door is wide open. You're, you feel like a canary. You go flying in and out the cage. There is nothing there to hold you. You've really got to want it. You've really got to sort of say I know what they're about I know what they're about most people do know what we are about they know it's a silent meeting and they don't hassle you to do any jobs. (Rosemary I.674-678)

I realised that they were quite an academic, intellectual lot. I realised that they were also quite into middle-class. Educated people. So they, they are a subculture of their own. You very rarely get Quakers who are not educated, forward thinking, and community minded. They're not there for a social club. (Rosemary I.678-681)

Because there are, there are people there that go are a real challenge. They are a real challenge. They're just so hell bent on, on being a Quaker the way they see it. They're very rigid. They're very [pause] forceful...(Rosemary I.1774-1777).

They sometimes spoil it for others. And they're there (Rosemary I.1781).

It's the political ones. They use it as a platform for political rallying. "And, you know, as Quakers we should do this" [they say]. And I think you're not supposed to be telling me what to do. I've got my own journey to have. And I've been made an elder so, you know, and I'm going to have to maybe be called upon to to bring this up (Rosemary I.1784-1790).

I find all these non-theist or whatever they're called, I find that really difficult. I don't know how you can be a Quaker and not have an idea about the deity (Caroline I.374-375).

Well okay. Well, often, I must say that one of the problems with our meeting is that people tend to come in late. It drives me mad. So quite often I take a Quaker book to read. And I only, or I read something out of faith and practice or I read an article in the Friend that I'm particularly wanting to read, or something like that. Just so that I don't get distracted by everybody taking off their crackly anoraks (Caroline I.765-769).

And, then you could argue that that goes right into the whole issue of the, are our elders and overseers doing their sort of individualised pastoral and spiritual care? (Matthew I.1638-1639).

In terms of Quaker membership, because a lot of weeds that have been weeded [laughter] and there are still weeds to be weeded. I'm sad that well established meetings have shrunk. To the point is that the future is problematic. And within my own area meeting, ..., I noticed the other day, when I arrived it had 280 members and just under 100 attenders. That would be in 1976. Now it's worried about its future. It's very difficult to understand why. Quakers, I find in my area meeting, very loathe to do outreach work. And again, I don't know why, except outreach work always requires something extra from you to be public. So, I'm sad about Quakers shrinking. I don't know the answer. (Phillip I.1121-1128)

But my own meeting, new people do keep on coming in. We lose people in a normal way. But we've got new people there. And if I look around the meeting, there's probably a lot of people there whose Quaker roots are quite shallow. So we have to always be careful that, like every other church, we've got people who find it socially acceptable to be there, but we've got to provide spiritual stimulus as well. (Phillip I.1139-1143).

### **Quaker social activism including the Quaker testimonies**

Why have I stayed? Because I like the way Quakers do things. I, I like the, I do like the testimonies. I mean I'm not totally sold on the peace testimony and I'm not a total pacifist. It depends on the situation. I think, I think that there is peacemaking and there is pacifism ... but I think there, there may be occasions where, where as a last resort would be that you know I wouldn't say I was an absolute pacifist (Gillian I.114-119).

It's the political ones. They use it as a platform for political rallying. "And, you know, as Quakers we should do this" [they say]. And I think you're not supposed to be telling me what to do. I've got my own journey to have. And I've been made an elder so, you know, and I'm going to have to maybe be called upon to to bring this up (Rosemary I.1784-1790).

There was a very vicious, nasty attack that did almost kill me and one of the reasons for the attack was that I didn't fight back. I had so internalised and ingrained the peace testimony and was in some ways sort of naive about, you know, Quakers I think, if I have one criticism to make, is that we have difficulty in confronting the dark side or whatever you want to call it. The side of human personality that in other, in Christians, some call sin (Susan I.893-897)

So, and then the truth testimony comes with it. The expectation that if you are very patient, the truth becomes known and you can help that along. What I was not really prepared for is that there are people who don't want the truth to come out. And that despite all of your rationality and the way in which you operate ... I didn't recognise the folly of using that approach in an environment in which people are not prepared to accept the truth. So the peace testimony collapsed. The truth testimony collapsed because it didn't work. And it was to nobody's benefit. (Susan I.921-928)

## APPENDIX 4: TOPICS AND THEMES RELATED TO INTERVIEWEES

### Quaker Theology and Quaker Structures Referred to in Interviews

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
<b>Quaker liturgy: Meeting for Worship</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Meeting for Worship for Business (Quaker business method)</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
<b>Meeting for Worship for Clearness</b>	X											X
<b>Programmed Meeting for Worship</b>										X	X	
<b>Experiment with Light</b>										X		X
<b>Sustaining a relationship with God through listening and prayer</b>	X	X	X				X		X	X		
<b>The Holy Spirit and the presence of Spirit, the presence of God</b>	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Christian mysticism</b>	X				X			X		X		
<b>The primacy of the Spiritual world / Invisible world</b>		X					X					X
<b>Theology of Light and the Inner Light</b>		X			X		X	X	X	X		
<b>Leadings</b>		X			X	X	X		X		X	X
<b>Theology of Ministry</b>	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>That of God in everyone</b>	X	X			X	X				X		
<b>Community as an integral aspect of faith</b>	X		X	X	X							
<b>The Quaker idea about evil</b>		X								X		
<b>Quanglican integration/Catholic integration</b>	X				X			X	X			
<b>Creating a new religious identity/seeking spiritual truth/experiential faith</b>			X	X			X		X	X		X
<b>No creed, not being told what to think or what to do, no separate priesthood</b>	X	X		X	X		X	X		X	X	X
<b>Diversity of belief</b>	X			X	X			X			X	
<b>The Quaker Testimonies</b>		X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Quaker Faith and Practice (including Advices and Queries)</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
<b>Quaker tradition</b>	X									X	X	X
<b>Quaker values</b>			X							X	X	X
<b>Interviewees' assertion of continuity of beliefs and commitments</b>	X	X			X		X				X	X



## **APPENDIX 5: TWO THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS RELATED TO AN IMAGINED LOCAL MEETING FOR WORSHIP**

Thought experiments are not new to sociology (Hill, 2005). Danermark et al (1997) discusses them in the context of critical realism and the social sciences. Watson (2011) discusses the writing of fictional/semi-fictional research texts (p.397) and the incorporation of, for example, 'vignettes' (p.401) into academic texts in social and educational research. In this research, the following vignette is intended to illustrate how Archer's social theory and its associated concepts provide a framework for thinking about the state of a local Meeting. Many local Quaker Meetings face challenges in responding to falling numbers at worship and falling overall membership. The vignette considers how its members meet those challenges to their continuing association. The vignette also provides an additional opportunity to comment on Dandelion's theory of the double-culture and how his sociological insights relate to Archer's.

### **The imagined Meeting's background**

The Meeting House is located in an outer well-to-do suburb of a large city. There is parking outside. It is some twenty minutes' walk from a railway station. A bus service, leaving every ten minutes or so from the station, stops about five minutes away from the Meeting House. This is not a convenient location but members have been and are reluctant to relocate as the setting is peaceful and the very attractive Meeting House is purpose built. Sixty years ago there would be more than fifty persons at Sunday Meeting with two children's classes. Young couples could have afforded to rent or buy in the area. Prices are now too high for any but the wealthier or the family subsidised. On Sundays in the last three years, there have never been more than twenty-five attending and in the last year the average is fifteen. There are



no children. Sunday worship is the Meeting's sole regular collective activity. There is a shared lunch and discussion every fourth Sunday and an annual Xmas celebration to which friends of Friends and Area Meeting members are invited.

The Meeting's current membership is imagined as including the twelve interviewees of this research plus other members and attenders who come from time to time.

Most members live just outside of the suburb. Some members belong to national or regional Quaker groups and other voluntary groups which meet on weekends so cannot attend every Sunday. Their average age (mean) is 65. There are nine attenders on the Meeting's list of members and attenders, five of whom attend regularly. All are over 40. They have not applied for membership for a variety of reasons e.g. worried about being asked to do jobs that take up too much time; and/or unsure whether their own beliefs fit in sufficiently with the vernacular Quakerism they have encountered at the Meeting or what they understand of canonical Quakerism. Two are unsure whether they believe in a personal God who offers guidance; another has doubts about the peace testimony though she does identify as a Christian. Three of the five are still in full-time employment.

There have been no new members or new regular attenders for a year. A decline in numbers committed to the Meeting and coming regularly to worship has become critical. The Meeting is just able to fill the offices that are thought needed for the Meeting to be run in accordance with *QF&P* 4.35-4.36.

### **A morphogenetic Meeting?**

The Meeting, would be defined by BYM as a medium-size (10-30 members) Meeting. It would not be in imminent danger of being 'laid down' (the Quaker term for closing). The Meeting had hoped that in time partly due to the outreach efforts of BYM and the Area Meeting, and partly because of people being 'led' to Quakers,

new attenders would appear and refresh the Meeting. This has not happened. The Meeting could be described as morphostatic or even becoming morphonecrotic as it has not changed its mode of working for years, has been losing participants and no children participate. In that respect its experience is similar to mainline churches who have also experienced decline.

New appointments have changed the dynamic of the Meeting by inserting new energies into three senior roles. Caroline, the new Clerk, and Clerk for the first time, is a peace and community activist. Phillip, an Elder, who has served before in this role, is committed to peace-work, ecumenical work and outreach. Both Caroline and Phillip identify as Christian. Shirley accepted appointment as Overseer which is her first major Quaker role. She is a community activist and councillor. She identifies as a non-theist. They were replacing those who had been in their roles for six years.

The Meeting has been facing internal and external pressures that had not been explicitly addressed by senior office-holders for a long time - specifically the consequences of dwindling numbers, falling revenue and the rising costs of maintaining the Meeting House and its difficulty in financially supporting the work of BYM. Some members feel that if it did not take steps to attract new members and increase its financial base, it would move into a morphonecrotic state. The new Clerk and Elder wanted to take action to reinvigorate the Meeting. The new Overseer was keen to encourage more involvement from attenders. The three believed in the value of outreach unlike some other members as we shall see in the next section.

At this point in its history The Meeting, or Corporate Agent, is not yet morphogenetic. There has been no structural change but there has been a change of Actors in occupying significant roles. The roles are now open to a new manifestation in so far as the personal histories, characteristics and styles of the new postholders influence

how the authority associated with their roles would be interpreted and used. This could be the beginning of a morphogenetic cycle depending on what happens next (Archer, 1995. p.195).

### **The morphogenetic scenario: a new outreach activity**

The Clerk used her authority, after informal discussions with Phillip, Matthew and Linda, to put the matter of outreach on the next Meeting for Worship for Business agenda. At the Meeting a leading to organise a new outreach activity was heard from some of those present, including Phillip, Matthew and Linda. A proposal for a new Outreach Committee was agreed. That was an innovative structural change, a morphological change. There was no consideration at that time of how the innovation might change the meeting in other ways.

The Meeting appointed Linda, Matthew and Phillip as the Committee. Matthew, aged 35 and Linda aged 49 were the two youngest members of the Meeting and Phillip was one of the oldest, aged 82. Encouraged by Caroline and Phillip, they had discussed the report *Engaging Young Adult Friends: A report on the experiences of 18- to 35-year-olds with the Religious Society of Friends in Britain* (Bailey, 2016). They agreed with one of its findings that younger Quakers and those in work often found Sunday Meetings difficult to get to because of other weekend priorities. They read that a lack of accessible mid-week Meetings was another obstacle.

Linda wanted to diversify the Meeting's membership e.g. those who were not white, middle class and university educated. She identified positively as a Quaker who believed in a Higher Power but did not consider herself Christian. Matthew, who did identify as a Christian, like 24% of other young people in the above survey (Bailey, 2016. p.1), would like to see younger people like himself at Meeting. Matthew has previously been involved with Young Quaker groups. Phillip is an intellectually

energetic 82-year-old. He self-identified as an individualist and non-Conformist Christian. He had held many roles in the Meeting. He had been very involved with Christian ecumenical peace work. He wanted to be part of this initiative as he had always been concerned with outreach. An Elder again for the first time in seven years, he had a particular concern to ensure people recognise and experience the spiritual basis of Quaker social witness. He also believed older people like himself might attract other older people through outreach. These three individuals, had objectives that were different but complementary.

When they first got together they shared some other experiences. They all had been touched by spiritual concerns. They have a sense of the transcendent although they understood the meaning of their spiritual experiences differently. Between them, they have had experience of Catholic, Anglican and Non-Conformist Christianity, and Buddhism. They have all been involved in social action. Matthew's secondary reflexive style as a communicative reflexive and as a young Clerk should help the team to bond although there could be friction with the more experienced Phillip whose reflexive style was more autonomous. Caroline hoped that this combination of individuals at different stages in their lives but sharing an enthusiasm for Quaker outreach would constitute an effective outreach team with a broad appeal. They weren't marketing professionals but were enthusiasts for the Quaker way.

Using Archer's concepts and terminology to describe what was happening helps to emphasise key features of a process of change. A lack of structural or cultural system integration is normally a prerequisite for change. In the situation of this Meeting's falling numbers, new ideas and new mechanisms were sought by some to try to remedy the situation. Change in a Corporate Agent is triggered by Actors. They either have role authority or give themselves the authority to propose a change to

meet what they take to be their organisation's needs or their personal ideals or interests. Personal ideals or interests should elide to some extent with those of the organisation to begin with but there may also be some contradictions which emerge e.g. some Actor's might resist proposals they fear will damage the organisation and consequently their attachment to it. Contradictory viewpoints may strain its social integration that might generate cultural and then structural changes. Irreconcilability may lead to the exit of the irreconciled. Ongoing tensions previously masked by orthodoxy emerge. When there is a change of role-holder and a new person/Actor occupies a significant role in the organisation, as Caroline did, it is possible to use the discretionary authority associated with the role to persuade the Corporate Agent (the group as an organised whole) to focus on an issue of possible conflict by using its social structure e.g. by putting an item on the agenda of the relevant committee. The event of new Actors in significant roles who use their authority to make a voluntary organisation face issues with which they believe it should be concerned illustrate the importance of persons influencing the dynamics of a Corporate Agent. They do this through their informal and formal interactions with other Actors in the group (i.e. the other members and attenders of the Meeting). Their ideas, drawn from the cultural system, and the way in which they are presented, which justify their proposals, will influence whether the group accepts or rejects them. Agreement to the creation of a new structural element e.g. a new Committee, moves the Agent into a morphogenetic state with some predictable and some unpredictable consequences. How social interaction is then affected (e.g. in a Local Quaker Meeting) is then dependent on how Actors act. Eventually a new state of the Corporate Agent is attained and a new morphogenetic cycle will eventually commence after a period of morphostasis. Archer's position is that the modern world

has come to be in a process of almost continuous morphological change and that is reflected in its societies and organisations.

The new activity the Committee agreed was to hold a mid-week 45-minute Meeting for Worship once a month as an experiment for three months. It would be held at the Meeting House on the first Wednesday of the month from 6.30pm to 7.15pm. This represented a move away from orthopraxy (structural stability). From 6pm soup with a roll and butter will be offered. Meeting expenses will be affected by new expenses, including use of lighting and heating. There will be a short presentation about Quaker Meetings for Worship aimed at first time attenders and a formal discussion about the experience of the Meeting and other aspects of Quakerism that people want to talk about. This was a new way of presenting and organising a Meeting for Worship, justified because it was intended for newcomers, which the Local Meeting would be asked to endorse at the following Meeting for Worship for Business. A budget of £200 would also be requested to support the production of a leaflet advertising the mid-week Meeting as well as the Sunday Meeting. The leaflet would be distributed to local libraries, a local housing warden-supported community for the elderly and to passers-by at the local shopping centre on Saturday mornings. Information would also be posted on relevant Quaker websites and the local University's website which advertised local religious services. This represented a move away from orthopraxy (structural stability). Meeting expenses will be affected by new expenses, including use of lighting and heating.

Some members were sceptical about outreach. Andrea, Trevor, Gillian and Rosemary were sceptical about deliberate attempts to attract new attenders and members which go beyond the display of suitable posters outside Meeting Houses and ensuring a Meeting is listed in suitable publications and websites. Andrea and

Trevor had experience of outreach initiatives that failed. Individuals, they believed, found Quakers just as they themselves found Quakers - by encountering an individual Quaker by 'chance'. That individual either accompanied them to their first Meeting or told them how to find their nearest Meeting. That was also the experience of most of the interviewees. The sceptics, however, did not want to stand in the way of what others had discerned as a necessary response to declining numbers and the Committee's enthusiasm. It was known that the Clerk backed it. They agreed that an advertised mid-week Meeting of itself might attract some interest. The £200 for leaflets was agreed. The Meeting was in unity.

The organisation's normal procedures were used to institute this change. If they had not been, those who were sceptical about outreach and uncomfortable about spending money on this particular proposal might not have been so willing to remain in unity with the Meeting. Although the idea was initiated with the support of the clerk, normal discernment procedures were used with no one excluded (cf. the introduction of the Local Development Worker programme based in the Recording Clerk's Office.)

### **Results of the Outreach initiative**

No new attenders came on the first month of the experiment but one of the Meeting's members, Trevor, who had been an irregular attender on Sundays and had expressed his doubts about the initiative came to the first mid-week Meeting and continued to come. Wednesday evening Meetings suited him more than Sunday mornings. He liked the intimacy of a small Meeting. He did not object to a new structure. On the second month a younger lecturer and her partner came from the university as a result of information placed on the University website. On the third month the lecturer and her partner returned and two other younger people came

whom Matthew had spoken to about the Meeting. Another 'under-40s' attender from a different Local Meeting arrived having noticed the details on a Quaker website. She was a self-employed website developer and preferred a mid-week evening Meeting that did not interfere with work or weekend commitments. She said she would ideally like a weekly Meeting. Trevor agreed. Matthew said the Outreach Committee would discuss that possibility at the Local Meeting's next Business Meeting. They were also aware that the professional expertise of the new attender might be available for some more imaginative advertising and marketing with social media. There were now nine (Linda, Matthew, Phillip, and Trevor plus the lecturing couple, Matthew's two contacts and the attender from another local meeting) seemingly committed to Wednesday Meetings. Four were completely new to Quakers.

A retired social worker, Bruce, who had seen a leaflet, came on the Sunday following to Meeting, but not to the Wednesday Meeting. He was surprised that the Meeting was so small. There were twelve present and himself. He received a warm welcome. The Meeting hoped he would continue coming. He did. After a month of his coming almost every Sunday, he was told by Phillip that if he wanted to go on a residential Introduction to Quakers course he should just ask and the Meeting would fund it. He was rather taken aback at such generosity.

### **The Three-month Review**

At the three-month review at the Meeting for Worship for Business, it was agreed that the experiment of the mid-week Meeting should continue for another three months. The Outreach Committee said they were thinking that the Wednesday Meeting might meet more frequently as a result of an attender's suggestion. They wanted to know what the Meeting thought about that. The Local Meeting agreed to



support more frequent Wednesday Meetings if that was wanted, bearing in mind the increased overhead costs to the Meeting of heating and lighting and refreshments. Linda and Matthew indicated that they would sometimes be prevented because of time needed for work commitments and they might not be able always to come to Meeting on Sundays. Phillip said he would continue to attend on Wednesdays and Sunday. The team hoped other members and attenders would be able to give support when they could on Wednesdays. The Outreach Committee would continue to meet at least once on the Wednesday before each Meeting for Worship for Business so that it could report on the Wednesday's Meeting's progress. Whoever was present on a Wednesday could participate in it whether they were members or not.

The Committee had been integrated into the Local Meeting's structures.

Morphogenesis rather than morphonecrosis was happening in the Local Meeting. A new morphostatic state was beginning to form. An almost completed morphogenetic cycle had occurred.

Taking a broad view, the Meeting recognised much had been achieved. Five Actors, completely new to Quakers, had begun an involvement with Quakers. They began to explore not only their own faith and reflect on their new experience of Meeting for Worship but also other opportunities for participation in The Society which they heard about in Notices and from leaflets they saw in the Meeting House. Four existing Actors substantially increased their involvement with their local Quaker Meeting. Linda, Matthew and Phillip created new roles for themselves in running the Wednesday Meeting and a new commitment to participate was made by Trevor. They had developed a new opportunity for expressing their Quakerism as well as new opportunities for others to become engaged with The Society. The Corporate

Agent, which was the Local Meeting, had become more active and may become a more noticed Agent in the local community. It was thinking of planning an open meeting on local social service provision for the elderly as a result of leafleting at the sheltered accommodation, although no one from there was currently coming to a Wednesday or Sunday Meeting as two or three had done in the past.

A process new to the Local Meeting for introducing people to Meeting for Worship had also been developed. Normally a newcomer arrives at a Local Meeting and may be given a leaflet to read but would have no formal introduction to how Meeting works and its conventions; nor would there normally be a formal discussion afterwards (Durham, 2011. p.22-27, describes the format of the normal Meeting for Worship in a text for newcomers). After Meeting conversation would be in the context of polite socialising rather than in the context of a more formal discussion. Some said that that lack of seriousness might have irritated new attenders as well as some existing participants who were inhibited from saying anything controversial. The new process that framed the Wednesday Meeting for Worship seemed effective.

Newcomers were informed as to what Meeting was about and after Meeting there was a focused discussions about Quaker faith and practice. Even at the first Meeting, when there were no newcomers to Quakerism, all those present discussed how they came to Quakers and began to feel more cohesive as a group.

It was noted that the new attenders were much younger than the average age of the Sunday meeting. Also noted was the fact that the new attender who had suggested weekly Meetings also had IT expertise and that she might have time to place this at the service of the Meeting.

The impact on the Sunday Meeting was also noted. It welcomed a new Actor although his presence did not make the Meeting more socially diverse. In fact the

overall average age of those attending changed marginally upwards and numbers attending moved marginally downwards. Linda and Matthew, younger members of the Meeting, who had been at Meeting regularly on Sundays, now participated in the Sunday Meeting less frequently: twice a month rather than every Sunday. An age divide was beginning to open up between the two Meetings as an unintended consequence of change and was the opposite of what had been hoped for.

The problem of decreasing numbers at Sunday Meeting remained one to which attention still needed to be given. More effort would be put into having the Meeting advertised on free electronic sources and with community groups. More thought would be given to ways of welcoming newcomers and introducing them to the Quaker way. Newcomers might be asked what they might want or be hoping for by an Overseer or Elder tasked to do so.

In this exercise, the possibilities of stimulating social interaction rather than avoiding a Local Meeting's problems were demonstrated. The existing structure and Actors were involved with every decision by those proposing a new structure and activity. The new structures and its integration with the existing structure effected morphogenesis. Social integration was maintained and progressed through the increased involvement of existing Actors and the welcoming of new Actors in the life of the Meeting. The project provided existing Actors new experiences of expressing their Quakerism, validation and empowerment. New Actors began, for them, a new way to experience religion, and perhaps express their religiosity, on Wednesdays and/or Sundays.

Unintended consequences were that some Actors' energies involved in creating the project (Linda's and Matthew's in particular) were diverted from an older activity into a new activity. The older activity might accordingly suffer. A new vested interest in

the new activity was created. Actors with vested interests might soon be competing for the Corporate Agent's resources and this might become a new conflict area whose consequences could not be foreseen. Although there were unintended systems effects, the meeting was no longer in danger of becoming morphonecrotic. It was reenergised.

Could the experience of an imagined Meeting's reenergisation challenge the theory of a double-culture? That theory provides a sociological explanation as to how The Society as a whole had functioned for a long period of time. In the vignette orthopractice in particular was challenged. The reenergisation of a Local Meeting occurred through a subgroup within the Meeting promoting the introduction of a new Meeting structure, an Outreach Committee, tied to a new way of organising the holding of Meeting for Worship.

### **Membership as a critical cultural issue for the Imagined Meeting**

Whereas the previous situation exemplified a Meeting's capacity for structural change, membership affects a Meeting's culture directly. All existing members and attenders affect the culture of the local Meeting to which they belong by their approach to Quakerism, that is to say by their ideas about Quaker faith and practice and religion and by what they say in vocal ministry and in conversation i.e. in socio-cultural interaction. Decisions about accepting new members are critical decisions about the acceptability of a new person's approach to Quakerism and the fundamental elements of being a Quaker. All Actors may contribute to reproducing or to changing the vernacular culture of the Meetings in which they act according to the ideas they have about it. For example a new attender who identified as a Christian and stands to give vocal ministry that refers to the life and teachings of Christ contributes differently from a member whose ministry is informed by their non-theism

or Buddhism. Depending on the religious culture of the Local Meeting, their contribution may be received as profound, unremarkable or startling. They themselves may change the religious balance of the Meeting, perhaps antagonising the religious leanings of those who begin to feel less comfortable in the presence of a view that upsets them e.g. paganism<sup>79</sup>. The participants in some Meetings, may not want to take on board the Advice ‘When words are strange or disturbing to you, try to sense where they come from and what has nourished the lives of others’ (*Quaker faith and practice*, 2013. 1.02.17). Opportunity for serious discussion of ideas that discomfort may not be made available owing to a Meeting’s conflict aversion and orthodoxy..

Those initially involved in the process of responding to applications for membership, the Oversight team of the Local Meeting’s applicant, have a significant responsibility to discern the ‘rightness’ of membership for the applicant and the Meeting (*Quaker faith & practice*, 2013. 11.11). The Oversight team are, in a sense, the first-tier gatekeepers of The Society<sup>80</sup>. Their support or otherwise for an attender’s application has consequences for the social composition of the Meeting – which, in turn, has consequences for both the cultural system and the decision-making processes of the Meeting. A canonical statement as to ‘the fundamental elements of being a Quaker’ is provided in *Quaker Faith and Practice* <sup>81</sup>.

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<sup>79</sup> See Vincett, G. (2009). Quakers fusing Quakerism with contemporary paganism. *Quaker studies* (13) 2 p.230-227.

<sup>80</sup> (The procedures for membership in *Quaker faith and practice*, 2013. Chapter 11 were discussed above (Chapter p..)

<sup>81</sup> Membership is also a way of saying to the meeting, and to the world, that you accept at least the fundamental elements of being a Quaker: the understanding of divine guidance, the manner of corporate worship and the ordering of the meeting’s business, the practical expression of inward convictions and the equality of all before God. Participation in the process that leads to admission into the community of the meeting is an affirmation of what the meeting stands for and of your willingness to contribute to its life.

**The scenario: a membership issue**

This vignette is presented to demonstrate how members who are the oversight team with different approaches to Quakerism, that is different relationships to The Society's cultural system, might respond to an expression of interest in membership by an attender.

An imaginary attender, Bruce, has expressed their interest in becoming a full member of The Society to two Overseers – Andrew and Shirley, who were talking together after Meeting. Bruce had had some good conversations with Shirley about Quakers and also about 'the state of the nation'. He was attracted to Quaker social witness, especially as regards equality, peace and climate change. He knew Shirley was a local councillor. He said he wanted to join because he thought he would feel even more fully a part of the group. They welcomed Bruce's interest but Shirley said, and Andrew nodded, they needed to discuss Bruce's interest with Joy, the third Overseer to see how to take his interest forward. They told Bruce they would get back to him.

As overseers they knew they all had to work together on membership matters and, as was the custom in their Area, would need to write a letter of support to their Area Meeting if they were to support his application. They would need to draw on their capacity for collective discernment to agree a response.

Bruce first came across Quakers many years ago because he supported CND. He liked the Quakers he met. He remembered their diverse religious backgrounds e.g. one said they were a Buddhist another was from a Jewish background and the third a birthright Friend who said he was Christian. He did not go to his first Quaker Meeting until about a year ago after he had been widowed, out of curiosity, and because he did not always have anything to do on a Sunday morning. He was a

former social worker who had taken early retirement three years ago, rather exhausted, but to support his wife who had cancer. He revealed this to Shirley. Shirley had welcomed him after his first Meeting for Worship. He told her that he had liked the ministry about mindfulness that he had just heard in the Meeting. He said he was surprised there was no obviously Christian ministry. Shirley said there were a mixture of religious and spiritual beliefs that Friends held and disclosed that she was a non-theist rather than a Christian. Since then, Bruce had been coming to Meeting quite regularly for nearly a year but not every Sunday. He was a grandfather and spent time one Sunday each month with family who live some distance away.

When he was speaking about membership to Andrew and Shirley, he said he liked the quiet ambiance of this Meeting, although he did not always agree with what was said in ministry. He said he benefited from what he described as doing silent meditation. He said that he had rejected Christianity and the idea of a personal God because he does not see how such a God could allow the horrors of this world e.g. the Yemen war; tsunamis; child cruelty. He liked the silence with Quakers and the fact that there were no priests and no creed and that anyone could minister. He has attended the Meetings for Worship for Business and liked the format. He has not yet been to an Area Meeting nor the annual Britain Yearly Meeting. He has looked at the *Quakers in Britain* website. He agreed with its messages, especially those to do with human rights and climate change; and the emphasis on equality and peace on the website home page. He said he had been asked by Caroline, the Clerk, if there were some service, such as Doorkeeping, he might consider but he did not really want to make a firm commitment. He has made a financial contribution to Meeting. He said he had been told about Quaker Quest but he had not yet attended any Quaker Quest presentations. When asked why he wanted to join 'now' he said it was because he

felt safe in this group and liked to meditate with others on a Sunday morning when he could. Membership would give him a greater sense of belonging.

### **The Overseers' response**

Shirley, Andrew and Joy together to discuss the matter. They were aware of his negative attitude to Christianity and conventional religion in general but they noted his regular presence in Meeting for Worship and that he seemed to appreciate the community of the Quaker Meeting.

As a non-theist Shirley's reaction might have been expected to have been totally positive but it was mixed. Whilst sharing some of Bruce's attitudes towards religion she thought that there seemed to be little in his approach to Quakerism that recognised its spirituality and its emphasis on faith *and* practice. Bruce did not seem to be a seeker nor did he say he was involved with any voluntary work. There seemed to be a gap between his positive response to Friends' social witness and his actions. For her, Quakerism was about faith and practice. Bruce spoke of Meeting as an opportunity for silent meditation and for screening out the noise of the everyday. She was not happy with that understanding of Meeting and Quakerism. She also knew that other members, especially the Christian members, reacted against the notion that Meeting for Worship was for silent meditation. She had recognised her own experiencing in Meeting of 'Aah' moments (Shirley I.801-802). Meeting was special as a collective rather than private act. She spoke of being a Quaker as 'a huge responsibility and a huge gift' (Shirley I.1065-1066) which gave her a 'grounded feeling from which you can grow and change and that effects all of your life (Shirley I.1149-1151). That was not how Bruce approached his engagement with Quakers. She also wondered why Bruce had not tried Quaker Quest as she had done before joining. Even though a declared non-theist, she embraced the spiritual dimension to



Quakerism. She, felt there was something very special that happened in Meeting, felt that Meeting supported her commitment to progress and owned the importance of members' contribution to the governance of the Local Meeting. Bruce did not seem to have felt any of what Shirley thought important about Quaker Meeting. .

Andrew agreed with Shirley's comments. He was unhappy about Bruce's reasons for wanting membership. Quakers were not 'just' a social club for nice people with progressive social ideas who found being quiet for an hour on Sundays with others therapeutic. That seemed to be why Bruce was wanting to join. In contrast, Andrew was committed to the Christian tradition within The Society and did not want to lose it. He wondered whether Bruce respected that tradition or would value Quaker theology. Andrew thought there was a big difference between being an attender and a member. He declared he felt a bit irritated with Bruce, especially as he had learnt from Caroline that he had declined the opportunity to be a doorkeeper. The Society was a Religious Society with a Christian tradition and was self-managed and required its members to involve themselves with the jobs that needed to be done. He wondered if Bruce appreciated that.

Joy was a liberal Christian. Her faith was deep and based on what she interpreted as her experience of the Spirit. She took her duties as a Quaker Overseer very seriously. Reflecting on what Shirley and Andrew said Joy agreed that Bruce had not yet got the point of Meeting for Worship, or, indeed of Quakers. She was, however, sympathetic to his application. She thought he had shown his commitment to the Meeting as evidenced by his attendance, even though it was not every Sunday, and by his financial contribution. From her religious perspective, she said that we cannot know how God works with particular individuals. His saying he benefited from silent meditation could well be a step on the way to his understanding of the Quaker

concept of the Inward Light and God's grace. He is benefiting from the silence of the Quaker Meeting and his own meditation and he could come to interpret his experience in a new way.

Practically, Joy said, that they could not simply say that he was not ready for membership. They had to offer a path to membership if he really wanted to be a member and understand what that meant. Shirley and Andrew agreed. Joy said she thought specifically that he had to be given an opportunity to appreciate the wisdom of *Advices & Queries*. She would like to know what he thought about it. He had to be able to say 'Yes!' to the last two sentences of query 1.02.7 in *Quaker faith and practice*, 2013.

Are you open to new light, from whatever source it may come? Do you approach new ideas with discernment?

Joy noted that these were her opinions and not part of the Membership procedures in *Quaker faith & practice*. But the first of the 'the Fundamental elements of being a Quaker' listed in *Quaker faith and practice 11.01* is 'the understanding of divine guidance'. What would be Bruce's response to that?

Shirley and Joy recognised they probably had different understandings of the meaning of 'divine guidance'. Shirley pointed out that The Society supported as a recognised group within The Society the Nontheist Friends Network. Their aim 'is to provide a forum and supportive framework for Friends who regard religion as a human creation':

They explore theological and spiritual diversity and their practical implications in respectful acceptance of different views, experiences and journeys. They share a radical questioning approach to contemporary religion. (<https://nontheist-quakers.org.uk/about/aims-of-the-network/> Accessed 07/01/2020).

Shirley wondered if Bruce had tried to get in touch with them. Joy accepted Shirley's point but added that Bruce, who had discovered the 'Quakers in Britain' website had not mentioned or shown an interest in Friends Nontheist Network. Bruce needed encouragement to realise The Society was a Religious Society although not necessarily a specifically Christian one.

After some further discussion, Overseers agreed that they should ask him to go on one or two residential Quaker courses, including one specifically for attenders, at one of the Quaker centres. They should tell him the Meeting would be pleased to pay and that that would put him under no obligation to the Meeting. In the meantime he should also be urged to try to go to Quaker Quest. They would tell him they thought he would be able to make a more informed decision about membership after he had had the experience of Quaker courses for newcomers. Andrew and Shirley would convey that message to him as he had approached them together. When they did, Bruce was rather surprised as he had expected an unconditional positive response to his interest. He said he would think about what they said.

### **Discussion of the Membership scenario**

The above imagined discussion involving four characters is derived from thoughts expressed in the actual interviewees' interviews for this research. This second thought experiment envisioned three different responses to an expression of interest in membership which were all mindful of the spiritual traditions of The Society, a response that supported morphostasis in relation to its culture.

Bruce represents attenders and members who identify as non-theists and do not believe in a personal God. Non-theists nevertheless find solace attending Meeting for Worship and enjoy being in the company of those whom they meet there. Many, although not Bruce, feel ready to take on certain roles that facilitate a Local

Meeting's operation, such as doorkeeping and may even serve as Overseers, as Shirley did. The consequence for The Society if they were to become members arises from the seeming meaninglessness for them of the concept of 'divine guidance' (*Quaker faith & practice* 11.01) and discernment as the practice of seeking God's will (Dandelion, 2019. p.127). In so far as the membership consists of those for whom those concepts are meaningless the nature of a Meeting for Worship for Business becomes at odds with canonical Quakerism as represented in *Quaker faith & practice*. Indeed, the whole meaning of 'worship' and the purpose of 'Meeting for Worship' would be at odds with canonical Quakerism, but not, necessarily, the vernacular Quakerism of some Meetings.

The scenario also draws attention to the fact that Overseers may be considered to be the first line gatekeepers to The Society as they are charged 'to be sensitive to the needs of attenders.... And when the time is ripe, encourage a consideration of membership' (*Quaker faith & practice* 11.09). Admitting those with beliefs and understandings at variance with canonical Quakerism will necessarily accelerate the morphogenetic processes in The Society. In the case of the three Overseers represented here, their decision that Bruce needed to learn more about Quakerism in order to progress his interest in membership represents a decision in favour of morphostasis, or the reproduction of the existing culture and underlying rationale for structures of The Society. In spite of differences in their Quakerism, they were in agreement with what it is not.

Joy's capacity for communicative reflexivity, discussed earlier in relation to her being a Clerk, contrasted with Shirley's and Andrew's initial responses to Bruce's interest in their discussion. Shirley and Andrew, whose secondary mode of reflexivity was as autonomous reflexives, seemed instinctively to have taken up a 'No' position as if

they were responding to a Yes/No or closed question. They related Bruce's request to their own Quaker way. It was fortunate that they remembered the need to consult with Joy before making an immediate reply to Bruce. Joy, whose own position regarding Christianity was quite different from Andrew's, Bruce's and Shirley's, nevertheless started from a position of sympathy to Bruce's interest in becoming a member. The three together were then able to start a discussion. Their responses affirmed their own unity in the discernment that he was not yet ready to become a member; but then they agreed with Joy's position that they should encourage and support him in exploring Quakerism further.