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## THREE KINDS OF BRITISH FRIENDS: A LATENT CLASS ANALYSIS\*

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### ABSTRACT

A latent class analysis was applied to the religious beliefs of 485 respondents in Rosie Rutherford's authoritative 2003 survey of British Friends. The analysis produced three groups: (1) Christian Quakers (27%), who hold a traditional Christian theology; (2) secularised Quakers (37%), who do not consider themselves atheists, but whose conception of God is not personal; and (3) Inner Light Quakers (36%), who emphasise the inner light and 'that of God in everyone'.

### KEYWORDS

Quakers, religious belief, typology, latent class, Britain Yearly Meeting

### INTRODUCTION

Various studies have shown that Quakers are diverse in their religious beliefs (Dandelion 1996; Bourke 2003). Cary and Weber (2007) recently used latent class analysis to classify Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Friends into two types. Those in Group G wanted a deeper and personal relationship with God, while those in Group S were more interested in social testimonies and generally did not believe in a personal God. However, these results could be specific to the Philadelphia area and/or the specific items on the questionnaire that was used.

Would other groups of Quakers show a similar internal structure? We applied the same latent class method to Rosie Rutherford's survey of British Friends. Rutherford's questionnaire differed from the Philadelphia survey. The British survey was designed more specifically to measure religious belief and self-identification, whereas the Philadelphia survey was primarily a tool for planning an outreach and membership recruitment program. Rutherford's survey data have never been fully analysed and its results never published. This work is a first step in that direction.

## METHOD

The survey was conducted in 2003 by mail with participants in 48 meetings in Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM). To circumvent criticism leveled at Dandelion's 1989 survey of British Friends, to which Rutherford's was designed as a longitudinal follow-up, a rigorous sampling method was devised with the help of Paul Buckley. The sampling method for meetings was based on a method developed by Kish (1965) in which meetings were stratified by size. The approximately 500 meetings in BYM were sorted into six groups based on size, with each group containing an equal number of respondents. Eight meetings from each group and 10 meetings from the smallest group were selected (50 meetings in total). Approval was obtained from 48 of the meetings. The surveys were sent by postal service to the meetings where they were distributed to the Attenders by the meeting clerk. Twenty-two persons from each meeting were selected at random using random number generation tables supplied to the clerks. Where meetings had fewer than 22 participants, all were used. In all, 800 surveys were handed out. Respondents mailed their replies back using a freepost address. The overall response rate was 75 per cent, producing 600 replies. It is the most rigorous survey of British Quakerism to date.

From the 600 survey respondents, we analyzed only the 508 respondents who ticked (check marked) the box for 'Quaker' in the question 'Do you consider yourself as a ...' This question had only a single place to check, so that we cannot distinguish a 'no' from a 'missing value'. We also excluded an additional 23 respondents who had more than 4 missing values on the variables used for the latent classes.

## RESULTS

### Number of Groups (Classes)

As in Cary and Weber (2007), we used the MPlus latent class program to determine the latent classes or groups. We used the Lo-Mendell-Rubin Adjusted LRT test to determine the number of classes. The difference between 2 and 3 classes was statistically significant,  $p=0.0173$ , but the difference between 3 and 4 classes was not,  $p=0.3399$ . There is no additional information to be gained by using 4 classes, thus the 3-class or group solution is the most parsimonious.

### Profile on Variables Used for Classification

Table 1 shows the profile of the three groups of Friends on the items used to create the groups. As in Cary and Weber (2007), the numbers are based on the individuals after they are classified into the most likely latent classes. The three groups are shown in the order in which they were extracted by the program. Table 1 also shows the value of the chi-square statistic and the significance level for the chi-square statistic. A significance level with a  $p$ -value less than .05 is considered statistically significant. However, these significance levels are not corrected for the multiple numbers of tests and are intended only as a guide to which differences are the largest.

As shown in the table, Group 1 was the smallest, with 27 per cent of the respondents. Group 2 had 37 per cent and Group 3 had 36 per cent. The three groups differ substantially from one another across a wide range of items. To profile the groups, we mention the most salient differences.

Group 1 is the most traditionally Christian. Compared to the other two groups, they are much more likely to consider themselves Christian (81% vs. 27% and 43%), view God as capable of a personal relationship (41% vs. 5% and 3%), believe in traditional views of Jesus, such as Jesus being God made human (38% vs. 10% and 8%), praise God in prayer (41% vs. 7% and 16%), and often or always seek God's advice and guidance (87% vs. 13% and 62%). However, they are not 'born again' Christians—only 6 per cent of them considered being born again as very important.

Group 2 is the most secular of the three. However, only 1% consider themselves atheists while 16 per cent consider themselves agnostics. Although they are more likely than the other groups to believe God is a human construct (20%) and call themselves Humanists (23%), nearly half (49%) say they 'believe in God' compared to 99 per cent of Group 1 and 83 per cent of Group 3. In addition, over a quarter (27%) consider themselves Christian.

Group 3 members say they believe in God (83%), but have much lower levels of belief in traditional Christian theology. For example, compared to Group 1, they believe less that Christ is the son of God (3% vs. 47%), or that Jesus is God made human (8% vs. 38%). Of the three groups, they have the highest level of agreement with some Quaker views. Over half (57%) consider themselves pacifists, compared to 32 per cent of Group 1 and 34 per cent of Group 2. Ninety per cent rate 'That of God in Everyone' as being very important compared to 73 per cent for Group 1 and 65 per cent for Group 2. Their main emphasis appears to be in the 'Inner Light' or the 'New Light' and they emphasise prayer as being still and silent waiting rather than listening to God.

#### Profile on Other Variables

Because the program classifies each respondent into a group, we can also profile the groups on additional items not used to create the groups. Table 2 shows the three groups profiled on some other variables.

All three groups have more women than men, but did not differ significantly on gender, and were in line with Yearly Meeting statistics. The groups differed little in age, ethnic background, or having an advanced degree. Almost all the respondents were white, and fewer than one in five were under the age of 50. They did not differ in the size of their meeting.

The three groups did not differ significantly in how often they reported attending Meeting for Worship, but Group 2 was somewhat less likely to attend Business Meetings.

#### The 'Non-Quakers'

The 82 persons who did not tick the Quaker box were excluded from the latent class analysis in order to limit the analysis to self-identified Quakers. Of these 82 persons, 46 per cent indicated that they were members, compared to 91 per cent for Group 1,

82 per cent of Group 2, and 95 per cent for Group 3. Of those who did not check the Quaker box and were members, 71 per cent had been attending meeting for four or more years.

A profile of the 'non-Quakers' shows that they do not differ in gender or age from the Quakers. Compared to the three groups of Quakers, the 'non-Quakers' are most similar to Groups 2 and 3 rather than Group 1. For example, 64 per cent say they believe in God, compared to 49 per cent of Group 2 and 83 per cent of Group 3. Likewise, 38 per cent consider themselves Christian, which is a percentage intermediate between Group 2 and 3. However, only 19 per cent identified themselves as pacifists, which was a lower level than any of the three Quaker groups. However, 77 per cent of the 'non-Quakers' report attending Meeting for Worship three or more times in the average month.

### DISCUSSION

The latent class analysis of British Friends found that they can be classified into three groups of Quakers. It is difficult to name these groups accurately, as assigning groups short names can imply connections that are not strictly true. For example, to call Group 1 'Christo-centric' suggests a higher level of belief in Jesus than the group shows. Calling Group 2 the 'secular' implies that many do not believe in God, but few of them consider themselves to be atheists. Only a few respondents self-identified as 'Universalists', which suggests that a 'Christian vs. Universalist' dimension is not very relevant. We also considered 'objectivising' and 'subjectivising' to link with recent sociological thinking about a trend in spirituality towards the subjective (Heelas *et al.* 2005), but these didn't help us name the third group.

However, one possible way to think of the groups is in terms of

1. traditional Quakers, who have a traditional Christian theology,
2. secularised Quakers, who do not consider themselves atheists, but whose conception of God is not personal, and
3. Inner Light Quakers, who emphasise the elements of liberal Quakerism such as the inner light, 'that of God in everyone', the peace testimony, but who generally do not believe in traditional Christian theology.

How do these results compare to the latent class analysis of American Friends in the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting? The Philadelphia survey found only two groups, one similar to some combination of the traditional and liberal Friends, and the other more similar to the secular Friends, but perhaps with more overtones of political action, some of which may be a result of an influx of members during the American-Vietnam war 40 years ago. One difficulty in comparing the two sets of results is that the content of the surveys was different. The Philadelphia survey lacked many questions on Christian theology. However, 77 per cent of their G (God oriented) group and 31 per cent of their S (Secular oriented) group agreed with a statement that 'I consider myself a Christian'. These percentages are similar to the self-identification of Christians for Group 1 (81%) and Group 2 (27%) in the British data. Group 3 falls between the two American groups. It could be that a more detailed

questionnaire would have split the Philadelphia sample into three groups, separating the Christian Friends from the non-Christian but religious Friends. However, it appears that the dimensions are comparable in both samples—that there is a dimension ranging from more to less religious in both studies on which Quakers separate into somewhat distinct groups. In broader sociological analyses of Quakerism, these results could be significant.

Gay Pilgrim (2003) has divided British Quakers into three types: Exclusivists, Inclusivists, and Syncretists. Exclusivists hold a specific set of beliefs and are not permissive about them: many of these Quakers, Pilgrim argues, have left Britain Yearly Meeting. Inclusivists have adapted to the diversity of believing within Britain Yearly Meeting while maintaining a traditional approach to business method and form. Syncretists are drawn by the permissive approach and their Quaker identity may be one among many. Pilgrim predicts that these two latter groups may form separate Yearly Meetings in time. In our analysis, the Christian Quakers and the Inner Light Quakers might be seen to most closely resemble the Inclusivists. The Secularized Quakers appear to be similar to Pilgrim's Syncretist group. Should this group become the majority within Quakerism, Pilgrim argues schism may occur.

In the recent study of religion in Kendal, England, Heelas *et al.* (2005) counted the Quaker meeting there as a religion rather than part of 'the holistic milieu' because the publicly stated reference point for the group was transcendent rather than subjective. Again, if the Secularized Quakers become the majority within the Yearly Meeting, the text of the book of discipline could change to the extent that sociologists like these would see Quakerism as being framed within a purely subjective focus.

Table 1. Profile on Variables used to create the groups

	Group 1 n=129 %	Group 2 n=180 %	Group 3 n=176 %	Chi-square(df) p=
<b>Which of the following best describes God for you (You may tick more than one box)</b>				
A father/mother/person figure	23	4	2	47.8(2), p<.001
A spirit	50	24	52	35.8(2), p<.001
A process	5	15	18	10.0(2), p=.007
A being	23	7	7	26.1(2), p<.001
The inward light	50	23	60	52.6(2), p<.001
Best not described	8	23	16	12.6(2), p=.002
Love	45	29	48	14.6(2), p<.001
Creative spirit	50	26	51	32.2(2), p<.001
All loving	44	2	15	91.8(2), p<.001
All knowing	37	5	5	80.6(2), p<.001
All-powerful	27	1	3	79.8(2), p<.001
Unknowable	15	21	18	2.0(2), p=.36
Capable of personal relationship	41	3	7	99.9(2), p<.001
A human construct	3	20	10	26.3(2), p<.001
<b>Do you believe in God</b>				
Yes	99	49	83	105.6(4), p<.001
No	1	12	3	
Not sure	0	39	14	
<b>Always/often seek God's guidance in making important decisions in your life</b>	87	13	62	179.2(2), p<.001
<b>Which best describes your view of Jesus (You may tick more than one box)</b>				
Christ the Son of God	47	5	3	136.6(2), p<.001
Containing that of God within as we all do	44	44	64	17.6(2), p<.001
An ethical teacher	28	52	44	17.8(2), p<.001

A spiritual teacher	64	57	81	23.2(2), p<.001
Christ the inward light	42	6	19	61.6(2), p<.001
God made human	38	10	8	57.7(2), p<.001
<b>Is Jesus an important figure in your life (% yes)</b>	75	13	29	130.8(2), p<.001
<b>Are Jesus's teachings important in your life (% yes)</b>	89	44	72	72.7(2), p<.001
<b>Which of the following best describes what prayer is for you? (You may tick more than one box)</b>				
Talking to/listening to God	71	16	34	99.6(2), p<.001
Asking God to change things	19	4	3	30.7(2), p<.001
Seeking communion with the divine	48	7	30	66.5(2), p<.001
Seeking enlightenment/guidance	66	37	56	26.5(2), p<.001
Meditating	24	37	32	6.0(2), p=.05
Daily life	32	22	16	10.1(2), p=.006
Still and silent waiting	50	44	64	15.4(2), p<.001
Praise	41	7	16	56.1(2), p<.001
Confession	36	6	10	59.5(2), p<.001
Recollection	13	13	7	3.6(2), p=.17
Seeking healing	45	14	20	42.4(2), p<.001
Thanksgiving	70	28	47	53.5(2), p<.001
Opening to the Spirit	53	43	64	14.7(2), p<.001
Tuning in to the consciousness of all around you	21	32	42	16.9(2), p<.001
<b>Do you pray (% yes)</b>	98	74	93	52.9(2), p<.001
<b>Prayer can change things</b>	79	33	62	83.6(2), p>.001
<b>Do you consider yourself as a (You may tick more than one box)</b>				
Quaker	100	100	100	Not applicable
Christian	81	27	43	90.8(2), p<.001
Universalist	9	17	29	20.0(2), p<.001
Pacifist	32	34	57	27.5(2), p<.001
Atheist	0	1	0	3.4(2), p=.18
Buddhist	0	7	2	14.3(2), p<.001



Agnostic	1	16	4	28.6(2), p<.001
Humanist	2	23	5	44.5(2), p<.001
A spiritual person	49	27	50	24.5(2), p<.001
<b>Firmly agree or agree with reservations that</b>				
Moral standards can survive without religion	52	79	70	25.9(2), p <.001
Learn from other faiths	84	82	92	7.6(2), p=.02
Learn from other churches	85	76	83	4.6(2), p=.10
Violence can be justified	24	28	12	15.2(2), p<.001
<b>How frequently do you pray outside of Meeting</b>				
Never	0	21	5	105.9(6), p<.001
Every day/constantly	60	13	34	
Less often	24	23	25	
Varies a lot	16	43	36	
<b>Ever read Bible in Meeting for Worship</b>	64	40	50	15.7(2), p<.001
<b>Ever read Bible at home</b>	94	68	82	23.8(2), p<.001
<b>Ever read Quaker Faith and Practice in Meeting for Worship</b>	76	74	83	4.2(2), p=.12
<b>Ever read Quaker Faith and Practice at home</b>	93	91	99	12.7(2), p=.002
<b>How important to you are (% very important)</b>				
Quaker Faith and Practice	36	14	55	63.3(2), p<.001
Bible	39	2	13	72.8(2), p<.001
Inward Light	59	17	80	137.9(2), p<.001
Will of God	63	3	23	124.3(2), p<.001
Reincarnation	5	3	4	1.5(2), p=.46
That of God in Everyone	73	65	90	31.3(2), p<.001
Gathered Meeting	55	25	56	41.6(2), p<.001
Being born again	6	1	1	10.0(2), p=.006
There is one, even Christ Jesus	48	4	14	92.1(2), p<.001
New light	57	32	80	77.3(2), p<.001
Peace Testimony	46	39	64	23.4(2), p<.001

Gospel order	8	0	8	12.4(2), p=.002
Sense of the Meeting	28	18	47	34.2(2), p<.001
<b>What kind of activities best describe what you usually do in Meeting for Worship (You may tick more than one box)</b>				
Praying	66	9	34	109.9(2), p<.001
Praising	36	3	11	66.8(2), p<.001
Meditating	45	53	39	7.8(2), p=.02
Listening	80	62	65	12.4(2), p=.002
Communing	33	13	30	20.5(2), p<.001
Seeking God's will	60	10	18	106.6(2), p<.001
Worshipping God	53	3	10	137.9(2), p<.001
Seeking union with the Divine	39	5	27	15.7(2), p<.001
Sleeping	11	9	4	53.9(2), p<.001
Thinking	56	68	48	5.6(2), p<.06
Opening up to the Spirit	69	41	78	61.2(2), p<.001
Being with others in Spirit	74	59	81	21.5(2), p<.001

Table 2. Profile on additional variables

	<b>Group 1</b> <b>n=129</b> %	<b>Group 2</b> <b>n=180</b> %	<b>Group 3</b> <b>n=176</b> %	<b>Chi-square,</b> <b>p=</b>
<b>Female</b>	65	59	67	2.5(2) , p=.29
<b>White race</b>	99	98	100	3.1(2), p=.31
<b>Masters or Doctorate degree</b>	11	19	14	4.4(2), p=.11
<b>Age</b>				
Under 50	16	22	14	10.0(8), p=.26
50-59	19	20	24	
60-69	22	21	26	
70-79	26	26	19	
80 or older	17	12	16	
<b>Meeting Size</b>				
9-19	41	32	35	5.1(4), p=.28
20-29	23	30	23	
30 or more	35	38	42	
<b>Years Attended Meeting</b>				
0-10	30	34	18	16.4(4), p=.002
11-12	25	27	22	
26 or more	45	39	59	
<b>Thinking back over the last six months, on average how many of the following activities have you attended each month:</b>				
<b>Meetings for Worship</b>				
none	1	1	1	5.4(4), p=.25
1 or 2	10	20	11	
3 or more	89	79	88	

<b>Business Meetings</b>				
none	19	29	13	14.5(4), p=.006
1 or 2	51	50	54	
3 or more	30	21	34	
<b>Quaker Social Gatherings</b>				
none	26	30	19	11.2(4), p=.025
1 or 2	60	63	63	
3 or more	15	7	18	
<b>Quaker Study Groups</b>				
none	57	55	37	14.8(4), p=.005
1 or 2	32	38	47	
3 or more	11	8	16	

## NOTES

\* We are grateful to Rosie Rutherford's generous gift of her data for our analysis. It is available for the use of other scholars using SPSS by application to Pink Dandelion. For comparative work on British Friends, the 1989 survey data from Dandelion's work is available from the ESRC Data Archive.

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