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‘DO WE STILL QUAKE?’
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC AND HISTORICAL ENQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

Michele Tarter's (2004) essay, on first generation Friends and their prophecy of celestial flesh, explores the striking bodily manifestations of their spiritual experience, particularly 'quaking'. Reflecting on this, she writes: 'it is precisely what we no longer do: *quake*'. Using interview data from a small group of British Friends I shall show that some twenty-first-century Friends certainly do quake. I use accounts of early quaking, a variety of Quaker commentators, and historical accounts of the understanding of the body, to show the ways in which current quaking is different, and differently understood, from that of early Friends.

KEYWORDS

Quaking, flesh, body, spirit, Toronto Blessing, Galen, enthusiasm

Historically, 'quaking' was one of the distinctive characteristics of the religious group that came to be known as Quakers (Nickalls 1952: 58; Brinton 2002: 2; Birkel 2004: 23). I have formulated my title to frame the question as 'we' because, as I shall show, the question of the 'we' being referred to is significant.

The instigation for this paper dates back to my reading of Michele Tarter's article, "Go North!" The Journey towards First-generation Friends and their Prophecy of Celestial Flesh', based on her doctoral research. After an overview of early Friends' bodily expressions of their spiritual awakening, she writes: 'it is precisely what we no longer do: *quake*' (Tarter 2004: 87). This is interesting because just the page before, describing her own first physical encounter with Firbank Fell, after being absorbed in reading manuscript accounts of early Friends, she writes:

My entire body shook with that knowledge...my heart pounding as it does when I am moved to speak in Meeting for Worship...what felt like a current of bright, endless

light surged through my feet, up my body and to my head, and then it planted itself in my heart. My body trembled and quaked with pulsating force. Instantly, I knew I could not stand another moment and gently negotiated my way to the ground (2004: 86).

This is, of course, a fine description of quaking, so I decided to pursue the paradox.

In the period during which I was conducting the interviews for this paper, and when Quakers visiting Woodbrooke asked me what I was currently working on, I described this piece of research. In response, I was given numerous informal accounts of people's experience of quaking, or of their experience of seeing others quake—bodily quaking visible from the other side of a room; and on one occasion an account of a public chaired meeting, a non-Quaker setting, in which my informant felt a powerful leading to speak, akin to the leading to give spoken ministry in Meeting for Worship. The quaking in that instance was associated with catching the eye of the chair, and indicating a wish to speak, rather than with the actual experience of rising to speak when that moment came. My informant explained it to me by saying that in a chaired meeting, the moment of obedience to your leading is when you indicate to the chair that you wish to speak, whereas in Meeting for Worship, the moment of obedience is when you rise to speak. Additionally I have had accounts emailed to me from Friends abroad who heard about this paper, and these may be set alongside published accounts or discussions of modern quaking (see, for instance, Gorman 1973: 117; Punshon 1987: 86; Hopkins 1999: 1; Committee on Eldership and Oversight 2001: 12; Birkel 2004: 47).

These additional descriptions of experience are mirrored in the tape-recorded accounts given by the 13 Quakers I interviewed for this study. I made no attempt to find a representative sample (whatever that might mean in this context)—I merely cast about for volunteers who were willing to be interviewed about the experience of rising to speak in Meeting for Worship. The extremely rich data from these interviews may also give rise to other future papers, but here I am focussing on the experience and descriptions of quaking. I am not, I should say at this point, suggesting in any way that quaking only happens when Friends rise to speak in Meeting for Worship; merely that in the context of my interviews, that was the experience I was asking about. I present extracts from the data first, and then move into a discussion of the issues raised.

The 13 interviewees, from five different Meetings, ranged in age from 33 to 60; their time worshipping with Friends ranged from 13 to 55 years, with three birth-right Friends counting this time from a point of adult commitment. There were 11 women and two men. All said that they gave spoken ministry 'rarely' or 'occasionally' (as distinct from 'frequently'). One question I asked was 'what actually gets you to your feet to minister?'. Some people spoke simply of interior sensations:

I'd say it was quite physical. It's actually an experience of something approaching nausea. The feeling stops when I get to my feet.

It's literally the heart beating. If I don't get that feeling of—it's particularly my heartbeat—then I don't stand and I don't do it.

There'll be thumping, and then a sensation of heat rising and permeating my body, so my hands will get hot and then the thumping will get louder so it feels as if my heart is rattling, shaking.

It's more there's a pit-of-the stomach feel, for me, that says: this needs saying. Sometimes I'm quite caught unawares by that, actually as I'm speaking. I've got up not realising quite that was what it was; and you find that that's coming out in your voice; and sometimes it's afterwards—you sit down and that's when I feel it.

Some spoke more metaphorically, but still with a clear description of something going on that was experienced physically:

An almost physical feeling of a force compelling me to stand up. It's a bodily feeling. It is almost as if someone is *lifting* you to your feet. And it is not—it's not a force of your own will because my natural inclination is to keep on sitting down [laughs] and not move.

The sense I have is that I'm drawn upwards. I can feel myself in some kind of state of awe, then I actually feel helped up. I feel helped to my feet, I don't have to fight myself. There's a sense of something rising.

Others described a kind of restlessness:

I'm never completely physically still when I'm ministering. I move about, I'm physically uncomfortable, I twist my hands about. It's not like I am when I'm speaking in front of an audience. It's not an enjoyable physical sensation. It subsides when I sit down; but if I don't speak when I should have spoken then it doesn't subside.

My body moves, so I probably shuffle a bit, and sit forward rather than in a slouch position backwards, so I can feel that—and maybe I move my hands and think: I've got to, you know, sit up on the edge of my seat, like sitting on the *edge* of your seat. And then, well, I've got to do it now, and stand up. There's definitely that kind of movement.

Some of the people, with professional experience of speaking before various audiences, were at pains to distinguish the difference between these kinds of speaking, or to distinguish different kinds of speaking within Meeting for Worship:

When I feel agitated enough something will come to me. I don't think I've ever mistaken that for the quaking in Quaker—I know that that's different. For me, proper quaking is a bit like trembling with joy. The anticipation is that something wonderful is possible; it's that kind of trembling.

The first time I ever gave spoken ministry I felt a kind of booming in my heart, and booming is the right word. I'm well used to doing public speaking and I know what nervousness feels like; I'm also quite shy. Whenever I ask a question at a big conference, I will often feel quite nervous beforehand. And it's not like either of those things. It really was a booming in my heart. But I couldn't at that point have not done it. It was very strong. And I was quieted after that.

I can remember my first or second time of ministering, literally shaking and standing and holding the bench in front and still shaking. I started shaking as I stood up. I'm someone who doesn't mind speaking in public, that was the bizarre thing about it. I spoke to somebody about it afterwards and they said: oh, but that happens with ministry.

I asked whether the physical sensations experienced would have been visible to others in the room, or whether they were entirely interior. I also asked if they had observed others visibly quaking. Most said they thought it was entirely interior, but others thought or knew it was externalised:

I start shaking. While I'm still sat down I will start shaking and feeling sick. And I'll probably hold that for what feels like quite a long time, but I guess that objectively it's a minute or two. Until at some point there's a release and at that point it's just sort of up on the feet and words...it starts with the stomach bit but yes, physically shaking in a way that other people can see. [My partner] said, when he first saw me minister, that it was the first time he'd actually realised what quaking meant.

I don't think I actually shake, or quake externally, but it's the same thing, I think. And my voice wobbles, too, it's quite embarrassing.

I don't know but I suspect that it's all inside. I have seen people visibly quaking, in the USA, not here. It feels to me when I've stood as if I'm shaking, but I don't think it's obvious to others. I've noticed others' voices are different, maybe mine is.

I felt that it must be visible but nobody else said that it was and I think that is quite often the case, though I have seen people shaking, but then you never know why that is, they might just be nervous.

oh, yes, particularly those who don't often minister, who have something quite important to say, you can see them shaking, where others who minister regularly just get up and speak.

And I asked if the perception of physical manifestations in others affected how my interviewees perceived the offered ministry of others:

I kind of want to say to my Meeting, only minister when you're feeling like that, and if you're not feeling like that, don't bother. You don't have to fill the space. It feels as though it's coming from another place, to me. Whereas it's all kind of predictable when the regular people get up, and you kind of know what they're going to say. The other thing you notice is that people who are doing the shaking bit when they're ministering, they don't minister for very long. It's just their bit, they say it and they sit down. It's not a little sermon, or what I did this week, or who I had dinner with, or...or, you know, that kind of thing.

Yes, it does, actually. There was one person who was speaking quite frequently, and with highly emotional content, but it doesn't feel like ministry. And then somebody else ministers, not very frequently, and it might also be emotional but I know enough about her to know it's coming from somewhere else. And there's also a quality of voice that says this is, this is something that's coming from a deep place.

After getting a *description* of people's experience, at a later point in the interview I asked for their *interpretation* of what they had told me: did they perceive this as something that was continuous with the seventeenth-century experience of quaking, or was it something different?

I find it hard to relate that idea of quaking to the Christian God, or the God of scriptures. Although Quakers still do radical things we've also become part of the

establishment. I think I would feel quite uncomfortable being part of some fringe group. So I think it might be [like quaking] but it's so hard to know isn't it?

I think I see a thread of continuity but I'm not sure that what I experience now is what they would have been experiencing. And that's something about the greater sense of complexity about the world we live in now. It's a mixture of theology and a broader knowledge base and all of that kind of stuff that means it's no longer simple for me, for us, now to interpret that experience as the word of God. And so I can't know whether what I experience is just a version of some of the descriptions one reads or whether it is qualitatively different.

I do see this as quaking, definitely. I don't think I actually shake, or quake externally, but it's the same thing, I think.

I would see the resonances of the seventeenth century are much more among the charismatic churches, where they do for instance fall to the floor and remain there for some time but quaking for me is a good way of describing it, actually, because there is more than the booming in the heart, there is a kind of quaking in the body. I don't think that we could ever be in the same situation as early Friends, it's more what could we learn from them. I think we really could learn something about the movement of the Spirit.

I hadn't thought of that but I suppose it probably is. A very seemly kind of British quaking. It's extraordinary enough for me that what happens, happens at all—because this isn't like me; I don't get nervous. It feels it's on a continuum of what early Friends were convinced about. It is possible to be a conduit for the Holy Spirit to speak to you. I don't think it happens very often, and I think it will happen less and less often as we become less and less sure that it *can* happen. If not enough people are there with the same desire and longing, it won't happen, it seems to me.

I don't suppose I've ever really thought about that question. If I thought about it I might say it was a similar thing.

I don't know. One of the mysteries for me is how we interpret when someone who lived in a different age said X. Ministry in a sense is part of sharing the experience of our faith. So what do you understand by the quaking, what do you understand by the fact that people were willing to go through all [that] to carry this word around the world?

One of my interviewees had a much more prosaic view of what was happening:

I do get the slight sense of adrenaline and shaking after I've contributed it, which I used to get much more the first few times I spoke in Meeting. That's all quaking is—I don't regard quaking as any more than the result of adrenaline without action. If you have adrenaline without action you quake, and adrenaline is caused by the 'fight or flee' things and the drive to minister is a sort of fight or flee challenge to ourselves, more or less.

This respondent is in good company: seventeenth-century philosopher Henry More condemned the spiritual frenzy and physicality of the radical sects:

And as for *quaking*... That fear causes trembling there is nothing more obvious...when they are to...go about some solemn or weighty performance in public, they will quake and tremble like an aspen leaf (quoted in Mack 1994: 60).

I put this view, that it's all just adrenaline, to some of my other interviewees, to ask their reactions to it:

In the end that's the problem about the whole thing. Is the whole thing a construct which one is overlaying, and a way of interpreting physiological and psychological experiences? Or not! And does it matter? I think I come in the end to saying I'm not sure it does matter.

I do agree, in a way, that's obviously the physiological basis of it. But I think the feeling isn't just pure nerves, which is what you get with adrenaline. I think it's something richer than that. I like to think that this has been led by the spirit and therefore although if you like the final common path is in the adrenaline surge there's actually more to it than that. But this is just a feeling—I can't say that this is really so. It's almost entirely dependent on how we look at things.

The Friend who said it was 'just adrenaline' went on to say:

I think the more often you give vocal ministry, the less you get the fight or flee feeling, because it's no longer quite such an unknown area. I think relying on a biological signal to indicate whether something is right or not is probably very simplistic and unhelpful because it might mean that a lot of ministry doesn't get given because people are waiting for adrenaline. And it may be that due to age or comfort, being comfortable in the circumstance, they're not going to get that.

This is an interesting echo of Gladys Wilson, writing in 1952 on the history of Quaker worship, and commenting particularly here on eighteenth-century Friends:

The danger for Quakerism lay, not in the experiences which in fact were known and treasured by individuals, but in the increasing tendency to make them the test by which the divine appointing of ministers might be recognised... The gravest danger would seem to be, not that those who had nothing to say should remain silent, but that those with the most active minds and spirits should condemn their thoughts as 'creaturally activity' (Wilson 1952: 55, 65).

What are we to make of all this? Interestingly, in *Quaker Faith and Practice* (1995) the index gives only two references to 'quaking'. One extract is by a modern writer quoting an eighteenth-century woman Friend and the other is from the second half of the twentieth century—the compilers of the book have not chosen to include any original seventeenth-century accounts of quaking. However, the subject of quaking remains of interest to modern people,¹ and two recently published articles by Friends in the USA have put the experience of quaking before their readers, in different ways.

Scott Martin's article "'The Power": Quaking and the Rediscovery of Primitive Quakerism' appeared in *Friends Journal* in 2001 (Martin 2001). He gives an historical account of quaking among seventeenth-century Friends and observes that, while some twenty-first-century Friends are fascinated by the seventeenth-century experience of the power of the spirit, others dismiss it as merely an excess of religious enthusiasm. He then embarks on an extended assertion that quaking is but one example of the manifestation of energy in the body—exactly like *chi* (in Chinese practices) or *prana* (in Indian Hindu practices). He then uses passages from the gospels to suggest that there, too, are descriptions of 'subtle energy'. Quaking, he suggests, is

merely the physical response to this energy, blocked in someone who is not an adept at directing it. Alongside Quakers who quake, he points to Shakers who shake, Holy Rollers who roll, and Pentecostals who speak in tongues and are 'slain in the spirit'. He goes on to advocate a kind of seated *qigong* practice as a way of connecting with one's own body's impulse to shake, sway, or bounce. This is, he claims, is just like Penington's advice to 'Sit, sit daily, and sink down to the seed and "wait for the risings of the power"' (2001: 13).

In among this he writes that 'modern Friends may no longer quake'; and then goes on to describe not only his own quaking but experiences of other Friends very similar to those of my interviewees. So here is a second person, along with Michele Tarter, suggesting that 'we' do not quake, whilst describing individual incidents of quaking.

In a talk given to The School of the Spirit (Shaw 2003), and in her Michener Lecture, *Being Fully Present to God* (Shaw 2005), Deborah Shaw describes experiences of quaking within Meeting for Worship, but not associated with rising to speak, and also outside of the context of Meeting for Worship. She stresses that these are different from the usually-described physical manifestations of rising to give spoken ministry—there is no accelerated heartbeat or respiration—more a light, rapid, and regular bodily quaking, which in one instance caused the bench she was sitting on to vibrate. She describes similar experiences in other Friends known to her, and explores seventeenth-century understandings of the power of the spirit manifested in the body, as well as other understandings of body energy (such as the practice of Reiki). She also refers back to Michele Tarter's work and to Scott Martin's 2001 paper.

Alongside this positive interest in and affirmation of modern quaking, there are contrary voices. In the July 2001 issue of *Friends Journal*, a letter from Patricia McBee commented on Scott Martin's article and gave accounts of her own and others' experiences of being asked to suppress their quaking because it distracted others, and of being careful to sit in Meeting in a place where any physical movements would not be disturbing to others. Similarly, in Britain, 'Ben' Pink Dandelion was told by a man of his experience of finding himself quaking and breathing noisily before ministering; the elders told him that the noise disturbed others and asked him to moderate his breathing. As a consequence he ministered less often.²

The question of the relationship of spirit to body, spirit to flesh, has a very long history, as does ambivalence towards it. In the period following the death of Jesus we have the account of the first Pentecost (Acts 2.1–41), with the apostles speaking in tongues—and bystanders mockingly wondering if they were merely drunk.

There are many accounts, described as physical manifestations of spirit, in the mystical traditions of all the world's religions. For instance, the followers of the thirteenth-century Sufi mystic, Rumi, founded the Mevlevi sect of 'whirling dervishes', who sought union with God through physical means, and Rumi's poems contain many evocations of the experience of flesh touched by spirit—perhaps the most well-known being 'Some Kiss' which begins: 'There is some kiss we want with / our whole lives the touch of / spirit on the body' (Barks 2003: 33). Rumi is now often referred to as a Sufi saint, but was regarded as dangerously heretical by the Islamic authorities of his own time.³

In the sixteenth century, Teresa of Avila described physical ecstasies:

I saw in his hands a long golden spear, and at the point of the iron there seemed to be a little fire. This I thought that he thrust several times into my heart, and that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew out the spear he seemed to be drawing them with it, leaving me all on fire with a wondrous love for God. The pain was so great that it caused me to utter several moans; and yet so exceeding sweet is this greatest of pains that it is impossible to desire to be rid of it, or for the soul to be content with less than God (Peers 1927: 197).

But there were those among her associates who feared such experiences were diabolical rather than divine (for a discussion of this see Williams 1991: Chapter 2). Similarly, among seventeenth-century sectarians and their detractors, quaking, trembling, and other physical experiences were sometimes perceived as being of the devil and not divine (Mack 1994: 82-83).

The Hasidic strand of Judaism, in its present form dating from the early eighteenth century, a time of severe persecution of the Jews, included ecstatic singing and dancing and was soon in schism with non-Hasidic Jews who were suspicious of such exuberance in worship, fearing the emergence of a messianic sect. They also wore distinctive dress and claimed that there was a spark of goodness in all things, which can be redeemed to perfect the world. These views were seen by many others as false and dangerous (Campbell 1991: 144-51; Dresner 2002: 47-49, 69-70).

So we can see here a continuity into which seventeenth-century Quakerism fits very easily—a continuity both of the variety of experiences of 'spirit poured out on flesh' (Joel 2.28), and of suspicion or active opposition to groups which encouraged such expression (see also Hunt 1995: 268).

Within Christianity, all such manifestations, including late twentieth-century charismatic renewal churches, challenge the historic, traditional position of the protestant churches, that miracles or 'extraordinary' charismata ceased at or near the end of the apostolic age—the doctrine of 'cessationism' (Ruthven 1993: 15 n. 2): that miraculous spiritual gifts (including prophecy) were 'foundational'—i.e. essential for the founding and initial spreading of Christianity, but no longer needed once the structure and doctrines of the church were in place (1993: 17). The strength with which this position has been, and continues to be, asserted lies in its being inextricably bound up with the completeness of the revelation as recorded in the biblical texts. If the Holy Spirit can still directly inspire, then the inerrancy and sufficiency of scripture may be called into question. Thus, in relation to Quakers in the seventeenth century, the bodily displays and the assertion of direct revelation were one and the same in challenging this doctrine. Interestingly, cessationism as a doctrine did not in fact originate within orthodox protestant Christianity, but within normative Judaism and within various Christian sects in the first 300 years of the Common Era. Within Judaism, the post-biblical generations were deemed unworthy; prophecy and miracle-working were replaced by study of the Torah and its scholarly interpretations (Ruthven 1993: 24-25).

In the sixteenth century, Calvin was particularly effective in popularising the idea that miracles were restricted to the need to accredit the apostles and their gospel in the early days of the church, and that scripture was now all that was required (Ruthven

1993: 34). During the rise of Puritanism, it was this same doctrine that the Anglican establishment drew on to suppress Puritan attempts to cast out devils (1993: 36 n. 3).

Into this atmosphere erupted the early Friends, quaking, fainting, prophesying, and claiming continuing revelation beyond the written text of scripture. An anti-Quaker pamphleteer wrote:

sometimes one, sometimes more, fall into great and dreadful shaking and trembling... sending forth shriekings, yellings, howlings and roarings (quoted in Tarter 1993: 34).

And another:

many of them...fall into quaking fits. [They] fall suddenly down, as it were in a Swoon...then they roar out horribly with a voice greater than the voice of a man (quoted in Tarter 1993: 36).

This is not what one would expect to see in today's Meetings for worship, but it bears close resemblance, including the noises, to some recent accounts of behaviour in charismatic churches experiencing 'the Toronto blessing' (Hunt 1995: 258; Richter 1995: 5-9; Percy 2005: 73).

Phyllis Mack discusses quaking as a loosening of inhibitions, dissolving the boundaries that separated individuals from one another, described by Friends then as 'melting' (Mack 1994: 350), and also as social commentary on the rigidity of contemporary body language which encoded the hierarchies and social rituals which Friends were challenging in other ways (1994: 152). Later she suggests that one of the most significant characteristics of those early Friends was their belief in the fluidity of the personality and the solidity of the group (1994: 246).

It is instructive to look at this in the light of seventeenth-century understandings of the body, which were radically different from our own (characterised by Zen writer Alan Watts as the illusion of being an ego inside a bag of skin).⁴ In the seventeenth century the Galenic view of the body was still the dominant model. The body, the mind, and the emotions were perceived as completely interrelated and composed of the four 'humours', fluids in a constant state of flux in varying combinations and proportions. The body was thus not firmly bounded but in danger of leaking uncontrollably—women's bodies more so than men's—leaking physically, emotionally, mentally, these not being distinguished or viewed separately. Proper behaviour—in your station and gender—required proper control of all this leakiness. Thus Friends behaviour in quaking was the abandonment of this control and—significantly—in men it was seen as allowing themselves to leak like women or children. In a discussion of bodily experiences among seventeenth-century women, Laura Gowing gives examples of situations where emotional or social stresses led to physical as well as emotional leakage: shame leading not only to tears but to loss of bladder control; men fearing that the experience of sexual ejaculation made them leaky like women; and so on (Gowing 2003: Chapter 1 *passim*). As she describes it:

The body's boundaries were imagined differently. Mental and physical subjectivity were entwined and emotional experiences made themselves manifest through the body. The flows of the body...were interwoven with those of the emotions...subjectivity was a more collective affair, a matter of belonging and embeddedness (Gowing 2003: 2, 6).

So if we put this understanding together with Mack's suggestion of individual fluidity and group solidity we can perhaps frame seventeenth-century Friends' openness, leakiness, as being possible precisely because of the strong shared containment provided by the group—individuals could risk letting themselves be leaky, could have the freedom to quake (and not to suppress it as some modern Friends were asked to do), because of the strong group. Referring to my title, they had a 'we' who quaked; whereas modern Quakers have a number of individuals who quake but no 'we' that does so.

Ann Taves tackles this whole area by examining principally the protestant revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but also looking back to the seventeenth and forward to the early twentieth centuries. She interweaves accounts of religious experience, manifested bodily, with the narratives of the time that sought to explain—or explain away—such physical manifestations. She demonstrates a tension between these two poles running from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century, tracing two narratives which run concurrently through the whole period: a polemic against enthusiasm, which constitutes all such bodily experiences in natural terms, usually in relation to secularising theories of mind; and a subjective account, continuing to present day Pentecostalism, which constitutes the experiences in supernatural terms. A third narrative arose from within German romanticism, persisting to the present day. Instead of opposing the supernatural and religious to the natural and secular, it proposed that experience could be both religious *and* natural (Taves 1999: 6). Significantly, this move coincides with the core of the period when the experience and understanding of the self were becoming interiorised—as the self became interiorised it became more individualised (see for instance Lyons 1978: *passim*; Taylor 1992: *passim*; Seigel 2005: *passim*), and so bodily manifestations could be explained in ways that stepped outside the prevailing consensus of the religious authorities. Similarly, we see in the accounts of most of my interviewees that, in late modern times, quaking has become largely interiorised; a matter of inner physical sensations experienced by the person quaking, rather than the striking outward and visible/audible bodily manifestations reported in the seventeenth century.

Taves discusses at some length the functions and uses of the accusation of 'enthusiasm', and points out that one of its consequences was to recast the theological claims of those so accused as being delusions that could be explained (away) in secular and scientific terms. In her terms we can ask whether Scott Martin's explanation of quaking in terms of *qigong* falls into this category. In the eighteenth century, 'enthusiasm'—a negative catch-all term for religious dissent—gradually came to be redefined as mental illness rather than heresy. Thus this disturbing matter which had led to regicide and republicanism could be explained scientifically instead of theologically (Taves 1999: 18). And just as modern Quakers have been asked to moderate their behaviour, so in 1814 a lay Methodist in Philadelphia wrote that:

he was not opposed to extravagant emotions and bodily exercises at the time of conversion or in private, but on the part of converted Christians in the context of public worship (Taves 1999: 76).

For 350 years or so, mainstream protestants have construed ‘enthusiasm’ as ‘false religion’. Putting the phrase ‘Toronto Blessing’ into Google⁵ produces a list of top-ranking results consisting predominantly of websites created by self-styled ‘fundamental Baptists’ and other such traditionally conservative protestant groups, seeking to discredit the Toronto Blessing as false religion or heresy, because it goes beyond the sufficiency of scripture. The preface to the 1995 *Church of England Yearbook* called it ‘an expression of mass hysteria’ (Porter and Richter 1995: 1). Sociologist Philip Richter describes the manifestations as including, typically: bodily weakness and falling to the ground; shaking, trembling, twitching, and convulsive bodily movements, often experienced in the stomach region; uncontrollable laughing, wailing, or weeping; apparent drunkenness; animal sounds; intense physical activity (such as running round the church) (Richter 1995: 7–9). Individuals who have received the ‘blessing’ describe it as ‘being surrounded by light’, ‘transparent with light’, ‘an electric current’, ‘melting into the chair’ (1995: 31). The accounts of the spread of the phenomenon make it clear that it spreads through whole congregations; it is a collective as well as an individual experience (1995: 9–13)—so perhaps more like seventeenth- than twenty-first-century Friends? But whether this collective experience is psychological or spiritual in origin is a matter of debate (Murphy 1995: *passim*).

John Kent, a historian, compares these experiences with those of the Wesleyan revival, but questions the simple acceptance of continuity of experience, because the ‘experiences’ have always existed in the context of the understanding and explanation of them. In Wesley’s time this was a contrast between the states of damnation and justification, whereas there is no suggestion of that in the Toronto Blessing accounts—one cannot simply compare physical symptom to physical symptom and then assume one is talking about the same religious experience (Kent 1995: 95–98).

The development of an understanding that experience could be simultaneously religious *and* true (i.e. not ‘false religion’) *and* natural situated bodily manifestations of religious experience firmly in their social and historical context. Eighteenth-century quietist Friends rejected, sought to suppress, transcend, or set aside the natural, the creaturely—only the divinely inspired, the supernatural, was to be encouraged and nurtured. But it was precisely during the eighteenth century that the third narrative described by Taves, of natural-plus-religious, gained ground; and of course it paved the way for nineteenth- and twentieth-century evangelical religion, which was perfectly comfortable with the natural, as is late twentieth- and twenty-first-century liberal religion.

All three of Taves’s narratives are represented among the accounts given by my interviewees.

1. Such bodily experiences are of the Spirit (‘supernatural’ in Taves)—the Friend who said:

It is possible to be a conduit for the Holy Spirit to speak to you. I don’t think it happens very often, and I think it will happen less and less often as we become less and less sure that it *can* happen.

2. Such experiences are entirely natural—the Friend who said:

I don't regard quaking as any more than the result of adrenaline without action. If you have adrenaline without action you quake, and adrenaline is caused by the 'fight or flee' things and the drive to minister is a sort of fight or flee challenge to ourselves, more or less.

3. Such experiences are religious *and* natural—as the Friend, quoted in part earlier said:

I like to think that this has been led by the spirit and therefore although if you like the final common path is in the adrenaline surge there's actually more to it than that. But this is just a feeling—I can't say that this is really so. It's almost entirely dependent on how we look at things—it's all very postmodern isn't it! But I've decided that there is a utility in believing this and so it's quite a good way to live your life, really—so I would resist pulling it apart too much.

In Phyllis Mack's terms, perhaps the situation now—with late modern individualism—is the inverse of the seventeenth-century configuration: solidity of the individual personality combined with fluidity of the group.⁶ So, modern Friends do not quake in the way that seventeenth-century Friends quaked and they do not quake in the way that twentieth-century charismatics quaked. Some quake and some do not—which was doubtless also the case in the seventeenth century—but now it is some Friends as *individuals* who quake; there is no longer a collective 'we' who quake.

NOTES

1. And not only to Quakers: Stella Gibbons, in her 1932 satirical novel *Cold Comfort Farm*, includes a character who is the preacher to a tiny religious sect called the Quivering Brethren (Gibbons 1932: Chapter 8).

2. Personal communication from 'Ben' Pink Dandelion, September 2006. This account was received during Dandelion's doctoral research in Britain during the early 1990s, subsequently published as Dandelion 1996.

3. See, for instance, the discussion at <http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/hmp/chp42.doc> (accessed 1 August 2007).

4. 'Even those who know it to be true in theory do not sense or feel it, but continue to be aware of themselves as isolated "egos" inside bags of skin' (Watts 1989: 9). I am grateful to Anita Bailey for tracking down this quotation for me.

5. Online: <http://www.google.co.uk/search?hl=en&q=%22toronto+blessing%22&meta=> (accessed 1 August 2007)

6. See, for instance, Dandelion's discussion of the attenuation of 'Quaker time' in late modern unprogrammed Quakerism (Dandelion 1996: xvi-xix).

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