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Quaker Beliefs: Diverse yet Distinctive

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also need to assess the place of science within the broader social and religious
history of Quakerism. In following these lines of research the historian will no
longer see the question at the head of this paper as particularly relevant.
Indeed, that excessively dominant question, together with the conventional
answer articulated by Raistrick, have acted as impediments to historical
understanding.

AUTHOR DETAILS
Geoffrey Cantor is Professor of the History of Science at the University of Leeds. Since the
publication of his Michael Faraday: Sandemanian and Scientist in 1991 (Basingstoke: Macmillan;
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facilitator of religious experience. Interaction between the congregants and the leaders (usually the preacher) was encouraged throughout the service.

From the Quaker belief in the ability of all to have direct relationship with God comes the concept of a priesthood of all believers. Thus there are no appointed priests. However, elders undertake some of the responsibilities of an ordained minister or a churchwarden in denominational churches (*Quaker Faith and Practice*, 1995: ch. 12).

Because all of life, when lived in the Spirit, is sacramental, no time should be marked out as more holy; hence what God has done for humankind should be always remembered and not on only occasions such as Christmas and Easter (*Quaker Faith and Practice*, 1995: 27–42).

The above summary of Quaker beliefs, based on *Quaker Faith and Practice* (1995), the book of discipline of the Yearly Meeting of Religious Society of Friends (1994), on a booklet by Hans Weening (1997) and on *Quakers in Wales Today* (1997), has been questioned by Dandelion (1996). He concluded from an extensive survey of 692 Quakers that rejection of creeds has tended, in itself, to have become a ‘behavioural creed’. The silence during worship means that individual beliefs are not made public. The unity of the group is maintained only by a conservative culture operating around the way the group is organized. Although the Society is rooted in the Christian faith, some 50 per cent cannot now be considered Christian. He also compared the answers of his sample of Quakers with groups from other Christian churches and from a student group who were neither Quaker nor religious.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question and Response</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Ecum</th>
<th>C of E</th>
<th>RC</th>
<th>Char</th>
<th>QQ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe in God?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>96.6</td>
<td>74.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is Jesus an important figure in your spiritual life?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>97.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>39.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It varies</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. This table is taken with permission from Dandelion (1996: 167, 174).
As can be seen from Table 1 (Dandelion 1996: 167, 174) belief in God and the acknowledgment of the importance of Jesus were found to be very much less among Quakers than among the non-Quaker Christians. The data for the denominational churches have been largely confirmed by Francis (2000). Ninety-five per cent of the churchgoers who participated in Francis’s survey stated that they believed in God and in Jesus Christ.

Method

Participants
Fourteen out of the sixteen Quaker Meetings in England and Wales that were approached agreed to distribute a questionnaire on Quaker faith and practice. All the Meetings consisted of 50 or more members. The Clerk of the Meeting was asked to invite all who were present at a given meeting for worship to participate. In fact 81 per cent of the respondents were formal Members of their Meeting. Thus the responses were largely provided by experienced Members. 370 questionnaires were sent out. Completed questionnaires were received from 61 men and 105 women, a return of around 45 per cent. Only 20 per cent were under the age of 50, 39 per cent were between 50 and 69 and 41 per cent were 70 or over.

Questionnaire
The questionnaire was designed to gather two main kinds of data.

First, to gather data on the background of the participants, a series of fixed format items was compiled to assess frequency of attending meetings, private prayer, reading the Bible and other religious material.

Second, to gather data on the beliefs of the participants, a scale of 24 items was compiled, based on Quaker Faith and Practice (1995), visits to Quaker meetings and discussions with Quaker friends. Each item was arranged for choice on a five-point Likert scale: Agree strongly, agree, not certain, disagree, and disagree strongly. While questions from the broader congregational survey were borne in mind, the scale was purposely designed to cover questions that seemed to touch upon points uniquely characteristic of the Society of Friends, for example the rejection of creeds as tending to ‘fetter the search for truth’ (Quaker Faith and Practice, 1995: 27.23). Since some Friends are not comfortable with the language used by Christian tradition, care was taken to avoid such language. As music seems now to be recognized by some meetings as having a part to play in worship (Quaker Faith and Practice, 1995: 21.30-31) one general question on music and religious contemplation and one on the desirability of having music during meetings for worship were included.

Mundane thoughts may enter the heads of any congregation during services and sermons are not always inspiring. It seemed likely that Friends might have similar feelings in the context of meetings for worship. Two questions explored the proposition ‘there is that of God in every man’. One questioned whether this would be felt to be true of a mass murderer, the other in the case of a personal wrong. Besides ‘theological’ questions, some of the ‘ethical’ questions discussed in Quaker Faith and Practice, 1995: 22) were included.

Results

Quaker Background
94 per cent of the participants stated that they had been attending Friends’ meetings for three years or more. The percentages of the respondents who attended meetings, prayed on their own and read religious literature are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Respondents’ Religious Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance at Meetings</th>
<th>Worship</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every week</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a month</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least six times a year</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a year</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Prayer</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a week</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a month</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a year</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Literature</th>
<th>Bible</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a week</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a month</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less often than once a month</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Attendance at other Friends’ Meetings was much less than for meetings for worship. This may have been because so many of the participants were rather elderly. Among the participants in the study reported by Francis (2000:87 per cent claimed to attend services at least once a week, with a further 8 per cent attending every other week. If the percentages for Quaker attendance at Meetings weekly and at least once a month are added together, the 96 per cent is very close to the 95 per cent for the churchgoers. The percentages for reading the Bible and other religious literature might be compared with Dandelion’s (1996) findings. The Quakers in his survey gave a low agreement to views of the Bible as an ultimate authority on religious questions and 26 per cent stated that they read the Bible at home less often than once a month. Daily Bible reading among the churchgoers varied from 32 per cent to 6 per cent of the Methodists to 6 per cent of the Catholics.

A general finding in the psychology of religion is that women are in many ways more religious than men (Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle 1997; Francis and Wilcox 1994). Inspection of the results revealed that there was little difference between the male and female responses. In the case of prayer, reading the Bible and other religious books, male respondents scored on average slightly higher than the female respondents. But the numbers were too small to be more than suggestive.

In reply to the question ‘Have you ever regularly attended (i.e. at least six times a year) any other religious groups?’ 22 per cent answered ‘None’. Thirty-nine per cent had attended an Anglican church. A variety of other faiths were mentioned—3 had been Roman Catholic, 9 had come from the United Reformed Church and 13 had been Methodists—but only a few had been regular attenders at more than one or two other religious groups.

Quaker Beliefs
The results of the questions on the participants’ beliefs are summarized in Table 3.

As inspection of Table 3 shows, the statement which receives the most definite rejection is the one suggesting that an ordained minister might guide worship—nearly 60 per cent are strongly against and 33 per cent against. Sixty-three per cent agreed that communion with God was best obtained by silent worship in a gathered company. Five other statements specifically referred to practices of the denominational churches. Observance of sacraments was rejected by 90 per cent, credal statements of belief and formal confession of sin were rejected by 80 per cent, baptism by over 70 per cent and communion using bread and wine by over 60 per cent. Nearly one half agreed that they sometimes have a sense of being prayed through when speaking at a meeting.

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which might indicate a sense of the Holy Spirit. The question on mundane thoughts intruding during worship might well elicit similar responses among worshippers in congregational churches. The respondents agreed that the meaning of Easter should be remembered on every day of the year. While this is a view with which all Christians should agree, the congregational churches still regard Easter and Christmas as of salient importance, indeed these are perhaps the events most likely to attract worshippers to the Christian churches. Those who agreed that music helped to deepen contemplation also tended to agree that they would like music to find a place in meetings for worship. The replies to the 'ethical' questions on human relationships and wrongdoing showed the liberal attitude of the respondents, which accords well with the views expressed in *Quaker Faith and Practice* (1995). A high proportion agreed that it is wrong to judge relationships by outward appearances and that divorced persons might be allowed to remarry in a Friends' meeting. On the other hand, there was uncertainty and both some agreement and disagreement with the statement that the paramount aim of education should be the development of spiritual life.

Table 4. Significant correlations between each of seven variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CG</th>
<th>CD</th>
<th>OM</th>
<th>OS</th>
<th>CS</th>
<th>BF</th>
<th>BW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communion with God (CG)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.17*</td>
<td>0.45***</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>0.26***</td>
<td>0.54***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communion with the Divine (CD)</td>
<td>0.23**</td>
<td>-0.30***</td>
<td>0.16*</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>0.23**</td>
<td>0.41***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordained minister (OM)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.45***</td>
<td>0.20**</td>
<td>0.16*</td>
<td>0.26***</td>
<td>0.54***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observance of sacraments (OS)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.30***</td>
<td>0.16*</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>0.23**</td>
<td>0.41***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credal statements (CS)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>0.26***</td>
<td>0.54***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bringing my failings (BF)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.17*</td>
<td>0.26***</td>
<td>0.54***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptism should be not with water (BW)</td>
<td>0.25**</td>
<td>-0.19*</td>
<td>0.26***</td>
<td>0.54***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P<0.05
**P<0.01
***P<0.001

There appeared to be considerable agreement in the answers to the seven questions that particularly seemed to distinguish Quakerism from other faiths. This suggested that it might be possible to extract an 'index of Quakerism'. A few statistically significant correlations were indeed found. Correlations that did not reach significance have been omitted from Table 4. Table 4 shows that the strongest correlations were found between 'observance of sacraments' and 'communion with the Divine', between 'bringing my failings into God's light' and 'credal statements' and 'baptism should be not with water'. However, many of the significant correlations were quite low and others were not statistically significant.

The verbal content of denominational church services may well work towards uniformity within one faith community. However, considerable heterogeneity may also be found in the denominational churches (Davidson 1972). Davidson studied 577 members of two Methodist and two Baptist churches using a scale to assess two types of belief, one 'otherworldly' in orientation, the other socially inclined. Some participants scored high on both indices, some high on one and only moderately on the other, others scored only moderately on one or low on both. For a church to be rated as 'homogenous', only one category of belief had to prevail among at least two-thirds of the congregation. Only one of the Baptist churches qualified as homogenous, the other congregations were classed as heterogeneous.

It may be that the diversity of beliefs among Quakers is too complex for...
to reality, to other people, and to one's self. From a secular point of view, 
Claxton (1998) noted that thinking in words can impede non-verbal or more 
intuitive kinds of cognition and stressed the value of stillness as being con-
ductive to the creative workings of the subconscious mind.

Note

The author thanks Dr Ben Dandelion, other Quaker friends for their advice and all the participants who kindly completed the questionnaires.

The present sample was too small to test crucial theories about the relationship between age and the changing face of Quaker faith and practice. The author would be interested to hear from Meetings who would like to distribute the questionnaire in order to obtain enough data to test such questions.

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Rosamund Bourke is a Research Associate of the Welsh National Centre for Religious Education, University of Wales, Bangor. Her earlier research centred on musical ability and led to the publication of the books The Psychology of Music and Psychologie musikalischen Verhaltens and other articles in that area under the name of Rosamund Shuter-Dyson. For several years she was editor of Psychology of Music. Her present research includes the personality characteristics of religious persons, Quakerism and the attitude to religion of musicians, especially of church musicians.
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