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## Dandelion & Collins' "The Quaker Condition: The Sociology of a Liberal Religion" - Book Review

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## BOOK REVIEWS

DANDELION, P., and COLLINS, P. (eds.), *The Quaker Condition: The Sociology of a Liberal Religion* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), pp. x + 265. ISBN (10): 1-84718-565-7, ISBN (13): 9781847185655, Hardback, £34.99.

This book accompanied me to a Sikh Studies conference at the University of California Santa Barbara. Perhaps, then, it is unsurprising that my review of studies of one contemporary religion, Quakerism, is coloured by my experience of academic engagement with another, Sikhism, both—as it happens—small minorities in their land of origin, and both of them reformist movements. Similar themes emerge in both fields of scholarship: identity (see in this volume Peter Collins on ‘The Problem of Quaker Identity’) and self-definition in relation to dominant and emergent traditions (see Kate Mellor’s chapter on ‘The Question of Christianity’); syncretism (see Giselle Vincent on ‘Quagans: Fusing Quakerism with Contemporary Paganism’); new activities and formations (Helen Meads on “‘Experiment with Light’: Radical Spiritual Wing of British Quakerism”); and the behavioural norms of congregations (Derrick Whitehouse on ‘Congregational Culture and Variations in “Gospel Order”’); as well as ethical issues and responses (Helena Chambers on ‘Modern Testimonies: The Approach of Quakers to Substance Use and Gambling’ and Jackie Leach Scully’s chapter ‘Virtuous Friends: Morality and Quaker Identity’).

The contributions are organised into four parts: Identity; Beliefs and Values; Meeting Culture; and Diverse Forms, each part consisting of three chapters. The book’s strengths include all the contributors’ clear discussions of painstaking research, and the evidence of a thoroughly Quaker scholarly process, as the interconnectedness and mutual supportiveness of the contributors’ chapters are striking—clearly the fruit of collaborative work and friendly conversation. Thus Helen Mead draws on Simon Best’s ‘community of intimacy’ (developed in his chapter on ‘Adolescent Quakers’) and Giselle Vincett comments on Gay Pilgrim’s ‘Syncretists’ (see Pilgrim on ‘British Quakerism as Heterotopic’). Another strength is the wide range of their coverage of aspects of the contemporary British Quaker scene: in addition to the chapters mentioned above, the book’s riches include Pink Dandelion’s exposition of not only the ‘Quaker double-culture’ but also the ‘absolute perhaps’. (I thrilled with recognition as he expanded on this: ‘Those who find theological truth or who wish to share it with the rest of the group feel increasingly uncomfortable’ [p. 35], much as I did on my first encounter with Collins’s ‘plaining’.) Thought-provoking, too, are the contributions by Susan Robson and Judy Frith respectively on ‘Grasping the Nettle: Conflict and the Quaker Tradition’ and ‘The Temporal Collage: How British Quakers Make Choices about Time’. I also noted with approval the 2:1 female: male

contributor ratio, departing as it does from a tendency for male authors to preponderate in religious studies literature.

The excellent Foreword by Linda Woodhead and Introduction by Pink Dandelion and Peter Collins situate the research in a broader scholarly setting. Woodhead takes up Pilgrim's concept of 'heterotopia', a 'social space on which it is possible to maintain a different form of social and individual existence than is possible outside it' (p. ix) and suggests its relevance for the study of religion more generally. Dandelion and Collins, too, strongly connect this volume's contents with wider debates in the sociology of religion (on, for example, liberal religion and on secularisation), and indicate the wider applicability of contributors' arguments.

This is particularly important because contributors tend not to have made these connections for themselves—and this is one critical comment that I would make about some of their discussions. My other criticism is the frequency of typographical errors. Most are widely scattered, but in the References the inconsistent punctuation of entries is disconcertingly concentrated.

Each chapter merited discussion by the reviewer, but this is impossible within the word constraints. In conclusion I congratulate the editors on the clever title ('condition' has three meanings) and commend other researchers—seasoned and less seasoned—to work in as collaborative a way, and I recommend all readers with an interest in the dynamics and manifestations of contemporary religion to engage with this book.

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FREEMAN, M., *Quaker Extension c 1905–1930: The Yorkshire 1905 Committee* (Borthwick Paper, 112; Borthwick Publications, 2008), pp. 42. ISSN: 0524-0913 ISBN (13): 978-1-904497-23-3, Paperback, by subscription.

In the early twentieth century, the word 'extension' was used in two contexts: university extension classes offered an introduction to advanced education; among Quakers the term referred particularly to activities which both widened and deepened spiritual experience in the Society of Friends. The object of the Yorkshire 1905 Committee was to make the Quaker message more widely known and to increase vitality in vocal ministry in its Meetings for Worship. It created and distributed a vast amount of literature, arranged lectures at 'settlements' and Meetings, made opportunities for fellowship for young and older, inter-visited between Meetings and set up a small staff to administer and teach. Freeman's thorough and straightforward account sits comfortably between the related texts on the period of Kennedy, Lunn and Whiting. Discussion of the techniques of 'study circles' arising out of the rather laboriously planned 'fireside chats' and 'tea table talks' leads into the wider context of adult education. Freeman notes this contribution to participative adult education as the most significant outcome of Quaker extension work in this period. It spread to the increasingly secular established 'settlements' and diminishing Adult School sessions. Considering only the first 25 years of the 1905 Committee he