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## Friends in Britain

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# FRIENDS IN BRITAIN

BEN PINK DANDELION

## ‘THE FUTURE OF FRIENDS IN BRITAIN’<sup>1</sup>

Work on the pattern of Quaker believing in Britain Yearly Meeting has revealed two phenomena, that of post-Christianity but also that of the marginalisation of belief and the centrality of form. Under the ‘mask’ of the ‘culture of silence’ (the value of silence, the devaluation of language, and the consequent rules governing the breaking of silence with speech), the Yearly Meeting has shifted its popular theology from a Quaker-Christian one to a post-Christian one. At the same time, the caution given words and the philosophical caution towards theology as a sufficient description of experience, had led to a marginalisation of theology and a permissive attitude to believing, a ‘liberal belief culture.’ Rather the group is held together by a conformist and conservative ‘behavioural creed’. This double-culture can be traced within patterns of leadership and authority within ‘Quaker-time’, patterns of resignation, attitudes to testimony, and in the way the group adapts over time easily in terms of belief and slowly in terms of form. This emphasis protects the means to experience, the highest authority within this form of Quakerism. Adherence to form provides unity, undermined only by the possibility of the heterodoxy becoming so diverse as to undermine the basic tenets of part of the behavioural creed. A further boundary function has been identified in the recent prescription of seeking, an attitude of ‘absolute perhaps’ towards theology whereby rationally, from outside the religious enterprise, Quakers know they can only be uncertain about their interpretation of experience within the religious quest. This functions as ‘orthocredence’, a conformist approach to how beliefs are held. Quakers are thus less permissive than they first appear in terms of believing although the content remains individuated. These phenomena are considered in turn. The chapter concludes that British Quakerism adapts its means to coherence over time rather than locating coherence in more stable tropes such as ‘plaining’, ‘habitus’, as suggested by Collins (2008), or the heterotopic impulse described by Pilgrim (2008).

## THE LIBERAL PROJECT AND THE PRIMACY OF EXPERIENCE

As Isichei (1970), Davie (1997), and Kennedy (2001) have shown, the seeds of liberal Quakerism can be found in the Duncanite controversy of 1870 but became established with the public presentation of Liberal perspectives at the Manchester conference in 1895. The meeting between J. W. Rowntree and Rufus Jones in Switzerland in 1897 proved a critical moment in the spread of the vision from Britain across the Atlantic and in the combined energies to realise that vision

Davie (1997, 67-72) sets out a list of features which characterised the Liberal Quakerism which emerged in Britain and parts of America at the end of the nineteenth century. Theologically, there were four main motifs to the modernist vision:

- a) that experience was primary
- b) that faith needed to be relevant to the age
- c) that Friends were to be open to ‘new Light’
- d) that new revelation had an automatic authority over old revelation and that God’s Truth was revealed to us gradually over time: the idea of ‘progressivism’.

In some ways, this reaction to the evangelical Quakerism of the Liberal Friends’ parents looked like a reclamation of early Quakerism but the emphasis on this set of characteristics was to create the biggest deviation from early Quakerism to date.

The primacy of experience accorded with the foundational experience of George Fox of 1647. Then, at a period of deep depression and having ‘nothing outwardly to help me nor could tell me what to do, then, oh then, I heard a voice which said, “There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to your condition”. And when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy.’ (Nickalls 1952, 11). Fox’s experience signalled the possibility and reality of a direct inward connection between humanity and God. It required no human or textual mediation. However, unlike Liberal Friends, Fox also claimed that everything revealed to him was later confirmed by the scripture (Nickalls 1952, 33). What was new about Liberal Quakerism was the authority given experience alone.

The other three aspects of the Liberal project (that faith be relevant to the age; that Friends be open to new light; and progressivism) enshrined an attitude of seeking never-ending revelation which

was also new to Quakerism. For example, in 1662 when John Perrot raised the possibility of changing the form of worship, Fox and his allies were clear that Friends had already been given their dispensation and that such innovation was inappropriate (Gwyn 2000, 344). Whilst Quaker theology has changed numerous times in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, such shifts had been protracted and sometimes bitter processes rather than the result of an innate flexibility about doctrine. Whilst taken by Liberal Friends as normative, the phrase ‘be open to new Light’ was invented by the 1931 Yearly Meeting (Punshon 1989, 15). The importance of these four characteristics is that they both represent a deviation from erstwhile Quaker theology and are also difficult to regulate, lacking as they do any external accountability beyond the collective interpretation of pure experience. Theologically, they are tied to nothing in terms of doctrine, to no particular text, no particular rendering of the tradition. Whilst based on interpretations of the past, they allow and accommodate a Quakerism potentially forever on the move.

#### DIVERSITY AND POST-CHRISTIANITY, THE MARGINALISATION OF BELIEF AND THE LIBERAL BELIEF CULTURE

Martin Davie has charted the shift as being one from ‘conservative’ to ‘radical’, most visibly seen in the move from a Liberal Quakerism which assumed Christianity to one in which it did not matter (1997). As early as the 1930s, Rufus Jones was apparently asked whether you had to be a Christian to be a Quaker. His answer is not known for certain but the question itself is more interesting. In 1966 at London Yearly Meeting, British Friends rejected draft membership regulations as too doctrinally Christian. One Friend ‘appealed for a place in the Society for those who, like himself, were reluctant to define their attitude in terms only of Christian belief’ (*The Friend* 124 (1966), 672). Davie (1997) cites Janet Scott’s 1980 Swarthmore Lecture *What Canst Thou Say? Towards a Quaker Theology* as symbolic of this shift. When faced with the question as to whether Quakers need be Christian or not, Scott answers that it does not matter: ‘what matters to Quakers is not the label by which we are called or call ourselves, but the life’ (Scott 1980, 70).

After the Second World War, particularly as the endogamous and dynastic Quakerism was replaced by an increasing number of Friends joining as adults, belief diversified. Eighty-five per cent of participants now join as adults (Dandelion 1996, 331), 47% directly from other churches, the rest with no immediately prior religious affiliation (Heron 1992, 13). In a group with a diverse and consequently diffuse belief system, these converts interpret Quakerism in the context of their own faith experience. As the diversity of belief increased, so too did the points of contact for a wider diversity of new participants. By the 1990s, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist (Huber 2001), and non-theist Quakers (Rush 2003) were all explicitly present in the group. The group is most accurately described as ‘post-Christian’ given the large numbers of alternative theologies present within the membership. In a 2000 survey, Rosie Rutherford asked over 1000 Friends whether they describe themselves as Christian: 45% responded that they do (2003). (However, at the same time, recent work by Kate Mellor has located Meetings where almost 90% of Friends have claimed to be Christian, with the term defined as they wish.) My 1989 survey found that 39% of British Friends claimed that Jesus was an important figure in their spiritual life with a further 32% for whom it varies. Thus, at any one point, as many as 71% could answer in the affirmative. Rutherford’s statistics are very similar (2003).

Belief, in the permissive Quaker ‘liberal belief culture’ (Dandelion 1996, 123), is thus diverse. Unlike other religious groups, belief does not play a central defining role. Indeed, accommodated by an historical critique of credal systems of belief, belief is marginalized as concept and content.

## CONFORMITY AND THE BEHAVIOURAL CREED

Eleven reasons for not adopting a credal system of belief come easily and readily to Liberal Quaker groups. These can be grouped into five categories as follows:

1. The Limitations of Language.
  - a) Religious experience is beyond linguistic codification and definition.
  - b) Credal statements demean, in their limited linguistic form, the depth of religious experience.

## 2. The Limitation of God's Word.

- c) Credal statements operate to close off new religious expression and revelation.
- d) Credal statements encourage a complacency of attitude to religious life by giving an impression of finality and surety.
- e) Credal statements take on an authority of their own, belying the authority of God.

## 3. The Limitation of Quakerism.

- f) It would be impossible, inappropriate and dishonest, because of the diversity of individual belief, to adopt a credal statement.
- g) Credal statements, even if possible, would misrepresent the nature of Quaker religion.

## 4. The Exclusive Nature of Credal Statements.

- h) Credal statements operate i) to exclude those outside the group, and ii) alienate those within the group, who cannot subscribe to them.
- j) A credal statement would separate the group from those of other faiths by identifying the group with one particular faith.

## 5. The Practical Points.

- k) There is no structural need to adopt a credal statement, e.g. as a basis for Membership.
- l) There is no mechanism for adopting a credal statement.

What is interesting in the way Liberal Quakers collectively agree and affirm these eleven values. Ambler has described six advantages of creeds. Creeds:

- a) express faith in memorable words;
- b) educate new members and the young;
- c) symbolise unity;
- d) define and defend the faith in relation to other beliefs;
- e) maintain authority and discipline;
- f) provide a church with a public identity (Ambler 1989, 11).

Faced with these advantages, Liberal Friends still affirm their opposition to creeds. If pushed, they resist more firmly. In other

words, Liberal Friends collectively agree that they do not have creeds. This paradoxical collective affirmation of belief in not having creeds led me to the idea of a 'behavioural creed' (Dandelion 1996, Chapter 3) In other words, a credal attitude to form or practice exists, visible through its opposition to more traditional kinds of creed.

If we take the eleven reasons against credal systems of belief and apply them to attitudes to Quaker worship, the keystone of Liberal Quakerism, we find that the opposition falls away. Liberal Quakers do not feel concerned that maintaining a similar system of worship for 350 years demeans the experience of worship, undermines progressive revelation or leads to complacency and a false sense of surety. These Friends do not feel silent worship misrepresents Quakerism and its diversity or inappropriately links Quakerism with particular faith. If it excludes those outside the group or alienates those within, this does not seem to concern these Friends. Orthopraxy is used as a basis for Liberal Quaker commitment and membership. Prescriptive passages on practice form part of the Yearly Meeting book of discipline. In other words, the concerns over the consequences of belief creed are not present when Liberal Friends think about their adherence to a particular form.

## THE QUAKER DOUBLE-CULTURE

This contrasting pattern, of a permissive approach to belief content and a conformist and conservative 'behavioural creed' comprising a 'double-culture,' is sociologically fascinating.<sup>2</sup> First, it is the behavioural creed, the way in which Quakers are religious, which acts as the social glue. Second, more detailed research may show that the two aspects of the double-culture operate in inverse relationship, so that when one is weak or permissive, the other is strong. Thus, we might identify a proto-behavioural creed in the Quietist period. The 'peculiarities' of plain dress and plain speech were the outward mark of the inward Quaker spirituality and they operated as a boundary marker of who was in and who was out of the group. The Evangelicals with strong belief content felt able to abolish the peculiarities and relax the behavioural creed surrounding worship, even in some cases replacing traditions such as unprogrammed worship. The Liberals with a permissive attitude to belief regrouped, according to Kennedy, on the peace testimony (2001) and latterly on process rather than belief content. The ways in which the two dimensions of the double-culture relate is illustrated in table 1-1.

**Liberal Belief Culture ..... Behavioural Creed**

Belief .....	Form
Non-credal .....	Credal
Religious basis .....	Pragmatic basis
Individually decided.....	Collectively agreed
Individually held .....	Collectively operated
Open to individual reinterpretation	
Accommodates diversity.....	Requires conformity
Diversity between participants.....	Commonality of practice
Inclusivist .....	Exclusivist
Syncretic .....	Conservative
Permissive.....	Conformist
Change of paradigm in last thirty years	Basically unchanged for 350 years
No official control.....	Official control (e.g. Clerks and Elders)
Unofficial leadership .....	Rule-defined (book of 'weighty Friends') discipline)
Not discussed in Quaker-time .....	Discussed frequently
Not required for membership .....	Required for membership
Not central to perceived .....	Central identification meaning of Quakerism with Quakerism Quaker identity
Subordinate .....	Dominant
Does not function as a framework ...	Meta-narrative

*Table 1: The Quaker Double-Culture*

In terms of sect/denomination typology, it can be argued that Liberal Quakers operate as both. The permissiveness afforded to belief content places low demands on participants: there is nothing to learn or get right, and no requirement for a confession of faith or conversion narrative. At the same time, participants are required to learn the

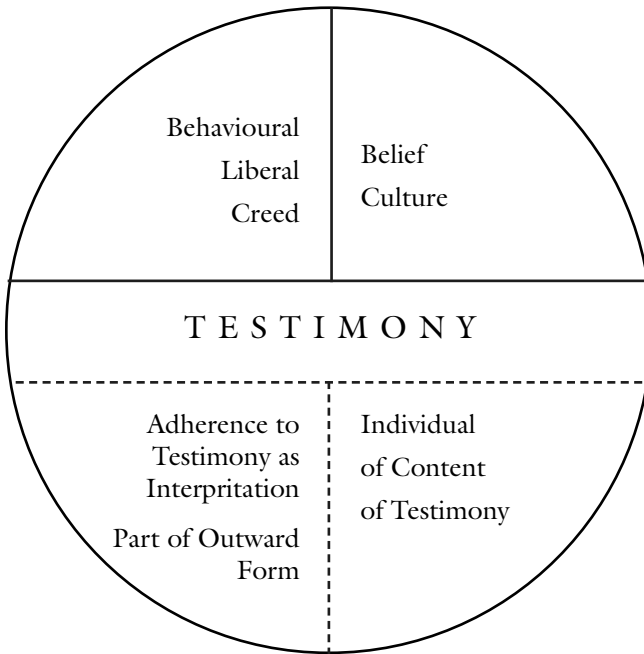


rules of worship and 'Meetings for business'. These collective acts are by default more public and more central to Liberal Quaker identity. When these Quakers answer that 'dread question', 'what do Quakers believe?' with a list of negatives: 'we do not sing hymns', 'we do not have outward sacraments', 'we do not have a separated priesthood' (Dandelion 1996, 302), it looks as if they are avoiding the question. They are actually answering the question they think is being asked, 'What is at the core of your religion?' In other words, what defines you as a particular set of believers? Silent worship, in its open and inward form is what defines this form of Quakerism. It is the means to the experience, central to the Liberal Quaker project.

These twin cultures play out in terms of leadership and authority. Explicit roles in the Meeting are limited to those concerned with the maintenance of form and to step beyond those limits is itself breaking the form and can lead to censure. Resignations also follow the dichotomous pattern of permissive attitudes to belief and conformist and conservative attitudes to form.

Attempted resignations which emphasise a crisis of faith or doubt are unlikely to be successful. They do not contradict the liberal belief culture in which doubt is valid (*Advices and Queries* 1995, No. 5). When one Friend criticised 'Nominations Committees' (who 'discern' the names for those appointed to roles) as 'undemocratic', a tension was exposed between the individual and the behavioural creed. No longer seeing itself as the true church, the Meeting encouraged this Friend to go elsewhere as there seemed to be so large a gap in understanding of the fundamentals of the faith. In a group which places so much emphasis on continuing revelation, individuals resign not only because they feel disenchanting generally but because they feel left behind by a group on the move. Equally they can feel 'left ahead', that the group is moving too slowly in spite of being 'open to new Light.' Each of these three types of resignation operates in each aspect of the double-culture, belief and practice (Dandelion 2002).

Testimony cuts across both aspects of the double-culture. Today, in the liberal-Liberal setting, Friends interpret the beliefs associated with the peace testimony individually. What is interesting is that the testimony itself, seen as part of the Quaker tradition dating back to 1660, is rarely questioned. Some Friends join in spite of not agreeing with the Peace Testimony but it is not challenged as foundational for most Quakers. In this way, attitudes towards testimony reflect both sides of the liberal-Liberal Quaker double-culture, as illustrated in figure 1-1.



*Figure 1-1: The Quaker Double-Culture and Testimony*  
*The Form of Religion*  
*The Description of Religious Experience*  
*The Consequences of Religious Experience*

## THE PRESCRIPTION OF SEEKING: THE ABSOLUTE PERHAPS

To try and understand its shifting dynamics, there have been various attempts to model Liberal Quakerism. In 1992 Fran Taber suggested a dynamic Quakerism in tension between Liberal and Conservative impulses (1992). She argued that this was a healthy Quakerism with spin-offs or aberrations the result of losing the counterbalance. In the British context however, the model fell short as much of what was normative in Britain had been described by her as an aberration.

Emlyn Warren focussed on the nature of believing within Liberal Quakerism. His models depict a shift from a Quakerism with a central core of belief in the 1660s, to one with a more diffuse pattern of

believing in the 1990s. His projection was of different clusters of belief affinities operating in the periphery of Quakerism, independent of each other.

This is similar to Gay Pilgrim's model of the future of Quakerism (2008). She uses the term 'heterotopic' to describe the way in which some social groups such as the Quakers have defined themselves by creating dissonant contexts, such as by turning the courtroom into a pulpit. She argues that Quakers have maintained unity and identity through their heterotopic stance. Pilgrim argues that for world-affirming Liberal Friends in a Quaker-affirming culture, the heterotopic impulse has become turned inward. In other words, the desire to create difference and dissonance becomes internalised when the world no longer readily affords Quakers the possibility of defining themselves in opposition to it. This results in the celebration and even prescription of mutual difference between participants. The ability to be different has become a normative expectation. She argues that three kinds of Friends have emerged as distinct groupings, akin to Warren's clusters. The first group are exclusivists, who maintain a doctrinal unity, some of whom have left the 'larger body' such as the Yearly Meeting of Friends in Christ. The second group is that of the inclusivists who manage the Liberal belief culture by continually adding new layers to their theology but who also uphold the conservative and conformist behavioural creed. The third group is that of the syncretists who follow a self-serving path through Quakerism.

The main problem with all these models is that they over-emphasise *belief content*. It is the behavioural creed which remains definitional for Liberal Friends, with belief, 'belief stories' of semi-realist interpretation, marginal and individual. Only the idea of 'that of God in everyone' is shared, acting as i) an underpinning of form (e.g. the free ministry), ii) an underpinning of testimony, iii) a common element of the belief stories, and iv) a boundary function in that anything which transgressed this idea would be challenged. Its meaning, what the 'that', the 'God' and the 'everyone' means, nevertheless remains individual.

More recently, I identified an additional boundary function to Quaker identity in the idea of the 'absolute perhaps', the prescription of seeking as the normative mode of belief, a rigorous and conformist aspect of the otherwise liberal belief culture which ultimately makes Liberal Quakerism less permissive than it first appears (Dandelion 2004). In other words, Liberal Quakerism is held together not by

what it believes but by *how* it believes. Caroline Pluss identified this epistemological collectivity in the 1990s but I argue that it has since become prescriptive. The set of characteristics that allowed this kind of Quakerism to be forever on the move have become normative. The possibility of difference has become a prescription. The idea of progressivism and of being open to new Light have become translated into the idea that the group cannot know Truth, except personally, partially, or provisionally. Thus Liberal Quakerism is not just about the possibility of seeking, it is about the certainty of never finding. I have suggested that these kinds of Friends can seek anywhere where they are sure they will not find. All theology is ‘towards’, a ‘perhaps’ kind of exercise. In a rational philosophical understanding of the nature of religion, these Friends have decided that religious truth claims are problematic, perhaps even neither true nor false but meaningless. From outside the religious enterprise they are sure of this. In other words, they are absolutely certain (rationally) that they can never be certain (theologically). They operate a doctrine of the ‘absolute perhaps’ and they operate it in a prescriptive way. In other words, these Friends are zealous, even fundamentalist, about their theological stance (Dandelion 2004). Those who find theological truth or who wish to share it with the rest of the group feel increasingly uncomfortable. One of the ironies for such a permissive group is that this position holds that any group or any individual who claims to have found the final truth, for all people or for all time, is wrong. All religious groups have to be partly wrong theologically: Liberal Quakers operate an orthocredence, a conformist approach to how beliefs are held. The ‘absolute perhaps’ is the defining characteristic of the Liberal Quaker and is the key difference between these Friends and the whole of the rest of Quakerism, worldwide today and historically.

Alex Wildwood depicts Quakerism as straddling the worlds of Christian theism, and multi-faith and new age spiritualities and the area of overlap between the two. Historically, Liberal Quakerism has shifted away from Christian theism in the last fifty years but Wildwood contends that at present the group straddles both worlds. This contradicts the work of Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas who in their work on the town of Kendal identified Quakerism as part of ‘religion’, i.e. emphasising the sacred as transcendent or ‘other’, rather than ‘spiritual’ where the sacred is part of the subjective (Heelas *et al* 2005, 6). In Wildwood’s analysis, Woodhead and Heelas are right to include Quakerism at the experiential end of religion (Heelas *et al* 2005, 21-22) but wrong not to have it overlapping into their

'holistic milieu'. Theologically or devotionally, Quakers need to address how to live in this multi-faith world whilst those who are more exclusivist, in Pilgrim's terms, leave from either side. Pilgrim's inclusivists and syncretists can lie at any place on the spectrum but those believing in a corporate structure based on divine guidance are likely to be grouped more towards the traditional end with more diffuse spiritualities towards the innovative end. The model is helpful too in letting us see that whilst particular theologies within Liberal Quakerism may not be distinct from those of other Christians or Buddhists, this form of Quakerism as a whole transcends any single faith definition or identity. Wildwood's model also leaves open the question of what constitutes the nature and boundary of Quakerism. It can thus accommodate Pilgrim's idea of heterotopia, mine of the 'absolute perhaps' or Collins' idea of 'plaining', a deeply enculturated construction of 'the plain' as a counter-cultural aesthetic impulse in everyday Quaker life (1996b).

## SHIFTING MARKERS OF QUAKERISM

Membership is falling in Britain Yearly Meeting in line with Bruce's predictions that Liberal religion is contributing to its own demise through diffuse belief systems, poor belief transmission, and the lack of seriousness identified by Kelley (1972) that encourages conversion. Liberal Quakerism *does* offer a stepping stone on the ladder of religious seriousness to the 47% who come from no immediately prior religious affiliation, but in time some leave because of the very permissiveness which first attracted them (Dandelion 2002). The 'absolute perhaps' with its zealous uncertainty requires conformity amongst participants in the Quaker group and the demands placed on members may be less denominational than the idea of a liberal belief culture might at first suggest (Dandelion 2004). Having said that, even this implicit sectarianism, seems to be failing to stem the fall in membership. Chadkirk (2004) and Stroud and Dandelion (2004) have both suggested that there will be no Quakers left in Britain within the next 30 years if present trends continue. Unlike the reforms of the 1860s which abolished endogamy and the 'peculiarities' as compulsory, which halted falling numbers, there is little major structural reform open to British Quakerism to reverse the trend. Quaker numbers are not falling because of disownment but because of a failure to attract new participants.

However, as the last two decades have shown, Liberal Quakerism, is highly adaptable. Freed from the constraints of a singular or fixed pattern of believing, it can mould its interpretations of the divine in wide variety of ways. Even form can ultimately be changed, as the growth of all-age semi-programmned worship in some local Meetings reveals. Indeed, the boundary function of the ‘absolute perhaps’ allows Friends to now experiment more fully with form, given that the creation of coherence has, in my view, shifted from orthopraxis to orthocredence, a normative approach to the credibility of belief, if not belief content. Counter-cultures (see Best 2008, Meads 2008, and Vincett 2008) could be co-opted or rejected. Quakerism is not immutable.

This shifting pattern around creating coherence suggests that Collins’ ideas of plaining and of a Quaker habitus, and Pilgrim’s ideas of heterotopia may need to be revisited as tropes which cut across centuries of Quakerism, or at least as ones which can be predicted to continue to operate as normative and foundational. In this reading, Liberal Quakerism and its enshrinement of seeking means it is far too flexible to be tied to any one particular form of coherence-creation, especially if they have been historically normative. Maybe Pilgrim’s idea of heterotopia has actually begun to play with itself to the point that even it can no longer adequately describe the group. Certainly twenty-first century liberal Quakerism is reaching out into new self-creations and interpretative identities that fly in the face of Quaker tradition. It is the most truly radically deviant form of Quakerism to date.

## POSTSCRIPT: THE FUTURE OF BRITISH QUAKERISM

In 1940, there were 157,800 Friends worldwide. In 2000, this figure had risen to 338,000. The major changes in numerical strength are in mid and south America and in Africa, the new strongholds of Evangelical Quakerism. Taken together, the increases there account for the worldwide increase, also offsetting some losses in North America and Europe. As mission work continues, now from within these indigenous yearly meetings, we can expect these numbers to continue to grow. These figures also denote a major shift in the geographical location of the majority of Friends, as well as a shift, in percentage terms, towards programmed Quakerism representing the vast majority of Friends. In 2000, 83% of Friends were in Yearly

Meetings where the worship is programmed, only 9% of Friends belonged to wholly unprogrammed Yearly Meetings, 8% to those affiliated to both Liberal and Evangelical umbrella groups (FGC and FUM). Liberal Quaker numbers are falling worldwide. In Britain, for example, there are 472 Meetings, but numbers in formal membership have dropped from the twentieth century high of about 22,000 in 1958 to about 15,000 in 2006.

In 1940, North American Friends represented 71% of world Quakerism, in 2000 the figure was 27%. North America and Europe together represent only a third of world Quakerism, a significant development given the way the tradition has been transmitted from those yearly meetings and the status which in the past has been accorded older yearly meetings. Still today, the bulk of Quaker staff and plant resources, and the bulk of Quaker publishing is located in north America and Europe and is in English. More Quaker publications are being translated into Spanish but we can see that at present rates of growth, majority Quakerism will soon be African, and in particular Kenyan. Of the 156,000 Friends in Africa, over 133,000 are in Kenya.

Evangelical Quaker missionaries travel worldwide and have been instrumental in establishing Friends churches even within heartlands of unprogrammed Quakerism such as Philadelphia. Should their attention turn to the renewal of Quakerism rather than the promotion of Christianity, we could expect African Quaker missionaries to travel to other parts of the Quaker world, once the resources are available. Certainly, world Quaker leadership is likely to come in increasing numbers from Africa and mid and central and south America. That in turn may bring further negotiations over what constitutes authentic Quakerism as newer yearly meetings, and those furthest away from the traditional centres of Quakerism (London and Philadelphia) have, historically, tended to innovate the most. The resource gap remains huge at present, as does, potentially, the willingness of white Quakers to learn from Black Friends, particularly those of a different worship tradition.

This may mean that Liberal Quaker groups, already low in numbers, may become sectarian remnants, reluctant to be allied to the majority of 'the world family of Friends', and possibly even each other given their theological differences. If Liberal Friends continue to diversify theologically and/or continue to move away from a Christian base, their connection with the Quaker tradition would be purely in terms of their worship method, witness, historical association

and name. With many of those coming into membership seeing themselves as ‘refugees’ from organised Christianity, and half coming from no immediately prior religious affiliation, the inclination to be part of a mainly evangelical world Quaker family is low. Moreover, if the reference point for the group moves from the transcendent to the subjective, this form of Quakerism would come to represent an option within what Heelas and Woodhead have termed the ‘holistic milieu’, rather than the religious world. In other words, this form of Quakerism would become increasingly focussed on the subjective. This would be in accord with much of European religiosity and could stem the falling numbers. But evidence also shows that those attracted to this form of person-centred spirituality are less inclined to join in with organised groups. And in terms of adherence to form, and the jargon used to describe it, Liberal Quakers still look like a sect.

However, there are also signs of religious renewal amongst Liberal Friends. Writers like Benjamin Lloyd (2007) and initiatives such as ‘Quaker Quest’ (a rolling programme of public talks on Quakerism initiated in London) represent a clarity over the strengths of Liberal Quakerism and a refusal to ‘dumb down’ descriptions of its spiritual core. Some of the analysis of the diversification of belief within Liberal Quakerism, was around the invisibility of belief, and the anxiety such invisibility gave those wishing to share more. These kinds of new currents represent a solidly theist approach unafraid to say so, and this may both create a clear ‘line in the sand’ as to how far Liberal Quakerism can mutate, as well as offering those inside the group and those coming in, a clear sense of what is central theologically. Diffuse beliefs and belief transmission have been seen to make liberal religious associations particularly vulnerable, but these trends counter both of these danger-points, and may help bring in those happy to worship in silence and to seek within a theist framework without being too theologically explicit. As for those who predicted the end of cinema-going in the 1960s, so the graphs of terminal decline (for example showing Friends in Britain will have disappeared by 2032), may prove to be over-deterministic.

## ENDNOTES

1. Originally published as ‘The Creation of Coherence: the ‘Quaker double-culture’ and the ‘absolute perhaps’ in Collins, P., and Dandelion, P., eds, *The Quaker Condition: the sociology of a liberal religion*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008, pp 22 – 37, with additional material added at the end for this publication.



2. Culture has been described in a multitude of ways, and the literature on organisational culture is extensive (Pettigrew 1979, 1986, Child 1984, Schein 1985, Ouchi and Wilkins 1985, Clegg 1990, for example). Allaire and Firsirotu have identified eight schools of cultural definition (1984), divided by whether or not culture is seen as an 'ideational' or 'socio-cultural' system. That is, whether or not culture and social structure are distinct from each other (ideational) or not (socio-cultural). In organisational terms, this distinction translates as whether or not a culture is something an organisation has (ideational), or whether or not the culture is something that the organisation is (socio-cultural) (Meek 1988, 464). Functionalist writers have traditionally viewed culture as a socio-cultural phenomenon in which culture and the social system in which it exists cannot be separated (Parsons 1960, 20). However, culture, here, is used to describe a transmission system of shared meanings, values, and informal rules. Reference in this chapter is made to a 'culture of silence', for example. In this instance, the term refers to the transmission system of meaning, values, and cultural rules surrounding the understanding and use of silence in the Quaker context. In this sense, culture is ideational, and operates as a transmission system component of the organisation. It is thus a) not identical with the organisation, and b) can be divided into separate components concerned with separate areas of organisational life. Thus, the division of attitudes towards belief and behaviour/form, is described in terms of the operation of a Quaker double-culture, comprised of a liberal non-credal belief system (liberal belief culture) and the behavioural creed (the meaning attributed to the organisational and behavioural rules). In this way, the double-culture functions as twin components of the culture of the organisation, thus operating within the organisational life of the group.

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