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Day's "Religion and the Individual: Belief, Practice, Identity" - Book Review

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DAY, A. (ed.), *Religion and the Individual: Belief, Practice, Identity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 214. ISBN 978-0-7546-6122-1, Cloth, £50.

This is the fifth volume of edited papers in the Ashgate BSA Sociology of Religion Study Group series, each one growing out of an international gathering organised by the British Sociological Association. Previous volumes have proved an interesting and stimulating read; this one is no exception.

The theme of the gathering, which was attended primarily by psychologists and sociologists of religion, was 'Religion and the Individual', and the papers and discussions focussed on four questions: What does 'belief' mean to the individual? What are the different ways in which people are religious in practice? What are the different meanings that people attach to religion, and the social expressions of their personal understandings? How does religion shape and reflect the ways in which people see themselves?

Of the thirteen papers included in the volume, only one has specific relevance to Quaker studies. Peter Collins, writing as an anthropologist, considers two apparently opposite modes of being in religious contexts—individuality and sociality. He then introduces what he describes as a complicating factor, the concept of 'secular discourse', to show how the terms 'religious' and 'secular' represent a second dichotomy which may contribute fundamentally to a misunderstanding of religious contexts. Drawing on observations of social interaction among members of a Quaker Meeting in the North of England and analysing those interactions by using narrative theory, Collins argues that, for Quakers at least, discourse is not 'secular' without being 'religious' and vice versa.

Other essays which may be of particular interest to those working in Quaker Studies include Douglas Davies' examination of the place of the individual in sociological studies of religion; Sylvia Collins-Mayo's exploration of the nature and meaning of prayer in young people's daily lives in the UK; a multi-authored essay on Muslim and Christian peacemakers; and David Bell's attempt to develop a theoretical framework for measuring religious identity.

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