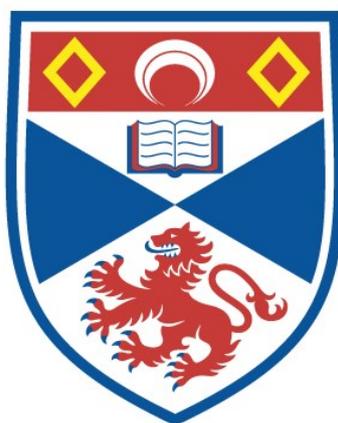


*THE PLACE THAT WORDS COME FROM...*  
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF QUAKER WORSHIP PRACTICES  
AND THEIR SOCIAL ENACTMENT

Huw Lloyd-Richards

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St Andrews



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**University of St Andrews**

Thesis Title:

***The Place that Words come from...<sup>1</sup>***

**An Ethnography of Quaker Worship Practices and  
their Social Enactment**

Student: Huw Lloyd-Richards 060014776

Department: Social Anthropology  
Faculty of Arts and Divinity

Degree: PhD

Supervisor: Professor R. Dilley

Date: July 2011

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase 'I love to feel where words come from' was spoken by Chieftain Papunahung from Wyalusing after his meeting with the Quaker John Woolman in 1761 when they dispensed with interpreters and fell into mutual silence (Vipont.1954:157, *Quaker Faith and Practice* 1.02.17)

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2

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## **Acknowledgements and Dedication.**

I should like to acknowledge those Quakers who supported this study from St Andrews Meeting, Muswell Hill Meeting, Friends House, and the *Kindlers*, those who agreed to talk to me, and those who agreed to be taped. I am particularly indebted to Alec Davison of Muswell Hill Meeting, the founder of *Quaker Quest* and the *Kindlers* who was a key informant and guide during the study. I thank John Fitzgerald, John Woods and the *Ecumenical Accompaniers Programme* for permission to use their photographs which appeared in The Friend. Thanks too to Ben Davies, and Megan Hoffman. This thesis is dedicated to Joyce Taylor, my partner, who has supported me throughout the study.

---

## **Abstract**

This thesis addresses the worship practices of contemporary Quakers and their social enactment. It presents an ethnography that attempts to evoke participation in Meeting for Worship at a local site (St Andrews Quaker Meeting) and also adopts a strategic perspective towards Quaker practices as a dispersed community of practice. It deploys two major theoretical frameworks: a revised theory of secularisation developed by Taylor (2007) and Martin (2005); and Cultural Theory developed from Douglas (1996,1998). A short history of Quakers is set out. A context for contemporary Quakers, the 'spiritual landscape' (Taylor, 2007), is characterised. Quaker reflexive literature is reviewed. Following the ethnography of a Meeting for Worship, four key domains of practice are further discussed – the body, silence, speech and gatheredness. The Meeting for Worship for Business is described using ethnographic material. Sources of power, decision-making criteria, the construction of the Quaker narrative, and the emergence of renewal initiatives are reviewed. Four central elements of Quaker practice – the Worship ritual, the Testimonies, Business Meetings, and Cosmologies – are plotted within the grid-group model and Cultural Theory. The thesis has twenty-two Figures and five Appendices which contain a *Dramatis Personae*, a Fieldwork Diary and background information on Quaker practice. The challenge for contemporary Quakers is portrayed as the attempt to create and maintain unity in diversity and this is explicated by analysing Quaker practices in the light of the pressures of secularisation and cross-pressures within the spiritual landscape, in particular the dialectical tension theorised by Taylor (2007) between 'transcendence' and 'immanence'.

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*The Place that Words come from...*

**An Ethnography of Quaker Worship Practices and  
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- 

## **Explanatory Notes on: Bibliography, Chapter and Section numbering, References, Footnotes, Quotations and Quaker terms.**

### **Bibliography**

The Bibliography has two sections:

1: Quaker Archives, Sources and Publications.

2: General Bibliography.

It is set out in the convention used by publisher Berghahn Books.

### **Chapter and Section Numbering.**

Chapters have numbered Sections and Subsections – as in 3.4.1. Within sub-sections, further sub-headings are occasionally necessary as in: 2.2.2./2.2.3/3.5.5./4.4.7./4.5.21./5.3.4. These are shown in the Contents pages, they are in italic font in the text, but are not numbered.

## **References.**

References, bracketed in the text, are made in the Harvard convention (author surname, date, page number).

## **Footnotes.**

All Quaker material is treated as a source and is footnoted on the page where it appears. Quaker material may include Quaker academic literature, pamphlets and text provided by or obtained from participants, and my participation in Quaker activities. Fieldnotes are footnoted as follows:

1. A transcription from a tape: 'Fieldnotes: Tape Text Pauline'
2. A text source: 'Fieldnotes: Text Pauline'.
3. Notes made from the author's memory of an event: 'Headnotes'.
4. Information obtained from a particular group source: 'Fieldnotes: Text *Kindlers*'. Where appropriate this also includes a named person.
5. In the ethnography in Chapter 3 thoughts are footnoted as: 'Author's Headnotes'.

The gender of informants is maintained. The names of the *Kindlers* group are their real names. Real names are retained of Quaker authors, quoted in the

thesis, who were also members of the *Kindlers*, for example, Alec Davison, Alex Wildwood and Linda Murgatroyd. All other names are fictitious. All persons, however named, may be traced to their profiles in the *Dramatis Personae* in **Appendix I**.

### **Quotations.**

Quotations are in indented paragraphs as follows:

1. Quotations from texts, both published and Quaker texts, are in regular font where dotted spaces .... indicate my editing of a quotation.
2. Quotations from transcribed tapes and ethnographic material from my notes of oral material, are in italic font, where .... indicate a pause in speech.

Quaker sources and quotations (texts or ethnographic material) are footnoted, other quotations are referenced in Harvard convention. The particular conventions used for indented paragraphs in **Chapter 3. 'An Ethnography of a Meeting for Worship'**, are set out in 1.3.4 below.

### **Quaker Terms.**

At the first use of any Quaker terms an explanatory footnote is provided. Certain formal Quaker terms henceforth retain initial capital letters, for example 'Light', and 'Meeting for Worship'. General Quaker terms once introduced are not further distinguished in the text, for example 'leading',

'concern' and 'uphold'. The practice of 'centring-down' is spelled 'centering-down' to indicate its Quaker pronunciation. Distinct sub-groups, or networks within Quakerism are italicised, for example: *Kindlers*, *Universalists* and *Experiment with Light*.

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## Chapter 1.

### Introduction.

#### Section 1: Contemporary Quakers, their History and Self-Representation.

##### 1.1.1 Images and Origins.

The word 'Quaker' may conjure up a number of images: a black hatted man on a packet of porridge, an image of a stern 19<sup>th</sup>-Century woman on a Bank of England £5 note or simple lines of wooden furniture. *'Quakers?... They are teetotal and pacifist aren't they?' 'Are they not evangelical?' 'Don't they sit in silent meetings, in a circle?'* are some immediate responses from the public. A self-deprecating Quaker described Quakers to me like this: *'We are Guardian Readers at prayer', 'hand-knitted' and basically, well, just "well-doing" people'*.<sup>2</sup>

Quakers emerged as a sect <sup>3</sup> after the English Civil War in 1652. George Fox was the early visionary prophet and they survive to this day. The hat is a symbol of equality;<sup>4</sup> the packet is an example of their success in trade and

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<sup>2</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text. The speaker also said that most British Quakers are 'white, middle class and work in the public sector'.

<sup>3</sup> Quakers certainly began as a sect in Bruce's (1995:20) terminology, but this is not a self-description. Quakers sometimes refer to themselves as a 'church'; *The Nature and Mission of the Church 2008*. Douglas (1996) prefers the word 'enclave' to sect. Quakers refer to themselves as 'the Society' from their title 'The Religious Society of Friends' or as 'Friends' or as 'Quakers'. I adopt the terms 'enclave' and 'Quakers'.

<sup>4</sup> Early Quakers refused to remove their hats to their 'superiors'.

banking;<sup>5</sup> the image of Elizabeth Fry is a testament to their penal reforming zeal <sup>6</sup> and the equality of women; the simple aesthetic lines are Shaker not Quaker; their 'hand-knittedness' is a pointer towards their commitment to the sustainability of the natural world; their choice of newspaper a clue to their demographic composition.<sup>7</sup> Their worship is distinctively based on silence.

Collins notes that:

Continuity figures largely in Quaker discourse, and British Friends have a strong sense of the historical trajectory of the group: the past is folded into the present...a diverse group of people who somehow manage to combine to rally under the same banner (Collins, 2002b:281).

The tradition is constantly mined by Quakers to explore their origins and is sometimes used as the justification of new interpretations. Quakers have their origins in the mid 17<sup>th</sup>-Century, post-reformation, post English Civil War period. Quakers survived from a raft of marginal and millenarian sects that included the Levellers, Seekers, and Independents.<sup>8</sup> Quakers were then therefore associated not just with religious dissent but with potential threats to the state. The head of both the Church and the State, King Charles 1<sup>st</sup>, had had his head severed. Quakers, however, preached the sovereignty of the individual in religious terms.

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<sup>5</sup> Quaker production was concentrated in chocolate (Cadburys/Terrys) in foodstuffs (Huntley and Palmer, Reckit and Coleman) and in necessities such as shoes (Clarkes). Between 1700 and 1750, 50% of the British iron industry was in Quaker hands. A significant producer was Lloyds of South Wales, which evolved into the banking family. Quakers were also instrumental in the creation of mutual societies such as Friends Provident.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Fry. Her prison reform work in Newgate (1815 onwards) was commemorated recently on the Bank of England £5 note.

<sup>7</sup> The Guardian newspaper is read by many public sector professionals who are well represented amongst Quakers.

<sup>8</sup> The full list of post civil war sects would include: Diggers, Ranters, Muggletonians, Grindletonians or Fifth Monarchy Men, and some with similar characteristics to Quakers such as Seekers and Familists (Bauman, 1933:7).

Quakers have been linked, by some historians, to continental mystical traditions and apocalyptic thought (Braithwaite, 1912, Jarman, 2010:28). Quakers were given their name after Justice Bennett described Fox at his trial before him in 1650, as 'quaking'<sup>9</sup> when speaking (Dandelion, 2007:29). They were also known as 'Friends' and as 'Friends of the Truth'.<sup>10</sup> They rejected the Puritan structures and practices of 'religion' and churches, which they referred to as 'steeplehouses', priests, creeds, and the mediation of sacraments and developed a belief in unmediated inspired religious truth. Conversion, becoming a Quaker, was called 'convincement'. Their inspired guidance was, and still is, referred to as a 'leading', which usually applies to matters of individual vocation, and as a 'concern' which is a more general issue of faith and action. Both of these 'promptings'<sup>11</sup> as they are called, may be taken for 'discernment'<sup>12</sup> to various kinds of Meetings. There is continued debate as to the relative emphasis early Quakers placed on scripture in relation to new revelation. Quaker practice today is referred to as 'rooted in Christianity but open to new light' (Wildwood, 1999:8, QF&P, 1.02.7, A&Qs, 7).

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<sup>9</sup> Quaking was however primarily associated with the process of convincement in 'threshings' meetings and this was noted by Bauman as 'marking the stage of transition or marginality between separation and integration that constitutes the structure of the rite of passage' (Bauman, 1983:80). An early anti-Quaker pamphlet by Higginson in 1653 similarly described the 'falling into quaking fits' as the struggle between the flesh and the spirit (Higginson, 1653:15).

<sup>10</sup> Quakerism's formal title is the 'Religious Society of Friends' and this is often now reduced to 'Friends'. The phrase 'Friends of the Truth' is not now in common usage. 'Truth' meant the Christian Gospel for early Quakers.

<sup>11</sup> The first paragraph of the Quaker Advices and Queries (A&Qs) notes 'Take Heed dear Friends to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts' (QF&P, 1.02)

<sup>12</sup> Discernment carries two meanings: the individual's attempts to receive and discriminate spiritual guidance from other contents of the conscience and a formal process used by groups in Meetings to authenticate truly spiritual leadings. This process is discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Section 2.

### **1.1.2. The Light.**

The word light raises complex issues for a study of Quakers. There are various traditional cognate terms and contemporary usages, namely: Inward Light; Inner Light; Light; Light of Christ; Light in their consciences; and new Light. The Quaker use of word Light originates with Fox, first appearing in 1652-54 (Moore, 2000:81, Nickalls, 1997:29,33). In the Journals (Nickalls, 1997) Fox uses the term variously: as being synonymous with the figure of Christ; as a pre-existent quality of the divine 'before the scriptures' (Nickalls, 1997:33); as the active disclosing image of the divine, 'I saw in that Light and Spirit...' (Nickalls, 1997:33); as the basis of creation; and as the capacity through which people are 'led and taught' (Nickalls, 1997:33). The historic and contemporary Quaker discourse of the Light dramatises its dual qualities of transcendence reference and embodied immanence. This entails considerable polysemiosity and potential ambiguity in use.

In encountering contemporary Quaker usage it appears initially that the transcendent interpretation of the Light carries a capital letter and reference to the immanent human capacity is rendered in lower case. On examination of historic and contemporary texts this is not consistent. However in some contemporary usage such a distinction does from time to time seem to be implied by upper or lower case renderings. Caution in interpretation is therefore required on a case-by-case basis.

Fox's use of capitals, in text derived from his writings and dictation, is not consistent with a particular interpretation. That is, he is not represented as using the capitalised 'Light' as referring to Christ as distinct from the use of the word 'light' as referring to the sense of an innate capacity of conscience. However different uses do appear in edited texts, as in: 'repent and come to the light [sic] that Christ had enlightened him withal...' and 'Ay, ay: the Light [sic] that is spoken of in the third of John' (Nickalls, 1997:92). Moore (2000) has noted these complex early usages.

When Fox spoke of 'the light' sometimes he meant Christ and sometimes he meant the way Christ made himself known. It may be that the phrase developed because it was a safe alternative to 'Christ', to be used with less risk of blasphemy charges. Fox's favourite 'light' phrases were, 'the light of Christ in your conscience', 'the light that Christ Jesus hath enlightened you withal', 'turn to the light', 'in the light', 'receive the light' (never just 'light'). 'The light' was an overwhelming invasive force not a mental illumination. It must be emphasised that that the phrase 'inner light' often used by modern Quakers never occurs in early Quaker writings and that 'inward light' is rare. 'The light in the conscience' uses 'conscience' in a stronger way than today, with something of the sense of 'consciousness'. If it was attended to, and not resisted, it involved a take over of one's personality' (Moore, 2000:81).

In contemporary Quaker uses of the term Light complexity increases. In the 'canonical' (Collins, 1994) text of *Quaker Faith and Practice* the word is both capitalised and non-capitalised. For example in QF&P 1.02, the following uses and meanings occur: 'the leadings of God, whose light [sic].....', meaning a metaphysical concept; 'the Light [sic] that is in all of us', meaning an indwelling capacity to response to a metaphysical entity; and 'open to new light' [sic], meaning new (non-Christian) sources of inspiration. The use of capitals or

otherwise is not always consistent with a particular interpretation of the term. Quaker commentators differ in their general use. Dandelion (2007:147ff) capitalises the word Light, Moore (2000:81) does not. Punshon (1987:17,113), a Christian Quaker, clearly identifies the Light with the figure of Christ, yet does not capitalise the word in his writings. However there are examples where capitalisation is used to refer to the historical use of the term and, or, to a sense of a strong realist ontology. By contrast, the indwelling sense of inspiration from other sources is then sometimes rendered without capitals. This occurs in Wildwood (2009:103) and in Lampen (2008). In these cases the capitalisation of the word Light is reserved for its traditional historic strong realist meaning and the non-capitalisation refers to both new sources of inspiration and insight particularly from an inner 'felt sense' (Lampen, 2008:108). I consider therefore that contemporary usages need to be viewed carefully since they entail a functional ambiguity, often intended by the authors, as to whether references are: Fox's use; a specific Christian use; a reference to a strong realist ontology; a generic word for 'Spirit' with a naturalistic interpretation; an indwelling and innate capacity for insight; or other sources of insight (new light).

I discuss such ambiguity in Chapter 4, Section 4. In Section 5, of Chapter 4, I examine the way in which the use of the term, and its capitalisation and non-capitalisation in the work of Ambler (2001a), Meads (2008), and Lampen (2008) is precisely used to establish a distinction in practice between the traditional theist meaning and a more generic contemporary use. In this thesis I capitalise the word 'Light' since it is a Quaker term. I note the use of capitals

or otherwise as representing a particular meaning in specific contexts where this is significant.

### **1.1.3. Contemporary Quakers and their History.**

Fox (1624-91) and the early Quakers, however, were steeped in Biblical language and Christian imagery and did not imagine a new dispensation that would supersede the Christian framework. Today, different strands of contemporary Quaker practices emphasise different characteristics of the early period 1652-1666. There is a political dimension to this historiography (Hamm, 2004, Dandelion, 2004, Punshon, 2000, and Barbour, 2004). It has been established from early manuscripts, epistles and letters (Moore, 2000) that early Quaker practice included such beliefs as personal 'perfectability' (Nickalls, 1997:367-8), an eschatological 'end-time' (Dandelion, Gwyn & Peat, 1998:149-164), speaking as a symbolic action (Bauman, 1983, Damrosch, 1996), and a collective silent practice called Meetings.<sup>13</sup> Quakers

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<sup>13</sup> The word Meeting is used by Quakers to refer to the event of a Meeting, the general composition of the membership of a local meeting, and to the place of the event. There is a range of different Meetings. Local Meetings hold Meetings for Worship, Meetings for Worship for Business (these were referred to until 2009 as Preparative Meetings). The latter are usually called Business Meetings. Area Meetings (called Monthly Meetings until 2009) cover geographic areas and usually include six or seven Local Meetings. They are primarily for business but this takes place through the same form and process as Meetings for Worship. General Meetings were 'laid down', that is abolished, in 2009 except in Scotland. General Meeting for Scotland is composed of nominations from local and Area Meetings and may also be attended by any members of the Society of Friends (Quakers). Meeting for Sufferings meets in Friends House London approximately six times a year. It is so called from its primary function in the 17<sup>th</sup>-Century which was to record the sufferings (imprisonments and distraints of property) endured by Quakers at the hands of the judiciary. Britain Yearly Meeting (it does not have the definite article) takes place annually over a five-day period, usually in London. 'Britain Yearly Meeting' is used to refer to all Quaker activity under its jurisdiction that constitutes The Society of Friends in Britain. These structures are set out in Appendix III.

believed in a universal Light that through being waited on, in silence, could 'speak'<sup>14</sup> through individuals as divine guidance within the context of a 'gathered' meeting.<sup>15</sup> Commitment to a collective form of silent worship, yet with more diverse notions of Light, is still characteristic of Quaker practice today.

The early period of Quaker activity included movement of enthusiasts and preachers around the country, for example The Valiant Sixty,<sup>16</sup> many of whom were put on trial for their refusal to take oaths of allegiance in court. This idea of an internal mission still survives in certain renewal groups and in the *Kindlers* group studied here. The early period included the emergence of George Fox as key prophet and organiser, and it was he who established a structure of practice and authority (Dobbs, 2006). The early period of enthusiasm and development, from 1647 to 1666, was followed by a period of modification during the early years of the Restoration. A degree of convergence between theology and practice was evident. Certain inconsistencies persisted such as the interpretation of the notions of the Light

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<sup>14</sup> The use of speaking as a metaphor for inspiration or action is common amongst Quakers as in, 'how does Jesus speak to you today?' (QF&P, 1.02.4) and 'Let your life speak' (A&Qs, 27.) and 'answering that of God in everyone' (Fox, 1656 in Nickalls, 1997:209). The ethnography of early Quaker speech can be followed in Bauman, 1983 and is discussed here in Chapter 3, Section 5.

<sup>15</sup> The term 'gathered' is used to describe the quality of a Meeting of any kind that seems to have achieved 'a state of profound corporate spirituality' (Collins, 1994: Glossary). See Chapter 3, Section 6 for full discussion.

<sup>16</sup> Fox urged his followers in the years after 1654 (when John Camm and Francis Howgill had travelled on foot from the north of England to see Oliver Cromwell) to go south and 'send abroad out of the north countries'. Fifty-four men and six women, referred to as the 'Valiant Sixty' travelled south in a successful missionary campaign (Vipont 1954:45, Bauman, 1983:143).

and Seed,<sup>17</sup> but the authority structures were firmly in place with the leadership in Fox's hands.<sup>18</sup> Five aspects of the early features were modified: more emphasis was placed on the Christian aspects, and the historical Jesus; an adaptation to the doctrine of perfection was made; greater emphasis was placed on collective authority over individual revelation; ways of policing Quaker theological pamphlets were instituted and hopes for a second coming diminished (Moore, 2000). The period of Quietism from the early 18<sup>th</sup>-Century till the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century (Dandelion, 2008:41,58-59) was characterised by a return to a sense of personal private conviction, by 'waiting'<sup>19</sup> and by maintaining visible signs of difference such as peculiarities of dress and speech. Quakers continued to 'marry in' and were Quakers by birth. Those who did not conform to the discipline were disowned.

The first 60 years of Quaker activity seem to exemplify the Weberian thesis of the routinisation of charisma (Bauman, 1983:138-153). The founding visionary

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<sup>17</sup> The word Seed appears in Fox's Journals frequently and includes the senses of God as Seed, Christ as 'the lord's everlasting Seed' (Nickalls, 1997:367) and as an indwelling power, 'be known to men in the Seed of God' (Nickalls, 1997:281). It was used extensively in the writings of Isaac Pennington (1616-1679) where Fox's senses of seed are developed in a metaphor of growth 'from the dead spirit of the veiled self to the life of the Spirit' (Keiser and Moore 2005:150). It appears in Quaker Faith and Practice (19.14), 'I have met with the Seed' and the 'Seed's Father' in quotation from Pennington. It also appears in that text in *Well-Loved Phrases* (QF&P:671). The word is usually capitalised. It has similar scope to the Quaker concept of the Light spanning references to God and to an indwelling innate capacity to respond to the Spirit and to experience its presence. It remains in use amongst Quakers.

<sup>18</sup> Fox was an inspiring preacher, an indefatigable missionary and traveller, and was supported and given resources by Judge and Margaret Fell (who later became his wife) of Ullverston. He steadied the movement after the prosecution of James Naylor whom he eclipsed. Fox also established Meeting Houses and was an effective organiser.

<sup>19</sup> The key to Quietism is the idea that the path to God is a retreat from the world and the self, expressed in the 1789 epistle from London Yearly Meeting 'wait humbly and diligently in the spirit of your minds...' (Dandelion, 2007 :59)

dies, his works are collected as text (George Fox's *Journals*), the inspired excesses, of Naylor,<sup>20</sup> are disowned (Damrosch, 1996) and the 'miracles'<sup>21</sup> claimed for Fox are expunged from later accounts. Spontaneous inspired speech gives way to more stylised ministry in permanent Meeting Houses and a definitive theology of Quakers is written by Barclay (1648-1690).<sup>22</sup> Quakers benefit from post Restoration tolerance and become a harmless sect which became settled and inward looking.<sup>23</sup>

The early Quakers were well educated and literate, mostly artisans, and though concerned about the payment of tithes were not a civil threat in terms of recruiting converts from the dissatisfied labouring classes. Quaker attitudes to money, trade and commerce, such as 'fixed prices' and plain dealing and the fusion of ethical and faith practices, enabled Quakers to prosper in business through to the 19th-Century. Quakerism has played a small but distinctive part in recent European history. Quaker pacifists formed the Friends Ambulance Corps in both World Wars. Quakers were active in assisting refugees from the Spanish Civil War and escapees from internment

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<sup>20</sup> James Naylor was an influential early Quaker who in 1656 rode into Bristol on a Donkey, re-enacting Christ's entry into Jerusalem. He was put on trial before Parliament for blasphemy. He was tortured, released in 1659 and died in 1660 (Moore, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> Fox believed in the possibility of 'miracles' both in a general sense of 'quickenings' they that 'were dead in Adam', that is to say bringing those who were 'dead' to see the true faith (Fox 1663: Manuscript Item 52.E quoted in McGregor Ross, 1991:35 *Miracles of Miracles*) and in the specific sense of 'cures' (Damrosch, 1996:158). However Fox described the report of an attempt to bring a child back to life as 'mad whimsey' (Nickalls, 1997:290). His list of 'cures' was thought to include cases of blindness. His *Book of Miracles* was suppressed after the late 17<sup>th</sup>-Century and only the contents page survives (Damrosch, 1996: 157-9).

<sup>22</sup> Barclay, 1678 (2002) *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity*.

<sup>23</sup> Fieldnotes Text: Bonneville. Tom Bonneville of the *Kindlers* noted that contemporary Quakers 'want a charismatic experience of inspiration without any shared notion of a charism'.

by the French Vichy Government. British Quakers received the Nobel Peace Prize after WW II.

Quakers are often in search of a connection with their history and founders. Of the twelve chapters of Dandelion's 2004 collection of *Quaker Theory*, eight are concerned with re-evaluating various aspects of the tradition and contain theories and historiography of early Quaker practices. Some revisionist work such as that on notions of the 'end time' (Dandelion, Gwyn & Peat, 1998) has found little resonance amongst contemporary Quakers but this has not been the case with the work of Ambler (2001,a&b). Ambler has attempted to show that the early spiritual disciplines of 'waiting on the Light' engaged in by George Fox and other early Quakers can be described in modern psychological terms and that this practice can be developed with the assistance of psychological techniques (Gendling, 1978). His work has been developed into a programme called *Experiment with Light* (Lampen, 2008) and researched by Mead (2008, Dandelion, 2008). I examine these claims in an ethnographic account of participation in an *Experiment with Light* group and in the discussion on renewal initiatives in Chapter 4, Section 4.

The focus of this study is on the British liberal unprogrammed <sup>24</sup> tradition that has persisted in Britain since 1652 and maintains 'silent' Meetings with no

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<sup>24</sup> This is the Quaker description of meetings that have no pastors, hymn-singing, formal prayers, and adhere to the original form of meetings established by Fox and early Quakers. These meetings were based on shared silence, broken only by verbal ministry by a member or attender who is moved to speak. The only exception to this is the requirement for Elders of local meetings to read a passage from the text *Advices and Queries* at meetings one a month. All meetings held within the jurisdiction of

liturgy, and no paid clergy. 'Britain Yearly Meeting' is the decision-making body for the 470 local Meetings, which had 14,550 members in 2009. Numbers in the UK are declining;<sup>25</sup> in 1965 there were 26,301 members. Attenders,<sup>26</sup> those who go to Quaker meetings but do not formally join are increasing as a proportion of total worshippers. Whilst the basic ritual form of worship has remained constant, differences in perspectives and personal practices have become more prominent.

#### **1.1.4. Quaker Self-Representation.**

How do Quakers describe themselves today? A personal account of the Quaker 'way' is provided by Gillman (2008):<sup>27</sup>

- (1) That all people may have a direct awareness of the divine at any time and at any place;
- (2) That the relationship between people and the divine can be deepened by communal listening to the divine within, in and in between;
- (3) Each individual's That my awareness of the divine has practical consequences in

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Britain Yearly Meeting are unprogrammed. Elders are appointed by Area Meetings to have a special care for the spiritual life of the Meeting. To be 'Eldered' is to be reminded by an Elder of some matter of conduct that has been thought by them to be unseemly, for example reading excessively during worship.

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix III for figures 1935-2009, the rate of decline is 1.21% for 2009.

<sup>26</sup> Attenders are those who attend meetings for worship and, by permission of the Meeting Clerks, other Quaker events, but who are not members of the Society of Friends.

<sup>27</sup> This text and the subsequent example are reproduced verbatim and have not therefore been corrected for grammar or punctuation. Quaker phrases used here are the subject of exploration in Chapter 4. Section 4 and are not therefore defined at this stage.

how we [sic] live our lives;

- (4) That the words with which this is expressed are secondary, it is the experience of the relationship that is primary;
- (5) Friends is a place of hospitality, of spiritual liberation, a people travelling together, open to truth, bringing life and life in abundance;
- (6) It is a pilgrimage in which we tell each other our stories in many different 'languages of the spirit';
- (7) The spiritual life is not about what we believe, it is about how we trust. The origins of the word 'credo', 'I believe' is 'cordo' 'I give my heart'. How sad that creeds as intellectual formulae have taken over from the promptings of the spirit;
- (8) You have to say 'yes' to something in the universe which I give my life to, religion should be about hope, Quakerism is about optimism;
- (9) We see as Fox did an infinite ocean of light and love which flows over the ocean of darkness.

Quakers attending an Ecumenical Meeting produced a description of Quakers for other participants, as follows.

- (1) We engage in silent waiting, we are open to new light but we have no creeds;
- (2) We practice the 'priesthood of all believers', have our own authority, we are in communion with one another in silence;
- (3) We are sharing experience with respect;
- (4) We believe in equal opportunities, we invite people to join the party, we are a refuge from elsewhere, we have open boundaries, there is no need to convert we are non creedal;
- (5) We believe that there is 'that of God in everyone', we have a complete respect for others' faiths;
- (6) We speak 'truth to power', we 'let our lives speak', we live our lives as testimonies, we are travelling under concern with leadings. <sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Fieldnotes Text: Ecumenical meeting Dunblane.

The primary metaphors in the above accounts illustrate the common tropes of Quaker narrative:

- (1) Being on a journey, seeking, travelling under concern and being on a pilgrimage;
- (2) Waiting, listening and communal listening;
- (3) Being open, having open boundaries, being hospitable, inclusive, a refuge;
- (4) Telling stories in different languages of the spirit;
- (5) Letting our lives speak;
- (6) Being all of one mind;
- (7) An ocean of darkness and an ocean of light.

This section has outlined Quaker history and initial 'self-representations' (Prince and Riches, 2000:20). These representations comprise a complex discourse including a vocabulary with historical references, a range of primary metaphors, and certain functional ambiguities concerning the meaning of key terms in use. The search for co-evalness (Fabian,1983:31) co-exists with the 'openness to new light' (Wildwood, 1999). Quakers survive, as an enclave today, by constructing their practices in a contemporary context. I theorise this context as one where Quakers are subject to the pressures of secularisation, and as a 'spiritual landscape'. The focus and starting point of this study is the practice of worship, which in terms of its form as ritual has remained constant since the mid 17<sup>th</sup>-Century and which I posit, for subsequent ethnographic exploration, as being the central, set apart, event that maintains the coherence of contemporary Quaker practice. The methodological problems presented by portraying a local event, of Worship and relating it to a dispersed

community of practice are discussed in Section 3, below.

## **Section 2.**

### **The Questions, the Theories in use and the Argument of the Thesis.**

#### **1.2.1. The Questions.**

How do contemporary Quakers construct their practices and create a Quaker 'way'? How have they responded, in doing this, to the prevailing conditions for the possibility of religious experience?

The first question asks: what is 'Quakerism'? The term 'Quakerism' is therefore problematic. Quakers certainly refer to 'Quakerism'<sup>29</sup> and in this study where they do so I retain their usage in the ethnographic account. These self-references to 'Quakerism', a general reference to some set of defining characteristics, can however, include a number of features – Quaker history, their tradition, to the canonical text *Quaker Faith and Practice*, to the totality of world-wide highly diverse Quaker practices, or to the broad church of contemporary British Quaker practices with common salient characteristics but significant personal variations. Since this study is an attempt to explore what contemporary British Quakerism entails, I do not deploy the concept 'Quakerism' as an analytic or explanatory concept, it is retained when Quakers use it, I use it to refer to the general field of enquiry,<sup>30</sup> and it remains

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<sup>29</sup> For examples of Quaker usage see (1) Page 29, line 7 item (8) above (2) Page 115, Fieldnotes: Kindlers, Alec Davison's overview account, (3) Page 216 Fieldnotes: Text Kindlers, Rose and (4) Page 417, Murgatroyd 2010:14ff.

<sup>30</sup> Quaker academic commentators however do not always limit themselves to this usage, for example Dandelion uses 'Quakerism' when referring to certain salient

an open concept.<sup>31</sup>

There are a series of subsidiary questions that flow from these initial questions. How have Quakers changed in terms of their own tradition? Are these responses 'new light' or submission to social pressures? What are the practices, the personal choices, and the spiritual disciplines that Quakers enact in their worship and beyond? What relationships exist between the elements of the Quaker tradition – collective worship ritual, personal preferences in practices, cosmologies, ethical action and self-representation and narrative? Do Quakers consider themselves as engaging in 'religion' and how do the various Quaker cosmologies interrelate? Do Quakers have beliefs? What is the relationship between worship rituals and the conditions for social enactment? How does a recognisable set of Quaker practices, survive or reproduce itself over time and what changes might take place during this process?

To address these questions the study employs a number of theoretical perspectives to open up the primary question. I also present an ethnography of Quaker practices for exploration both on their own terms and in the light of these theoretical perspectives.

I set out here the central aspects of the theories I use and note the way in which they are deployed in this study. The theories fall into four types: first

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substantive characteristics of practice, as in Dandelion 1996:268, see page 349 of this study. My usage avoids reifying and essentialist interpretations of the term.

<sup>31</sup> See discussion on open concepts below page 43.

macro theories which rely on historical perspectives and are sociological and applied philosophical studies of secularisation with direct anthropological relevance; second, middle-range theories of local conditions derived from empirical studies of religious and spiritual practices; third theories of practice and fourth, theories that concern the use of analytical concepts.

### **1.2.2. Macro Theories: the Developed Theory of Secularisation.**

I present here a development of secularisation theory from Bruce (1995, 2011) as critiqued by Cannell (2007), Berger et al (1999) Davie (1994) Jenkins (1999) and Prince and Riches (2000), and developed by Martin (2005) into a revised general theory and deployed and augmented by Taylor (2007).

Bruce (1995, 2011) exemplifies the standard secularisation thesis that asserts the decline of religion under the pressure of modernism as a determined linear process leading to a secular end state. The pressures in this process stem largely from social differentiation and include the decline in membership of churches, the loss of various community groups, egalitarianism, individualism (privatisation), relativism, pluralism and naturalism. Drawing on the critics noted above, I adopt Martin's view (Martin, 2005:2-22) that the teleological aspects of standard secularisation theory are unnecessary.<sup>32</sup> However I retain the features Bruce describes as the effects of modernism -

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<sup>32</sup> Martin rejects the view of secularisation as 'a uniform intellectual advance to the arrival of the secular age as a kind of epiphany' (Martin, 2005:10).

pressures, or 'cross-pressures' in Taylor's terminology – as having validity and potential applicability to the Quaker case.

Critics of the standard secularisation theory raise a number of other theoretical points. Martin (2005), Cannell (2007) and Berger (1999) note how Christianity is itself implicated in shaping accounts of modernism and secularisation. Quakers, with their early and radical commitment to egalitarianism are part of this process, as well as being subject to continued external pressures. Critics, particularly Berger (1999), also note that the social sciences contribute to the creation of the 'myth' of secularisation. James (2003) and Cannell (2007) consider the problem of anthropological discourse as tending towards a naturalistic and immanent interpretive use of the concepts of 'religion' and 'belief'.

Prince and Riches (2000) noted the dangers of grand narratives and stress the local and constructed nature of religious movements. They also note that religious movements in their self-representations often seek to place themselves in a grand narrative. There are two intertwined narratives here – the Quaker narrative and the theorised process of secularisation. I approach the former as an ethnographic exploration and the latter I establish here, not as a grand narrative, but as a series of pressures and social biases that combine, and can be combined as theory, to have some explanatory value.

I wish to retain the pressures towards secularisation that Bruce identifies but use the theory in a more dynamic way.<sup>33</sup> The title of this thesis refers to the way in which Quakers articulate their inspiration, ideas and perspectives. I require therefore a theoretical approach to the conditions that make this more or less possible and which point to the conditions within which Quaker discourse is formed. I therefore adopt theories that develop the secularisation thesis along these lines. I use them to characterise a context for Quakers, a 'spiritual landscape', an epistemic space, in which certain 'cross-pressures' influence the conditions for religious thought and experience (Taylor, 2007:302).

Both Taylor and Martin base their theories on a reading of history that implicates Christianity, in its diverse forms, in the processes they describe. In Martin's case the four 'incursions' of Christianity into European culture culminate in the effects of Protestantism producing a 'recoil' to each incursion within Christianity towards 'nature' (Martin 2005:134-136). Taylor draws on similar roots in what he calls the 'Reform Master Narrative' implicating Protestantism, which 'introduces an anthropocentric shift and hence a break-out from the monopoly of the Christian faith' (Taylor, 2007:774). In the long historical arc Taylor sees the post Protestant reforms as producing influences

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<sup>33</sup> Bruce (1995, 2011) identifies from his empirical studies: social differentiation; egalitarianism; individualism (privatisation); relativism; pluralism; and naturalism. Martin argues for the dominant effects of social differentiation, individualism and pluralism, and adds a dialectical relation he terms 'faith-nature' (Martin 2005:8-20). Martin also notes that Europe and the USA differ markedly in these matters. The use of Taylor's work enables me to move away from the reification of these pressures towards the conditions for the possibility of religious experience, nevertheless I retain them as terms pointing to 'pressures' related to, Taylor's concept of 'cross pressures' (Taylor, 2007:302,414-415).

of individualism, self-fashioning, pluralism leading to relativism, and the retreat from theism to a relatively impotent deism which sows the seeds of religious redundancy. Critically here, social life becomes seamless with nature in the sense that there is no knowledge to be encountered as something discontinuous with a human moral order. In short, the 'cross pressures' on those who may maintain or develop an interest in religion or in religious belief do not primarily concern questions of belief, a/theism, but the irrelevance and marginality of religion and the loss of conditions that point to what religious experience might comprise.

I now set out the key aspects of Taylor's theory and the complementary contribution made by Martin (2005). Taylor begins his exploration by asking 'what are the features of the new spiritual landscape?' By this he means the social forces creating conditions for belief and religious experience, the 'new ways in which we experience our world' (Taylor, 2007:4,573). He describes a spectrum of social 'cross-pressures' as the 'nova' (Taylor, 2007:299-313,414-415). This is the contested space of 'galloping pluralism' stretching out between the polarities of the 'immanent frame', 'closed world systems' and some notion of the 'transcendent' (Taylor, 2007:542-557). Both Taylor and Martin characterise this epistemic space, the nova, as dialectical. Taylor proposes a 'transcendent-immanent' dialectic (Taylor, 2007:13-16, 544, 632). Martin proposes a dialectic of 'faith-nature' (Martin, 2005:1-13). Martin notes that, 'once the dialectic between transforming vision and natural and social

reality characterised as good has been introduced into history, it does not and cannot lapse' (Martin, 2005:11).

The nova is not a 'level playing field' (Taylor, 2007:275) but a space in which irruptions of religious commitment take place against a set of default assumptions whereby believing becomes an 'embattled option' and the drift is to 'exclusive humanism'. All religious options in the nova are 'fragelised' (Taylor, 2007:303), undermined not just by contestation, by the fact that contrary views to our own are held by those we respect, by the plurality of religious claims, but also by the suspicion attaching to master narratives as truth.<sup>34</sup> The provisional and tentative way in which beliefs must be held in the face of competing claims to religious truth and the tension between the desire for truthfulness and the rejection of a notion of truth contributes to 'fragelisation'.

Taylor (2007), argues that the secularization of the public sphere in the nova has the effect that our default orientation is not only to distance religion from the public sphere but to assume that the social and natural world we live in is

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<sup>34</sup> Fragelisation can be understood through the discussion in Bernard Williams (2002). Here he addresses the tension between the demand for truthfulness and a pervasive suspicion about truth itself, 'the devotion to truthfulness and the suspicion directed to the idea of truth are connected to one another. The desire for truthfulness drives a process of criticism which weakens the assurance that there is any secure or unqualified stateable truth'. Williams notes that this is no abstract paradox, '...it does not mean that the demand for truthfulness and the rejection of truth can happily co-exist as stable. If you do not believe in the existence of truth, what is the passion for truthfulness a passion for? Or – as we might also put it – in pursuing truthfulness, what are you supposedly being true to? (Williams, 2002:2-6).

a 'closed world system' of immanence. This effect is intertwined with a story he calls 'the subtraction narrative' (Taylor, 2007:530). In this account science has released us from the grip of the enchanted spirit world. The autonomous self, freed from the grip of religion, feels 'a sense of power, of capacity, in being able to order the world and ourselves' (Taylor, 2007:531). The positive impact upon the person of the subtraction narrative is that the self is apparently freed from servitude to metaphysical and ecclesiastical forces; we arrive at an unsullied place and become our more natural selves. The 'buffered self' emerges (Taylor, 2007:300-307). This self has won through to invulnerability where power and reason have freed us from 'unreasoning fears' (Taylor, 2007:307). The person, the self, the body, become sources and sites of authenticity and authority. The buffered self thus freed is less porous to other possibilities. It has the courage to create its own moral order.

Taylor develops his theory as part of an arc of history. He also rests these consequences, the cross-pressures he describes, on some assumptions. He portrays the cross pressures, in part, as operating within the answers we give to certain questions. These answers flow from shared concerns with the shape of our moral lives and our image of human flourishing. He links this to the desire for 'wholeness' and 'authenticity'. He theorises once again as to the conditions that support this perspective and on how our answers are shaped by the 'shaping of our reasoning', and suggests that some of these aspects are unconscious assumptions and 'hold us captive' (Taylor, 2007:549).

These are the key elements of the theories of Taylor and Martin. I discuss their consequences and effects in Chapter 2 where I show how they contribute to a picture of the spiritual landscape – the conditions necessary for the possibility of religious experience for Quakers.

I make use of another macro theory in Chapter 5, at the end of this study. After presenting the ethnographic material and considering it in the light of various theoretical perspectives, I reassess an aspect of the historical arc to which both Taylor and Martin refer. I use the theoretical perspective from the work of Mary Douglas (1996) and the development of her work in Cultural Theory (Thompson, Ellis and Wildavski, 1990). Using this framework I consider whether the contemporary balance between the main elements of the Quaker tradition – the worship ritual, testimonies, decision-making and cosmologies – shows a significant shift from early Quaker practices. I consider that these effects may be consistent with the secularisation thesis and the effects of the cross-pressures identified by Taylor. Cultural theory and specifically, the grid-group model, enable me to chart the change over time in Quaker practice and organisation from sect to ‘enclave’ (Douglas, 1996:16) to a ‘network mix’ (Douglas and Ney, 1998:146) (from sect to congregation in Bruce’s (1995) terms) and show that some residual enclave features now might also be expressed as features of Douglas’s ‘latent groups’ (Douglas, 1986:37-42). Secondly, by plotting the changing relationships of the internal dynamics of the elements of contemporary Quaker practices I explore how this illustrates adaptation for survival and an equilibrium of unity in diversity.

### 1.2.3. Middle Range Theories.

Heelas and Woodhead argue that a 'spiritual revolution' from 'religion' to 'spirituality' has taken place. (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005: 995<sup>35</sup>) Their study begins from a macro theoretical base – the 'subjective turn' – and they develop a theory of practice, 'subjectivisation and sacralisation' from an empirical study. This can be used to locate Quakers within the spectrum of contemporary religio-spiritual practices, which range from church congregationalism, what they call, 'life-as' religion, to the 'holistic milieu' of alternative spiritualities and the culture of wellbeing. This is a distinction between 'support for a higher authority and the authority of the unique life' (Heelas and Woodhead 2005:1592-1598). Their subjectivisation thesis states that:

The massive subjective turn of modern culture reinforces those (subjective-life) forms of spirituality which resource unique subjectivities and treat them as a primary source of significance, and undermines those (life-as) forms of religion which do not (Heelas and Woodhead 2005:1105).

The subjective turn entails an ethic of subjectivity which attaches value to expression, fulfilment, being 'true to yourself' and 'doing what feels right'.

The holistic milieu has key features of the release from exterior authority structures and norms and a focus inwardly on the body, feeling and intuition. The source of insight and authority referred to here is 'your true nature', 'the deep inner self' and 'the essence of the person'. The goal of activities focusing

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<sup>35</sup> The text of Heelas and Woodhead (2005) has been accessed as an e-text and numeric location finders are the 'page numbers'.

on these areas of experience are 'balance', 'harmony' and 'integration' (Heelas and Woodhead 2005:1487). The 'holistic milieu', that is, specific activities of spirituality, would fall within what Taylor calls the *nova*. The holistic milieu encourages the search for 'the truth of one's experience' rather than the truth of a belief. It is therefore a shift in the locus of control, authority and trust.

I now turn to a theorist who focuses directly upon Quakers. Collins (1994, 2002a&b, 2005, 2008) an anthropologist, has studied Quakers since the early 1990s and wrote an ethnography of vernacular Quaker practice (Collins, 1994). His approach, in publications following his ethnography, adopted an analytic, problem-solving approach to Quaker practice. The explanatory solutions Collins used included the following. First, he described Quakers in terms used by Van Genep (1960) and Turner (1969) as having preliminal (informal talk and arrival), liminal (settled silence of the worship) and postliminal (information and coffee talk) features (Collins 2002b:284, 2005:4). Second, he applied the construct 'binary oppositions' drawing on Levi-Strauss (1976) (Collins, 2002b:284, 2005:4,5). Third, he applied a "Geertzian" anthropological analysis' by looking for, and at, the symbolism of Quaker worship, the absence of a 'host', the substitution of a simple table for an altar and the symbolism within the paradoxical denial of 'outward signs' (Collins, 2002b:285). Fourth, he observed that Quakers 'talk' and that they are concerned to create their story so that 'the past is folded into the present' (Collins, 2002b:281). Conversation and narrative became prominent in his analysis and he used the work of Bakhtin (1986:60) and his concept of 'dialogism', to outline a framework for Quaker discourses – 'canonical', 'vernacular' and 'prototypical' (Collins, 2005:8, 2002b:295). Fifth,

with Coleman (Coleman & Collins, 2000) he applied the concept of 'habitus' from Bourdieu (1990) to suggest that Quakers have a seamless relationship between ritual – conceived as a process of ritualisation rather than as a bounded event – and daily life. This is mediated by an experiential aesthetic called 'plaining' (Collins, 1994:485, 2000:317, 2008:44), which is the expression of the ethical values of the testimonies (in particular, care for the eco-system) in a style of 'simplicity'.

Collins noted his 'growing disillusionment with this approach' because it seemed too 'cerebral' and exposed 'the hiatus between these understandings and my experience of meeting for worship' (Collins, 2002b:284,5). There is value, however, in keeping these applications of anthropological theory to Quaker practices in mind in this study, since my findings support Collins's views on, for example, narrative but contrast with his views, shared with Coleman (2000), on the relations between worship as an event and conduct in daily life.

#### **1.2.4. Theories of Practice.**

In addressing Quaker practices ethnographically I initially use a phenomenological approach to create an evocation of participation in worship ritual. Then, from the analysis of transcripts of conversations with Quakers across Britain, and derived from the initial ethnography, I establish themes for exploration – from spiritual disciplines to decision-making for social enactment - which are developed in Chapter 3, Sections 3-7. I use a range of theories to explicate these practices (Bell 1992,1997, Bourdieu, 1990 and Humphrey and Laidlaw, 1994) a number of which are indigenous (Collins, 1994, Dandelion,

1996, 2008, Pilgrim, 2008). I also draw on Foucault (2001b) in particular to describe ministry as *parrhesia* – courageous speech, and to discuss the ‘care of the self’ (Foucault 2001a).

### **1.2.5. Analytical Concepts.**

There are a number of concepts that are used in this study which require clarity in relation to their use. These include concepts such as ‘religion’, ‘belief’, ‘ritual’, the ‘sacred’ and ‘transcendent’. They present two kinds of problems. First, for a concept to function analytically it has to explicate the matter in question. The difficulty in the anthropology of religion is that these analytical concepts are themselves contested in this regard. Secondly, analytical concepts may not always be easily distinguished from indigenous terminology.

I consider the theories that relate to definitions of ‘religion’ (Asad, 1993, Jenkins, 1999) and to ‘belief’ (Needham, 1972, 1981) in Chapter 2, Section 2.

I retain the use of ‘ritual’ as a description of Quaker worship on grounds set out by Collins (2005). Though Quakers do not refer to their worship as ritual, since their origins are as dissenters from liturgical form, some Quaker commentators accept that its use is appropriate (Punshon, 1987:70).

I use the term ‘transcendent function’ to mean the activity in general of any and all the images, symbols, affective qualities, names, universals and

attributions that Quakers hold as part of their cosmologies and attendant ontologies.<sup>36</sup> I propose it as the term which can include the various Quaker cosmologies and the variety of names and images of the Spirit, for example 'Light, Seed, Source, Love, Life, Force, 'that of God in everyone' and 'the place that words come from'.<sup>37</sup>

I consider that these concepts, religion, belief, ritual, transcendent function are 'open concepts', entail meanings in use, with original and derivative features, sometimes correlating with ideals or models, sometimes regulative, projective and emergent. I adopt the definition of an 'open concept' from Goehr:

When we treat a concept as open we treat it as unbounded; its definition need be confined only to know or uncontroversial, canonical, or paradigm examples, such as the word 'game'. Open concepts are treated so they can undergo alteration in their definition without losing their identity as new examples come to appear as standard, as the practice within which they function changes...they are 'signposts' facilitating language use (Goehr 2007:93ff).

Furthermore the attempt to provide definitions of these terms is itself an act of inclusion and exclusion within categories which themselves relate to matters of orthodoxy. This can be difficult to discern as in the case of Quaker *universalists* who as a networked group within Quakers posit a generic and naturalistic definition of religion thus include many

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<sup>36</sup> This is consistent with Taylor's usage (Taylor, 2007:20, 144-5, 517-518) that I discuss below on page 88.

<sup>37</sup> I show below (Chapter 4, Section 4, on narrative and in Chapter 5, Section 3, in plotting Quaker cosmologies) that the terms of the Quaker vocabulary (for example the word 'Light') are not exclusively associated with particular cosmologies. I shall show, by contrast, that the shared use of the traditional vocabulary is functional in masking the differences inherent in Quaker cosmologies.

incompatible beliefs under one concept and minimise (and thereby reject) differences and potential conflict. This inclusion is not a neutral act.

### **1.2.6. The Argument of the Thesis.**

The title of this thesis is “*The place that words come from...*’, An Ethnography of Quaker Worship Practices and their Social Enactment”. I take up Collins (2002b) concern that in order to try to understand Quakers we need to make central the experience of the Meeting for Worship and the other ritual extensions in Business Meetings and decision-making that flow from it. This focusses on the conditions for social enactment that Quaker practices create. This is not, therefore, primarily a study of the daily lives of Quakers insofar as their activities can define a picture of what it is to be a Quaker. This assertion is an explanation of the starting point, the ritual worship, not an empirical claim. It may transpire that there is now a disjunction between the experience of worship and the conditions for social enactment, and I consider aspects of the ethnography that indeed point in this direction.

The initial starting point of the study is Quakers and their participation in worship. I set the event of the Meeting for Worship in St Andrews Meeting. This starting point is justified by the Quaker tradition, by the account of contemporary practice in the canonical account, *Quaker Faith and Practice* (QF&P) and by the ethnographic evidence set out in Chapter 3, Section 2, on the reasons Quakers give for joining Quakers. These sources establish the engagement and participation in the ritual meeting for worship and all that it entails as the *sine*

*qua non* of Quaker practice and that all else – decision-making, discernment, authorisation, agency and coming to unity – flows from this.

I show through the ethnography that engagement in the ritual has two key components. Firstly, there is a potential encounter with some transcendent function that is symbolised by silence and referred to variously as Light, Inward Light, Seed, and Source. This is therefore an empty space symbolised by the seated circle of worshippers and is experientially a sense of openness to presence and disclosure. It is thought that from this engagement in silence words may constellate and be articulated. Secondly, it entails a practice of ‘centering-down’<sup>38</sup> which enables worshippers to bring their experience of personal stillness into the corporate silence. This is the stillness that may be carried beyond the place and time of the meeting as the basis for social enactment. It is from this engagement and through this way of knowing that guidance for social enactment is thought to derive. It is these foundational aspects that I engage with in the initial phenomenological description of the worship ritual.

I present a set of tensive relationships between the elements of inner stillness and outer silence, and the tradition of the Light and personally held cosmologies. I suggest that these tensions are managed by the invariant form of the ritual, personal elaborations of spiritual practices and the Quaker narrative. In short, in the construction of Quaker practice, in what appears as unity in diversity, process unites and content divides. Put another way, concern with

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<sup>38</sup> This practice is fully explored in Chapter 3, Sections 3 & 4, and so is not defined here.

epistemology, the 'how', occludes the potentially disclosed character, the 'what', of the Light.

So far, therefore, I take Quakers on their own terms as a starting point. However I theorise that Quakers and their practices can be situated in the contemporary 'spiritual landscape' (Taylor, 2007, Heelas & Woodhead, 2005) and that their relationship with it can be described using a development of secularisation theory. My argument is that Quaker practices take part in the dynamics created by the social biases and cross-pressures of this context. They adapt to them, absorb them, contribute to them and resist them in various ways. The elements of the Quaker tradition allow Quakers to do this. I submit that Quaker practices dramatise a number of features of this developed reading of a secularisation process. I theorise that Quaker practices through their Christian-rooted traditions are not acted upon but are implicated in secularisation – and that the ethnography elucidates this. Quakers' engagement in the process of secularisation includes their resistance and adaptation to its pressures.

In Sections 3-7 of Chapter 2, I identify and explore themes that arise from the ethnography of the Meeting for Worship. I set out in detail the combining of elements – techniques of the body, speech, silence, cosmological assumptions, group identification and ethical action – in the ritual event. I argue that this combining is both a personal 'harmonic integration' of these elements and is a shared aesthetic in the ritual creation of an 'artwork' in worship. This set of relations enables Quaker practice to adapt and recreate itself. The picture is of a religion that works for its members, allowing them with a sincere sense of the

sacred, (however they articulate that), to engage in spiritual practices and community. It enables them to find a Quaker 'way'. These practices are the positive and actively-fulfilling source of both inspiration and group membership. I discuss these elements in the light of the cross-pressures identified in the spiritual landscape. For example, pluralism and relativism produce multiple cosmologies, while individualism asserts the validity of each, and fragelisation makes matters tentative and discourages assertion or affirmation. Individualism and subjectivisation locate truth and authority in the person and produce tensions between the individual and the group. The recourse to nature and naturalism makes the body central to the experience of worship. Certain patterns emerge as adaptations to the cross-pressures within the spiritual landscape. This produces a practice economy in which the elements of Quaker practices are combined in individual practices. This can be viewed from different perspectives as a signal achievement of a form of secular religion or by contrast the hollowing out and loss of the tradition.

I consider the conditions that are created by the centrality of the worship ritual for the processes of social enactment. Through further ethnographic material on Business Meetings, I assess institutional and group control of the process and in doing so, I chart a shift in the criteria used for discernment from inspiration by the Light to a 'sense of the meeting' (Best, 2010).

I finally take four general features of Quaker practices – ritual, ethical testimony, decision-making, and the range of cosmologies – and consider how they have shifted significantly in their relationship to each other by plotting them within the

'grid-group' model (Douglas, 1996, 1990, 1998) and Cultural Theory framework (Thompson, Ellis & Wildavsky, 1990). Furthermore, these shifts are consistent with secularisation theory and may be explained by the pressures and dialectics I theorise above as constituting the spiritual landscape.

I conclude that Quakers are a dispersed community of practice and a complex, adaptive, pluralistic enclave. Their practices maintain a fragile and complex balance of tensions that create unity in diversity; process unites, content divides, epistemology dominates over ontology, ethics displaces inspiration, and diversity in personal stillness is masked by corporate silence. I suggest that renewal initiatives are similarly vulnerable to these pressures and simply reflect and even amplify these patterns whilst providing a reflexive space. However Quakers also keep open a ritual space in which explorations of many cosmologies may be possible and in which sincere and deeply felt concerns may be discerned. This, I suggest, rests upon an understanding that sets worship apart from daily life (Pilgrim, 2008)<sup>39</sup> and allows it to offer a radical reframing of experience and this contrasts with the perspective of seamless continuity between the domains of the sacred and the everyday, such as proposed by Collins (1994, 2005, 2008) and Coleman and Collins (2000).

## **Section 3: Methodology and Organisation of the Thesis.**

### **1.3.1. Methodology.**

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<sup>39</sup> See Pilgrim's model of Quakerism in Appendix 5.

Quaker practices have at their centre the participation in, and the experience of, the ritual Meeting for Worship, as the source of guidance and inspiration. This has to be examined as a local event with knowledge of a local meeting. I take its activities as an instantiation of a practice shared by British Quakers. I situate this aspect of the study in St Andrews Meeting. Since my interests in the character of British Quaker practices are strategic, I explore central Quaker institutions, contact Quakers from around Britain and participate in groups who exemplify the current concerns and trends within contemporary Quaker practices. These contacts constitute a study of a dispersed community of shared practice.<sup>40</sup>

This study explores a series of relationships in Quaker practices:

First, the link between the ritual event of worship and decision-making that creates the conditions for Quaker social enactment. I pursue this by creating ethnographies of participation in the ritual worship in Chapter 3, and of three kinds of Business Meetings in Chapter 4.

Second, the way Quakers construct unity in diversity through the relationship between diverse personal practices and corporate activity. I pursue this by adding material gathered from a wide range of contacts in the fieldwork to the practice themes that emerge from the ethnography of worship ritual. This is set out in Chapter 3, Sections 3-7.

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<sup>40</sup> See Appendix I for the *Dramatis Personae*, Appendix II for the network of fieldwork contacts.

Third, the relationship between Quaker practices as portrayed and the conditions for the possibility of religious experience and belief, or what I label, from Taylor (2007) the contemporary 'spiritual landscape'. This is achieved by observations made at the end of each of Sections 3-7 in Chapter 3.

Fourth, I chart a historical comparison between the elements of contemporary Quaker practices – worship ritual, decision-making and cosmologies – and their original 17<sup>th</sup>-Century pattern by a diachronic comparative mapping of early and contemporary Quaker practices. This is set out in Chapter 5.

Decisions about the methodology were informed by a number of factors, such as: my local and strategic purposes; the theoretical framework of the study; issues of access, role, and researcher status; the nature of the events and subjects studied; and the exigencies and practicalities of the fieldwork. These decisions were also informed by the work of other anthropologists – the study builds on Collins's work but takes a significantly different approach.

### **1.3.2. The Methodology and Perspective of Peter Collins.**

Collins focussed on the production of 'vernacular' Quaker practices in one anonymous meeting, 'Dibdenschaw', over one year. He adopted two personae in the ethnography to discuss his material, Peter, the 'insider' and Simon (a pseudonym) as the third person 'outsider' (Nesbitt, 2002). He concluded that Quakerism<sup>41</sup> is generated by talk, story, and narrative and by the practices of

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<sup>41</sup> Collins uses the term Quakerism, see Collins 1994:17ff.

'plaining' – living by an aesthetic of simplicity (1994,2002a&b, 2005, 2008). He adopted a problem-solving approach to Quakers and deciphered their practices by applying a series of theoretical perspectives which I have noted above. However, he did so making two linked assumptions: first, that he came to assume that in a Quaker meeting he was not attending a specifically 'religious' practice (Collins, 2002b:283); second, that such 'religion' is seamless between daily life and ritual (Collins, 2000:317). These assumptions lead Collins to downplay the possible exceptional potency of ritual as an event in itself. This is at variance with a Quaker ethnographer who describes the worship as 'heterotopic', as set apart, a 'place of otherness' (Pilgrim, 2008:53). Collins described Quaker ritual as having many objective facets – confessional, transformative, playful, moral, emotional, performative, rhythmical expressive, instrumental, ideological (Collins, 2002a:89, 2005:1-18). By contrast, my study explores these facets as the cumulative properties of the practices that individual Quakers perform as part of the event of the ritual. I therefore revisit the assumption that this ritual is not primarily religious and I note the contested discourse on this definitional matter.

I follow Collins's conclusions, that certain theoretical approaches can be limiting and too cerebral, in that I attempt to return to the centrality of experience in the ritual event. I keep open the question of its set-apart qualities and whether these offer themselves to a local, particular definition of religion. I also take a more strategic view of British Quaker practices and forms and cast my net wider than the local meeting. I do not repeat the application of a number of anthropological theories to Quaker practice. I accept Collin's rejection of the insider/outside

dichotomy (Collins, 2002a, Nesbit, 2002) and I do not adopt a persona within the ethnography.

### **1.3.3. Engagement with Quakers.**

My engagement with Quakers was structured as follows:

1. Attendance at Worship Ritual in St Andrews over several years (2003-2010) and at a number of other British Meetings;
2. Conversations and taped Interviews with Quakers;
3. Participation in Groups, local discussion groups, *Quaker Quest*, *The Kindlers*, *Experiment with Light*;
4. Observation of Events such as Business Meetings, Britain Yearly Meeting, Area Meetings, and an Ecumenical Meeting;
5. Documentation of texts, canonical texts, Quaker literature and text sourced from the above events.

The specific details of fieldwork contacts are set out in an Appendix II. I now explain these engagements, their resultant materials and the use to which I put them.

### **1.3.4. Worship and Ritual and the Evocation of Participation in an Event**

I have attended many meetings for Worship, both prior to the fieldwork period and approximately fifty during 2009-2010. During the fieldwork my presence could be paradoxically described as covert (Nesbit, 2002 and Dandelion,

1996) in the sense that I was present at an event open to the public. My status was as an attender not a member of the Society of Friends. I was indistinguishable from other participants and not identifiable by any distinctive feature pertaining to my research. My approach was mimetic in engaging with Quaker practice. During the fieldwork I attended many discussion groups about Quaker worship practice and found my practice to be within the spectrum of the descriptions I heard. Like Quakers I have learned worship practices through conformity and imitation. I note in my account some personal predilections from my previous experiences of worship in other churches and this I also found to be common amongst Quakers. I therefore submit that my use of myself and my experience in this context is a sound source of ethnographic material.

The products of this participation were 'headnotes' (memory and reconstruction) and fieldnotes which enabled me to write an 'evocation of participation' in a single, selected, reconstructed ritual event. I considered the possibility of producing a composite description of a 'typical' Meeting for Worship from fieldnotes. This may have enabled me to construct an account for later analysis. One example of such analysis would be a taxonomy<sup>42</sup> of features of meetings. However I rejected this approach as constructing the

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<sup>42</sup> For example, Davies, (1988) *Talking in Silence: Ministry in Quaker Meetings* in Coupland (1988), *Styles of Discourse in The Liturgies of Quakerism* Dandelion (2005). In the latter source seven elements of normative ministry are identified; 'length, style, frequency, (aspects of vocal ministry which Elders are sanctioned to police), timing, content, thematic association, and linguistic construction'. My approach does not attempt to produce such descriptions of systemic patterns but rather explores key themes and practices that arise from the ethnographic evocation.

ethnographic data too closely in terms of a structural analytical framework.<sup>43</sup> I have chosen to describe a particular Meeting and to evoke the feeling of integrity of one particular event supplemented by some fieldnotes and footnotes. The very many other meetings I attended influenced the attention that I was able to adopt and the grounded confidence that I bring to my description. These other participations assisted me in identifying and bringing to the fore the elements of meeting for worship ritual. This is a reflection also of Quaker experience. Participation in worship is a recursive process over time. In a sense, all meetings and the history of participation are implicated in any one event.

This intense focus on a single event also enabled me to assess the potency of the event as heterotopic (Pilgrim, 2008:54-67). I am thus better able to show how the ritual worship emerges as a potential key characteristic, indeed as a possible *sine qua non* of Quakerism (as the tradition asserts) and that all Quaker practices are anchored in and flow from participation in this event as the exemplary source of disciplines, assumed inspiration, and the basis of group discernment. This material is the basis of my phenomenological description in Chapter 3, Section 1.

Here I create an ethnography both from the perspective of a participant committed to attending the act of worship and as an anthropologist committed to exploring the possible meanings of these practices in a discursive mode.

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<sup>43</sup> I considered that it would reify a series of components, themes and features. My approach is to retain the embodied and experiential quality of description. This epistemology I regard as closer to Quakers' embodied understanding of tacit knowledge and of inspiration through 'leadings'.

This evocation is an interpretive act based upon the experience of participation in the event. This ethnography is not, therefore, the result of 'participant-observation' (Clifford & Marcus, 1986:13, 183-4.) but a description and an evocation of participation followed by an analytical discussion. The ethnography is a *post hoc* reconstruction of what happened as I understand it. The ethical correlate of this methodology is important in that I did not set out or intend to observe this event and experience, it presented itself as a memory in the context of my general anthropological orientation to reflect upon Quaker worship. I experienced and heard it as a worshipper and remembered it as an anthropologist. Since it fell during the fieldwork period I was predisposed to the possibility that such a process might unfold. The nature of engagement that I am describing here therefore relies on the memory of what happened, recorded in fieldnotes soon afterwards, rather than on the note-taking practices associated with participant-observation well documented by Collins, (2002a:82) and Warner (1990:67ff).

Writing an ethnography of the experience of a Quaker meeting poses certain problems. Participating in worship entails a number of practice modes and different registers of awareness. Sentience, cognition, concentration, imagination, reverie, and a willing suspension of conscious activity are all part of worship practice. There are practices of, for example: getting there; moving into the worship space; being there; being still and silent; listening and these contribute to different registers of awareness, which might include, being aware of others; thinking, meditating or contemplating; having thoughts, feelings and imagination; emptying the mind as in the practice of 'centering-down'; listening

to spoken ministry; being prompted to speak or speaking; feeling part of the group or not; or being aware of time, place and space. But these are neither bounded, mutually exclusive nor linear. Practices like being 'still' are themselves interrupted and distractions occur, so I attempt to capture this iterative aspect of worship. The practice modes co-exist with the registers of awareness.

Most practices are iterative, one can go back or start again, as with the practice of centering-down. There are practices that interpenetrate each other like personal stillness in relation to the group silence. Other features such as the room, or others' faces may be constantly present but may change their hue or quality during worship. Some qualities of worship have a gestalt; elements of place, space, group composition, and silence may flow into focus at different times. There may be moments in the flow and tempo of the event whereby a mood or atmosphere emerges that seems to be shared by those present. Worship time is subject to a lived distinction between linear lapsed time and a sense of duration. These temporalities co-exist in relation to a further chronology, namely that of the eternal.<sup>44</sup> Worshippers are acting, the situation is acting upon them, and something happens, and there are both intended and unintended consequences. The unintended consequences are in some sense expected within the nature of disclosures or promptings. The very notion of inspiration requires a breaking into intention and expectation.

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<sup>44</sup> QF&P 1.02 A&Qs 18 'Seek to know one another in the things that are eternal.....' Also see discussions on Quaker views on time, realised eschatology 'end-time' in Dandelion, Gwyn & Peat (1998) *Heaven on Earth. Quakers and the Second Coming*.

The first ethnographic challenge is, therefore, to evoke the dynamic in the spatio-temporal flow of participation in the event. I attempt to capture registers of emptiness, reverie, focal attention, inattention, comfort, speaking and listening, both as an interior state and as a co-sentient being with others. I describe the preparation for the meeting, Doorkeeping,<sup>45</sup> at length because I want to evoke the processes by which prospective participants shape their expectations. I later theorise this period as a process of 'sacralisation' and 'ritualisation' (as do Heelas and Woodhead, 2005:968) which is accomplished by making small things matter and paving the way for them to carry import and significance. I consider that Quakers are both making a ritual and going to a ritual.

The ethnographic approach I adopt is a phenomenological one:

For anthropology this implies a practical relativism; the suspension of inquiry into the divine or objective truth of particular customs, beliefs or worldviews in order to explore them as modalities or moments of experience, to trace out their implications and uses. Ideas are not so much discounted as deconstructed; they are seen as approximate expressions rather than exact explanations of experience. The phenomenological method involves 'placing in brackets' or 'setting aside' questions concerning the rational ontological or objective status of ideas and beliefs in order to fully describe and do justice to the ways in which people actually live, experience and use them - the ways in which they appear to consciousness (Jackson (1996:10).

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<sup>45</sup> This is a duty at all Quaker Meetings of all types. The Doorkeeper greets all arrivals to the meeting with a handshake. This contact is seen as an important welcome and aspect of Quaker hospitality. The Doorkeeper will also explain aspects of the meeting to any new attenders. The Doorkeeper ensures that the space for the meeting is managed in terms of its boundaries. Late-comers are let in at certain times. The Doorkeeper sits by the door during the meeting and deals with any arrivals. The Doorkeeper has other duties and these vary from local meeting to local meeting. In St Andrews Meeting the doorkeeper arranges the refreshments after the meeting for worship and ensures that the building is in good order after the event. A full description of Doorkeeping is provided in the ethnography.

However, in Chapters 3 and 4, I use the ethnographic material within a particular analytical perspective.

Describing and evoking ethnographically a single 'event' called worship raises a number of theoretical problems (Ardener, 1989:88). A single contemporary Meeting for Worship may not always exemplify all traditional practices, yet they are all in some sense present possibilities. For example, a reported sense amongst worshippers that a particular meeting was 'settled' or 'gathered' does not always occur. Also the extension of the worship event to include doorkeeping, coffee, and the prior existence of a community with associations and memories make the event's boundaries porous in other ways. The very nature of inspired speech and worship may be thought to create a unique creative act of the moment such that generalisations appear illegitimate. These issues can be addressed ethnographically. Quaker worship can be described as having a regular form but not a programmed template, and as having predictable and unpredictable aspects. Links with the Quaker tradition can be noted and I attempt to do this.

In Chapter 3. Section 1, I provide a basic narrative of the worship event in time place and space. The narrative is a first person account in the present tense.

The elements of the ethnography are:

- (a) a running narrative ;
- (b) silence and its imagined qualities;
- (c) personal thoughts, feelings and reflections;

- (d) speech, ministry, quotation by speakers;
- (e) extracts from fieldnotes on specific practices;
- (f) quotations from Quaker texts;
- (g) footnotes for explanations of specific Quaker terms and practices;
- (h) footnotes which flag key issues taken up in later chapters;
- (i) footnotes which cross-reference other data in transcripts of tapes.

I represent the backdrop of silence by gaps in the text. Speech, ministry, and quotations read from a text are indented in ***bold italic***. My thoughts are represented by indented *non-bold italics*. Quotations from fieldnotes or Quaker texts are represented by indented normal font. Participants have fictitious names. In real time, the ethnography covers 2 hours 35 minutes, 09.55 to 12.30 on a Sunday in May 2009 at St Andrews Quaker Meeting House.

### **1.3.5. Conversations and Interviews**

I have had substantive contacts with more than 150 Quakers from various parts of Britain. My engagement with 30 of them included a formal explicit contract (an ethics form) to talk on tape and to allow me to use their material anonymously. I met individuals and couples in their homes, in the offices of Friends House and in cafés. Usually, the contacts with those who agreed to be taped began with a meeting or an introduction. The first encounter, following a contact, would generally be about finding common ground, noting how I had got to them, possibly through other people we might know, and talking generally about Quaker practice and organisation and their personal

story. I would, at some point, explain my interests and they would respond to this. I would then make a decision about whether to ask them if they would agree to talk at length, usually for about an hour, on tape. In most cases, I had several contacts with a person before asking them this. I would consider that what I had heard so far would be valuable to record and usually described the upcoming session as a continuation and expansion of our conversation. The interviews or conversations were unstructured. I have considerable experience and training in undertaking such sessions. I used prompts to encourage talk and reflection on Quaker practices and said little in the taped sessions. The transcribed tapes were extensive and therefore I drew from them selectively to illuminate the domains of practice that emerged from the ethnography of worship, (See Sections 3-7, of Chapter 2.). Those whose contributions I use are noted in the *Dramatis Personae* in Appendix I below, they include; personal profiles of those present at the worship event (26 participants), profiles of the members of the *Kindlers* group (15 members) and profiles of those whose taped material is most extensively quoted (19 individuals). The first two cast lists are best consulted before reading the chapters in which they take part, for example reading about the St Andrews Meeting participants (Appendix1.) before the ethnographic description of the event in Chapter 3. I regarded all these contacts as relationships of trust. I kept in contact with most of those taped for the whole fieldwork period and in some cases for a considerable time afterwards.

### **1.3.6. Participation in Groups.**

I attended as a member and visited a number of groups during fieldwork.

I was a member of the first *Kindlers* group. *Kindlers* is an initiative within Quakerism to explore and renew Quaker worship practices and spirituality. The group that I was able to join was the first that was run. Alec Davison the initiator of the project invited a group of experienced Quakers from around Britain to work in the first group. I was given access to the planning meetings between the facilitators for this first group. I attended all the sessions. I visited the second group of *Kindlers* on two occasions. The groups met for 12 four-hour sessions over a three-month period. Each *Kindlers* group had 15 members from across Britain selected for their knowledge and experience of Quaker practices.<sup>46</sup> In a sense, *Kindlers* could be thought of as group of adepts. The group leaders produced a publication *Journeying the Heartlands* from which I quote in this study. I took extensive fieldnotes during the planning meetings and during and after the sessions. I draw on these materials throughout this study.

I took part in a session of the *Experiment with Light* with some members of the *Kindlers* groups. This is a structured meditative programme led by a facilitator, in this case Elizabeth Brown. It was created from the work of Ambler (2001a) and Gendling (1978) and has been described and researched by Meads (2008a&b) and Lampen (2008). I describe this important group under Renewal Initiatives in Chapter 4.

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<sup>46</sup> A list of the members and their localities is noted in Appendix II

I attended several sessions of *Quaker Quest* which is an off-street introduction to Quakerism for seekers,<sup>47</sup> in contrast to the *Kindlers*. I took part in a three-month programme, called *Hearts and Minds Prepared* at St Andrews Meeting, which met every two weeks for three hours, for newcomers. This programme focussed on the elements of worship with points for discussion afterwards. I attended a workshop on the *Peace Testimony*<sup>48</sup> at St Andrews Meeting. I attended the *Quaker Theology Seminar* at the Quaker Study Centre, Woodbrooke in Birmingham for three days and established contact with Ben Dandelion and Rex Ambler, whose works are quoted in this study (see Bibliography).

In these groups I was explicitly a researcher and the members were aware of this. Several members of these groups agreed to be interviewed and taped and if they did, signed or waived an ethics form. All taped persons remain anonymous except the leader and founder of the *Kindlers*, Alec Davison who was willing to have many extensive discussions. He gave me extensive material he has written but declined a taped interview and did not require anonymity.

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<sup>47</sup> This is the Quaker term for those who are enquirers, someone who has shown an interest, and for those who attend events such as *Quaker Quest*. Activity focussed upon their needs is called 'outreach'. The term 'seeker' is also used to describe any Quakers in the sense that all engagement with Quakerism is seen as seeking. *Kindlers* could, by contrast, be called 'in reach'.

<sup>48</sup> The Peace Testimony is the earliest formulation of a Quaker belief in non-violence and in some cases pacifism which can also be expressed as an ethical principle. It emerged from the 1660 *Declaration to the King* (Charles II) entitled *A Declaration from the Harmles [sic] & Innocent People of God called Quakers against all Plotters and Fighters in the World*. The original pamphlet was intended to explain that Quakers were not a threat to the realm and were being unjustly persecuted. From these origins Quaker developed practices of non-violence and pacifism. The development of Quaker Testimonies is fully discussed in Chapter 4, Section 3.

These renewal initiatives are having a mixed impact on British Quakerism and are still to be assessed; an overview is provided in Chapter 4. Section 5.

### **1.3.7. Observation at Events.**

I attended and observed a number of Quaker events during fieldwork, notably by permission, Britain Yearly Meeting, a five-day gathering of up to 1,000 Quakers in London who conduct business and establish policy. The annual Swarthmore Lecture is given at this meeting and I interviewed the 2009 lecturer who also agreed to be taped. Her lecture, *Minding the Future* and these tapes provide material to illustrate Quaker witness and testimony in daily life in Chapter 4, Section 3. I attended and observed several Area Meetings, notably in Hampstead, and field notes from this meeting are used to reconstruct one of the business meetings set out in Chapter 4, Section 2. I attended and observed a Scottish Ecumenical Meeting at which Quakers were present and field notes from this provide the examples of Quakers' descriptions of themselves used in Chapter 1. and subsequently a part of an exploration of Quaker narrative in Chapter 3, Section 7.

### **1.3.8. Use of Quaker Texts.**

I note the extensive archive of Quaker texts below in Chapter 2 Section 3. These are canonical (Collins 1996), devotional, and academic. I also gathered texts from members of the groups I attended and some Quakers sent me

texts of their own writing, some of which were later published (Murgatoryd, 2010, Brown and Davison, 2010). The canonical texts *Quaker Faith and Practice* (QF&P) and *Advices and Queries* (A&Qs) are frequently quoted and referred to in this study. QF&P is a text which covers all aspects of Quaker life, tradition and procedure. It is updated every generation and this is a constant process of identifying new material, editing, updating, and reshaping the tradition. This text is, therefore, in a constant process of change and is not a fixed expression of orthodoxy. A&Qs, by contrast, is less frequently changed. A&Qs is a small pamphlet of 42 paragraphs on themes of Quaker life. These paragraphs are often selected quotations or homilies from past Quakers and their writings. They are intended as prompts for meditation, reminders of the dilemmas faced by Quakers, and as aids to moving into silent worship. I refer to QF&P commonly at the beginning of sections concerned with Quaker practices, for example, in Sections 1-7 Chapter 3. I do so to establish the received wisdom concerning that particular practice as a starting point for the exploration of current practice. I use extended quotations from texts Quakers sent to me in two cases: firstly, in the section on silence when Rose provides a comprehensive biographical account of her Quaker upbringing in silent worship; secondly, in the text that emerged from the *Kindlers* group from the hand of Alec Davison, and which is again a comprehensive attempt to encapsulate a Quaker way today, as he sees it.

### **1.3.9. Fieldwork Sites.**

During fieldwork, I based myself in London, making visits to various events and parts of the country and to Quaker Meetings for example, in Cardiff and Birmingham. I also over the three years of the research had regular contact with the St Andrews Meeting. In London I visited various meetings including Muswell Hill, Hampstead, Finchley, Winchmore Hill, Westminster, and the Meeting at Friends House. I made some useful contacts at these meetings but they were not fieldwork sites in which I based myself. The visits also enabled me to confirm what I knew from my long-term association with Quakers, that meetings as a form of worship and doing business are a shared common form and process. That is not to say that meetings in the sense of their social make-up and quality of community do not have some distinctive characteristics but these aspects do not impact upon the practices of worship and were not the focus of my study. I have explained above my strategic concern and my contacts with gathered groups or single Quakers that provided me with a sense of contemporary Quaker practices. Indeed, I found Quakers more likely to talk about issues that concern them when they were not concerned about creating tensions in their local meeting. For example, the members of the *Kindlers* group talked at length about the 'poverty and paucity of ministry', conflicts and other problems in their local meetings. The meetings represented in the *Kindlers* group included Oxford, Surrey, York, Cardiff, Westminster, Muswell Hill, Winchmore Hill, Essex, and East Sussex. The meetings represented in the Ecumenical event I attended in Dunblane included Dunblane, Edinburgh, Angus, Glasgow, Milngavie, Dundee, Aberdeen, Perth, and St Andrews, and they produced the statement of Quakerism that I quote above. In pursuit of my sense of British Quakerism, I

have therefore had contact with more than 150 Quakers from a large number of meetings. These contacts fulfilled my strategic requirements. The common themes that emerged from these contacts shows, I submit, that common problems and challenges to contemporary Quakerism are shared across the dispersed community of practice.

### **1.3.10. St Andrews Meeting.**

My initial ethnography is a Quaker Meeting for Worship that took place at St Andrews. I now provide a background picture of this meeting and this can be supplemented by the profiles of participants of the specific meeting recorded in Appendix I.

The book of members shows the following membership for 2010:

	Women	Men	Children
Members	22	7	-
Attenders	12	10	4
Total	34	17	4

The attendance at Meeting for worship is usually about 18 and ranges from 12 to 28 people. There are usually 2 or three students who attend, sometimes for up to two years, but usually for one. The age range of adults is from 18-90. The current children are aged 2-7. Lately, there has been attendance by a

mother and two further children aged 4 and 6. This means that a small children's group can be run at the same time as the Meeting for Worship on a Sunday. The children join the meeting for the last five minutes. Over the last 10 years, there has been a pattern of attendance by children. There have been three families with young children who have come to the meeting. The children attended for several years but ceased in one case when they reached 10-11 years old, and in another at age 16-17. The third family has young children and have been attending for three years. In two cases one or both parents stopped attending once the children stopped. It is the case nationally that Young Friends, an organisation that runs summer schools for young Quakers, is well attended but that this does not translate into ongoing membership.<sup>49</sup> Recruitment and retention of children of St Andrews Quakers appear to be low. There is also a very low level of engagement with Quakerism by the children of existing members. Sylvia, aged 89, and her late husband were lifelong Quakers and have five children and have 18 great grand-children. None of the children or their offspring became Quakers. This is repeated throughout the meeting with only three exceptions. St Andrews being a university town sometimes attracts students to the local meeting – often American students – with Quaker connections through Quaker schools. They stay for short periods, usually a year. At any one time there may be two or three such attenders. Over the last five years one student has joined the Society of Friends. Five new members from existing attenders have formally joined over the last 5 years, all women between the ages of 35-60. These numbers and ratios have changed little over the past 5 years while the

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<sup>49</sup> Fieldnotes: *Kindlers*.

national figures show a percentage decline of 1.54% in 2008, and 1.21% in 2009 amounting to 223 and 184 people nationally. St Andrews meeting seems not to recruit the children of existing members but existing attender adults, usually women. This reflects a recruitment pattern noticed by Heelas and Woodhead (2005) in relation to the 'spiritual milieu'. They also noted that this age group of women brought experience of other spiritual milieu, 'spiritual capital'. This pattern is reflected in St Andrews recruits; they all had experience, sometimes extensive, of other faiths. Of the 35 regular participants at worship six are members whose parents were Quakers. There are five couples, sometimes six, who come to the meeting and this creates significant close communications when jobs are allocated and pursued. There are two members with physical disabilities. Most members are British, one attender is from India, one has a Czechoslovakian background and another is Polish.

In terms of occupation, the available information on those who regularly attend is as follows:

Public	Voluntary Sector	Business	Academic	Not in Employment	Retired
7	2	5	3	1	14

Of the 14 retired members 4 had been in academic positions.

The Meeting comprises a well-educated, able, group of adults with an average age in the mid-40s, mostly middle class, white, with retirees and

public service professionals being the most numerous groups. Included in the public service group is a person who is a local Lib-Dem councillor. Those with accounting backgrounds are sought for the position of treasurer and some with business expertise have lately taken on the responsibility of Clerkship.

The Meeting has cash assets of £11, 2047 plus the value of the Meeting House (c£300.000). General donations and Gift Aid to the meeting from members is annually about £5,600. A minimum £125 donation per member per annum is required to make ends meet and of that, £53 goes to central work in London. The meeting gives £2,000 per annum to worthy causes. An example of a donation to Ramallah School can be seen in Chapter 4, Section 2. The affairs of the Meeting are efficiently managed and the premises maintained by a small committee. There is a sense of order, care, and quiet efficiency in the dealings of the Meeting.

I describe the physical aspects of the Meeting in the ethnography. Like all meeting houses there is a well-used library which is important to Quakers. It stocks a range of books on Quaker history, peace, and devotional and theological publications. It holds regular magazines and periodicals on Quaker affairs. Notice boards are also a feature of most meeting houses and here they are extensive. Notices inform members of all the activities of the meeting, jobs, roles, and upcoming events. Meetings and conferences are well publicised and there is a sign-up system for those who want to make suggestions or bring some event to members' notice. The notice boards also contain, from time to time, samples of the work of discussion groups or the

output of the children's meeting. There are various groups – the *Peace Action Group* and the discussion groups on various aspects of the Bible – which co-ordinate their activities through these systems. The meeting provides members and any newcomers with considerable information. Coffee after Meeting provides a key gathering for the exchange of information and arrangements to be made and I describe this below.

St Andrews has most of the features that I have seen in other Meetings. It keeps good communications with Friends House, the administrative centre in London, and the initiatives that come from there. One of the Meeting's Elders is on the Meeting for Sufferings (a key central decision-making body related to the Trustees) and writes a regular report for the monthly *Tayside Quaker* pamphlet on their work. Members of the St Andrews Meeting, two or three per year, attend courses at the *Quaker Centre* in Birmingham on Quaker work and duties. The Meeting attends the University Student Fair, has an Open Week and occasionally has vigils, or sets up a stall on peace issues in the town centre. These events create interest but do not recruit members. The Meeting raises money for *Quaker Homeless Action* and for work in Palestine. It meets with all political parties and candidates during election times and presses its views on peace and sustainability. The Meeting is supportive of the member who is a Lib-Dem councillor and has to make difficult economic decisions. The local air force base is occasionally the subject of discussion but no direct action in relation to it has taken place to my knowledge.

There are strong, long serving central characters in the Meeting who help determine its character and stability. I assess that there is a core of six people, Robert & Laura, Joy, Hannah, Sandra, and Mary who are long serving, committed and active members.<sup>50</sup> They are linked to the three elderly members who have been at the meeting for many years and provide continuity. Most of these members carry the history of the meeting and can remember the move to these premises in the 1980s. Two of them were the first members of the meeting when it was first set up in St Andrews. Close to these two groups is a more recent group, whose members are equally active but are less 'weighty', although highly regarded by others for their abilities and commitment. This group is composed of a further six people. It is from these three groups that most verbal ministry comes, either in the form of a reading from A&Qs, a well-crafted reflection on current events or upon the work of the Meeting for peace. Personal material is usually embedded within ministry that often has a theme of justice, peace or tolerance. It is rare for ministry of a personal vocational type to be given but it does happen and did towards the end of the meeting for worship I describe. It is usually warmly affirmed and welcomed at coffee afterwards. The pattern and content of ministry over five years shows that the use of Quaker text, particularly A&Qs, is prominent since it is a requirement that some section be regularly read.

The commonest forms of verbal ministry are: those that note Quaker tradition and history and its relevance to today; personal reflections on a poem or a biblical text; a general sense of seeking for meanings in contemporary events

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<sup>50</sup> I discuss these members' expression of their Quakerism in their workplaces in Chapter 4. Section 3.

within in a universal perspective; and a comment on the talents and ills of the human condition. I provide examples of such ministry in St Andrews meeting for worship in Chapter 2. Sections 1 and 5. I estimate that one in five meetings is wholly silent, with the average number of ministries in any meeting being two or three. Their duration is usually less than five minutes. The atmosphere created thereby is of a settled and serious gathering. Those present are able, experienced, serious and knowledgeable and this combines with a warm and hospitable feeling within the Meeting in general that clearly sets apart the actual worship as an event of importance, even reverence.

The Meeting contains and conceals much diversity – one long standing member might volunteer that she does not believe in any kind of ‘God’, another who was brought up a Quaker but shrinks from parading her Quakerism, is committed to Celtic prayer traditions, another links her ‘storytelling’ job to Quakerism and is highly eclectic, and yet another is concerned with Sufi spirituality and its connections to Quaker practices. A significant number are ‘refugees’ from other churches and they divide evenly into those who draw on that spiritual capital and those who wholly reject the paternalism of these churches. There is little overlap with what Heelas and Woodhead (2005) would call the ‘holistic milieu’ of alternative therapies or New Age ideas. Consistent with the atmosphere I describe surrounding the actual meeting for worship, I judge that most members and attenders would define what they are doing as ‘religious’. However, there is a rigorous rejection of symbols. Flowers and Bibles are allowed on the central table during worship but a candle placed there by a student, who was doorkeeping

on one occasion, was met by hostility from an Elder. Jobs are filled and proper Gospel Order and procedure is applied to all activities. This order seems not to be experienced as control but is accepted by members. It is in this setting that the ethnography of a particular Meeting recounted in the Chapter 3. is located.

### **1.3.11. Outline of the Thesis.**

The shape of the thesis is intended to address the questions laid out above. In Chapter 1. I have described the key aspects of Quaker history and its traditions. I have given an overview of Quaker self-representation and the common tropes that inflect their narrative. I set out the primary and secondary questions that the study addresses as well as the theories in use and the argument of the thesis. I have discussed my methodology and its rationale. I reviewed the key anthropological work undertaken on British Quakers to show how my approach, argument and methodology is sharpened by and distinct from this important body of work.

In Chapter 2, Section 1, I describe the conditions for the possibility of religious experience in our era, the spiritual landscape that contemporary Quakers inhabit, by using the frameworks of Taylor (2007) and Heelas and Woodhead (2005). I develop this picture from theories of secularisation, in particular, the work of Bruce (1995, 2011) and critiques of secularisation theory from Martin (2005) and others.

In Chapter 2, Section 2, I set this study in a disciplinary context by reviewing the relationship between anthropology and Christianity. I note particular problems associated with the definition of 'religion', and the meaning of the concept of 'belief'. What emerges from this review is a complex field of enquiry in which Christianity and Quaker practices are implicated in social processes of secularisation, as are the academic disciplines of sociology and anthropology. These are contested discourses that I show are dramatised within the field of Quakerism itself in its continuous attempts to maintain unity in diversity. In Section 3, of Chapter 2, I show through a review of Quaker literature the variety of cosmologies and the explanations of their culture that Quaker commentators produce.

Having established these theoretical, historical and contextual conditions, I then present in Chapter 3, the ethnography. This section begins with a phenomenological description, an evocation of participation in the Quaker worship ritual. I will establish the cornerstone of my ethnographic material in a specific Meeting for Worship. I provide background information about the Meeting and explain my reasons for focussing on the event of worship and the evocation of participation in it. The strategic aspect of my study is developed by opening up the ethnography to the material gathered from Quakers from various parts of Britain. This material allows me to confirm and develop the themes that emerge from the meeting for worship ethnography. By these means I address the field of Quakerism as a community of practice, practices shared in common throughout Britain Yearly Meeting.

The five sections in Chapter 3, that follow the ethnography of the Meeting for Worship, take up themes concerning Quaker practice that flow from the centrality of worship. These themes emerge from the event described and from the taped interviews and participation in the *Kindlers* and other groups. I draw on canonical sources and these personal and group statements to explore themes of, the body, stillness and silence, speech, corporate gatheredness and narrative. These are the practices that are combined by Quakers to create both a personal way and a sense of unity. They show the tensions inherent in this balance, the construction of personal practices and how this diversity and potential incompatibility is contained and managed by the retention and reproduction of the traditional form of silent worship. The Quaker epistemology is shown to play a key part in containing diversity.

Chapter 4, shifts the focus to the conditions for the enactment of Quaker commitments. In Section 1 this is approached through the various notions of power that Quakers use, including institutional structures and processes, and the norms of the decision-making Business Meeting. The forms of ritual worship and styles of participation are shown to determine these processes. Section 3 provides some examples of Quaker enactments of the testimonies and reflects on some masked aspects of Quaker practices in everyday living. Section 4 explores the tendency over the last five years for 'renewal initiatives' to arise amongst British Quakers. I show how these are networks linked to specific individual visions of Quakerism and have become problematic in so far as they create competitive accounts and create potential conflict by

making diversity explicit. I argue that they suffer the same cross-pressures identified in the spiritual landscape identified in Chapter 2, Section 1.

I then return in Chapter 5, to a strategic overview of the central elements of Quaker practice – ritual worship, decision-making, testimonies and cosmologies – within the framework of Cultural Theory. This serves to show diachronically in broad terms how these elements have shifted under the pressures of ‘group’ and the pressures of ‘grid’ (Douglas 1996). I show that Cultural Theory is compatible and complementary to the developed theory of secularisation and further explicates the field of Quaker practice.

## **Chapter 2.**

### **Orientations.**

In this chapter I set out three kinds of context for this study. First, in Section 1, I set out descriptions of the spiritual landscape that Quakers occupy. Second, in Section 2, I provide a disciplinary context by discussing the relationship between anthropology and Christianity and providing some case studies of marginal Christian groups. Third, in Section 3, I consider Quaker literature on Quakerism and its reflexive aspects.

#### **Section 1.**

##### **Quakers in the contemporary Spiritual Landscape.**

Here I characterise the spiritual landscape, the contemporary context and conditions for the possibility of religious practice, for Quakers. I do so in two ways. First, by locating Quaker within a spectrum of religious and spiritual activity, by drawing on frameworks from Bruce (1995), Heelas and Woodhead (2005) and Warner (1990). Second, by setting out the qualities of the spiritual landscape in terms of the pressures of secularisation (Bruce, 1995,2010), the cross-pressures identified by Taylor (2007) and two dialectical tensions theorised by Martin (2005) and Taylor (2007). Both of these approaches provide a picture of a context and raise a series of questions that can be used to address the ethnography of Quaker practice that follows.

### 2.1.1. Locating Quakerism.

For Heelas and Woodhead (2005) Quakers exist in practice between what they call the congregational 'life-as' religion of churches and the 'the holistic milieu'. The latter is a culture of wellbeing concerned with alternative spiritualities, and centred in what they call 'subjective-life'. They argue that a 'spiritual revolution' from 'religion' to 'spirituality' has taken place. They base their view on a subjectivisation thesis,<sup>51</sup> which they argue explains both why people are less attracted to congregational religion and more attracted by the holistic milieu.<sup>52</sup> Although they did not study Quakers, they classified them as a group which gives weight to subjectivity and experiential material in the search for truth and guidance.<sup>53</sup> This shift, in their view, has as much to do with trust in the authority of external guidance as much as the decline in belief (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005:1793). They argue that organisations in the holistic milieu and mainstream churches will recruit members 'insofar as they offer to enhance subjective wellbeing and bring the sacred within the realm of personal experience' (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005:1787). The attractions of the holistic milieu include a sense of integration and 'centring', care of the

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<sup>51</sup> They link this specifically to the work of Taylor discussed here (Heelas and Woodhead 2005:134).

<sup>52</sup> Heelas and Woodhead's (2005) work is based on a large-scale empirical survey of the town of Kendal in northern England in 2001. The 'holistic milieu' is defined and described as comprising activities within a 'wellbeing culture' in which people use a generic vocabulary such as 'spirit' or 'holism' and engage in 'mind-body-spirit' practices of 'yoga' 'feng shui', and 'meditation'. The full list of activities is set out in Appendix 3. Heelas and Woodhead (2005).

<sup>53</sup> Heelas and Woodhead (2005: Appendix 2) developed a taxonomy of congregational religions: 'religions of humanity' such as the Holy Trinity, Church of England, 'religions of difference' such as Jehovah's Witnesses, 'religions of experiential difference' such as the Salvation Army, and 'religions of experiential humanity' in which they include Quakers. These definitions relate to the extent to which the subjectivisation thesis is exemplified and the religions place emphasis on the experience of the individual as the source of authority. Heelas and Woodhead did not study Quakers in any detail.

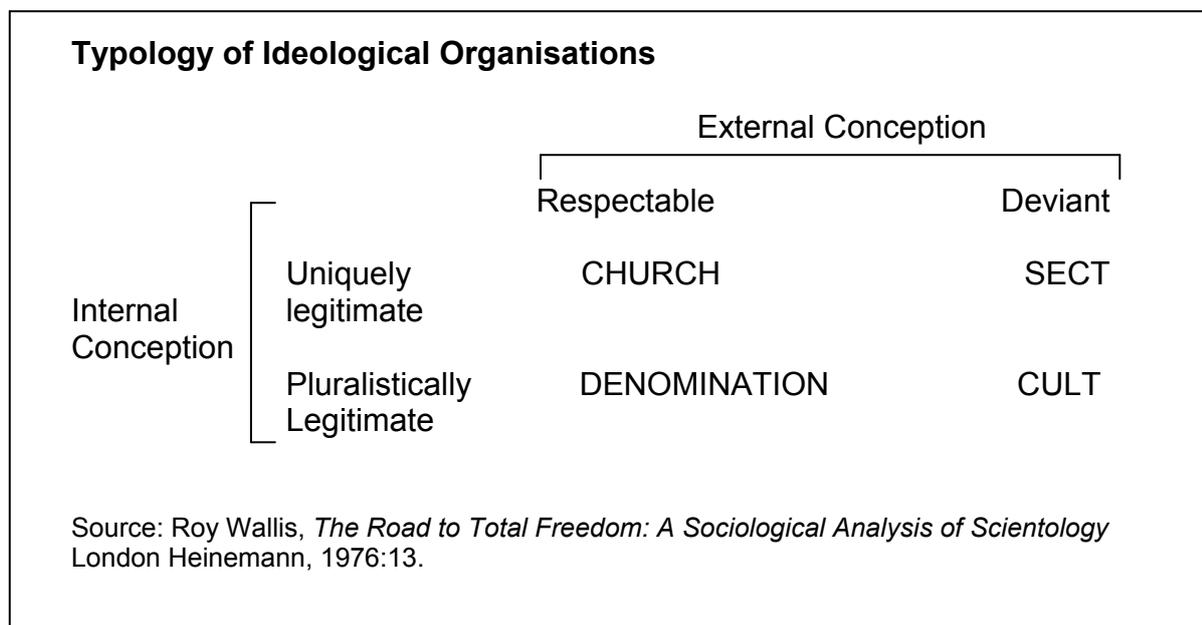
body as well as the spirit (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005:1496). Taylor also notes that the desire for wholeness and authenticity based on experience and the pre-eminence of the body may be linked with two other features: a rejection of disembodied reason and a preference for spirituality rather than religion.

Spirituality as opposed to religion, is indeed defined by a kind of autonomous exploration which is opposed to the simple surrender to authority; and people who engage in this kind of spiritual path are indeed put off by moralism and the code fetishism they find in churches (Taylor, 2007:509).

These perspectives raise some questions for this study. Do Quaker practices exemplify the subjectivisation thesis and have they shifted from their traditional domain of religion to that of spirituality? How significant, for Quakers, in such a shift towards subjectivisation, are matters of trust and authority as compared to matters of belief? Do Quakers recruit people from, or import practices from the 'holistic milieu'?

Bruce (1995) also noted a shift in religious organisation under the pressures of modernism away from churches, which see their role as linked to the nation and the community in general, towards sects, denominations and cults. Churches were associated with total communities, with states and nations and had therefore legitimacy. Sects by contrast are more egalitarian and by creating pressures on the individual retain their commitment. Bruce (1995:20) outlines a framework for locating religious movements:

**Fig. 1:**

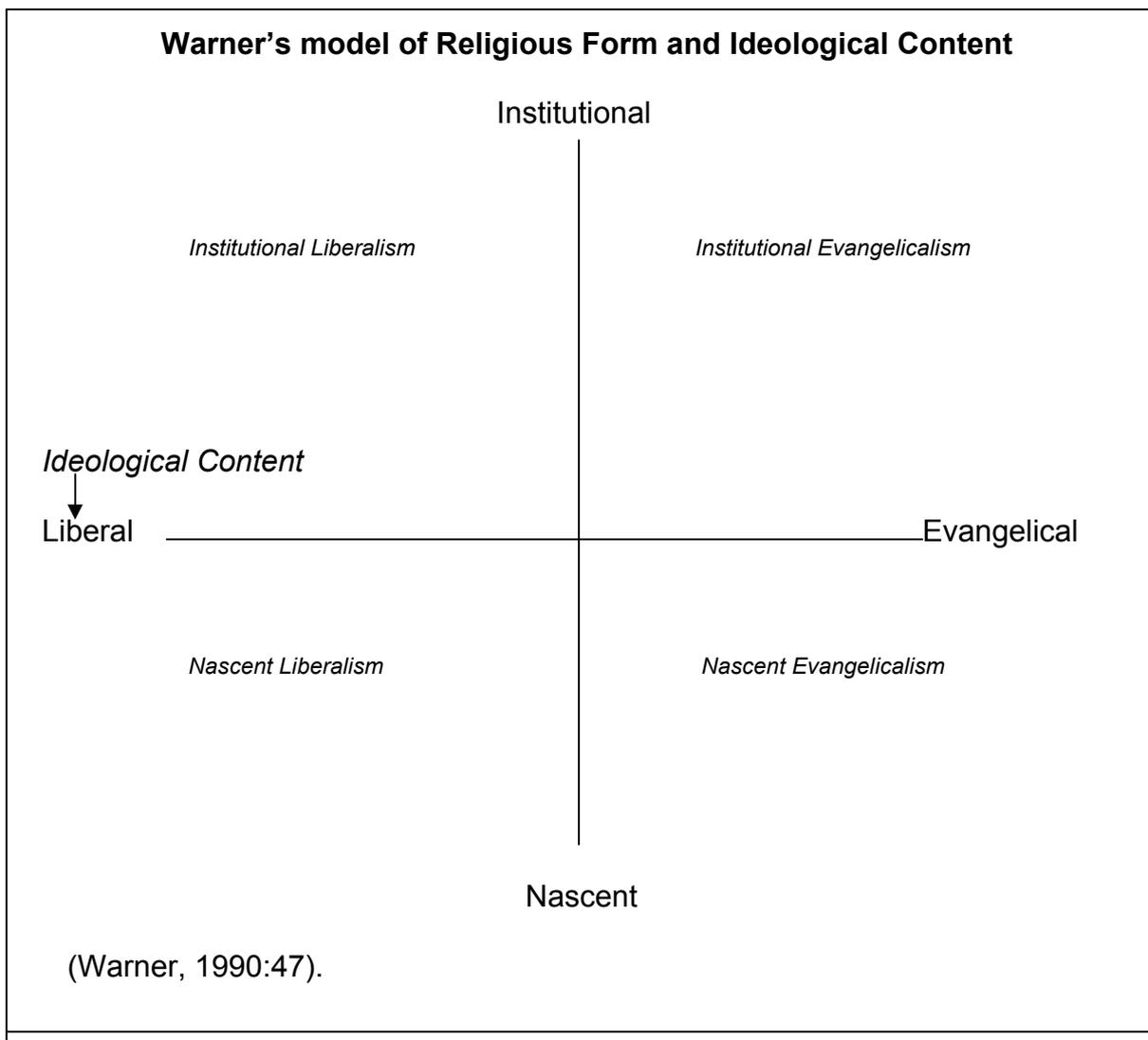


On the basis of the historical outline in Chapter 1, it is clear that Quakers began as a sect. The contemporary features of inclusion, pluralism, and tolerance, together with the demographic picture of their current composition suggests that Quakers may have moved, in the terms of this framework, from a sect to becoming a respectable, pluralistically legitimate, denominational organisation. In Douglas's (1996, 1998) terms Quakers were a sectarian religious group but now might be better described as an egalitarian enclave. This is a question to which I will return in Chapter 5.

Warner (1990:45ff) developed a framework that considers religious 'form' in relation to 'content' along two dimensions. First, religions tend either to 'institutional' or 'nascent' forms, particularly of ritual, and second, they tend to express either 'liberal' or 'evangelical' content. From the history set out in Chapter 1, it is clear that early Quakers manifested 'nascent evangelicalism'. I

shall consider below in Chapter 5, in the light of the ethnography whether contemporary Quakers might be considered to have now moved to a more 'liberal' location, have become more conservative and institutional in their ritual form, and whether renewal initiatives promote new inspiration, or 'nascence'. Warner's framework also raises a critical question for Quakers: what is the relationship between (ritual) form and (belief) content, and is this changing over time, and if so under what pressures?

**Fig. 2:**



These perspectives enable Quakers' position relative to other churches and to emerging practices of spirituality to be assessed. These frameworks also suggest that there are certain pressures upon such groups as Quakers in the spiritual landscape. They raise questions which can be used to address the ethnography.

I now turn to the second, complementary, approach to the characterisation of the spiritual landscape which considers the pressures of secularisation (Bruce, 1995,2010), the cross-pressures identified by Taylor (2007) and two dialectical tensions theorised by Martin (2005) and Taylor (2007).

### **2.1.2. The Conditions for the possibility of religious practice in the Spiritual Landscape.**

Bruce (1995, 2011) identified, from his empirical studies, the following pressures towards secularisation: social differentiation; egalitarianism; individualism (privatisation); relativism; pluralism; and naturalism. Martin (2005) argued for the dominant effects of social differentiation, individualism and pluralism. I have noted that it is possible to avoid a linear, determinative role for these pressures whilst still retaining them as pointers to influences within the spiritual landscape. Martin supports this approach. He rejects these processes as 'a uniform intellectual advance to the arrival of the secular age as a kind of epiphany' (Martin, 2005:10). I have also proposed that these

pressures be considered as functioning in a more dynamic, contested, way in the spiritual landscape and both Taylor and Martin endorse this approach – both positing certain dialectical tensions. I therefore set out here a picture of the spiritual landscape for Quakers that shows the features that create the conditions for the possibility of religious practice. It also shows a set of cross-pressures (Taylor, 2007:302,414-415) and tensions under which Quakers construct and maintain their practices.

Taylor begins his exploration into the ‘secular age’ by asking ‘what are the features of the new spiritual landscape?’ That is, what are the social forces that create conditions for belief and religious experience? (Taylor, 2007:4,573). Taylor notes that religious belief has become a beleaguered position and that,

secularity in this sense is a matter of the whole context of understanding in which our moral, spiritual or religious experience and search takes place. *An age or society would then be secular or not in virtue of the conditions of experience of a search for the spiritual* (Taylor 2007:5). (My italics)

To describe these conditions of experience for a search for the spiritual, Taylor conceives of a discursive metaphorical space that he calls the ‘nova’ (Taylor, 2007:299-313,414-415). He describes the nova as a contested space of ‘galloping pluralism’ between two perspectives, the polarities of the ‘immanent frame’, and the ‘transcendent’ (Taylor, 2007:542-557). Taylor also uses the metaphor of terrain for the nova, describing it as ‘not a level playing field’ (Taylor, 2007:275). By this he means that it is a space in which irruptions of religious commitment take place against a set of default assumptions

whereby believing is an ‘embattled option’ and the terrain is tilted towards ‘exclusive humanism’ (Taylor, 2007:276). Taylor describes the nova as a dynamic space which contains, in its pluralism and its dialectical perspectives, a series of epistemic cross pressures.<sup>54</sup>

These epistemic features of Taylor’s concept of the nova have similarities to Foucault’s (1970) concept of the episteme. An episteme for Foucault is a three dimensional space, an epistemological field in which the order of knowledge is constituted by groups of discourses. An episteme is ‘the ground of thought on which at a particular time some statements and not others will count as knowledge;’ an ‘episteme includes the range of methodologies which a culture draws on as self evident in order to be able to think about particular subjects’ (Foucault,1970:346ff).

Thus the nova, the spiritual landscape, is an epistemic space in which cross pressures shape our thought and the constructions we place on experience. Taylor suggests that here we are subject to some cross-pressures which shape our thinking, become unconscious assumptions and ‘hold us captive’ (Taylor, 2007:549). Taylor describes a bias against religious belief within these cross pressures. Taylor’s approach is to look beyond practices to try to discern the assumptions that lie behind them. It may be that these assumptions, when operating in taken-for-granted ways, create systemic changes that are not readily perceived by the actors who produce them. In this case the development of a Quaker reflexive literature<sup>55</sup> and renewal

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<sup>54</sup> Taylor refers both to ‘the nova’ and to ‘the nova effect’ (Taylor, 2007:299).

<sup>55</sup> Discussed below in Section 3.

initiatives <sup>56</sup> may show an awareness of such unconscious assumptions and their unintended consequences, and be attempts to articulate and face them.

Taylor therefore describes how the epistemic space of the nova offers orientations that become unexamined, unconscious assumptions, and have 'the false aura of the obvious'.

I am taking "epistemology" here as more than a set of theories but also at the level of a structure, in my sense, that is, an underlying picture which is partly consciously entertained, but which controls the way people think, argue, infer, make sense of things. (Taylor, 2007:330).

One such assumption is what Taylor calls the 'immanent frame' (Taylor, 2007:330ff) in which: there is no guide outwith our moral order; there is no authority beyond the person; there are no constraints other than science and technology; there is no account of human fullness other than one of utility; and no purposes other than our own. Taylor argues that these assumptions are insidious and come to shape reasoning in taken-for-granted ways. Thus options may be closed to us and that closed condition itself constitutes an attitude towards the possibility of religious experience.

The priority relations tell us not only what is learned before what, but also what can be inferred on the basis of what. They are foundational relations. I know the world through my representations. I must grasp the world as fact before I can posit values. I must accede to the transcendent, if at all by inference from the natural (Taylor, 2007:558). <sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> See Chapter 4, Section 5.

<sup>57</sup> This tension appears in the ethnography of Quaker worship and will be discussed below. It is exemplified particularly in the different approaches to certain Quaker worship practices such as centering-down (personal stillness) in relation to corporate silence. Quakers differ in the emphasis they give to the emerging qualities ('inference

Taylor's first contribution to the characterization of the spiritual landscape is a description of why, and how, religious practice has become a beleaguered option. These pressures can be linked to the comments by Heelas and Woodhead (2005) that trust and authority are as important factors as beliefs. This raises the question as to whether the task and challenge for Quakers is likely to be diverted, by these pressures, from any assertion of a shared set of beliefs, to simply retaining a form and space within which the possibility of religious experience might be articulated. Has Quaker practice been reduced to defending a possibility rather than being able to affirm a shared cosmology?

I now turn to three particular features of the spiritual landscape of relevance to a study of Quakerism: the dialectical tension between transcendence and immanence; the image of the secularised person; and the effect of pluralism in producing alternative and competing perspectives.

Taylor imagines a tension between natural understandings and spiritual ones (Taylor, 2007:13-15,542ff). The natural world we live in is a 'closed world system' of immanence where 'instrumental rationality is a key value' (Taylor, 2007:542). Instrumental rationality and the pervasiveness of secularity go together (Taylor, 2007:542). Taylor concludes that the 'immanent frame' constitutes a 'natural order' that contrasts with a 'supernatural one' (Taylor, 2007:543.) The effect of the bias towards the immanent frame and away from

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from the natural') of worship compared to the 'covering' of the worship meeting by a transcendent presence, which has to be assumed is possible. This is examined in Chapter 2, Section 6.

transcendent perspectives is not primarily about belief in matters such as theism. The redundancy of the transcendent arises because,

..it just seems evident that what is centrally at stake in morals must be either utility, or utility plus the requirements of freedom and/or those of rational argument. There seems no call to examine the understanding of the incomparably higher underlying all this, much less raise the question as to whether it points to something transcendent (Taylor, 2007:591).

The effect is that religious accounts are marginalized in favour of reductive reasoning and naturalism, and this itself seems, natural. For Taylor religion and transcendence are synonymous. The transcendent perspective that is in dialectical relation to the immanent frame and a closed world system has a number of dimensions. It supposes that there is 'some good higher, beyond human flourishing', that this good is beneficent, that we can 'partake of this power', that this in turn offers 'a possibility of transformation that takes us beyond human perfection', that partaking of this entails 'faith', and that we see' life as going beyond the bounds of its 'natural scope between birth and death' (Taylor, 2007:20, 144-5, 517-518). Engagement with the transcendent and its dialectical relation to immanence is an active one in Taylor's view. It is the pressure towards 'putting an end to' (Taylor, 2005:21) the conditions for searching and questioning within this dialectic that Taylor suggests is the subtle effect of secularisation.

Martin, in also rejecting the linear picture of a process of secularisation, proposes a similar dialectic of 'faith-nature' (Martin, 2005:1-13). Martin notes that, 'once the dialectic between transforming vision and natural and social reality characterised as good has been introduced into history, it does not and

cannot lapse' (Martin, 2005:11). These dialectical features of the spiritual landscape suggest that in viewing the ethnographic material on Quakers and their practices that we should be alert to the choices and discontinuities that they point to. I shall examine in Chapter 5, how the plurality of Quaker images of the transcendent (and its denial) and the beleaguered position of Quakers may combine to create a reluctance to explicitly address these dialectical relations to which Taylor and Martin point.

I now turn to the image of the individual located in this spiritual landscape. The most potent feature of the process of secularisation in Bruce's account is that of individualism (Bruce 1995:134). Two accounts of its effects are provided by Heelas and Woodhead (2005) and by Taylor (2007). According to Heelas and Woodhead (2005) the shift or drift towards the holistic milieu encourages the search for 'the truth of one's experience' rather than the truth of a belief and this has the 'logic of the unique' (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005:1068). This shift entails a release from exterior authority structures and norms and a focus on the body, feelings and intuition. It is therefore a shift in the locus of control, authority and trust. The source of insight and authority in this case is a person's true nature, 'the deep inner self and the essence of the person. The focus in these areas of experience is 'balance', 'harmony', 'integration', 'authenticity' and 'wholeness' (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005:1487). Individualism for Heelas and Woodhead is linked to subjectivisation and the shift towards the authority of the self but also to the feeling of balance and harmony in the self.

Taylor, taking a similar starting point of secularization and individualism, by contrast, presents an image of the individual as even more self-contained. Taylor portrays this self as the 'buffered self' (Taylor, 38-42, 262-264, 488-490). This is a sense of the self as 'invulnerable, as master of the meanings of things for it', less open and 'porous' (Taylor, 2007:38). 'To be a buffered self is to have closed the porous boundary between inside (thought) and outside (nature, the physical)' and is a matter of living in 'a disenchanted world' (Taylor, 2005: 300). This 'buffered self' has a sense of 'self possession' and of a 'secure mental realm' (Taylor 2005:301). It has a 'pride in the sense of its own worth' (Taylor, 2007:302). The 'buffered self' is freed from the constraints and influences of the world of spirits. It does not conceive a boundary of the self that might be crossed from the outside by any transcendent disclosure. Taylor describes this self as unbounded, as not limited, as one engaged in a 'disciplined self-remaking' particularly by the use of 'disengaged reasoning' (Taylor, 2007:300). This is an emancipation, an invulnerability, a release from an 'earlier state of captivity in an enchanted world' (Taylor, 2007:301-2).

These two portraits of the self, in the light of the pressure towards individualism, from Heelas and Woodhead, (2005) and Taylor (2007) stress the shift of the locus of authority from any belief in external authority towards what is deemed true for the person, and the capacity of the individual for 'self making'. Taylor stresses the capacity of disengaged reason in this process whereas Heelas and Woodhead place greater emphasis on the body, feelings and the notion of harmony and balance. However both imply significant limiting conditions for engagement by the individual with the spiritual realm.

Finally in this picture of the spiritual landscape I consider the effect of both individualism and pluralism as the problem of competing perspectives between and within religious groups. This raises the question of Quakers' ability and willingness to make positive affirmations of belief, which might be related to tests for membership, given its significant internal plurality.

Taylor identifies a process at work here which he calls 'fragelisation' (Taylor, 2007: 303, 437, 531-2, 833n19). This he describes as 'the fragility of any formula or solution, whether believing or unbelieving' (Taylor, 2007:303) and interactively it becomes 'mutual fragelisation' in which 'homogeneity and instability work together to bring the fragelising effect of pluralism to a maximum' (Taylor, 2007:304). Taylor traces a history of the concept (though the actual word is his) from Joas (2004) and Berger (1994). He notes several meanings. First, he says, 'I mean by this that greater proximity of alternatives has led to a society in which more people change their positions, 'convert' than did their parents' (Taylor, 2007 883n.19). Second, fragelisation is associated with the decline of master narratives. He draws a general conclusion from these trends. The very fact that we live under conditions in which it is legitimate to have such different perspectives (and that these are held by others whom we respect) means that any position adopted must entail doubt and uncertainty, and that each position held is a working hypothesis.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> This trajectory which Taylor identifies I have noted finds a resonance in Bernard Williams (2000), This effect was encountered in fieldwork by Alec Davison, a key respondent who was reading the work of Rorty and Engel (2005) and who quoted from it: 'The notion of truth has no explanatory use...the problem is not to make our statements true but to justify them. Justification itself is nothing other than agreement

In this regard Bruce (1995) also notes a series of links between individualism, the right to choose, epistemological relativism and what Taylor calls 'fragelisation'. These include 'the right to determine what counts as authoritative knowledge', which in turn may extend to 'the denial of the possibility any authority beyond the preferences of the individual', and a rejection of authority and tradition producing 'untutored personal choice' (Bruce, 1995:135). Here fragelisation reaches an end point whereby it ceases to describe a contest between affirmations but becomes the denial that any affirmation can stand scrutiny.

These effects of fragelisation have particular relevance for religion in Taylor's view, because 'many forms of belief jostle and hence fragelise each other' (Taylor, 2007:531), and this jostling includes distorted stereotypes held by some religions about other religions. Fragelisation may be a relevant pressure in the Quaker case where diversity (in theology or other spiritual perspectives) is managed by inclusive tolerance. It becomes normative to avoid strong assertion of any one position and all positions are made more provisional thereby.<sup>59</sup>

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among the members of a group, there is no ultimate or final agreement' (Rorty and Engel 2005:6).

<sup>59</sup> It is a common Quaker solution to this problem to use the metaphor that all believers of any kind are 'all climbing the same mountain' (Fieldnotes: *Kindlers*), whereas some Quakers will also say 'we need to be open and tolerant because not all religions can be right...' (Field notes: *Kindlers*). I note below in Section 3, Pilgrim's (2008) distinction between 'exclusivists' and 'syncretists' among Quakers. This is a theological problem also. For example D'Costa (2003) describes the inclusivist position ('we are all climbing the same mountain') as 'transcendental agnosticism' which claims a bogus objectivity. He argues that this leads to a situation in which 'any claims for final definitive truth are undercut and denied, and this entails a methodological refusal to take any religion seriously on it's own terms' (D'Costa,

### 2.1.3. Summary

I have characterised the spiritual landscape that Quakers occupy. First, by locating Quakerism in a spectrum of activity that ranges from religion to spirituality. I have identified the pressure of subjectivisation upon Quakers, suggesting a shift in the locus of trust and authority irrespective of specific beliefs. This picture also suggests that Quaker practices may not have moved in the direction of a cult but occupies a middle position as religion with some experiential features. In Chapter 5, this question will be taken up in Douglas's (1996, 1998) terms. From this perspective Quakers may not now be a sectarian religious group but an egalitarian enclave. Second, I have set a context for an examination of the ethnography of Quaker practice. This spiritual landscape is a terrain in which contemporary thinking marginalises the constructs of a religious world-view. Thinking is so shaped to make religious practice a beleaguered option. The question is raised therefore whether Quakers have to deal with, and spend their energy on, this preservation of a possibility rather than the affirmation of particular beliefs. The pressures of secularisation are seen to bear down upon Quakers and do so also in terms of dialectical tensions that sharpen the distinction between the domains of religion and secular perspectives. The question is raised as to whether, and if so, how, these tensions are dramatised within the ethnographic account of Quaker practices.

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2005:35). These observations are related closely to what Taylor refers to as fragelisation.

In Chapter 1, I noted that Quakers have their roots in the Christian tradition. The relationship between these roots and 'new light' (Wildwood, 1999) amongst Quakers, is a tension which has also been noted above by Taylor in his 'transcendent-immanent' dialectic. I have also shown that religions in general and Quakers in particular are implicated in the processes described as secularisation. Religion, and specifically Christianity, shapes both sociological and anthropological enquiry, not least in the role of a notion of the transcendent. I now turn therefore to consider the general relationship between Christianity and anthropology and provide two examples of anthropological studies of marginal Christian groups. These examples are relevant to this study in that they show how a range of elements, symbols and practices may be understood and practised in different ways. I also discuss issues surrounding the concepts of 'religion' and 'belief' in anthropology. These matters are relevant to a study of Quakers because Quakers have historically rejected propositional religious belief in the form of dogma or creed.

## **Section 2 The Disciplinary Context – Anthropology and Christianity**

### **2.2.1. Introduction**

In her review of major themes in the anthropology of religion, James (2003) notes that Christianity has posed a 'root question' for anthropologists, 'as to whether we are, and therefore are studying, God's creatures or nature's creatures' (James, 2003:119). She concludes that the question should be

'depersonalised' as far as possible and that findings should be 'framed more by the moral and intellectual frame in which you cast your investigation, than personal allegiance'. She also notes the need for anthropologists to be aware of 'the complex place 'religion' has in the history of his or her own part of the world' (James, 3003:136). James notes two issues here. First, that anthropologists must be aware of their own biases towards or against religious belief and second, that certain of these biases may have become historically intrinsic to the study of religions.

Cannell (2006) notes that there has emerged a modernist sense of being 'after religion' in anthropology. Christianity, in Cannell's view, has become an 'obvious' or 'known' phenomena. Following this, studies 'exercised a completely secular analytic approach' (Cannell, 2006:3), and this, in turn, produced a 'disciplinary nervousness' about religious experience. This disciplinary nervousness can be seen in Harding's (2000) study of Jerry Falwell and Christian fundamentalism which engaged, in Cannel's view, with liberal anthropology's 'repugnant social other' (Harding, 2000). Cannel notes that religious experiences have been viewed as having

no foundation in reality, but are epiphenomena of 'real' underlying sociological, political, economic or other material causes (Cannell, 2006:3).

Coleman (2007) also notes this problem:

The stereotype many scholars still maintain is of the conservative Christian as 'simply' literalist. There is very little that is simple about it. In using a stereotype of the Christian other as unthinkingly chained to

referential views of the sacred text we may be in danger ourselves of taking an ideology of literalism rather too literally (Coleman, 2007:58).

Cannell charts the relationship of Christianity to anthropology in several domains. Christianity 'elevates the spirit above the flesh' yet 'flesh is an essential part of redemption'. This dualism is linked to the idea that God 'withdraws from the world of mortals' and that radical changes and 'self-fashioning' emerge from the transformation that occurs when 'orientation to the life beyond' takes hold (Cannell, 2006:21). These features of splitting and discontinuity have inflected, in her view, certain ideas of modernism and therefore secularisation, in particular, in notions of step changes, transformations and end states. I have noted this connection with Christian thinking in my description of secularisation theories above in Chapter 1, Section 2.

Cannell also alerts anthropologists to be wary of treating Christianity as homogeneous in the sense of assessing any variant by an assumed orthodoxy. Christianity has always been fissiparous and diverse. This is related to the tendency to treat Christianity as paradigmatic of religion as a whole. The eleven studies in Cannell (2006), the nine studies in Engelke and Tomlinson (2007), those in Pines and Cabral (2008) and Berliner and Sarro (2007) show the wide variety of ways in which the elements of Christianity take on different meanings and functions in local areas. There has been a general shift towards nature (Martin, 2005) and the body, and specifically towards various different functions given to speech, speaking, silence, text, breathing and posture, and general expressiveness. These functions and

symbolic meanings differ markedly between groups who have their roots in Christianity. Religious engagement can come in a wide variety of forms (Cannell, 2006:30), for example, syncretism in Fijian Christianity (Toren, 2006), the impact of missionaries on the Piro life-world (Gow, 2006) and the construction of charismatic protestant identity (Coleman, 2007).

Cannell notes the contribution of Christianity to theories of secularisation and to the 'myth of modernity'. Cannell suggests that if anthropologists can free themselves from supposing that Christianity is behind us, is homogeneous, and 'changes everything for ever', then we may 'be able to see the experiences of Christianity, in all their diversity, complexity and singularity for what they are' (Cannell, 2007:45). This study takes the approach that the reported experiences of Quakers can be studied without taking the view that they are epiphenomena.

### **2.2.2. Two Studies in the Anthropology of Christianity**

#### ***The Vineyard Christian Fellowship***

Luhrmann joined a 'new paradigm' Christian church in California, in 2004 as an ethnographer and formally interviewed thirty members and talked with many more. She attended Sunday worship and many of the courses and activities. She focussed on how members 'learned to feel God in their bodies and in their minds'. For these evangelical Christians, humans can experience divinity intimately in such a way that internal mind and external reality in some each participate in the other in some way. They 'develop a direct personal and vividly felt relationship with their creator experienced through dialogue through

an interaction between two intentional consciousnesses' (Luhrmann, 2007:32). She found that 'people are encouraged to interpret God's presence in the everyday flow of their own awareness, and to seek in it evidence that they might be hearing a voice spoken by another' (Luhrmann, 2007:84). Luhrmann thus summaries her theoretical focus:

The experiential dimension of religion rests upon the way people learn to use cognitive concepts to interpret their minds and bodies, and the practices people learn which change bodily experiences in relation to those concepts, to make those concepts real. That is what they are learning to do when they learn to experience participation (Luhrmann, 2007:84).

Luhrmann was able to chart the practices that members used. The congregation were encouraged to become absorbed in their own thoughts. In order to do this they imported, 'techniques that we think of as part of older eras and more exotic spiritualities – Christian mysticism, Zen Buddhism, Siberian Shamanism' (Luhrmann, 2007;86). They were also to go to a quiet place to calm their thoughts and emotions to allow for the spontaneous flow of God within. They 'wait on God' to see if they can identify something in their thoughts, their minds and bodies as God. (Luhrmann, 2007:88) They were recommended breathing techniques, and encouraged to keep a journal in which they were to write the dialogue with God. The members also used the notion of 'promptings' of the Holy Spirit and these are described as 'tingling, peace, warmth, crying, and images that seem to come from God'. The practices generate these experiences, which are then subject to what Luhrmann calls the 'problem of discernment'. This entails various tests. A thought should not be your thought; it should be the kind of thing that God

would say. It should be shared by others in similar images. It should emerge through spiritual practices, and it should bring a feeling of comfort and peace, a settled acceptance.

Discernment thus is clearly a social process, in that there are socially taught rules through which God is identified. These social rules interact with the psychological consequences of practising absorption states. Those who experience heightened absorption and its associated consequences – greater imagery, greater imaginative engagement and increased internal or external sensory phenomena learn to interpret those phenomena as signs of God's intentional presence in their lives (Luhmann, 2007:90).

Luhmann charts the process of reframing perceptions and notes that this process is not primarily about either belief or cognition.

As God comes to be experienced as an interlocutor, as concrete events in body and psyche come to be recognised as his responses, in the moment, to the worshipper's prayer, God emerges as a real person – what psychoanalysts would call an object – in the worshipper's emotional life. As this happens the problem of disconfirmation is no longer the challenge to an abstract hypothesis, a theory of reality (Luhmann, 2007:95).

The members of the church are not modelling the world by different constraints. In a real way they live in a different world; things are changed utterly. They then draw on different evidence for their ideas, so the initial sense of continuity and seamlessness with everyday life results in discontinuity when everyday life is reframed as a dialogue with God. Luhmann notes that belief in the truth of the senses is a 'primitive zero-order belief' (Luhmann, 2007:101). She concludes her study by noting that these outcomes are the results both of learning and of social processes

## ***The Word of Life Christian Ministry***

The Swedish Word of Life charismatic revival church was studied by Coleman in the 1980s and written up through a series of publications (Coleman, 2000, 2007). He notes that such groups are often thought to be naively literal and engage in the suppression of semantic content to achieve certain kinds of meaningfulness. Coleman shows that this apparent literalness is more a mode of being in and acting upon the world than a cognitive focus on the specificities of chapter and verse. He shows how the elements of listening, speaking, hearing, text, readings from text, preaching and ministry become disciplines and combine and reinforce a 'metliteral' understanding of actions in relation to words (Coleman, 2007:51).

The Word of Life church, as its name implies, is centrally concerned with how the Word is heard, received and acted upon. Coleman notes:

...silence and stillness are hardly strangers to ritual. Bell and Collins (1998) have juxtaposed British Quakerism and Buddhism and argued for the positive, communicative function of silence, since it can imply much more than the absence of sound, and can signify messages ranging from political protest to a marked receptivity to the divine. Bauman (1974:146) shows how the language ideology of the early Quakers stressed that speaking was seen as a faculty of the natural, outward person, and was therefore not perceived to be as valuable as the inward communion with God (Coleman, 2007:41).

Coleman argues that literalist interpretations focus on the semantic dimension of language and not on its pragmatic, performative and context-related

aspects. Coleman further notes that the Protestant subject is characterised by a normative ideal of sincerity in which words and interior states are made transparent and sincere and where the emphasis is on 'truthful propositions rather than on ritual and bodily disciplines' (Coleman, 2007:39). He focuses therefore on the practices of reading, hearing and speaking. He identifies a charismatic process whereby an ideology of literalism does not itself constitute literalism but is subverted. Coleman shows how the modes of hearing (sermons), 'listening with the heart', reading and speaking, accepting and applying the Word are linked in a rhetorical process which involves the performative engagement by members and creates agency. Preachers urge listeners to speak rather than inwardly register what they read or what they hear, 'the words must be *sounded* so that a description of one's identity is intended performatively to create that identity within the self' (Coleman, 2007:47)

So, several modes of perception are activated. The listening to and hearing of the preached Word activates the bodily thought, the Word within, and this is sounded, spoken to become an embodied participation at worship and the basis of guided agency in the world. Worshippers develop 'spiritual ears and eyes' The metaphors of walking by faith and doing God's word are made concrete. A key element in this is the connection between what the preacher says and the replication of that discourse in the words of others. What the preacher says and asks the congregation to do become the property of the group and the individuals that make it up. The literal passing on of the message from listener to listener through greetings shows the transitional process from the speaker's words to the social currency of the group. The

apparent simplicity and literalness of this is complex when the rhetorical devices used by preachers and the performative engagement of modes of perception by listeners are examined. Literalism has 'its own ambiguities and subtleties' (Coleman, 2007:58)

These studies show varieties of Christian practices. They show the ways in which the elements of silence, waiting, giving attention, text, authoritative speech, speaking and hearing are combined as sources of evidence for God's word. These themes, the combining of elements from the Christian tradition in new ways by marginal enclaves, will be further illustrated in the ethnography of Quaker practices.

### **2.2.3. The Category of Religion and the Concept of Belief.**

Central to the Quaker tradition and operative today, is the rejection of features of traditional religion. Priests, creeds, steeplehouses, doctrine and dogma were all thought to create unnecessary and falsely authoritative mediation of what was expected to be inspiration by the Spirit and not the letter. The category of religion and the concept of belief have both been problematised in anthropology. I therefore examine how these discourses might inflect each other and some misunderstandings that may arise as a result.

#### ***The Category of Religion.***

Asad (1993) argued that there is no autonomous essence in religion and nor are its symbols embodied with essential meaning and, from this he concluded that there cannot be a universal definition of religion. He considered the elements of religious practice to be historically specific, that any definition is the result of discursive processes and that Christianity is not paradigmatic of religion in general. Asad traces this perspective to modern Christian hermeneutics, claiming that the attempt to construct a universal definition of religion 'ought to be seen in the context of Christian attempts to achieve a coherence in doctrine, practices, rules and regulations' (Asad quoted in Engelke & Tomlinson, 2007:3). Asad's position is not without its critics. Engelke and Tomlinson (2007:4) suggest that 'problems of meaning continue to impel people in modern societies towards religion'. Pine and Cabral (2008:8) also note that 'Needham's critique of religion continues to rankle on as a source of contention'. Needham's (1972) contribution to questions of definition is to suggest that religions share 'family resemblances' and can be classified polythetically and this can be achieved without making belief a necessary feature.

Taylor avoids the task of trying to define 'religion' and adopts a reading of religion in terms of a transcendent-immanent dialectic. He recognises that religion in general cannot be defined in terms of this distinction. He justifies his dialectic as 'taylor-made for our culture' (Taylor, 2007:16). Heelas and Woodhead (2005) identify a shift from religion to spirituality. Collins (2002b) asserted that in taking part in Quaker worship he was not taking part in a

primarily religious event. Cabral and Pine (2008:10-12)<sup>60</sup> suggest that while religion is a 'constant of human existence' there is 'a challenge to the very notion of religion as a clearly defined domain'. Religion has been conceptualised as a quality entailing sacralisation and ritualisation embedded in social practices. These practices include, for example, performances such as the 'Whit Walk' (Jenkins, 1999) or a dispersed 'believing without belonging' (Davie, 1994) and can be taken to counter Bruce's narrower definition of 'church going'. Religion for Jenkins is the way in which we pay attention to human wellbeing in a concentrated way.

The expression of the human aspiration to flourish, or – to put it another way – as the expression of the desire to be human in a particular form (Jenkins, 1999:13,14).

Jenkins wonders if an ethnography of religion is possible since it is not clear whether the term is necessary or useful.

A part of the point of anthropological method is that its argument springs from the ethnographic description, so it sheds or defers the whole business of prior definition and justification of its object. But it does so at first sight at the cost of reducing its ambition and speaking only of particular events, moments and contexts. In which case, it cannot be clear in advance that the category of 'religion' in any form will have place in the ethnographic account: after all, a whole anthropological literature exists dissolving comparable overarching categories (Jenkins, 1999:5).

So a key feature of the spiritual landscape is the way religion is conceptualised and the way Quakers understand religion. Both analytical uses and everyday discourse can be viewed in the following way. On the one

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<sup>60</sup> The published collection of papers is correctly referenced to Pine and Cabral, 2008, the first paper in the collection is authored by Cabral and Pine, 2008.

hand, there is a perspective of continuity. Here religion and spirituality are seen as part of a seamless spectrum of practices, and definitions and generic descriptions such as 'orderings of the sacred' are preferred. On the other hand, there is the discontinuity perspective which sees religion as pertaining to the character that may manifest some transcendent source of creative animation as an 'other' to the human condition. Here religious practice is set apart from daily life as an encounter with this possibility under certain conditions, at particular times and in places and usually entailing ritual. Even those who accept the latter position divide into those who stress the givenness of the 'other' and its possible discovery by its manifestations (a 'top-down' realist view) and those who stress the constructed emergent, creative and language determined construction of religion, (a 'bottom up' critical realist view). Most of these perspectives may be found amongst Quakers.

These positions can be seen as falling within the cross-pressures that Taylor identifies, namely his dialectic of 'transcendence-immanence'.

These positions themselves are defined in a field in which the extreme ones, transcendental religion and reductive materialism are crucial reference points. Yet the cross pressures can lead to a condition in which many people hesitate for a long time in their attitude to religion. But where they do not lead to prolonged uncertainty, cross pressures of this kind have been responsible for a host of new positions which constitute what I call the 'Nova'. We are torn between an anti-Christian thrust and a repulsion towards some (to us) extreme form of reduction, so we invent new positions (Taylor, 2007:599).

One of the key dilemmas in the cross-pressures that Taylor identifies is what I described above as the continuity-discontinuity perspective, one pole of which locates the possibility of religious experience within the immanent frame and rules out therefore any image of a transcendent function.

### ***The Concept of Belief.***

The central element of Needham's (1972,1981) critique was the deployment by western anthropologists of the concept of 'belief' and its general application to religions. He criticised this description of belief as a neutral term 'for all that people claim to know and affirm or take for granted' (James, 2003:123). The effects of his position can be summarised thus:

'Belief' as a species of internal creed is not a 'natural' human capacity, but a component of the way that images of the human psychology and of the nature of knowledge, especially of the divine, have been constructed in human history. Malcolm Ruel has pursued a parallel argument, locating the notion of 'belief', as something to be opted for by the individual in specific periods of Christian history. He comments on the 'monumental peculiarity of Christian "belief", as it emerged from the older Hebrew sense of 'trust' to become an 'acceptance of teachings' after Christ's death and resurrection. Belief in the sense of required personal commitment is a relatively modern, post-Reformation idea; it has a close connection with the modern spread of Christianity and missions in the context of imperial rule (James, 2003:123).

How does Needham's critique and the debate that surrounds it impact on a study of Quakerism? Quakers may agree with Needham that religion is not 'a critical apparatus for epistemological speculation' (Needham, 1972:75). They may also agree that although the tenets 'can be represented as a set of

propositions' (Needham, 1972:75.) it is not a general characteristic of Quakers 'that the tenets are generally said by their proponents to be true' (Needham, 1975:75). Indeed, Quakers would agree that in many cases practices entail 'abstention from such judgements' (Needham, 1972:77). Quakers may also agree that belief in the propositional sense is a modern characteristic with specific Judeo-Christian roots from which they have marked themselves off and is 'not to be found in the Bible' (Needham, 1972:77ff). However, Quakers would assert that if, as Needham speculates, the etymology of the word 'religion' is 'recollection', and speaks to the 'doubtful quality of a troubled conscience' then this is traditionally a defining quality of Quaker practice (Moore, 2000:81,82,86). It is also thought amongst Quakers to be universal and also an inner state as in the idea of 'that of God in everyone'. Of course, Quakers are not arguing that all religions are concerned with these matters, but that the 'human condition' (Cabral, 2009:163ff) has this characteristic at its centre. It is important to note other features that Needham accepts such as the aspects of 'adherence', 'commitments', 'symbolic classification', 'communal undertakings', 'conversion', and 'notions of good and bad' (falling short of hypostasised evil) (Needham, 1972:76,76,86,84,80,81 respectively) in the raft of characteristics that argue for religions sharing some characteristic features.

Quaker practice also provides a cautionary note for the tendency, following Needham, to discount or marginalise beliefs, ruling them out as a characteristic of religious practice because of their lack of anthropological universalisability. Quakers hold a universal idea of 'that of God in everyone' in

the face of obvious cultural differences, and in cases where the attribution would be rejected, Quakers persist in holding the belief.

Therefore, to assert that religion ought not to be defined universally or generally by the Christian paradigm is not to suggest that Christians do not describe or understand themselves as performing religion and defining it by what they do. To assert that belief is not a description of an inner state with descriptions in all other languages so that it could be universalised does not claim that it is not used in various Christian-rooted movements to refer to certain trusting orientations that might reasonably be described as belief. In other words, although I accept the rejection of these Christian-rooted definitions as being able to provide an adequate general anthropological gloss, I do not wish to overlook the residual particularity of their use. I also retain the possibility that some of the actors in this study may make a sharp distinction between the domains of religion, ritual and daily life. They may consider that worship is an activity set apart and discontinuous from quotidian life, hence my use of Taylor's (2007) framework which, in the transcendent-immanent dialectic of the *nova*, gives space for the continuity and discontinuity perspectives to co-exist.

### **Section 3. Quaker Literature**

Quaker literature is voluminous and varied. It spans canonical and foundation historical texts, for example, *Quaker Faith and Practice* (QF&P) George Fox's Journals (Nikalls, 1997), magazines and periodicals such as *The Friend* and *The Quaker Quarterly*, pamphlets from different interest groups such as the

*Universalists, Quaker Quest and Kindlers*, and academic commentary. I discuss these in Chapter 3, Section 7 on Quaker Narrative. Here I wish to set out the scope of the Quaker ideas and reflexive concerns that are relevant to this study. My review of the published works of Dandelion, Pilgrim, Ambler, Davison, Wildwood and Dawes is supplemented by fieldwork notes of discussions with them.

Dandelion (1996, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008) is a sociologist and a prolific writer on both Quaker history and contemporary trends. I leave aside his historical work on time and his historical surveys of Quakers and concentrate on his analysis of present day Quakers. Dandelion considers that Quakers have entered a post-Christian phase whereby belief and shared belief have become marginal, and the *form* of worship and doing business has become central. A permissive 'liberal belief culture' (Dandelion, 2005, 2008) <sup>61</sup> has emerged. This has the effect of encouraging pluralism, elevating individualism and reducing both shared beliefs and intellectual enquiry. This is combined with a conformist and conservative 'behavioural creed' (Dandelion, 1996, 2008) to create a 'double culture' of liberal belief and orthopraxis. He also notes that there are beliefs about the way beliefs are held which he calls 'orthocredence' (Dandelion, 2008). He describes a 'culture of silence' (Dandelion, 1996, 2008) both within and beyond worship whereby silence is used to mask disagreement. This masking combines with the devaluation of language, the rules and norms governing speech in worship and business events to engender more silence. The practice of silence therefore functions

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<sup>61</sup> These ideas have been developed over a number of publications noted in the bibliography. I cite the original and the latest works in which they appear.

to contain and to inhibit. Dandelion argues that it is these features of contemporary Quaker practices that enable it to adapt rather than the creation of a Quaker habitus (Collins, 2002b) or 'plaining' (Collins, 2002a&b) or a 'heterotopic impulse' (Pilgrim, 2008). Dandelion's work on notions of 'end-time' in early Quakers has led him to consider how contemporary Quakers see both the past and the unfolding future in terms of inspiration. Dandelion creates a portrait of Liberal Quakers around the central concept of an epistemology of deferral that he calls the 'absolute perhaps' and introduces a notion of 'meantime' in contrast to the early Quakers notion of the 'endtime'.

'Liberal Friends operate a 'doctrine' of absolute (rationally certain) 'perhapsness' about theology. Liberal Quakerism is now bounded, beyond the theological diversity, and the coherence around form, by a particular approach to theologizing I have termed the 'absolute perhaps' (Dandelion, 2008:82).

This has certain epistemological features.

The possibility of seeking in new directions and subsequent pluralism and differences within the group has become a norm and a boundary. The ideas of progressivism and of being open to new Light have become translated into the notion that the group cannot know Truth except personally, partially or provisionally. It is not just about the possibility of seeking, it is about the certainty of never finally finding. Friends have decided that religious truth claims are problematic, neither true nor false but rationally meaningless. This is corporate uncertainty. What it means in real terms is that Quakers cannot subscribe to any doctrinal unity or see one as intelligible (Dandelion, 2008:83).

This will be kept in mind as the ethnography provides material to assess the claims of this theory.

Some commentators are both Quakers and anthropologists, as in the case of Peter Collins, whose work I have noted above (Collins, 1994, 2000, 2002a&b, 2005, 2008). I have shown how he has applied a range of anthropological theories to Quaker practices and, although these have validity and interest, dissatisfaction with them led him to return to his experiential roots which were in evidence in his 1994 PhD. From this he developed a view of Quaker habitus driven by talk, story, tradition and narrative (Collins, 2008) and by an experiential aesthetic of simplicity and non-violence he calls 'plaining' (Collins, 2000). Collins considers that Quaker stories are transmitted not just through extensive talk but also their bodies, their creation of environments, the clothing worn, and other consumables. He makes three observations about this narrative feature. First, this 'concatenation' of stories comprises the Quaker meeting and lends individuals their Quaker identity. Second, these stories are more implicit than they once were, are 'far less likely to be acknowledged, regenerated, restored and revitalised', and they are more inward looking, 'woven primarily for the consumption of the group' (Collins, 2002b:291ff). Third, that they are part of 'plaining', a life-style of simplicity, care for the environment, non-violence, non-gambling and an avoidance of excess (Coleman & Collins, 2000:340). There are a number of implicit assumptions in his later work which influence the explanatory thrust of his theory. Collins applies the notion of habitus to Quaker practice and in doing so plays down any sharp distinction between the sacred and secular. He does not regard participation in Quaker worship as attending a religious event. Similarly, he does not see Quaker ritual as a 'periodic and specially marked performance' or a 'paradigmatic act' (Coleman and Collins, 2000:318ff) but part of a general

ritualisation of daily life. Plaining, an experiential aesthetic, narrative and habitus are all interpreted through this lens, an orientation I have described above as one of continuity between ritual and daily life. This thesis argues for a contrary interpretation by showing ethnographically how worship ritual is separate and performs critical functions in both offering the potential for a radical reframing of participant's world views, and containing diversity and promoting unity amongst Quakers.

Pilgrim (2008), also by contrast to Collins, adopts the concept of 'heterotopia' from Foucault (1986) to propose that Quakers, to obtain a 'sense of identity and unity', stress their 'otherness' and their activities as an 'alternate ordering' rather than their 'overarching beliefs' (Pilgrim, 2008:53). She shares this view with Dale (2009) and Wildwood (1999). She argues that this 'mirrors the pluralism, individualism, and crisis of meaning common in the West' (Pilgrim, 2008:61). She identifies three groupings of contemporary Quakers. 'Exclusivists' regret the lack of explicit Christianity in Quakerism and seek a return to 'primitive Christianity' and reject Dandelion's formulation of a permanent state of seeking, waiting and the 'absolute perhaps'. They are a small and dwindling group and institutionally have seceded from the Britain Yearly Meeting. They are present in local meetings but their voice is muted. 'Inclusivists' hold to the mainstream of the Quaker tradition but adhere to the behavioural creed. They see Quaker values as shared by others in society and consider the traditional language of the Light to be adequate as an expression of a transcendent but resist its further explication. This is the group that might be described as 'Quakers of the Book' in the sense that they are most

concerned with the preservation of traditional forms, especially of worship, and the guidance for this is contained in *Quaker Faith and Practice* (QF&P). 'Syncretists' are more 'amorphous' and concerned with their own spiritual quest, with a synthesis of spiritualities and with life-style, not religion. Pilgrim identifies a desire in Quakerism to be on the edge and marginal but does not identify a shared set of beliefs or orientations that would support such a heterotopic stance. Hence, simply regarding the group as heterotopic becomes a shared rationale. In this she echoes Collins who described Quakers as 'playing the vis-a-vis' in relation to organised religion (Collins, 1996). She concludes, by agreeing with Dandelion (2008), that the 'absolute perhaps' is the defining characteristic of the liberal Quaker. She does, however hint at the contestation and potential conflict between the inclusivists and the syncretists, even predicting in 2002, that 'inclusivists might act to curb the utopic space that syncretists had become accustomed to' (Pilgrim, 2008:64). She acknowledges (Pilgrim, 2008:64ff) that this did not take place. The effect of her theory is that, by contrast with Collins, she sees the worship ritual as a place set apart, albeit characterised by the features that Dandelion identifies, and therefore that Quakerism is a religion. She notes, however, the desire of syncretists to change the name the 'Religious Society of Friends' to the 'Spiritual Society of Friends' (Pilgrim, 2008:66).

Ambler (2001a&b) has written extensively on Quaker theology, but here I focus on his significant intervention in the contemporary Quaker scene. Ambler considers that an examination of George Fox's (1624-91) practice, as set out in his Journals, shows concordance with contemporary techniques of 'focussing' as developed by Gendling (1978). He developed a meditative

programme which he calls an *Experiment with Light* (Ambler, 2001a&b). This was further elaborated by Lampen (2008) and was researched by Meads (2008a&b). I set this out more fully in Chapter 4, Section 4. on renewal initiatives. There are three matters of significance to note about this initiative. First, Ambler puts forward the view that contemporary Quakers are able to engage in the same ritual engagement with the Light as were the original Quakers. Second, Ambler implies that the Light always had an immanent sense in the conscience beyond the biblical interpretation of the 'Light of Christ' (Nickalls, 1997:774). Third, as an intervention within Quakerism it has had a number of effects, some of which point to the tension between the first two claims. Its potency as a technique has been established by Meads' research (Meads 2008), however, its promulgation by enthusiasts has not generally been welcomed into the mainstream and some see the technique and its implications for the idea of the Light as compromising traditional worship practice (Wildwood in Lampen, 2008). It remains, therefore, a significant but contentious approach within the spectrum of contemporary Quaker practices, and I discuss this further below in Chapter 4, section 5.1.

I now give an example of another form of Quaker literature, that produced by adepts. So far, I have reviewed academic commentators who are Quakers. The relationship between their academic work and their Quakerism is not made explicit. Davison (Brown & Davison, 2009) and Gillman (2006, 2008) both attempt to describe Quakerism and Quaker practice as a whole. I have noted Gillman's account above. Davison's account is significant because he is the originator of two renewal initiatives, *Quaker Quest* and *Kindlers* – and he

proposes the same underlying framework for them This is the text Davison sent to me outlining his view of Quakerism.<sup>62</sup>

- (1) **Friends of Truth:** seeking, continued revelation, revision;
- (2) **Religious Experience:** worship, inward knowing, silence, the Light, stillness, gathered meeting, promptings of love and truth in the heart;
- (3) **Christianity-Universalism:** historic Jesus-the Christ; multi-cultural consciousness, all faiths and none, human unity;
- (4) **God in everyone:** Light of the Spirit, equality and justice, the Source;
- (5) **Against all war and violence-peaceable processes:** alternatives to violence, conflict resolution, non-violent action;
- (6) **Sacramental vision:** sustainability, economic justice, environmental care, fragile unity of interdependence, evolution.

What Davison achieves is a combination of the elements of Quaker practices in a way that is coherent for him and which he commends to others. It is clear from my contacts and extensive discussions with him that he believes in a realist Source, a power suffusing all matter and consciousness that is linked in some way to evolution but is not a personal God. He also places considerable emphasis on the spiritual disciplines of the worship. He structured the first *Kindlers 1* programme meetings thematically around features of worship. Davison is also a universalist and therefore regards Jesus as a teacher, however, he also suggests that the concept 'Christ' might be used to refer to the spiritual dimension of all faiths. Whilst holding this foundational position,

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<sup>62</sup> Fieldnotes: *Kindlers*.

Davison also stresses the idea of revision and being open to new light. What he creates is an embodied account of Quaker practices which attempts to link all its elements together. There are many facets to his vision and they mutually reinforce each other. There are checks and balances in his account which connect his ontology, epistemology, spiritual practices and ethics. For him it is a coherent whole which works with collective worship practice at its centre.

What is significant is the way in which overarching visions like this come from individuals making sense of the whole as a set of practices, beliefs and guides for action and contained within the shared ritual form of practice rather than this vision being present in a canonical text. These personal, private versions of Quakerism are respected in their diversity amongst Quakers. I will show below, in Chapter 4, that unity is a key aim of the Quaker discernment processes but this is binding in a provisional way rather than through establishing orthodoxy. The creation of wider initiatives from this experience, like Davison's, might be regarded as courageous and prophetic. I consider these initiatives in Chapter 4, Section 4.

I now turn to the third group of publications from Quakers that set out particular personal readings of Quakerism and also represent particular standpoints to the central issue of what has traditionally been called the Light. Many attempt to give an overview of Quakerism before outlining their particular contribution. I set them down in order to establish the spectrum of cosmologies that Quakers hold. This is a critical background aspect of this

study, but it is not the focus of this study to discuss the merits of these cosmologies as claims or as worse or better descriptions of Quakerism. They are, however, potent foundational positions that are explicit and not always compatible. Yet, for reasons possibly explained by Dandelion's work, contestation seems to be masked. The reasons for this are explored in this study. What is clear is that amongst contemporary Quakers there is a spectrum of different orientations which entail different cosmologies and notions of the transcendent, or a rejection of any such interpretation.

The *New Foundation Fellowship*, and *Friends in Christ* (Dandelion, 2007:201) adhere to a Christo-centric interpretation of Quakerism. They are now a small and declining group. However, Christian roots are still common and some Quakers still refer to their denominational past (Allen, 2007). Punshon (1987, 2001)<sup>63</sup> retains a strong Christian foundation linked to a distinctively Quaker practice and in this study he represents this perspective. Ambler, as I have noted, has researched Fox and early Quaker practices and developed a contemporary practice called *Experiment with the Light*, a quasi-therapeutic practice of focussing. This practice allows both an essentialist and a metaphysical reading of the Light.<sup>64</sup> *Universalists* propose a generic eco-spirituality, a perennial philosophy influenced by and connected to all world religions. They have also made a link with a universal idea of 'peak experiences' as a description of worship practice put forward by Heatherington (1975) based on the psychology of Maslow. Dawes (2009) has

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<sup>63</sup> Punshon 1987 *Encounter With Silence. Reflections from the Quaker Tradition*  
Punshon 2001 *Reasons for Hope. The Faith and Future of the Friends Church*

<sup>64</sup> Ambler 2001a *Light To Live. By An Exploration in Quaker Spirituality* Ambler 2001b  
*Truth of the Heart. An Anthology of George Fox.*

produced a pamphlet for the *Universalists* outlining an inclusive spectrum of generic and naturalistic spiritualities with an emphasis on processes and emergence centred around a 'sense of soul'.<sup>65</sup> Dawes is one of the few Quaker commentators to refer to New Age thinking. Heelas suggests that Quakers are 'one of the most New Agey forms of Christianity' (Heelas, 1996:10), and the summary of New Age assumptions produced by Tarcher (1991, in Heelas, 1996:226) would be unobjectionable to universalist Quakers. However, Dawes quotes Myss (2006) approvingly: 'the New Age culture got blocked in the comfort zone when it discovered the Self whereas service to someone other than yourself is essential' (Dawes, 2009:16). These connections relate to the holistic milieu (Heelas and Woodhead (2005) and Quaker connections to it are examined in this study.

Quaker commentators such as Boulton (2002) adopt a non-realist interpretation of Quaker language and belief and are explicitly atheist.<sup>66</sup> Some Quakers of this orientation are also members of the *Sea of Faith Group* associated with the atheology of Don Cupitt (White, 1994). Amongst Quakers, non-realist atheists are emerging as a *Non-Theist Network*. Davison (2009) as I have noted above, by contrast, holds a realist cosmology of what he calls the Source.<sup>67</sup> Wildwood (1999, 2009) proposes a post-Christian evolutionary perspective of spiritual practices and an inclusive model of all of them.<sup>68</sup> Some

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<sup>65</sup> Dawes 2009 *Choosing Life. Embracing Spirituality in the 21st Century*

<sup>66</sup> Boulton, 2002. *The Trouble With God. Religious Humanism and The Republic of Heaven.*

<sup>67</sup> Brown & Davison, 2009. *Journeying to the Heartlands. Exploring Spiritual Practices of Quaker Worship.*

<sup>68</sup> Wildwood, 1999. *A Faith to Call Our Own.* Ashworth & Wildwood, 2009. *Rooted in Christianity Open to New Light. Quaker Spiritual Diversity.*

Quakers describe themselves as Buddhist Quakers.<sup>69</sup> Finally, the mystical tradition in Quakerism has been emphasised by Jarman (2010).

All these orientations are significant in providing material for practices that make sense of the Quaker 'way'. They also reflect the different notions of the transcendent element of the pathway that individual contemporary Quakers make for themselves. In this study I refer to this spectrum of cosmologies generically as the 'transcendent function' in any particular Quaker version of the way. It is clear that any approach to Quakerism that asks 'what do Quakers believe?' will be faced by a range of practices and accounts that show many meanings in use.

This review of Quaker literature has enabled me to set out several indigenous theories of Quakerism which will be discussed as the ethnography progresses. It has shown that coherence, the Quaker 'way', is achieved by individuals combining elements of the tradition, and some of them promulgating their own particular combination. It has enabled me to set out the spectrum of Quaker cosmologies, as well as the background diversity to Quaker attempts at unity; it has also allowed me to introduce the authors associated with the various positions that I draw on in this study. These cosmologies are further explored and analysed in Chapter 5.

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<sup>69</sup> Fieldnotes: Text *Kindlers*.

## CHAPTER 3.

### Quaker Worship Practices.

#### Section 1: Finding Quakers and the Meeting.

How do people find their way to Quakers? When I asked Susan she immediately replied:

*We invite them to dinner and tell them to go to other Meetings. They would know what it is to be a Quaker by being with them.....<sup>70</sup>*

Quaker practice is an embodied 'way' – 'Quakerism [sic] runs through me',<sup>71</sup> so its features should become evident by being with Quakers. Quakers seek to link the inward stillness, 'even amid the activities of daily life',<sup>72</sup> 'the ordinary activities and experiences of your daily life'<sup>73</sup> with a spiritual dimension. I have shown that the dominant metaphors in the Quaker narrative are 'seeking', being 'open to new light' and on a 'journey'. The latter is often referred to as a 'spiritual journey'. The Meeting for Worship seems to be the critical point of arrival.

*I first encountered Quakers in my teens when I got very involved in the Peace Movement and in CND and youth CND and they all met at the Quaker Meeting House in Southampton. And I picked up a lot of the pamphlets lying around, and having been brought up by communist parents, and brought up as an atheist and I had reached the point of thinking myself an agnostic....., so I started going to Quaker Meetings and went for most of the time I was an undergraduate and then stopped for a bit and then at a time about 18 months later at a time of personal crisis went back and that was at Westminster Meeting in central London. And someone greeted me there and said 'How lovely to see you again,*

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<sup>70</sup> Fieldnotes: Susan

<sup>71</sup> Fieldnotes: Joyce

<sup>72</sup> A&Qs 3

<sup>73</sup> A&Qs 7

*have you been away?’ She had recognised me from two years previously. As soon as I went in and sat down I felt as if I had come home. This is where I want to be, this is where I belong.<sup>74</sup>*

Geraldine begins with her concern for peace, a social issue, she meets some Christian students and is interested in their confidence, she goes to a Meeting and encounters key Quaker qualities; recognition, greeting and hospitality. I noticed during the fieldwork that Quakers are good at remembering names and faces. Geraldine says she felt that she had ‘come home’ and ‘belonged’ at the Meeting for Worship. This I found repeated often by Quakers in describing their encounter with Quakers.

*....and so I began to go to Quaker Meeting, and I know many people have said this, but when I went I felt a sense of coming home. It is impossible to describe, but having come from loving Roman Catholic Mass and the liturgy to silence is a long journey, but it is my kind of religion, it gives me time to speak to my God.*

<sup>75</sup>

For many Quakers their experience of other denominations and religion in general has shaped their search for a place to worship. Roger told me:

*I was brought up in a Baptist Church, and was very happy there.....they had a relaxed attitude to the Bible and were not fundamentalist, in the sense we could talk about what we wanted. Even so I was pleased when I encountered Quakers which gave me the space to reflect. When I came back to London the Baptists had become even more evangelical and charismatic, and in the church I was in, even Calvinist, and I was very uncomfortable with that. For me to move to a Quaker Meeting was not a very big jump because in Baptist practice you have the prayer meeting in which everyone is responsible for the meeting and contributes a prayer. Then I quickly discovered the whole differences, the whole way in which Quakers use language and think about the Bible were much*

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<sup>74</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Geraldine.

<sup>75</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Alan.

*bigger than I thought and some of that I was pleased about and some of that I found difficult.*<sup>76</sup>

The relationship between worship and social action will be explored later but here we can note that the link is very direct for Quakers, they feed on each other and Martin explained to me that some people come to Quakers through peace work, but that because the work is never ending and sometimes fruitless, sustaining their witness and establishing the link between social activism and supportive spirituality becomes important. He said that holding to a value in the face of hopelessness needed some deeper engagement:

*Alignment with the world and others, and that is God's purpose. The pain of the victim we see, actually being in right relation to each other is what peace work is about. So all these aspects are involved, pain, seeing God in the other, taking on that pain, breaking the cycle of revenge (mimeseis) and being related. In non-violence we do not make our opponent an enemy, we do not dehumanise them, you raise up their humanity and you treat them with respect and that is how you get transformation. This is different from a tactical or technique of non-violence this is more profound. I would say that conflict is part of life.*<sup>77</sup>

Some Quakers have found their way to worship for reasons they describe as 'finding oneself'; a search for authenticity. This is sometimes triggered as in Kate's case by a life event:

*For me I think what is most important is to be part of a community, where I feel I belong, to a certain extent, because my roots are not belonging. Coming from a Jewish background where there are tribal wanderings which to a certain extent I feel in myself. My roots are very much Jewish, that is what I was born and what I was brought up culturally. But I did not feel part of what for me seemed a narrow way of being religious. And there was a prescriptive way of being not*

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<sup>76</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Roger.

<sup>77</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Martin. This process of 'alignment' between various aspects of practice and having them be 'in right relation' I call 'harmonic integration'.

*only religious but how you lived your life. And I was not slotting into that and so when I was about 20 I went away searching really searching for myself. Not a spiritual search at that time just trying to find out who I was. And my spirituality is always around that question, what is my soul...<sup>78</sup>*

The characteristics of Quaker practices are emerging and some themes are becoming apparent. Quakers are suspicious of words and language and rely not on dogma, propositions or creed but on direct experience, and in particular experience of the spirit

*I think we are reluctant to use words in Friends because we know that they will be misunderstood, we have no way of having the discussions and we remain woolly in our heads. One of the things about words our reluctance to use them, or with ourselves, we know they will be misunderstood by others we use them individually, we do not have any 'yardsticks' that can help us have some of the discussions...<sup>79</sup>*

Consistent with this suspicion, Quakers do not believe in belief. They use the word 'believe' in its generic sense and will speak of their Testimonies as beliefs in the sense of values. They rarely use the word belief about matters spiritual. They reject any formulation in words about matters spiritual as being invalid as compared with experience. The concept of 'belief' is problematic because of its close ties to the particular historic features of Christian believing. It is to some of those features that 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Quakers objected and 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Quakers continue to do so.<sup>80</sup> Quakers point out that there is

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<sup>78</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Kate Jane.

<sup>79</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Caroline.

<sup>80</sup> The word 'belief' moves for Quakers between three meanings, (1) *belief* in a propositional sense relating to ontology, truth claims, and depending on the perspectives of implicit realism or non-realism; (2) *belief* as 'confidence', 'trust' or faith (Greek *pistis*, faith as opposed to Latin *credo*, belief); (3) as a commitment to values as in the '*belief*' in equality and non-violence. I have noted the critique of the role of 'belief' in anthropological theories of 'religion' by Needham 1972 *Belief, Language and Experience* and Needham 1981 *Circumstantial Deliveries* is recognised here and would be endorsed by Quakers' rejection of metaphysical

an important distinction between beliefs as corporately declared orthodoxy concerning adherence to a tradition and statements about experience that might look like belief statements. The creative aspects of the latter are lost when belief is exclusively associated with codified statements of belief (propositional statements).<sup>81</sup> If Quakers are asked what they believe they are more likely to refer to values such as 'social justice' than a transcendent feature like the 'inward light'. They see their difference from the mainstream Christian tradition as not so much believing different things (though many clearly do) but believing differently. So it is not that Quakers do not have beliefs, but that the sense in which they do is problematic, masked from time to time by the desire for simplicity, suspicions about the adequacy of language, and the rejection of religious authority in both institutional and dogmatic forms, particularly in text. This authority of personal experience and the primacy of speech creates conditions for inclusion and hospitality; 'our diversity invites us both to speak what we know and to be true in our lives'.<sup>82</sup> Yet these words may 'come to us, be given to us'. Certain inspired speech acts 'may arise from deep experience', and the personal nature of this experience is seen in the light of the advice; 'trust that words will be given to you'.<sup>83</sup> This thesis explores the question of where Quaker words come from.

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propositions, philosophical truth claims especially when codified in creeds or doctrine. However Quaker clearly do hold certain tenets as beliefs (Collins 1996:26,55), notable are: 'that of God in everyone'; the 'testimonies' to peace, justice, simplicity and equality; and the 'trust' in the process of inspiration and group discernment. Quaker beliefs are largely of the type 2 and 3 above. See the discussion on the concepts of 'religion' and 'belief' in Chapter 2. Section 2.2.3 above.

<sup>81</sup> These questions can be examined in the light of the works of Ruel 1982 *Christians as Believers* in Lambeck 2002 *A Reader in The Anthropology of Religion*; Needham 1972, 1981 and Southwold 1979 *Religious Belief Man* 14(4) December.

<sup>82</sup> A&Qs Introduction.

<sup>83</sup> A&Qs 13 This will also be developed in the light of the work of Bauman, 1983:3,38. *Let Your Words be Few. Symbolism of Speaking and Silence among seventeenth-*

*I like the Meeting for Worship, but when we get into discussion it becomes intellectual, and that to me is not what I can bear really.....putting a ten year perspective on it, to be able to find the words for these feelings, for me there is a gentleness and beauty of unfolding and I see this as of God, and Quakers have a way of bringing their work into the world. It is hard to be in that place to know oneself to be free of some aspects of oneself.... since I was about 30 when I decided to listen to a force to guide me, to try to listen to that voice, they say it is the 'quiet voice within', that is how it has been for me; what is the truth for me at this moment to be with the moment unfolding, this helps me with my connection with God, this helps me with the journey,*<sup>84</sup>

What began as dissent from traditional Christianity in the 17<sup>th</sup>-Century persists now as the problematisation of many aspects of 'religion'. The Meeting for Worship, my central focus, does not escape this. Quakers are not agreed about what the word 'worship' refers to, even though they adopt a range of practices within the outward form. Several members of the *Kindlers* group proposed that the root of the word 'worship' is that of 'worth', that worship is honouring and reflecting on those values that are of the highest worth.<sup>85</sup> It is an important development because it impacts on the rationale for worship practice. In which sense are Quakers 'worshipping'? The orientations and

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*century Quakers*, where he suggests that early Quakers were influenced by the idea that there was an 'Adamic' language behind all speech, and that inspired speech in 'Ministry' in Meetings for Worship was to be 'spoken through' as giving voice to the spirit.

<sup>84</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Kate Jane

<sup>85</sup> A genealogy of the word from, Gray in Hastings, Mason & Pyper 2000 *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*. suggests that *weorthscipe/weorthcipe* in older Anglo-Saxon English usage means *honour* as in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, 'with my body I thee worship', an activity of honouring another person. The Greek word used in the New Testament is *latreia* which has its origins in the honour or service due to someone. This suggests that the root is related to a relationship of honour or service to an individual usually in the context of some experience of reverence for office or of 'the 'holy' as noted by Otto, 1923 *The Idea of the Holy*. Throughout this thesis I chart the changes in meanings in use of many Quaker phrases and aphorisms. These changes are of considerable importance. Such genealogies are not explored to establish an orthodox meaning for phrases and sayings.

cosmologies noted above are not only discursive accounts they support and articulate different practices. In what sense we might ask, are Quakers in worship doing the same thing? In what does unity and the reproduction of the tradition reside? I now explore this question by presenting an ethnography of a Quaker Meeting for Worship.

## **Section 2: An Ethnography of a Quaker Meeting for Worship.**

### **3.2.1. Arrival and Doorkeeping**

I arrive early, 9.55 for the 10.30 meeting. It is a sunny cold day, the streets are quiet, a breeze blows in from the sea and the occasional gull wheels away cawing into the distance. I open the building and begin the chores; putting out cups, and filling the urn with water. I put out 20 mugs for coffee and put the biscuits that I have brought on a plate. I try to buy Fair Trade brownies at the Co-op. I check the temperature of the Meeting Room and switch on an electric heater.

The Meeting Room itself is the front room of a Georgian terraced house that has been converted into the local Meeting House. The ground floor consists of the Meeting Room, a library room that is used for other informal meetings, tea, coffee and for 'shared lunches' once a month, and a small kitchen. The basement is owned by the Meeting and let to a student. There is a children's room for the meeting in the basement. The garden belongs to the Meeting and the library windows look out onto it. The Meeting Room has two large windows

looking out on a similar Georgian town house opposite. It has a disused fireplace with the mantel still in place, and has a semi-ornate cornice. It accommodates about 30 chairs.

There is a Premises Committee that looks after the building and facilities. The Meeting room itself has recently been upgraded with new chairs. This change from the previous mixture of old wooden chairs and brown stackable plastic chairs has created a significant change in the atmosphere in the Meeting Room. The chairs are wooden framed with one of three pastel coloured variants on woven upholstery; simple designs with natural materials. The Quaker aesthetic, derived from the testimony to simplicity is linked to the desire not to be distracted during the worship, and this reflects the commitment to a direct experience of the sacred not mediated through outward forms.

The Meeting has an active membership of about 35 people, with an attendance at Worship Meetings of between 18 and 28. There are four 'Elders', Laura, Hannah, Robert and Sylvia, for the Meeting whose role is to 'foster the spiritual life of all members'<sup>86</sup>. There are four 'Overseers' who have a pastoral concern for members or 'attenders' on the register. The list of names and Overseers is pinned up in the library. The Meeting has two 'Co-clerks' Mary and Hannah, whose role is to manage the governance and business of the Meeting. Members accept responsibilities after being approached by a 'nominations' group. Jobs are usually of three years duration. Jobs are about service not power, but Elders are referred in some Quaker literature as 'policing' certain functions such

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<sup>86</sup> QF&P 2.71

as reading excessively or speaking inappropriately, too lengthily or more than once. Elders may exceptionally intervene during the worship but more usually after the worship.

The word 'Meeting' refers to the 'branch', that is to a congregation; to the Meeting as the people on the membership list; to the place, the building; and also to the Meeting for Worship event. Friends often talk of 'going to Meeting' often leaving out the word 'worship'. 'Friend' is also a term used by Quakers to refer to themselves and they often sign off letters and e-mails with 'in friendship'. Being in friendship is therefore a specific kind of relationship that exists between worshippers inside and outside the worship event.

In the Meeting Room the chairs are arranged in three concentric circles, each circle has a break for access in line with the door. At the centre is a circular oak table with an aged patina. Upon it are books and pamphlets. The books are a red A4 size copy of '*Quaker Faith & Practice*' and another small print version, several versions of the Bible, the Authorised Version from the mid 17<sup>th</sup>-Century, the *New English Bible* from the 20<sup>th</sup>-Century, and *Advices and Queries*.

I put some fresh flowers in a jug at the centre of the table, and check that the books are the usual ones on the table. I ensure the seats and footstools are positioned correctly. I switch on the light. I think this justified even though some members think it unnecessary. When I have finished I leave the Meeting Room and return to the hallway and position myself behind the front door to await those arriving.

The first person to arrive is Tuve,<sup>87</sup> well dressed in dark grey, almost business like. She is a good ten minutes before the start at 10.30. I know her, but not well. She comes from a Russian background but I think was brought up in Poland. I greet her, shake her hand and say 'Welcome' which are the basic requirements of being 'on the door'. She says something inaudible like 'I'll just go in then' and enters the Meeting Room.

The Doorkeeper's job is assigned by means of a voluntary rota. I do not often sign up. The person who is in charge of the rota does it if no one signs up. From time to time she notes that no one is signing up, and this produces some volunteers. The Meeting for Worship traditionally begins when the first person takes a seat, this has happened earlier than I expected. This beginning of the Meeting has historical roots. One of the earliest descriptions of the start of meetings comes from 1660:

So Friends when you come together to wait upon God, come orderly in the fear of the Lord; the first that enters into the place of your Meetings, be not careless, nor wander up and down, either in body or mind, but innocently sit down in some place, and turn thy mind to the light, and wait upon God singly, as if none were present but the Lord; and here art thou strong. The next that comes in let them innocently and in sincerity of heart sit down....and so all the rest coming in...sit down in pure stillness.<sup>88</sup>

This is echoed in the 20<sup>th</sup>-Century by George Gorman:

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<sup>87</sup> For profiles of the members present at this Meeting see the Dramatise Personae in Appendix I. First names are used here since that is the common practice in the Meeting.

<sup>88</sup> Thomas Salthouse and Alexander Parker *Manifestation of Divine Love* 1660 in Moore, 2000:153.

No outward sign marks the beginning of the meeting: it starts when the first person arrives, enters the room and sits down in silence.<sup>89</sup>

This can be compared to the account given by Collins where he describes participants as waiting in a hallway and going in together (Collins, 1996:67)

More people begin to arrive, most alone and quiet. Occasionally they will say something like 'Oh it's you' but even if they speak voices are generally muted. I greet each person with a handshake and welcome them to the Meeting. The next person to arrive is one of the Elders, Hannah. She is a reserved and quite solemn person in her late 40s. She is measured and deliberate in her movements and goes slowly and quietly into the Meeting Room. I see through the door that she pauses before seemingly selecting her seat; however she usually sits in the same place. More people arrive. I am involved in a series of different handshakes, outstretched and firm, timid or cold from the weather. Some even apologise for their cold hands.

There is little chatter. People take off their coats, hang them up, use the WC, or drink a glass of water. The scene is one of small personal manoeuvres in the hallway. All these seem to have a kind of carefulness, a kind of deliberative feel to them, as if people were slowing all things down to give them significance, a kind of reverence. Slowness and simplicity in movement seems an important aspect of preparing for silence and stillness. However the next arrivals are a

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<sup>89</sup> Gorman, 1968:9 *The Amazing Fact of Quaker Worship*.

noisy trio. I recognise the voice of the most voluble. They all shake hands with me.

The calming influence of the entry to Meeting has also its roots in the early days of Quakerism. Literal quietness relates to devotional stillness, silence; quietness calms enthusiasm, and creates the conditions for a different kind of speaking. Much is being reframed at the threshold of the actual Meeting Room door. Worshippers are to arrive 'with heart and mind prepared'.<sup>90</sup> All actions from now on become candidates for some new possibility of inspiration. The initial posture on entering the space of worship is to wait in stillness and silence. Any speaking that is now done is to be done with 'new tongues'. Talking at the point of entry would be speaking 'in the fleshly outward word' (Bauman, 1983:30) and is not speech that emanates from silence. The doorkeeper therefore exemplifies this movement into the possibilities of silence. A doorkeeper is slow, deliberate, careful and quiet in demeanour; waiting for people. Making small, elemental qualities matter is part of the creation of symbols for use in the worship; slowness, silence, carefulness are some of these.

The next to arrive is Angela a post-graduate student who seems not to want to shake hands, although does; she does not speak or take off her coat and goes straight into the Meeting Room. More people continue to arrive, I greet them, and now the hall is quite full. There are no newcomers. I see Colin, Mary, Rita, Gail, Robert and Joy and some others. In these circumstances a non-verbal ushering gesture by the Doorkeeper is in order to quell any conversation and to

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<sup>90</sup> A&Qs 9.

get a bunch of people into the room at the same time. This prevents constant opening of the door to the Meeting Room.

This activity with its variations continues until 10.30 approaches. This is when the Doorkeeper has a key responsibility. The arrangement is that anyone arriving after the start time should be shown into the library and taken into the Meeting with the Doorkeeper at 10.40. There is a notice to that effect on the wall next to the Meeting Room door. This gives the Doorkeeper something to refer to in explaining the rule to those who may not know of it, and sometimes to those who are late and say 'I'll just slip in'. Lester arrives exactly on time and I get him in swiftly, closing the door after him. By this time there are about 18 people in the room sitting in silence.

The next person to arrive is too late to enter. She is Mary the Co-Clerk of the Meeting and I wonder whether she will want to also 'just slip in' since it has only just turned 10.30. I sense that she hesitates with that in mind but then she says 'I will just do my notes' and moves swiftly to the library. She immediately takes out her notes and begins writing. I recall that she has to give the Notices after Meeting and that this is her preparation. She is a busy person by repute and is doing the work for the Meeting. This reminds me of a dual aspect of Quakers; on the one hand the Meeting is clearly precious and special and yet on the other Quakers recognise no days, times or seasons as of sacred significance. That all is therefore equally sacred leads to the possibility that the Co-Clerk is in a sense worshipping in what she is doing. The time moves on. I consider going in with

my one waiting person after five and not ten minutes. I decide to stick to the ten. At that time I go and get Mary and we go in together.

This process of arrival and entry and gathering has taken twenty minutes. All those arriving knew the conventions of this process. In a sense they were taking part in the process from the moment they decided to come that day. They are ritualising actors well before they cross the threshold where I meet them. They have 'an initial openness to the possibilities of the Meeting' (Gorman, 1968:43).

In the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Quaker greetings and encounters were opportunities for Friends to demarcate themselves from those 'of the world'. They did this by the use of 'thee' and 'thou' instead of 'you' (Crystal, 2000) by the wearing of hats in the presence of 'superiors', and by the refusal to use honorific titles in addressing others. Present day practice has a link to this; the Doorkeeper's greeting marks both recognition of a Quaker or a seeker and a reframing of their worldly status. In my role as Doorkeeper, I welcome, recognise and legitimise participants. This may be hardly noticed by regular members but in the case of those who turn up and have never been before this greeting is a critical moment of engagement with the meeting. He or she will ask anyone whom they do not recognise who they are and if they have been before. There are decisions to be made; to reach for an introductory leaflet or to give a basic explanation of the Meeting and what they are likely to face and let them go in. There are various strategies therefore as to how the boundary is managed, but it is actively managed. The Doorkeeper continues to have a responsibility within the

meeting, he/she has a seat next to the door and manages movement in or out of the room.

Doorkeeping is taken for granted with little or no comment or thought. The practical tasks and the recognising and greeting, the naming and handshaking is a kind of 'upholding' of the Meeting. However doorkeeping is a formal example of other informal symbolic actions. Ordinary everyday actions, walking, talking, taking one's coat off, tidying one's hair or clothes, drinking a glass of water, greeting one another and shaking hands with the Doorkeeper become imbued with significance. The slow deliberative, measured acts draw participants into a sacralising process. Small and simple things become expressions of a heightened sense of their potentially numinous qualities. These acts of slowness, deliberation, and mindfulness are not in any sense decodable for their content or even identifiable as specific symbols. They point to the central symbol of worship, silence. Interactions of many kinds cease. To newcomers these constraints are slightly puzzling.

### **3.2.2. The Threshold and the Meeting for Worship.**

Worshippers have got themselves there, and for some this is itself an act of simplicity; walking or cycling. For others it entails a bus journey and some elderly and less able members depend on lifts. They come to a graceful, simple and domestic house. They are recognised and welcomed. This is the time of the creation of an environment and an atmosphere. The hallway of the house becomes the outer room to the sensorium (Bille & Sorensen, 2007) that is the

Meeting Room. Participants' senses are made both more acute and stilled by gradations of movement over the threshold into the Meeting space. The simple elements of movement, proximity to others, settling to a seat, finding a place, being separate yet together, connected yet isolated and especially being quiet, produce a series of sensed elements. These become available both for dwelling in, worshipping through and for metaphoric elaboration from their literalness<sup>91</sup>. Quietness offers itself as an invitation to be quiet, to be still in the silence. This quietness, placement, posture and settledness makes the silence. The 'outer' silence and 'inner' stillness may then connect up, linking individual, the group and the event. This marks the transition from going to Meeting, to being there, constituting the worship and being constituted by it.

We look around, most of us now know those present, and absent. We know little of the nature of their preparation, of personal habits, of expectations. Some will have heeded the Advice to come 'with heart and mind prepared'. Others will prefer the open spontaneity of participation in the event, and yet others will enjoy the personal, habitual ceremonial of regularity and habit. Some will yearn for the peace and quiet that is not the day to day. Some will have jobs to do for the Meeting. Some will be agitated and concerned about the politics of the week or some personal problem. Some will enjoy the privacy and others will hope for energising contributions from speakers. What were relationships as family, friends, acquaintances, or strangers are now placed within another dimension of relatedness. What we are to each other, for each other, as worshippers will

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<sup>91</sup> This is not to imply a progression from the literal to the metaphoric as a way of conceiving the sacred as metaphysical. On the contrary Quakers embody both the literal and metaphoric silence and its meanings. There is no disembodied metaphysic being imagined.

emerge in the Meeting. Gifts are exchanged by co-presence as we constitute, and are constituted by, the meeting. One person's stillness is another's silence.

The door has now closed upon the Meeting, no latecomers will arrive.....

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The Meeting began when the first person sat down. So by the time I enter at 10.40 Tuve has been sitting there for about 20 minutes, that is 10 minutes before the 'start' of the Meeting. It is the practice of this meeting not to have a single time boundary, but at 10.30 the Meeting has 'really' begun and people who arrive after that time are referred to as 'latecomers'. I settle into my seat.

There is someone in the next seat, a small elderly woman, Sylvia, who is very still. She has always been at the Meeting in my time. She carries the history of

the meeting. Her husband also until his death some six years ago always sat in a certain chair and ministered. I remember the tone of his ministry; often starting with a political or ethical issue from a Quaker pamphlet, adding his own struggles and always affirming hopes for the future; always hoping that the next generation had learned something from his generation's struggles.

I become aware of my back, make it arched, sit on my 'bottom bones', ensure my legs are not crossed...and immediately feel my shoulders dropping and my breathing evening out and slowing.....I breathe in slowly through the nose and out slowly through the mouth...Sometimes I feel rather exposed at this point. Closing my eyes is a way of being present with others in close proximity but not available to them, not distracted by any engagement with them.....

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I usually try to sit comfortably in Meeting, feet on the ground, weight evenly distributed, and to still my mind in order not to have to pay further attention to my body. Then I can put my full attention to the listening and waiting. Often, I look around the Meeting and hold each person there in the Light for a short while. I may also observe the room, its history, the light and sounds beyond the window, and bring the wider world into the listening. This can help to ground me in the here and now, as a tiny moment in a beloved Eternity.

If a particular concern or person comes to mind, I tend to hold them in the Light for a few moments, focusing worshipful attention on them. Then I let go, handing over to God. Though words aren't involved, this seems to be a form of prayer. If, after a while, I am really having difficulty settling into worship, I may say a few words to myself. These have changed over the years; sometimes 'Come, Holy Spirit' is enough, but I have also worked my way slowly through prayers or a poem or read a short passage from Quaker Faith and Practice or the Bible until a phrase speaks to me and forms a bridge to the great Silence.

Although Quaker Meeting for Worship is a particular and a pure form of waiting together upon God, the Creative Spirit, I don't feel that it can be kept separate from the rest of life. If I meditate, pray, or spend time in centred, creative activity or acts of witness during the week, this helps still the monkey mind and focus the inner ear more quickly when I come to Meeting on Sunday. Spiritual reading matter and discussion can also help. For me, though, there are important differences between Meeting for Worship (an engagement with others and with the divine) and meditation (more of a dis-engagement).<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Fieldnotes: *Kindlers Penny*.





leave stuff behind....there is this oscillation between helpful words and being empty, open and receptive.....

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The Meeting is silent. Silence is the ground of activity, a kind of flat white surface, a kind of horizon. I imagine the sea, some expansive space. I see myself walking away, I feel pleasantly alone.

*I wonder about presence, the idea of some guardian angel, some sense of being beside oneself, maybe these are the same thing, maybe all these images of worship are parts of ourselves.....<sup>96</sup>*

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The meeting is silent for about twenty minutes. Most people close their eyes, some adopt a fixed gaze, some look down. Occasionally someone looks around the room at those present. Most people sit quietly keeping still. Few people slouch, some cross their legs. Some take up a kind of meditating posture seated

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<sup>96</sup> Author's headnotes

with the arms coming together with palms laid over each other on their lap, or apart as in a 'yoga' posture.

*I wonder what others are doing or experiencing...the empty place is not easy for me to occupy today.....I think I have a noisy body...for me part of this practice is to prevent myself being stimulated and distracted...sometimes this goes ok and I realise I have been in a sort of reverie...but I then feel that I was not there...be puzzled later I tell myself...give your mind a rest just now.....<sup>97</sup>*

.ACCEPTING SILENCE

The Meeting continues in silence. No one looks up. The members look as if they are at work on something, mostly their heads are bowed and they all seem

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<sup>97</sup> Author's headnotes

attentive. Attentive I suppose to some inner idea, object of feeling or to the attempt to be empty of thought. I notice one member whose eyes are open looking with an unfocussed and far away gaze through the window. One person consults the small pamphlet *Advices and Queries* maybe to be reminded of some words. Some postures are relaxed, sitting back in the chair, others are in more studied or constructed positions with straight and inward arched back, with legs slightly apart, both feet on the ground and hands with palms upward resting on the lap. Two people sit in this way both women. One woman has a leg crossed under her on her seat. Most bow their heads and close their eyes. From time to time, often accompanied by exhaling, some heads are raised. These movements were rhythmic and seem to punctuate some inner process. As one person adjusts their posture or a noise intrudes others seem to take the opportunity to shift their posture. This positioning seems to be very personal; each participant finding the best posture for the task at hand.

I am now in a good place, I have found some still place, am able to let be.....

*I still find that old words come into this space.... 'we do not presume to come to this thy table trusting in our own righteousness.....'<sup>98</sup> it is good not to presume. Maybe my need for some words is not so that I can speak instead of listening (although this might be the case) but that when I find a sense of something....I suppose I might call it sacred, or at least wanting it to be, then I feel I ought to 'address' it in some way...respectfully....it seems so hard just to listen...but that is what this tradition urges me to do.....humility is a good feeling-idea, it sort of*

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<sup>98</sup> This is a quote from the 'Prayer of Humble Access' from the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*

*gives ignorance and incompetence a bit of a forgiving feel....I do not have to understand what is going on.....I can give in, what is the risk?....<sup>99</sup>*

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### .ACCEPTING SILENCE

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I have been sitting for about 20 minutes, I have adopted a process of settling, breathing, taking a posture, being distracted, noticing it, starting again (though of course it isn't starting again) and moving through some contemplative space and also through some meditative process. I imagine this taking place inside and amongst us. This is 'centering-down', making ourselves 'empty', or with specific attention to a word or phrase either where meaning becomes secondary to its repetition. Others, I imagine, have a sense of waiting or anticipation or are trying to 'do nothing'. The concept of being 'still' is a Quaker worship practice referring to both bodily and mental states. Stillness is the internal correlate of the external silence, and by this practice the quality of silence as worship is created. Being still is poise, balance, an expectant receptivity, waiting or 'listening' in

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<sup>99</sup> Author's headnotes

silence. I wonder about the others present, their lives and why they are here. Their faces seem to show aspects of their character. I become more aware of the presence of the others around me. I should not presume, we do not know what goes on for other people, their burdens and preoccupations. Just being with others has this effect of sociality, a kind of basic feeling of belonging to the human traffic.....

*There is no right way to do this worship thing, I just have to accept the space as one that has possibilities, some stuff gets rearranged in my head, some stuff has the heat taken out of it. I do not think I should dismiss these things as therapeutic, maybe they are necessary leavings to which we return and find ourselves strangely somewhat more reconciled to them.....maybe when we look into the well we will at the beginning see only our own reflection?..is there anything else? <sup>100</sup>*

There is a connection between 'me' and 'them', strong in presence but weak in communication...maybe it is not what happens, we happen....

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#### A RESTFUL SILENCE

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<sup>100</sup> Author's headnotes

I look around, at the faces, Petra, Robert, Jean, Sylvia, and someone whom I do not know. When people have their eyes closed you can look at them for as long as you like, as if they were asleep. It is rather moving. I suppose there is a sense in which we make ourselves vulnerable in this semi-public practice. I take pleasure in the compassion that arises as I gaze on the face of someone; some rapt, some troubled, some serene. I note the inevitability of my projection, tempered by the fact that I do know something of these people, and that having such feelings is itself a concern for them. It seems like the generosity that comes from just being willing to be with others. Maybe this is why our failures in worship are no more than opportunities for forgiveness and acceptance of our mutual fallibility.

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I notice that my mind has wandered again into these excesses and intellectual ornamentations.... I read a small sentence in Advices and Queries; something about difficult questions and a loving spirit. I settle once again in silence. I have another look at the booklet – I read:

‘Bring into God’s light those emotions, attitude and prejudices in yourself which lie at the root of destructive conflict, acknowledging your need for forgiveness and grace. In what ways are you involved in the work of reconciliation between individuals, group and nations?’<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Advices & Queries 32

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The stillness of the Meeting accentuates the sounds that can be heard: breathing, any page turning by someone consulting one of the books,<sup>102</sup> the chatter of the departing churchgoers from the local Presbyterian church in the street outside, and the cries of seagulls. It takes time to process even the smallest thought, but there is the sense that there is time here. The piece I read is full of questions. Somehow it points away to an impossibility, what have I got to do with 'nations'? This pointing away moves self-preoccupation into a wider sphere.

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<sup>102</sup> It is acceptable to consult books on the table during the early part of the Meeting. This is because a text can be used as an aid to worship but not meditation. This suggests that words can be used in relation to the practice of 'centering down' with emptying the mind, so both practices are probably going on. It is common for someone to reach for a book during the Meeting but usually for a short period of time. Reading these given books for long periods of time would be regarded as preventing the person from taking part in the worship event. Small copies of the Advices and Queries are placed on some of the seats by the Doorkeeper so that they are accessible for the members furthest from the table. Some people bring other devotional texts or books of poetry, or a Quaker publication. The same norms apply to the reading of these as to the books on the table. Text has a role therefore in what is a ritual economy of silence. All norms about the use of text suggest its secondary status to proper worship practice. Excessive and persistent reading (or writing) would elicit a firm stare from an Elder or even some verbal ministry to affirm the non-textual nature of worship.

*The first part is rather confessional.....bring emotions and prejudices....admit one's small mindedness...accept the need for forgiveness...these are all a bit heavy....* <sup>103</sup>

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## SILENCE

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The sense of silence, what is accepted as being silence for worship depends on a working distinction between voluntary and involuntary sound and silence. There are lots of sounds going on. So silence is created by an act of perceiving the conditions that prevail in the room as silent even though sounds may exist. My perception of literal silence is influenced by the state of interior stillness and the cumulative atmosphere created by the collective silent practice. It has to be sufficiently literally silent to become a non-literal silence then it is the silencing of the ambiance and the holding of all the silences....

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<sup>103</sup> Author's headnotes

*Your silence and stillness is for me, we are giving each other our stillness by letting it fill the silence....a Quaker told me that for him worship is as if everyone present was holding up a glass bowl....sometimes the space is empty...not really like a lost thing or someone's absence but like a setting off... 'like the pianist's hands before they play' as another Quaker described it to me...what has this got to do with God I wonder?...maybe it is what gets done in clearing some space for the spirit...I listen on the edge of the rim, balancing so that my body and business can't claim my attention, so that the faded sounds of the world have less pull also....so the bowl of silence might gently hum.....* <sup>104</sup>

.A FULCRUM SILENCE

The Meeting was silent, in this sense, for the first thirty minutes. The early period of about ten minutes is characterised by a process of settling. In some Meetings the early minutes are disturbed by the arrival of any latecomers.

.DEEP LONG SILENCE

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<sup>104</sup> Author's headnotes.

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During this period nothing has been said. This may extend through the whole event. There is no speech upon which members can focus. Thoughts, feelings, sensation and awareness are the properties of participants and there is also an atmosphere in the room<sup>105</sup>. This atmosphere has the quality that worshippers call 'settled', 'gathered' or 'covered'.<sup>106</sup> I feel the community, its smallness as an outpost and continuation of the tradition. These are good, sincere, decent people. They care about most things, from each other to politics, to the environment. Some are vulnerable, and carry the scars of difficult times past. It seems just a human thing to be together, doing our D-I-Y non-religion.

Sometimes however for me this worship has a liturgical poverty; the loss of the language of the Prayer Book. I often hear the music of Bach in the silence.

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<sup>105</sup> I have described the group silences in various ways; settling, impatient, accepting, restful, focussed, fulcrum, deep and long. These personal projective descriptions co-exist with the possibility that the group may create, systemically, certain qualities or atmospheres. Quakers may describe the meeting as having a sense of shared intent, 'gathered' and 'covered' in the sense that there is a third 'presence' over and within the individual and the group.

<sup>106</sup> Hoare, 1988:4. *Deepening the Spiritual Life of the Meeting* makes this awareness, and the ability to contribute and recognise this atmosphere, to be the defining aspect of true and proper participation in Quaker worship. He notes that the differences between those who have had this experience and those who have not is more potent in creating mutuality than is agreement about beliefs or theological matters. To be at one with others, to be in this unity transcends difference.

Several Quakers have spoken to me about the music in the silence. I think they meant its fullness as silence. I can sense this also as the music fades.....

*There are many silences, the inner composure that may be full of feeling or even words, or empty, void....there is the outer silence.....they are, and are not the same thing....my silence is our silence and vice-versa in some sense....is gatheredness. When they are the same? Is gatheredness an atmosphere?..... This way of worshipping seems always so tentative, so provisional, so on the edge...so reluctant to reveal itself.....but sometimes so smug in its uncertainty... 'we are right because you cannot know'..... 'beware certainty as the seed of fanaticism'.....why is silence the best manifestation of the spirit?.....if the spirit chooses other ways..... why not polyphony or stained glass? I wonder what Quakers are missing by the certainty of silence being the way the spirit has to manifest itself? <sup>107</sup>*

.BENIGN SILENCE

I wonder where Matty is today. It is clear who has turned up and set aside that time for mutual worship activity. Often after a Meeting it is noted in conversation that 'so and so was not here today'. This can be the prelude to a pastoral

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<sup>107</sup> Author's headnotes

concern or some general enquiry about the person. Absences are therefore part of the awareness of those who are gathered for the worship event at the time of the event.

*Matty is probably cycling.....or walking in the hills..<sup>108</sup>*

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.SILENCE of the ROOM

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The Meeting continues in this constructed silence. No one has spoken; the presence of a collection of people immersed in their own thoughts and awareness is sensed as permissive. You can think what you like. It is also passive in the sense that you are not expected to say anything, or to join in liturgical practice as in other church ritual.....

*I am not 'prompted' by any particular concern....nothing I have been thinking or feeling, would pass muster as ministry or anything anyone else would want to hear I am sure....but I am dimly aware that this might not be about me waiting for some inspiration.....on the contrary perhaps in self forgetting there is the release, a freedom to listen and find something new, even if it is strange at first.....it will come from someone else...this self forgetting and charity to others' ways of seeing things is good...maybe one can identify too much with one's own experience.....<sup>109</sup>*

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<sup>108</sup> Author's headnotes

<sup>109</sup> Author's headnotes



She sits down. The silence takes hold once again.

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.SETTLING SILENCE

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'I hope she will soon be better.....' trails off a street exchange outside the window, as the Presbyterians leave their service in the nearby church, a gull 'caw caws' wheeling away to the coast. Speech inside and noise outside has created a kind of turbulence. I cannot begin to process the actual content of the ministry. I settle back to my customary breathing exercises; counting ten on the in-breath through the nose, pausing, feeling the heartbeat, and counting ten on the out-breath through the mouth. After a while doing this I stop counting. My heart rate goes down and I become aware that my shoulders are lower; a more comfortable lack of tension prevails. I scan the room and then close my eyes.

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.SETTLED SILENCE

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I wonder what organisations would be happy to attract 18 or so people to an event on a Sunday, or at any time. I experienced the Ministry by the Elder as an interruption but I feel I should pay it attention. I wonder how 'God's word' can be 'God's word' for some and not for others. That our personal silences are construed as 'ministry' returns me to a more attentive and receptive devotional state. I certainly feel part of what is going on.

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#### .MUTUAL SILENCE

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I imagine what Hannah, the Elder feels after giving the reading.....'Did I get the emphasis right in reading the Advice? Did I do it too early in the Meeting? Should I have expanded and added some personal material on my struggles and distractions?' I am already distracted by my thoughts about the Elder and

what she might be thinking. I remember that ministers sometimes report worries over whether what they have said was appropriate or well expressed.<sup>110</sup>

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.SILENCE of WORK IN PROGRESS

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As time passes in the Meeting the silence is again well established. There is an atmosphere of work. The early engagement has passed. A point of formality, verbal ministry by an elder, has come and gone. A certain institutional legitimacy has been created in my sense of the Meeting. The Meeting seems settled.

*I am in a good place, but it is not of my doing that is for sure...maybe this is what ministry does? I actually do trust that this is a sensible thing to be doing....maybe others with some church background supplement the silence*

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<sup>110</sup> There is testimony by John Woolman (1741) of the remorse and the sense of forgiveness required for speaking inappropriately in a Meeting (QF&P 2.57) so there are clearly some norms for inspired speech.



***Since we are about to begin our evening discussion groups on the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel I thought it would be helpful to read some of the opening prologue.***

***“When all things began, the Word already was. The word dwelt with God, and what God was, the Word was. The Word, then, was with God at the beginning, and through him all things came to be; no single thing was created without him. All that came to be was alive with his life, and that life was the life of men. The light shines on in the dark, and the darkness has never quenched it”.***

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.UNSETTLED SILENCE

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I smile inwardly. I fell in with the rhythm of the quote easily, hearing the cadences of the Authorised version behind the modern translation. The poetry is a prayer. The sound, the imagery, the memory of hearing it intoned countless times has gathered to it what the writer intended; that we can imagine ourselves hearing the eternal saying of creation brought into being by God's uttering it....

*This suits me fine...but feels a bit unusual, not particularly Quakerly ministry...not sure what this is about though.....it is about the central idea of Quakers, that there is a light in everyone, 'that of God'.....<sup>112</sup>*

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#### PENSIVE SILENCE

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I receive the ministry sympathetically but I feel that it may not have been received that way or by the meeting. I career off into a theological discussion, partly thinking about how those present might understand the text.....I think

*this an explicit foundational Christian text. It is complex, deriving as it does from the late 1<sup>st</sup>-century with its roots in Greek philosophy, the use of the concept 'logos', and the 'Light', and its problematic relationship to the synoptic gospels. The text is critical for a genealogical understanding of the concept of the Light in Quakerism. ....<sup>113</sup>*

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<sup>112</sup> Author's headnotes.

<sup>113</sup> Author's headnotes.

I feel that it has been quoted as a kind of invitation to the discussion group which is to begin in the next week. The speaker, Angus, was a previous Clerk of the Meeting and he retains a certain authority from that previous role.

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I struggle to re-find the receptive devotional mode to work with the reading. The difficulty has something to do with its relationship to an event external to the Meeting for Worship. Maybe it has been said as something of a challenge to the Meeting, 'Do you people really believe this?' I am also thinking of this as the

source of the ambiguous understanding of the nature of the 'Light' amongst Quakers. Is it logos? Christ? A divine spark in the human condition? A faculty of conscience and reason? However it is a text that I know well and is deep in my memory, historically at the root of my personal engagement with the earliest forms of religion that I encountered.

*This is one of the struggles amongst Quakers.....it is of course ok for the figurative poetry of prayer, where propositional sense is set aside, to make language pliable, where its sense can be occluded by its devotional function.....we need not worry about the 'propositional' sense, or what it refers to, or means in that way of knowing.....but what if the poetry is the limit of our reference to a reality of presence?.....what if there are better or worse words and concepts for talking about that reality?.....I find it difficult to fully grasp that here may only be the waiting and that all affirmations are so transitory and unstable that one has to fall silent....always and eventually in all eventualities. Yet the tradition says. "What canst thou say?" Maybe some things have been said before....what has been said that needs not reinvention but appropriation? Maybe the freshness of invention, the excitement of the present, the me-ness of my experience needs the memory of the thing done....the tradition?..... Sometimes I feel that Quakers are laying down a challenge to the Spirit.....we have made the least complicated space available for you...now speak! Maybe the Biblical quote suggests to us that the reply might be 'I already have!' This could in some form or place be the germ of spoken ministry,.....I feel strongly about this and it is a real question....<sup>114</sup>*

.PRAYERFUL SILENCE

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<sup>114</sup> Author's headnotes.





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*Maybe I just reconciled a split there...its "both/and" head and heart,.....poetry and prose...thinking and feeling...mind and body.... anthropology and worship....of course I and we know this but do we know it this way....from stillness.....this is a third dimension...I suppose that it is from these places and moments that if something came to me I might feel moved to speak it...from a process of taking the thought, feeling, insight, image into the silence, getting lost in that and feeling how it remains or gets transformed or confirmed as one returns to a more tactile register....this was a good experience being in reverie...I do not associate this with being in some union with the spirit but I suppose that some do...being 'at one with' has to have some connection with something which holds and manifests the sacred...I would find it strange to think of the spirit as a state of mind or awareness...it would be of something....<sup>115</sup>.*

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<sup>115</sup> There is warrant in the canonical text QF&P for this view in para. 2.47 where Bodine is quoted as saying; 'we suddenly feel a sense of unity, a sense of togetherness with one another and with that something outside ourselves that we call God'.

This reverie was broken by a woman behind me, Laura, in the back row against the wall who rose to speak. She says:

***I have been thinking about how we obtain our understanding about the world and the universe. I suppose there are two contrasting ways. Firstly there is the active seeking after knowledge which requires us to be intrusive and to dominate nature, to take it apart to understand it. Then secondly there is the other approach which is more like wooing a bride, and the self disclosure of the world, we become more of a passive recipient of knowledge, the universe and its suitors.***

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SILENCE

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She sits down. There is a shuffling amongst those present. I feel the ministry is sincere and it creates the very sense of passivity, of not trying too hard, of negative capability. Maybe that is how we can be more in harmony with the world and the universe. She is also saying that to know, to really know something maybe you have to have a relation to it like love, to let it be free but to want to know it. She contrasts desire with knowledge and power.....





tidying up the Meeting. I wonder about the speaker of the first part of this conversation, she puts herself out there, in a way makes herself vulnerable to such a kind of reply. The idea of wooing as a way of knowing has got lost. Maybe one just has to have the courage or the impulse to speak and even if you do have some idea of what it is that you are saying you will have not much idea of what other people will make of it. But the making of something with other's speech is part of the process, if we listen, 'with a tender and creative spirit'.

*I wonder about unity, the need to bring things together, at the expense of differences being accepted...all has to be gathered in...on the one hand and on the other hand...the trajectory at the end of group sessions to bring things together....make it ok...<sup>117</sup>*

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By this point Angela is somewhat agitated. Several members are looking at their watches, it seemed unlikely that we would settle to another phase of silence. I imagine her turmoil; 'Should I speak at all now? Was that the final contribution? Will what I say be thought too much?' She is probably somewhat caught in the tension noted in the Advices, that one should be moved to speak but that this

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<sup>117</sup> Author's headnotes

impulse is to be managed in terms of style and timing. In this way ministry is not necessarily spontaneous, and inspiration is not synonymous with the immediate verbal expression.

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.CLOSING SILENCE

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After 50 minutes of the hour Angela stands to speak.

***I want to read you a poem by Rilke which as a scientist I find  
important both in my work and in my life.....***

***“I want to beg you as much as I can to be patient  
Towards all that’s unsolved in your heart,  
And learn to love the questions themselves,  
Like locked rooms,  
Or like books that are written in a foreign tongue.  
Do not seek the answers that cannot be given to you,  
Because you would not be able to live them,  
And the point is to live everything.  
Live the questions now,  
Perhaps you will gradually,  
Without noticing it,  
Live along some distant day,***

***Into the answer.”***

*Quakers are Seekers.....nomads.*

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SHARED RUMINATIVE SILENCE

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I feel this is a good poem. I feel that the well-honed aesthetic of the pre-planned ministry has a place, as the earlier contribution from the Bible had, and that this in particular had a real meaning for the person speaking. It is a well-crafted poem and particularly attractive to Quaker sensibilities, the futility of seeking after answers is associated with intellectual pursuits and propositional aspects of truth claims. I feel that the words have been chosen because they enable Angela to tell us something about her engagement with Quakers. Quakers try to live 'in the life' where questions are lived.



part of a call and response exchange. Meanwhile the final premeditated written contribution finds a place in the emerging theme of knowledge and how we know things by capturing the paradox of questions as answers. Angela unwittingly rounding off the Meeting with a relevant contribution but one which was prepared before the theme of knowing could itself have been known.....

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The Meeting closes with the Elder Hannah, who had first spoken, shaking hands with the person near her, Gordana. Handshakes then take place around the room, I shake hands with those nearest me.

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There are then 'notices' given by the Co-Clerk, Mary, about events for the coming weeks, the St John discussion group amongst them. There is then a greeting to any newcomers, and if there are any they are asked to introduce themselves. Sometimes if they are from another Meeting they will bring 'greetings' from that Meeting. Then the Clerk says;

***There is a library next door and you are free to use it. Tea and coffee will be available in the library after this Meeting and***

***you are all welcome. There will be an Elder in this room for anyone who wishes to speak to, about Quakers. Now we have a moments silence before we go next door.....***

This silence is brief perhaps 20 seconds.

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It seems to reassert the primacy of the worship act and medium over the intrusion of worldly concerns. It is a 'coda' to the silence of the main Meeting. At the end of it people begin to get up and move. There is still a slowness about the movement, some talk quietly to others, some view the 'What's On?' leaflet that has been left on the central table and take their own copy. The Elder on duty remains quiet in her seat. The sense I have is that we should quietly vacate the space so that it becomes a new quiet space with a different but related 'pastoral' function. We move to the library.

### **3.2.3. Coffee**

In my Doorkeeping role I have already prepared the tea and coffee and all that remains for me to do is to pour the hot water. Some people have to get away, and leave, and some are sought by others who saw them at the Meeting and want a conversation with them. The noise level goes up considerably. Talk and chat are relatively loud. Some people peruse the library books, some the notices. Most people end up in a conversation usually with one or two others. The members with various responsibilities — for a rota of duties, or lifts for

people to the discussion group, or some other aspect of the running of the Meeting or the Meeting House — take this opportunity to move around the room contacting the relevant people. This has the effect that these conversations, which may be about many things personal or about the meaning or import of the Ministry are often interrupted. These interruptions are surprising until one is used to them. Generally chat is animated and friendly. I suppose that most of us know each other through the Meeting although social contacts probably take place outside. This part of the event lasts for about 40 minutes. On some Sundays there follows a Business Meeting<sup>119</sup> that is clerked by the two Co-clerks. On this occasion there is not one. I take a cup of tea to the Elder who is in the Meeting Room.

I get into conversation with a member, Colin, who says that she thought that the St John quote was a bit leaden, but that the poem was very good. He felt it had been a good meeting. Another member, Katherine, says that she could not always hear what was being said.

*I feel the importance of this social contact for the members, it seems as if we can talk about something common and shared without having to talk too much about what exactly it was...but it does give a chance to talk, to chat, to be a community. Looking round the notices on the boards I feel that there is so much to Quakerism, so many projects, lots of causes that are supported, small financial contributions made to some huge global problem....it's a kind of hope that thinking of the big problems and making these small contributions somehow keeps a sense of responsibility going even when we are relatively powerless ourselves.<sup>120</sup>*

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<sup>119</sup> See Chapter 4.2.1 for ethnographies of Business Meetings.

<sup>120</sup> Author's Headnotes.

I clear up the tea and coffee things wash and dry them and tidy the kitchen. I get into conversation over the dishes about music and storytelling. A newcomer says goodbye and we say we hope that they will come again. The place empties. I lock up and leave. It is 12.30.

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## **Section 3: The Quaker Body in Worship.**

Jumping off into the pool of silence is how I used to do it, but I slowly realised that I was not taking my body with me, which was making its own demands....<sup>121</sup>

### **3.3.1. Relationships with the Sacred through the Body.**

Quakers grew out of a post-reformation period in which a central issue was the state and status of particular bodies. Belief in the presence or symbolisation of the body of Christ in bread and wine had divided European Christendom. By the time of Fox in 1652 a royal body, that of the Monarch Charles I, had lost its head; the body politic now being constituted by autonomous subjects. The body was both literally and figuratively central to emancipation, freedom and autonomy, and the site upon which these issues were inscribed. The name Quaker refers to a bodily state.

As a dissenting sect Quakers sought to return to the primitive, simple core of the Christian life, an embodied life unencumbered by layers of interpretation or mediated by ceremony. This basic Christianity would be manifest through the indwelling of the 'Christ' in each person, as Inward Light. The expression of this faith was also an embodied social witness. The body became the site

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<sup>121</sup> Fieldnotes: Text *Kindlers* and in Brown & Davison, 2009.

for such a witness in the world as well as the vehicle for relations with the divine.

Quakers therefore clothed their bodies in distinctive ways. Dress, gesture (hat wearing<sup>122</sup>) speech (thee and thou<sup>123</sup>), speech as 'ropes of sand',<sup>124</sup> preaching in public places, interrupting sermons in churches, trembling in court, being silent in worship, and going to prison were all ways in which the body expressed and witnessed to a relationship to the sacred. Some enacted their identification with Christ,<sup>125</sup> others made their nakedness a portent of divine judgement. These bodily states expressed and exhibited the direct unmediated work of spirit, the Light, and the emancipation from categories<sup>126</sup> of religion:

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<sup>122</sup> Quakers kept on their hats in the presence of all others even people of high standing. Only God was worthy of respect by the removal of the hat and all people were equal in the eyes of God. These gestures therefore linked social convention with the sacred. See Dandelion 2007:45.

<sup>123</sup> Crystal 2000 *The Stories of English* explains the social context in which the English language was changing. The usage of 'thee', 'thou' and you (singular and plural) split into differential use within family and class, between classes and in master-servant relations. Quakers refused to use the polite form 'you' and retained the old terms that in certain circumstances could be either offensive or inappropriately familiar.

<sup>124</sup> Higginson 1655 in Damrosch 1996:81 *The Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus. James Naylor and the Puritan Crackdown on the Free Spirit* 'Their speaker for the most part uses the posture of standing, or sitting with his hat on; his countenance severe, his face downward, his eyes fixed mostly towards the earth, his hands and fingers expanded, continually striking gently on his breast...his voice for the most part low, his sentences hanging together like ropes of sand...a mixed bundle of words.'

<sup>125</sup> James Naylor rode on a donkey into Bristol in 1656 as an enactment of Christ's entry into Jerusalem. David Hume in 1778 noted that 'he endeavoured to imitate many actions of the Messiah...as he bore a resemblance to the common pictures of Christ, he allowed his beard to grow in like form...' Damrosch 1996:4,161.

<sup>126</sup> See discussion of 'categories' and pressures of 'grid' in Chapter 5. where 17<sup>th</sup>-century Quakerism is discussed within the model 'grid-group' set out by Douglas 1996:64.

When the self was burned away, so must the sinful flesh in which it has been incarcerated. To Puritan critics, 'quaking' looked like a gross lapse in self control, disgusting proof of surrender to the body. But from an anthropological perspective, as the work of Mary Douglas has shown, quite the opposite is true. In movements of millennial tendency 'society appears as a system that does not work' and 'the human body is the most readily available image of that system'. A free and undifferentiated life of the spirit is therefore symbolically expressed by contrasting it with the structuring rigidities of the body. 'The millennialist goes in for frenzies; he welcomes the letting go experience, and incorporates it into his procedure for bringing in the millennium'. As Naylor said plainly, not only is 'self dead' for those that are truly righteous, but for them 'flesh and blood is an enemy'.<sup>127</sup>

These symbolic acts today take the form of vigils, demonstrations and non-violent action. The fundamental dichotomy for both Fox and contemporary Quakers was and is the nature of the relationship between the human and the divine, the sacred and the profane. In the living body 'both the sacred and the profane are part of the same ordering system' (Bowie, 2006:47). This indwelling of the divine in the world is to be sought through experience, the direct sensing through the body of the divine will. Fox's own vision of convincement on Pendle Hill was a physical manifestation with echoes of Augustine's struggles and Saul's experience on the Damascus road.

Quakers inherited from Christianity a complex understanding of the body. Paul, the Biblical author had metaphorised 'body' as a 'spiritual body',<sup>128</sup> attempting to keep bodily and spiritual life as integrated. Christianity wanted to

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<sup>127</sup> Damrosch 1996:110

<sup>128</sup> For example in I Cor.15:44 Paul writes that on the day of resurrection it is a 'spiritual body' that will be raised and 'we shall all be changed', and that the 'spiritual body' is now being formed as we undergo daily renewal (2 Cor. 4:16).

avoid the Manichean split of matter and spirit, body and soul that created a dualism and was regarded as heresy (Runciman, 1947).<sup>129</sup> The central image of the crucifixion is of a broken, soon to be resurrected body. The idea of Incarnation is that what happens to the body of Jesus also happens to God. The gendered body of priesthood, and ascetic practices of monasticism are various later manifestations of the play of the literal, metaphoric and symbolic in the Christian tradition where relations with the divine are played out in the site of the body. Sin, temptation, purity, asceticism, punishment, and redemption were already established by 1652 in the Christian discourse of the body. Fox's insight was therefore an 'event in thought' (Foucault, 2001a:xxi) in the way in which he reframes purity and divinity away from the ingestion of substances entering the body or the categories of religious institutions but as the capabilities of the body itself.<sup>130</sup>

Early and contemporary Quakerism are coeval in the discourse of the body and its epistemic significance. A key aspect of the tradition is that today's Quakers can do what Fox did.<sup>131</sup> They share the masking of a distinction between the literal and the metaphoric/symbolic functions of the body in relation to the spirit. In a realist theology like Fox's 'breath', 'light', 'life' itself were inherently sacred. Contemporary Quakers point to injunctions such as, 'wait in the Light',<sup>132</sup> 'be still and cool'<sup>133</sup> as ways of experiencing the Spirit

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<sup>129</sup> The dualism was attacked by Augustine and resolved partly by Irenaeus arguing against the Gnostics for 'salvation of the flesh' rather than 'salvation from the flesh'. See Hastings, Mason & Pyper, 2000.

<sup>130</sup> I note below in 3.3.8. how this is imagined as a 'temple' of the body.

<sup>131</sup> See examples; Ambler, 2001b *Truth of the Heart. An Anthology of George Fox*, Ambler, 2001b *Light To Live By*. and McGregor Ross, 1991. *George Fox Speaks for Himself*.

<sup>132</sup> QF&P 29.19.

and manifesting its character. Ritual mastery is achieved not by asking what the words mean as symbols but by taking part in the bodily practices, and there to find the symbolic meaning embodied as indistinguishable from the literal.

How can this relationship with the divine through the senses be sought, manifest, and entered into? The Quaker answer, or rather their bodily way of asking the question, forms their ritual practices. A series of practices have been developed which link the human and divine realms. The spirit indwells the person and the body. Literal aspects of the body are imbued with the actuality of this relationship with the Light. So listening, waiting, keeping still and silent, posture, speech, speaking itself, and tone of voice, become both literal practices, metaphors and symbols for realising the relationship with the Light. Interior stillness is 'that of God in everyone' and constitutes and is constituted by the corporate silence which symbolises and manifests the presence of the sacred.

Fox's life was an 'event of thought', a shift necessary for this relationship with the divine to arise as a renewal of Christianity rooted in the body, and dispensing as much as possible with other media and mediation, churches, creeds, priests, dogmas, times, and places. In theological terms the search was for unmediated radical immanence of the divine, the logical fullness of incarnation.

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<sup>133</sup> QF&P 2.18.

Contemporary Quakers have elaborated this in three ways. Firstly the experiential exploration now includes the search for the very possibility, for any sense, of the sacred particularly through the body. Secondly these apparently simple inclusive practices can maintain solidarity in worship practice whilst containing considerable diversity. Thirdly the original bodily practices have been maintained and elaborated by drawing upon therapeutic practices and psychological sources and other non-western traditions. For example, the practices of stillness, 'centering-down' and silence have been elaborated to include *Experiment with Light*,<sup>134</sup> getting a 'felt sense' of one's personal predicament; Buddhist mindful breathing exercises; focussing techniques; Tai Chi, Yoga, dance and postural approaches like the Alexander Technique.

### **3.3.2. The Body in Worship.**

I now draw on my ethnography of the Meeting for Worship in order to examine contemporary Quaker practice. I showed that worshippers arriving are slowing down, being quiet, calming themselves and expressing their seriousness by being measured, 'making small things matter'. This is a process of intentional ritualisation,<sup>135</sup> sacralisation, in which the body is implicated. They cross a

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<sup>134</sup> Ambler, 2001a.

<sup>135</sup> Quakers can be thought to have agency as 'knowledgeable actors', (Giddens 1984:21,25,26,258) in the sense of 'negative capability' (Keats 1817) and as 'intentional non-intentionality' (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994:94). I suggest that in this process objects and bodies are made to matter, ritualised and sacralised, beyond their literal qualities.

threshold and by 'being there' are alert, even aroused, and see the elemental in small things. They seek simplicity.<sup>136</sup>

*The scene is one of small personal manoeuvres in the hallway. All these seem to have a kind of carefulness, a kind of deliberative feel to them, as if people were slowing all things down to give them significance, a kind of reverence. Slowness and simplicity in movement is an important aspect of preparing for silence and stillness.*<sup>137</sup>

After crossing the threshold, sometimes pausing as they do so, they position themselves, often sitting in a particular place. They are thereby enspaced in the Meeting Room environment.<sup>138</sup> At this point participants are alert, acutely aware of their inner states and surroundings. In this sensorium of place, space, light, in close proximity to others, yet separate, there is an amplification of the senses and the given aspects of the Meeting Room. There can be an arousal and attention to these small details; simple separation and proximity, light, colour, and being aware of things in their quiddity, like the flowers on the table. These separated features may then take on an elemental quality. They can also be seen and reframed in their glory. Rose said that as a child, 'the Meeting House had a magical atmosphere'.<sup>139</sup> These practices are a way of sacrelising both objects and the abstract qualities of the worship environment.

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<sup>136</sup> Collins, 1994 calls this tendency 'plaining' the search for an aesthetic of simplicity and also plain speaking.

<sup>137</sup> Chapter 3, Section 2 above.

<sup>138</sup> They cannot see where they are only from where they are, see Merleau-Ponty (1962:172ff).

<sup>139</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Rose.

Part of this may be the creation of wonder at creation itself or what is behind it.<sup>140</sup>

This process of attention and arousal and the way objects and qualities become elemental takes place in the register of stilling and calming oneself within the silence, the practice Quakers call 'centering-down'. This produces a first wave-like movement in the engagement with the event, from acute bodily perception, heightened awareness of detail including the co-presence of others, to a kind of attention, being calmed and stilled, and a letting go of normal preoccupations. The medium in which the body is immersed is silence; the medium of silence is the body. I have shown ethnographically that the sense of silence tracks the worshippers' bodily states, as I was still so the silence seemed deeper, and this is collectively amplified.

*Far from being a mere absence of sound, the silence in Meeting can be different at the beginning, middle and end. I often find that the first few silent minutes of Meeting are the most full and meaningful for me and that this silence has a powerful 'opening' quality to it, in which we are all settling ourselves and making ourselves available to whatever might happen in the hour<sup>141</sup>*

Quaker bodily simplicity is about 'letting go' and giving attention to 'small things':

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<sup>140</sup> There are different emphases in cosmologies and the character of the transcendent held by Quakers. For some, objects and qualities are appreciated for their sheer existence, giving rise to a sense of wonder at matter in its place in a natural world and the engagement with them is holistic, 'the paramount drive and purpose of life is to achieve a complete and ongoing full-body experience of being an integral part of a benevolent, independent and purposeful universe' (Dawes 2009:17). For others, the spirit has a sense of otherness 'I see God as Source, as creative energy as the Power behind the All'. Fieldnotes: Alec *Kindlers*.

<sup>141</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Rose.

..letting go of our cramped grip on our defences is to 'get low'. This means letting go of our controlling ideas so as to sense the presence and guidance of the divine; moreover it breeds an attentiveness to "the day of small things" (1.89; from Zech 4:10) to the small concrete matters in our lives.<sup>142</sup>

### **3.3.3. Co-sentience, Co-presence, Visual Space and Masked**

#### **Intersubjectivity.**

As participants enter they are aware of others, and I call this close proximity 'co-sentience'. Not interacting accentuates the imagined relations between them:

*I can sometimes sense the waves of silence if others are already gathered in worship as I enter.*<sup>143</sup>

Co-sentience is the presence together of individuals combining alertness, slowness, arousal, and a focus on objects' elemental qualities that may be reframed as potentially sacred. Co-presence is an analytical term used by Giddens:

Co-presence is anchored in the perceptual and communicative modalities of the body...the full conditions of co-presence are found whenever agents sense that they are close enough to be perceived in what they are doing, including their experiencing of others, and close enough to perceive in this sensing of being perceived...(this) presumes the mutual reflexive monitoring of

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<sup>142</sup> Pennington 1658 in Kaiser and Moore 2005:130 *Knowing the Mystery of Life Within. Selected Writings of Isaac Pennington in their Historical and Theological Context.*

<sup>143</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Penny.

conduct...in some part introduces an enclosure of those involved (Giddens 1984:36,64,67,68).

Co-presence defines a collective mutual endeavor and is an analytic concept subsuming within it the notion of co-sentience. This enclosure is a space between people and the configuration of the space made by the disposition of bodies has its qualities also:

*The empty space in the middle of the circle of people is perhaps a physical representation of the silence of the Meeting. It is a space/time in which people can throw all the stuff of their lives into a big heap and start to heal themselves and each other, if that is what is needed.....*<sup>144</sup>

The event is based on a basic sociality, a mutuality that has a number of features. I am placed in close proximity to others, to Sylvia. I feel her presence and I also know her. I hear her breathing and know of her chest condition. I appreciate her stillness that has come from long practice. She grounds the space around her.

In worship we have our neighbors to right and left, before and behind....worship does not consist in achieving a mental state of concentrated isolation...but it is as if we found our separate lives were all one life, within whom we live and move and have our being...<sup>145</sup>

This awareness of others has a history. Just as the muscles have their memory, so this basic co-presence has established patterns of personal habits, sitting and posture, and also in a small Meeting, knowledge of others

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<sup>144</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Rose.

<sup>145</sup> Kelly, 1938, QF&P: 2.36.

present. This is the physical basis of mutuality, intimacy<sup>146</sup> and feeling of others created by a memory of having been with these people in this way. At one Meeting an Elder reminded those present that the central circle was not in any way the preserve of Elders. Yet those who sit in the centre tend to be those of long standing and are more likely to speak. Geraldine and Roger from a large London Meeting noted;

*I sometimes wonder if it is not a bit too easy to be a Quaker in Torridge Meeting. We have become so much part of the way it operates, and we have become, if there is one, a part of an inner circle.*<sup>147</sup>

The 'inner circle' is also the shape of influence and power. At my local Meeting the Doorkeeper sits next to the door, the Elders each side of the fireplace, some weighty members in the inner circle with the Elders. Others are dotted around and the walls almost completely lined. We all sit. These bodies seem like an installation, a human sculpture.

Worshippers place themselves in the space. They have a perspective; they see certain people, faces, windows; they have framed the visual world which will be the world's representation for the duration of the worship, for staying still and stationary is a key practice. The knowledge of others is one kind of history, the embodied memory of repeated co-presence in worship another. In one Quakers have relationships, in the other they have relatedness in the Light.

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<sup>146</sup> Dandelion, 2005.

<sup>147</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Geraldine and Roger.

*I look around the Meeting and hold each person there in the Light for a short while.....If a particular concern or person comes to mind, I tend to hold them in the Light of for a few moments, focussing worshipful attention on them. Then I let go, handing over to God. Though words aren't involved.....<sup>148</sup>*

A history together is a history of co-presence in worship. A feel for each other can draw on memory and habit. Friends at worship are both part of the 'Life' and 'other' to each other. This is a kind of distance and relation. In worship there is no verbal interaction yet worshippers strive to know each other 'in the things that are eternal'. The worshipping body reframes social relations as subsisting in this human-divine relation and this rebounds as the desire for community:

*If you are in a meeting in which nothing much happens, or even when the ministry is regularly and predictably the same person or persons and the coffee chat afterwards is trivial then you could easily know little of your fellow worshippers.... a self selected group 'go for coffee' to a local coffee shop maybe up to 20 people might go.....and for some reason 'coffee after coffee' is a deep experience where you will hear people arguing fervently..... there are long discussions about how people did end up coming to Quakers, about peoples' personal journeys, that will come up there but not in the Meeting House coffee.<sup>149</sup>*

So being there with others creates several layers of relations. Worshippers feel their proximity to each other and can know and remember things about each other in wordless ways.

How is this intersubjective? Inter-experience is already potentially in place as co-presence:

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<sup>148</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Penny.

<sup>149</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Tim.

Intersubjectivity is not simply a dialectic of conceptual intentions; it is lived as intercorporeity, and through the five senses as introceptivity. (Merleau-Ponty 1964 in Jackson 1998:11).

The conditions of Quaker worship are that co-presence is not verbally interactive. Knowledge of and awareness of others persists but is set aside. Aspects of inter-subjectivity are therefore present but masked and so therefore is diversity and disagreement:

*Silence can be used as a cloak to cover up and smother  
our disunity<sup>150</sup>*

### **3.3.4. Bodily Metaphors.**

This co-sentience generates a Quaker discourse in which the body provides many metaphors and symbols of human-divine relations. For example the individual 'life' and 'Life'. This real tangible physical life is in Quaker discourse an instantiation of Life. Quakers used and use the fact of human existence to develop metaphors and symbols base on 'life' itself and the body. Here they were, and are, developing 'natural symbols' (Douglas 1996). The word 'life' as metonymy is biblical and was used by Fox often in valedictions as in, 'from thy Friend in the life and power'<sup>151</sup> and 'the intent of all speaking is to bring into the life'.<sup>152</sup> Pennington in 1660 elaborated 'life' as a polyvalent idea: 'the truest

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<sup>150</sup> Dandelion, 2005:110.

<sup>151</sup> Nickalls, 1997:70.

<sup>152</sup> QF&P: 2.37.

end of life is to know the life that never ends.<sup>153</sup> He also developed a criterion of matters being 'in the life' or 'out of the life',<sup>154</sup> and this is a key criterion today.<sup>155</sup>

This metaphorising process applies also to 'breath' and L/light, two central concepts in Quakerism. As I have noted above it is not always clear whether L/light is a reference to human conscience or the transcendent Spirit or both.<sup>156</sup> Whichever emphasis is given L/light is never not embodied.

### **3.3.5. Arousal and Affect.**

Stillness and calmness are the salient bodily qualities of worship practice. The canonical text exhorts that 'the clamour of our emotions must be stilled'<sup>157</sup> Feelings and emotions are muted in QF&P, in accounts by Quakers, and in my ethnography of worship. Yet Quakers are enjoined to be compassionate and to allow feelings for other worshippers to arise:

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<sup>153</sup> QF&P: 22.95.

<sup>154</sup> Kaiser & Moore, 2005:134

<sup>155</sup> See Chapter 4.2.1. on the Business Meeting

<sup>156</sup> That there is a distinction is clear in Lampen (Ed) (2008:91,99) *Seeing, Hearing, Knowing Reflections on Experiment with Light* 'more than one talked of feeling being guided by a force or energy, 'external intentionality', some named it as 'the Light' outside or other than themselves, yet part of themselves, both immanent and transcendent', and in versions of the meditation the distinction is clearly made; 'as we gradually become aware of these things we are beginning to experience the light' as compared to 'Allow the Light to show you your real concerns'. Upper and lower cases are in the original text. See discussion in Chapter 1, Section 1, and the distinction in use in the *Meditation Guidelines* set out in Appendix IV.

<sup>157</sup> QF&P: 2.12.

*(to)Enter with tender sympathy into the joys and sorrows of each other's lives,  
ready to give help and receive It*<sup>158</sup>

These feelings are to inform our attitude to strangers, and are also moral dispositions to others present. Emotions such as 'the promptings of love and truth in our hearts' are to be linked to a universal or theistic Love in order to be authentic emotions in worship. Elizabeth expressed to me the sense she had of 'relating to each other in truth and tenderness',<sup>159</sup> and these qualities are not valuable only in themselves for they express the character of the spirit.

These approaches to emotion have several historical roots. Firstly, enthusiasm and passion characterised the excesses of James Naylor in acting out an identification with Christ. Secondly, Fox guided early Quakers to speak in ways that made sense and neither in ecstatic speech nor in 'tongues' as glossolalia.<sup>160</sup> Thirdly the Quietist period in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century was based on the notion that 'sanctification is the attainment of Holy indifference, of absolute non-desire' and even the Quaker self was to be 'mistrusted as it was beset by human emotions and motives'.<sup>161</sup>

Contemporary practices of calming, stillness, and emptying are intended to allow worshippers to be prompted, touched or moved to speech. Emotions are considered as affect, received and reflected on as qualities of the spirit rather

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<sup>158</sup> A&Q 18. QF&P 1.02

<sup>159</sup> Fieldnotes: *Kindlers* Elizabeth.

<sup>160</sup> See discussion on the definition of 'speaking in tongues' which would exclude Quaker speech in Davies, 1984:220ff in Martin and Mullen 1984.

<sup>161</sup> Dandelion, 2007:59

than as emotion. Emotions are subject to testing as to whether they are from God and they have the sense of being received as grace.

Gradually I begin to feel myself receiving love in the silence and a huge gratitude wells up in me that nourishes my dry thirsty inner landscape. I feel a great thankfulness for life...and praise for the fountain of goodness that springs from this centre.<sup>162</sup>

### **3.3.6. Bodily Practices; Stillness, Breathing, Posture, Centering-Down.**

Participants are aware of their bodies and through their bodies. The practice of 'centering-down' in silence achieves stillness. Stillness is a kind of attention:

hence the distinction between silence and stillness. Silence is simply a preparation for being still, the means of worship not the worship itself...early Friends were able to discern the spirit because of the stillness of their hearts, not because their bodies were motionless.<sup>163</sup>

Centering-down has a number of aspects, the putting aside of thought and preoccupations, an emptying, and yet a focal awareness of oneself with others and in some possible communion with some ground of being. Some Quakers express this in terms of time:

..it helps you get in touch with the present moment and let go of worries, or at least to loosen your attachment to them...Eckhart Tolle in his book *The Power of Now* mentions focussing on the space between things to help you get in

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<sup>162</sup> Brown & Davison, 2009:20.

<sup>163</sup> Punshon, 1987:11.

touch with the present moment. Be still and Know that I am God, Be still and Know that I am, Be still and Know, Be still; space, silence, stillness.<sup>164</sup>

*As I got used to it and it became physically less strange that I could settle with other people, I began to understand what 'centering down' is and sometimes I would be thinking and someone would minister and it would speak to my concern. This is quite uncanny. I am a doubting Thomas, yet this has happened on a number of occasions. I am beginning to get to understand 'centering down' and what a 'gathered' meeting means.<sup>165</sup>*

This continuous movement from the body to the spirit and back, as a constant creation, is the basic axis of this embodied religious practice.

That is not to say that Quakers do not sometimes see the body and its noise, business, and its arousal as an obstacle to worship:

I have to cope with my own body and its periodic discomfort,<sup>166</sup>

*the empty place is not easy for me to occupy today.....I think I have a noisy body...for me part of this practice is to prevent myself being stimulated and distracted.<sup>167</sup>*

*I usually try to sit comfortably in Meeting, feet on the ground, weight evenly distributed, and to still my mind in order not to have to pay further attention to my body. Then I can put my full attention to the listening and waiting.<sup>168</sup>*

Breathing becomes elaborated in various ways that reflect its literal, natural and spiritual dimensions. These extended meanings are referred to in spoken ministry:

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<sup>164</sup> Fieldnotes: Text *Kindlers Wise*.

<sup>165</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Alan.

<sup>166</sup> Punshon 1987:62.

<sup>167</sup> Chapter 3.2.1,2, & 3. An Ethnography of the Meeting for Worship.

<sup>168</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Penny.

*Spirit, spiritus in Latin means breath, as does ruach in Hebrew, the nature of breathing is to be so part of the source of life, as all people in history, and in this we are all connected, and breath is 'where words come from..'*<sup>169</sup>

Breath not only sustains life but is necessary for speech. This is a further elaboration on the theme of breathing to which I shall return.<sup>170</sup> In this Meeting, after a pause, another participant ministered:

*I have a maxim, 'do not forget to breathe' and I had cause to use it the other day when Sally (her small child) was having a tantrum and seemed inconsolable, and I gave her to Chris (her husband) which helped me to breathe...*<sup>171</sup>

The bodily function, of breathing, becomes highly elaborated. The distinction between the metaphoric and literal is no longer maintained. Breath and breathing cease to be a matter of autonomic reflexes and become conscious practices which entail life giving sustenance, symbolic manifestation of the spirit and the source of words. But it never loses its presence as rhythm:

conscious awareness does not retreat with practice, or subside into the murky depths of unconscious automatism, but rather increases in concentration and intensity with the fluency of action, along the ever-extending pathways of the body's sensory entanglement in the lifeworld.<sup>172</sup>

Quakers can elaborate breathing;

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<sup>169</sup> Headnotes: St Andrews Meeting 2008.

<sup>170</sup> See Section 5 below: Speech, Ministry and Speech Acts.

<sup>171</sup> Headnotes: St Andrews Meeting 2008.

<sup>172</sup> Ingold 2009 This also provides a perspective on the claim by Bourdieu 1990:67ff that the central tenets of religious practices are located in bodily automatisms. Here autonomic reflexes such as breathing are brought into conscious awareness to be used as symbols.

Close your eyes and feel your breath. Imagine that your breath is like a wave, and as you breathe in feel the wave washing over you, starting at your toes and ending with the crown of your head. Pause. Feel the fullness of the breath inside you. Be open to the divine. Breath out, starting at the crown of your head and ending up with your toes. Pause. Feel the emptiness inside you. Be open to the divine.<sup>173</sup>

### **3.3.7. Centering Down, the Ethics of Passivity, Trembling Speech.**

All these practices contribute to ‘centering-down’. There are a number of ways of doing this:

Friends have different preferences about closing their eyes, as can be seen by glancing round the meeting. I have difficulty if I close mine too soon, but I find that with deep, regular breathing the surface distractions diminish and closing my eyes helps to accelerate this process. Somehow the power of silence becomes tangible at this point. After a few minutes of stillness I may have the sensation that my mental powers are being concentrated as a bird wraps itself in its wings and I am coming into harmony with the other worshippers<sup>174</sup>. This is the process known as “centering down”.<sup>175</sup>

This Quaker, John, links the practice to coming to meeting ‘with heart and mind prepared’ and notes that he tries to come to worship with a word or phrase, a text or something memorable in order to restore ‘concentration’. For him this centering-down is not a process of emptying but a focal stillness. He hopes that shared practice will create harmony with other worshippers. Yet they may not be doing exactly the same thing. Sophie by contrast, as I have noted, thinks of centering-down as approaching a state of emptiness.

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<sup>173</sup> Fieldnotes: Text *Kindlers Wise*.

<sup>174</sup> This ‘native category’ supports my analytic concept of ‘harmonic integration’.

<sup>175</sup> Punshon, 1987:64.

*Close your eyes and feel your breath..... Feel the fullness of the breath inside you. Be open to the divine. Breath out, starting at the crown of your head and ending up with your toes. Pause. Feel the emptiness inside you. Be open to the divine.*<sup>176</sup>

There is a tension here amongst Quakers:

There are Friends who think that we should clear our minds of everything when we come to Meeting, that preparation is some sort of obstacle to the proper use of silence, and that we should rely on something happening to us after the Meeting has been going on a little while. I doubt whether this is good advice.<sup>177</sup>

Different practices of centering-down were expressed by Quakers with differing cosmologies. Sophie described herself as 'Buddhist' whereas John is an explicitly Christian Quaker.

Elaborated bodily practices are linked to an ethical stance:

Alexander Technique teaches us how to move in a more balanced and harmonious way from a place of inner calm. Many people think it is about posture but that is a by product. What is new to me is the practice of softening and allowing: softening my wrists as I turn them over to rest, allowing my belly to come back into my back so that I am centred. Instead of lurching forward into action, I allow a pool of calm to emerge in front of me. I become more present in myself and more open to receive. Alexander is showing me how to embody the Quaker way of living, to feel more connected to the Source and to the principles of non-violence.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Fieldnotes: Text *Kindlers Wise*.

<sup>177</sup> Punshon, 1987:65.

<sup>178</sup> Tod, 2008, *Being Mindful of Body and Spirit* The Friend March 7<sup>th</sup> Issue

Here Pauline speaks of inner calm being associated with a life of non-violence. What the body does in worship has an ethical extension.

Physical turbulence is often associated with the prompting to speak:

*My mother was an active Quaker for most of her life, more than once she would say to me before Meeting, 'I shall not minister, I say too much', but then sitting next to her, as an adolescent, part in embarrassment and part in admiration, she would start to vibrate, and I wish my ministry was more like that.<sup>179</sup>*

Very occasionally I've found myself on my feet giving ministry and then I can barely remember what I said. It has been sudden. I have felt a glimpse of an insight and been weighing up whether this is just me or for the Meeting, when my body has precipitated me to stand and I just have to give myself to my trembling tongue. It is weird but often when I have been thinking whether to minister or not, someone else has stood up and said something better along the lines of what I was going to say...<sup>180</sup>

It seems that the individual body is somehow impelled, gets to its feet and speaks, often articulating a thought that has been in the silence and recognised by listeners who also thought it. The body expresses the group synchronicity; something constellates in the space as a thought or a possible speech and a speaker is on their feet speaking it before they realise it.

### **3.3.8. The Body as a Temple of the Spirit.**

As I have shown Douglas describes the way in which bodily functions express and symbolise the body social and certain relations within it. The body is a mechanism of symbolic classification of norms, conventions, and relations.

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<sup>179</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Stephen.

<sup>180</sup> Brown & Davison, 2009:7.

One such classification is the very distinction between the holy, separate, pure, unsullied and the engagement with the material world of grime, muck, filthy lucre, and 'getting your hands dirty'.

Certain Quaker bodily functions and practices are associated with the idea of purity:

innocently sit down in some place, and turn thy mind to the light, and wait upon God singly, as if none were present but the Lord; and here art thou strong. Then the next that comes in let them innocently and in sincerity of heart sit down....and so all the rest coming in...sit down in pure stillness.<sup>181</sup>

What is being classified here, in through and by the body? Worlds are being delineated; the world of the flesh from the world of the spirit; loose worldly talk from the words that arise in silence, and the purity of stillness and silence from the defilement of the 'spirits of all flesh'. The spirit is ingested as the purification of the body. Effective practices create 'true silence' that is to the 'spirit what sleep is to the body, nourishment and refreshment'.<sup>182</sup> This purity is itself both literal and metaphoric, as the body is cleansed by stillness and silence so moral purity may be achieved.

These practices extend to moral conduct in social contexts for example in the practical link between stillness/silence and non-violent protest. These classifications return from ritual to the social sphere, demarcating, by their observance, the distinction of the sacred from the profane and adding to the

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<sup>181</sup> Thomas Salthouse & Alexander Parker, *Manifestation of Divine Love* 1660 in Moore, 2000:153.

<sup>182</sup> Penn, 1699 in QF&P: 2.13.

store of possibilities open to social actors. They may be pressed further by their proponents as not just dissent, deviance or a critique but as alternative ways of being which are brought into being as potential changes to the secular sphere. This is the process of structuration where ritual extension of worship practices interpenetrate secular orderings. Quaker examples would include extending gender equality; offering same sex weddings; non-violent dissent; wearing white poppies; worshipping in public places; standing still as witness to oppression; coming to decisions through unity not votes or consensus; regarding and treating others and strangers as children of L/light. These are all radical reclassifications of social and ethical actions that are symbolised in and by worship practices. The 'commonality' of our bodies makes them particularly useful tools for "saying things" about society',<sup>183</sup> making (re)classificatory acts.

This relationship between the sacred and the profane for Quakers is rooted in the body in worship. This is the beginning of a process I call harmonic integration. The Quaker body is the hospitable place for the spirit and the space between worshipping bodies is where presence and absence are symbolised. The whole body is a 'temple of the spirit' (Collins, 2005:6). Quakers from the outset placed the body as central to the relationship with the divine:

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<sup>183</sup> Bowie 2006:15ff claims that 'An anthropological approach to religion involves seeing how symbols, myths, rituals, ethics, and experiences of the "sacred" operate within, and are produced by, society'. This does not refer to the converse, the way in which ritual may be part of structuration, reproduction and change in and of society.

Worship is free in the spirit to all men.... for men and women are to be temples for him to dwell in; and they that defile his temple, them will he destroy.....<sup>184</sup>

How is this temple constructed? How is it kept undefiled? This is achieved by the harmonisation of natural symbols in bodily practices. The natural symbols are generated from the body and its senses; the L/light, stillness, silence, posture, and breathing as practices and metaphors carry meanings. These natural symbols function not as the kind of metaphors that say 'this' is 'that', for example, 'Achilles is a Lion', but convey that 'this' is more than 'this'. Their metaphoric function is amplification not substitution. In the case of breath the natural symbolic act is experienced as co-existent with the biological function. So as the worshipper comes to see that life is sustained by the spirit then breathing in worship combines literal survival and spiritual access. The more basic to survival the bodily function is that is symbolised, the more this may happen:

No experience is too lowly to be taken up in ritual and given a lofty meaning. The more personal and intimate the source of the ritual symbolism, the more telling its message. The more the symbol is drawn from the common fund of human experience, the more wide and certain its reception (Douglas 1969:72).

There are few actions more basic and universal than breathing. This is one of the central ways the temple for the spirit is sustained. Thus we can see how the components of the body as symbol of the 'temple' are developed and combined; stillness, silence, centering-down, breathing, enspacement become components in a human model; a 'pattern'. The body is a model that can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any

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<sup>184</sup> Fox, 1661 in Ellwood, 1675 in Nickalls, 1997:417.

boundaries which are threatened or precarious. The body is a complex structure. The functions of its different parts and their relation afford a source of symbols for other complex structures.

We cannot possibly interpret rituals....unless we are prepared to see in the body a symbol of society, and to see the powers and dangers credited to social structure reproduced in small on the human body (Douglas, 1969:78).

*Alignment with the world and others and that is God's purpose. The pain of the victim we see, actually being in right relation to each other is what peace work is about. This is different from a tactical or technique of non-violence, this is more profound.*<sup>185</sup>

I allow a pool of calm to emerge in front of me. I become more present in myself and more open to receive. Alexander is showing me how to embody the Quaker way of living, to feel more connected to the Source and to the principles of non-violence.<sup>186</sup>

Social meanings are incorporated into the body and made subject to techniques of the body. For example, stillness, calmness, and silence can become non-violent protest:

I tried to be very still, with them, but not to be provoked by the Israeli soldiers, just to witness to the checkpoint procedures.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Gordon.

<sup>186</sup> Tod, 2008. *Being Mindful of Body and Spirit*. The Friend March 7<sup>th</sup> Issue.

<sup>187</sup> Fieldnote Text Helen. This quotation is from notes made at a talk given by a Quaker who had joined the Ecumenical Accompaniers Project in Palestine/Israel. She was responding to a question about how she dealt with the heavy and aggressive atmosphere at the checkpoints between the territories.

The ritual enables an expression of the autonomy of the person, as a member of the sect in the world, to feel autonomous in relation to social conditions. The techniques of the body provide a way of engaging with the world with a view to changing it. A social critique and engagement are enabled by this alignment as well as the representation of society to which Douglas refers.

### **3.3.9. The Ritual Sensorium, Schemes and Illusio.**

In considering the place of the body in Quaker worship it is important neither to be reductive to the physical nor to detach the metaphors from the bodily functions that give rise to them. The senses are both metaphorised and remain as literal activities. 'Breathing', 'listening', 'waiting', and 'stillness' are examples. These activities in turn require a ritual sensorium in which these elaborations can find meaning. The medium in which they do so is silence. Silence itself is also both literal and metaphoric. These classification systems, the combination of the literal and the figurative meanings, become what Bell calls schemes (Bell, 1992:115). They inform the combining of bodily practices as the components of harmonic integration and organise ritual practice and understanding. In Bell's terms repeated performance of presence, bodily disciplines, basic sociality of group constitution are the initial basis for ritualised action. We can see the development of an initial scheme from material presented so far: body (being there) – sentience (co-sentience) – presence (co-presence) – posture (looking at others) – breathing (listening) – stillness (silence) – emptying – centering-down – attention – waiting – ritual extension into and representation of the social world.

These are the components of a model and the practice of harmonic integration. They are an embodied habitus, (Bourdieu, 1990:66-79) a preconceptual structuring of experience. These classifications are social in origin, a property of the group<sup>188</sup> and acquired by mimesis. Thus the concept of the body includes the ritual corporate body. Bodies so nurtured create the conditions for knowledge for Quakers. We must examine the possibility that in these Quaker modes of knowing some intersubjective features may be masked and that certain assumptions, preconceptions inscribed on the body fade from discursive articulation and remain potent but unnoticed.

One of the Elders in our Meeting was an English teacher, and is a poet. She is happy to deconstruct poetry but less comfortable deconstructing the discourses associated with Quaker practices. This is because she, like all Quakers, worships by inhabiting the world of the poem not by explaining it. What might be concealed by this way of knowing?

Bell suggests that there is a 'not-seeing' in ritual that rests on a masking of the distinction between relating directly *to* (an object), to the literal silence, and indirectly relating *through* (a natural symbol) when keeping silence. The masking relies on the illusion that no ritual or symbols are involved; that the practices are simple, you can just do them; and that the spirit and silence are one. Secondly it depends on the claim that the 'felt sense'<sup>189</sup> of the Spirit, its

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<sup>188</sup> As pressures on the member they are what Douglas conceptualises as 'group' in her 'grid'-group' model. See Chapter 5.

<sup>189</sup> Gendling, 1978. *Focussing* and Lampen, 2008.

presence, as indwelling light, is embodied and real; a literal feeling of presence. So the feelings of presence, that are palpable, are then not thought by worshippers to be have been arrived at through some metaphoric or symbolic means. The feeling of presence is both that the sense has arisen inside the body and is the same as the quality in the Meeting Room. Here the body, in its mode of sense experience has no need of the interpretation that participation is symbolic and where silence is a state of mind, an orientation, or a construct for spirit. The body, a felt sense, is therefore fundamental to a Quaker epistemology; whatever emerges or is inherited in the tradition as knowledge is always folded back into knowing through embodiment, the senses and social ritual practice. Everything substantive is rooted in the pre-verbal. This is the basis for the arguments developed by Bell and Bourdieu concerning *illusio* and circularity. The interpretation is that the Quaker habitus, the bodily hexis, the *doxa* (rules of the game) determine how anything that is known can be known. These ways of knowing, the epistemology, is then taken for granted and becomes the habitus, a set of unexamined assumptions. By this means a closed and circular system of knowledge practices is created to which practitioners become 'blind'. There is also no escape from the *illusio* since the only way something can be known is this way and the only test of such knowing is to repeat the same process. The *illusio* resides in this inability to be free reflexively from this circularity. Part of *illusio* is that what might be seen to be constraint is experienced as enablement. I have already noted that this theory has to be seen in relation to the intense preoccupation of Quakers with precisely the bodily matters that are supposed to create *illusio*. Quakers are more like our Elder above,

knowledgeable actors entering the poem, the drama, making the 'art-work' of worship on its own terms and knowing, in an 'intentional unintentionality', that they can only be actors and not spectators. In this sense *illusio* is not just illusion but is intentional, knowingly necessary for this form of knowing.

### **3.3.10. Conventions, Rules and Constraint**

Bourdieu noted that 'nothing less than a whole cosmology is instilled in the words "Stand Up Straight!"'<sup>190</sup> The Quaker analogue would be 'Sit Still and Silent!' In worship there are prohibitions on certain interactions like touching, speaking to another person directly, and moving around. Participants are situated. The spatiality of situation, and the 'here and now' aspects of participation, involve an active body 'orientated towards its tasks' (Giddens, 1984:65).

Practical belief is not a 'state of mind', still less a kind of arbitrary adherence to a set of instituted dogmas and doctrines ('beliefs'), but rather a state of the body (Bell, 1992:99).

The body at worship is orientated to others by virtue of constituting the basic sociality of the event. The event requires that participants at a minimum sit unless they are speaking, when they may stand. When they sit, they sit still in silence. They stay for one hour. This minimum is easily grasped as a bodily discipline. Excessive reading and writing of any kind is proscribed. These rules are not experienced generally by Quakers as constraint because they are participating voluntarily. They are experienced as the establishment of

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<sup>190</sup> Bourdieu, 1990:69 and 'one might say that arms and legs are full of numb imperatives'. Bell, 1992:99.

proper conditions for worship, as disciplines not constraints. However it is the bodily practices that are 'policed'<sup>191</sup> by the Elders of the Meeting; keeping silent, not reading for any length of time, not sleeping, not moving around, not speaking too long or more than once, not writing or shuffling around.

### **3.3.11. The Gendered Quaker Body**

The local Meeting that I attend has many more women members than men. In any Meeting there will be 12 women to 3 or 4 men. The two Clerks are women and one of four Elders is a man. This is reflected amongst Quakers nationally and has been a stable feature of the Society during its existence.<sup>192</sup> Forty-five percent of the first and early Quakers were women and they spoke in Meetings, although segregated in certain Meeting Houses. The James Naylor incident was closely associated with the support and encouragement that he received from his women disciples. Margaret Fell, later to become George Fox's wife, not only provided the early movement with funds but began the first Quaker fund, a proto-bank, practices later to develop into Quaker banks such as Lloyds, Barclays and Friends Provident. Elizabeth Fry was a key social and prison reformer in the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century, recently depicted on the British Bank of England £5 note. The Quaker commitment to gender equality is therefore strong:

*We believe that there is God in all of us, so God cannot be male; the I-Thou is the God in me, God in you and the relationship between us. From this follows*

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<sup>191</sup> Dandelion, 2005:99.

<sup>192</sup> Membership Statistics from 1935 to 2007 in the Tabular Statement of 2007 show that this is the case in 1945 when there were 7,582 men and 9,669 women, in 1979 the ratio was 7,590 to 10,474 and in 2007, 5,694 to 9,150. This gender balance is maintained against a background of declining membership 26,310 in 1965 to 22,780 in 2009.

*equality and the valuing of people and inclusiveness and not hierarchy. British Quakers showed respect for lesbian and gay relationships before most other religions*<sup>193</sup>

*Few if any religious forms have equality as one of their central themes and this one is important. For me equality between the sexes in Quakerism has been something that has been a present and living truth and has meant much to me.*

<sup>194</sup>

Jantzen (2000) a Quaker feminist theologian, proposes a new Quaker theological imaginary. She calls this 'natality' and contrasts it with a modernist and masculine imaginary that is dominated by domination over nature, entailing an aesthetic of menace, threat and fear; disguising ownership and control as progress and utility. Natality is a metaphor of flourishing, fullness, plenitude, emergence, and creativity. Natality also presupposes an encounter with alterity, with the Other. It is an embodied, 'pantheistic' basis for becoming divine, whilst being in relation to God who is a 'horizon of becoming'. Jantzen links this imaginary to the notion of 'sensible transcendentals' from Irigaray:

Irigaray speaks of the "opening of a sensible transcendental coming into being through us, of which we would be the mediators and the bridges," The transcendent and the immanent are not seen as opposites. Rather the sensible transcendental, the pantheistic projection of the female divine, opens out what has hitherto been seen as a set of polarities into a play of diversities, "bringing the god to life through us". In doing so it not only subverts the symbolic of modernity, but it offers new horizons for becoming which are rooted in gendered embodiment, and thus for the flourishing of natals (Jantzen, 2000:272).

Here the metaphor of natality connects the sensory with the transcendent, the body with natural symbols, in sensible transcendentals. Quakers are therefore

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<sup>193</sup> Fieldnotes: *Kindlers* Elizabeth.

<sup>194</sup> Fieldnotes: *Kindlers* Rose.

concerned with gender equality <sup>195</sup> and practice such equality in their Meetings.

### **3.3.12. Summary**

Contemporary Quakers are coeval with their forebears in that the body and embodied participation in worship is experienced and practiced as the way apparently unmediated human-divine relations can be established. Practices such as silence, stillness, waiting and listening were adopted in an attempt to become part of a radical immanence of the divine. Quaker worship was and is based on the relationship of interior stillness with the possibility of a sense of presence in the jointly created, shared and gathered silence. The Quaker body is a corporate body. The body and co-sentience provides Quakers with natural symbols. The Quaker body is gendered and an imaginary of natality and 'sensible transcendentals' illuminate Quaker practices. Illusio and circularity are features of the Quaker closed epistemology which is rooted in the body. Quaker worshippers enter the drama of worship knowingly, accepting its norms constraints as the enabling form in which the spirit is likely to be manifest. The bodily practices in worship that have described ethnographically can be summarised as;

- (a) Crossing a threshold. Sitting. Being there, having an acute sensory awareness. Noticing elemental qualities as natural symbols and 'sensible transcendentals'.

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<sup>195</sup> At the time of writing the Britain Yearly Meeting has become the first church or religious organisation in Britain to agree to same sex marriages in Quaker Meeting Houses and use the term 'marriage' for them. This would, under present legislation, be unlawful for Quaker Registering Officers and therefore cannot be implemented.

- (b) The body's enspacement, its posture, its positioning, and its immobility. Disciplines of the body include, slowness, stillness, and letting go.
- (c) Engaging in habitual practices, learned mimesis, of breathing, listening, waiting, and centering-down. These bodily disciplines are thought to create the conditions for words, 'promptings' to arise. Breathing is both literal and metaphoric as the breath of Life.
- (d) Co-sentience and co-presence create mutuality and intimacy and a distinctive mode of relatedness between worshippers. The co-presence of worshippers can be thought of as an art-work, a human sculpture.
- (e) The 'temple of the body' purified and nourished by breathing subsists in the Life and Light and is the starting point for the process of harmonic integration.
- (f) All these combine and are combined by worshippers to create a central space which is the symbol for what is meant by the 'space that words come from...'

I have shown how personal practices and the meanings worshippers give to them differ considerably, for example the meanings of 'breath' and 'life' yet the set of practices are flexible enough to allow for such individuality within a corporate form. The dialectical tension noted by Taylor (2007) between transcendence and immanence can be seen. Amongst early Quakers the state of body was the effect of the infusion by the Light, immanence here, was thought to be a radical manifestation of a transcendent property. The body was not primarily engaged in practices but in surrender to this specified entity. Physical surrender was a prerequisite and a clear consequence of encounter with the Light. However in contemporary practice, *practices* (my italics) of the body are prominent as the vehicle for a hoped for sense of presence. Here

the bodily practices create the conditions for a possibility. Natural symbols (Douglas, 1996),<sup>196</sup> including the body itself, are deployed in practices to create a possibility of presence which in turn is assumed to have a bodily correlate. The epistemic order has shifted, under the cross-pressure of the immanent frame (Taylor, 2007), in contemporary Quaker practice:

The priority relations tell us not only what is learned before what, but also what can be inferred on the basis of what. They are foundational relations. I know the world through my representations. I must grasp the world as fact before I can posit values. I must accede to the transcendent, if at all by inference from the natural (Taylor, 2007:558).

The reasons for this shift, to immanence and nature,<sup>197</sup> may lie in the absence of a shared belief, and faith in, a transcendent entity. This explanation is supported by the ethnographic evidence of the multiplicity of cosmologies and interpretations of the practice of 'worship' set out below in Chapter 5. I now move to an examination of two of these practices in more detail.

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<sup>196</sup> I use this phrase in the ironic sense intended by Douglas (1996), that such symbols are constructed but made to appear 'natural'.

<sup>197</sup> This 'relapse into nature' is also suggested in Martin's (2005,4-12) dialectic of faith-nature, where he notes the co-existence of transcendent and immanent interpretations of symbols – the interpretation of baptism as unnecessary because 'birth itself is the one true sacrament' (Martin,2005:4), and 'the symbol of the candle is simultaneously a sign of returning natural light and of the advent of the redeemer' (Martin, 2005:7).

## Section 4: Silence and Stillness.

No moment of silence is a waste of time.<sup>198</sup>

### 3.4.1. Initiatory Advice on Silent Practice.

Silent worship is the sine qua non of British Quakerism. It is the ground of the 'unprogrammed'<sup>199</sup> tradition and is the key anti-symbol<sup>200</sup> in practice that emerged in Fox's inaugurating ministry. Its origins are in dissent from, and renewal of, Christian practice. These practices and disciplines were described as:

Now thou must die in the silence, to the fleshly wisdom, knowledge, reason and understanding....Keep to that of God in you which will lead you up to God.<sup>201</sup>

Here there is a giving up of traditional ways of knowing from authority and the taking up of the challenge to 'stand single'.<sup>202</sup>

Silence is a discipline, a medium and a symbol of presence. Quaker silence was initially exclusively linked to God's word:

Though it was silent from words, yet the word of the Lord was among us; it was as a hammer and a fire<sup>203</sup>

In QF&P, keeping silent is the essential, necessary way of being related to the divine:

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<sup>198</sup> Needham, 1987 in QF&P: 2.17.

<sup>199</sup> This is the term used for Meetings with no liturgy.

<sup>200</sup> Punshon, 1987:70.

<sup>201</sup> Fox, 1669 *Journals*.

<sup>202</sup> Fox, 1669 *Journals*.

<sup>203</sup> QF&P: 2.12.

I know of no other way, in these deeper depths, of trusting in the name of the Lord and staying upon God, than sinking into silence and nothingness before him.<sup>204</sup>

So silence is 'preparation for communion with God'.<sup>205</sup> The leaflet given to newcomers at Meeting Houses contains a quotation from the work of John Southall (1855-1928):

Be Still and Know that I am God...that still small voice of the Holy Spirit in my heart was God's prayer in my secret soul.<sup>206</sup>

Quakers recognize that silence has had a key place in Christian practice particular in the experience of mystics:

Dionysius in the sixth century found the traditional language of God inadequate and unrelated to his experience of God. The key word in Dionysius' writing is "silence". He claims to have experienced God as silence.<sup>207</sup>

QF&P gives advice about effective ways of being silent. Worshippers are not to be 'scared of the silence, or restricted by it, it sets you free from movement, thought, pressures of life and it should not be spent in indolent or vacant musing but in waiting'. The advice is practical, silence 'stills' both 'the clamour of our emotions, and subtle argument';<sup>208</sup> even 'words' themselves are 'purified in a redemptive silence', as is our 'reasoning' left aside.<sup>209</sup> So there are certain ways to be effectively silent. Bodine, quoted in QF&P, suggests a model, whereby; centering-down leads to stillness, that leads to shared

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<sup>204</sup> Bellows, 1895 in QF&P: 2.15.

<sup>205</sup> Jones, 1937 in QF&P: 2.16.

<sup>206</sup> Southall, c1900, *The Power of Stillness* in QF&P 2.53.

<sup>207</sup> Heals & Cook, 1992:66 *Images and Silence*.

<sup>208</sup> Needham, 1987 in QF&P 2.17.

<sup>209</sup> Yearly Meeting. London, 1884 in QF&P 2.14.

silence, that in turn leads to identification with others, that leads to gatheredness.<sup>210</sup>

Southall recognizes that distractions sometime require new beginnings:

I thought this would be a very easy matter, and so I began to get still. But I had no sooner commenced than a perfect pandemonium of voices reached my ears, a thousand clamouring notes from within, until I could hear nothing but their noise and din.<sup>211</sup>

In Southall's case the starting over entailed going back to the original traditional formulation of the phrase 'Be Still and Know that I am God'. Practices were relatively clear when silence was rooted exclusively in the Christian tradition, as in QF&P where silence is referred to as 'the stillness of God'. However in contemporary practice silence conceals considerable diversity and difference.

Silent practice has three dimensions. Firstly, it is a corporate activity within which relatedness between worshippers is created. Being silent in this way is 'ministry'; being silent creates the conditions for one's own and others' worship.

The ministry of silence demands the faithful activity of every member in the meeting. As together we enter the depths of a living silence, the stillness of God, we find one another 'in the things that are eternal', upholding and strengthening one another.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Bodine, 1980 in QF&P 2.47.

<sup>211</sup> Southall, c1900 in QF&P 2.53.

<sup>212</sup> Q&P 2.01.

*Your silence and stillness is for me, we are giving each other our stillness by letting it fill the silence*<sup>213</sup>

Secondly, silent passive presence is acceptable ministry:

Come regularly.....even when you are angry, depressed, tired, or spiritually cold. In the silence ask for and accept the prayerful support of others.....<sup>214</sup>

We may be tired irritable or sleepy...we should not turn away from the meeting for worship but should realize the value of such occasions as training times.<sup>215</sup>

Thirdly, Quakers are urged to set aside of times for silence 'even amid the activities of daily life'. Here silence is a source of strength, and maintains awareness of the divine and encourages a 'habit of dependence on God's guidance for each day'.<sup>216</sup>

Actively keeping silence, or falling silent sets thought and emotion aside. This 'true silence' is to the 'spirit what sleep is to the body, nourishment and refreshment'.<sup>217</sup> Silence is also the ground for speech. Silence is thought to produce spoken ministry and this 'helps to articulate the common guidance which the Holy Spirit is believed to give to the group as a whole'.<sup>218</sup>

Silent practice is clearly a dependent disposition to worship and to listen, figuratively, for inspiration and guidance from the divine whose character is

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<sup>213</sup> Chapter 3. Section 2.

<sup>214</sup> QF&P: 1.02/para10.

<sup>215</sup> Berks & Oxon QM Ministry & Extension Committee, 1947 in QF&P 2.45.

<sup>216</sup> QF&P: 1.02/para 3.

<sup>217</sup> Penn, 1699 in QF&P 2.13.

<sup>218</sup> Punshon, 1987 in QF&P 2.37.

itself manifest by silence and stillness. In this sense the object and the medium are conflated.

### **3.4.2. The Character of Silence**

Rose has been a Quaker all her life. She is now in her late 40s. She is a designer and editor. She attended the Kindlers group for three months where I met her. She is tall, moves in a very measured way, is alert, calm and particularly silent. I noticed her ability to be very present in a group; her ability to pay attention to others. The sense she gave of being present and attentive seemed to be to do with her ability to tolerate silence, to accept it, to create it. She projected very little anxiety or a sense of being pressed to speak. She did not feel the need to talk to express herself, yet she was expressive. She seemed both present and distant and somewhat formal with others, yet she had a deeply benign sense of permissiveness towards those around her. I wondered how significant her Quaker silent practice was to her.

On one occasion she was working with Susan, another group member, on some thoughts about the 'Spiritual Needs of Friends' for the group. They positioned themselves in a corner of the large workspace. They looked serene together, enjoying the task and then wrote their findings on a flip chart. Rose spoke back to the group just pointing out the words; *What is it that Quakers want?...*

To Rest in SILENCE

No effort required

Just 'be'

I began to appreciate that Rose's stillness, her 'being' and her social silence were two sides of the same thing. I wondered how this character had been formed. I asked her about silence and she began by talking of Quakerism:

Quakerism has meant more to me than I can express or even be fully aware of. In a way it has informed my whole life, as I have been in it and of it all my life and it is a part of me. Coming from a Quaker family, in and out of Quakerism for several generations, I have never known life without it. Quakerism suits me and my temperament-it is a good fit and hopefully I suit it. The Quaker 'way' of worship, for me beats other ways hands down because it gives us the chance to find our own route without being distracted by words, music, symbols (or not too many anyway), form and decorative embellishment.<sup>219</sup>

Rose continued with a list and commentary on Simplicity, Integrity, Peace and Equality that flowed from and in the Silence and Stillness.

Rose's life-world is an integrated whole. She understands her history and upbringing, her temperament, her spiritual path, her relationships with others, her ethical precepts and her worship practice to be grounded in silence and stillness. Silence seemed to be the central element of her equilibrium.

I have always been intrigued by silence. This goes way back to my first experiences in Meeting as a child, when I found the ministry either hard to understand or easy to ignore, and the gaps in between long. I relied on gazing out of the high windows at the trees outside to pass the time (when my sister

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<sup>219</sup> Fieldnotes: Text *Kindlers* Rose.

wasn't trying to make me laugh!). In that space of waiting for something, whether this was the end of Meeting, when we could go and rush around outside and play games among the tombstones, or just allowing my own daydreams to entertain me, I found great solace and creativity, which sustains me to this day. I found I could just get my mind to 'hang' or 'hover', creating a space for 'something' to arrive. This wasn't difficult or odd to me, for it seemed to chime in with an 'inner silence', which I could feel at my core – it was as though two silences, inner and outer, were coming together, recognising one another and finding harmony and meaning.

The Meeting House had a magical atmosphere, with its high, plain Georgian windows, its rectangular arrangement of hard wooden benches, disused raised elders' pews looking out over the Friends below and the separate 'women's Meeting' room outside. The fabric of the building seemed to hold the kindly ghosts of earlier Quakers and I often convinced myself that I could see them sitting quietly there in their black hats and white bonnets - someone had possibly shown me the famous painting of Christ in a Quaker Meeting.

No one tried to explain anything to me (for which I am now grateful); I wasn't burdened with books and leaflets – except a wonderful children's book 'Brave Quakers'. We had little in the way of formal children's groups and so I was left very much to my own devices, to make what I could of the practice of Quakerism. This might seem strange to modern parents who try their best to educate and explain, perhaps too much, but I now believe that this was the right way to introduce children to Meeting – to let them find their own way in the silence. For, in the end, this is, indeed, what we all have to do, on our own and in our own way.

Since then, I've found silence a vital aspect of my life, both in and out of Meeting, and when it isn't present I can find it quite mystifying. For example, in the odd church service, wedding or funeral it can seem as though people are rushing through the service and not waiting long enough between the hymns or spoken prayers for something else to be heard.

I do now experience silence as a sort of 'spiritual vehicle': it allows the spiritual to take place. In other contexts, there are other types of silence. For example, there is the 'silence of expectancy', when the conductor allows a preparatory silence between raising the baton and starting the piece, or a 'silence of completion', when a gap is allowed at the end of the performance, before the audience starts to applaud. This allowance for silence seems right – it is giving

space between one thing and the next, to let the spirit speak, to let the 'other' happen. There is also a distinct difference between the anticipatory type of silence experienced before the music starts and the reverential/awe-full type of silence experienced after, and I think people are aware of this and want space and time to let it happen. The same should be true of programmed religious practice.

A few years ago, in a go-round at a healing workshop, I found myself saying that I was 'exploring different kinds of silence' in my life, and I find this still to be true. There are those kinds that I have just described, and also the kinds experienced in Meeting. Far from being a mere absence of sound, the silence in Meeting can be different at the beginning, middle and end. I often find that the first few silent minutes of Meeting are the most full and meaningful for me and that this silence has a powerful 'opening' quality to it, in which we are all settling ourselves and making ourselves available to whatever might happen in the hour. Later on in the hour the silence seems to gather weight and become 'heavy', like a vehicle gathering speed – like wading through thick mud or groping through dense mist, but without getting stuck or lost. This is what, for me, the 'gathered' Meeting is: when everyone's thoughts and focus seem to be settled, concentrated and even perhaps pointing in the same direction. We may all be contemplating different things, but we seem to have a common direction in the 'heavy' silence. This type of silence is enhanced if there is physical stillness - no one is coughing, shuffling or shifting about: everyone seems poised on the brink of a precipice and whether this then leads to jumping off the edge into the precarious flight of vocal ministry and the chasm of not quite knowing where the words are leading, or not, is a question of personal leading.

If something momentous has occurred in the world, which everyone knows about, such as some dreadful accident or terrorist attack, or if a member of the Meeting has died, then you can literally feel the weight of common thought in the silence – the silence seems a vehicle for that common thought. It seems almost tangible. Perhaps you could even say that this is really all one thought. The silence seems full and 'made heavy' with the same single thought, which seems to be coming from a single point, or source. For if we are all part of it and if it is part of us, having one thought simultaneously is not such a crazy idea. The silence is, perhaps, an 'organising mechanism' for this joint thought.

It seem, then, that some aspect of Quaker spiritual practice, at least for me, concerns silence being a vehicle for the connection of inner silence with outer silence and common connection with each others' inner silence. Another idea about silence that I find interesting is that silence is 'something' rather than 'nothing'. It is not the absence of something, but rather the 'thing' itself. And this is a key aspect of Quakerism that means so much to me (and why I find the lack of it in other forms of worship so frustrating and perplexing). If silence is 'something' rather than 'nothing', it may even be 'everything' – indeed it must be 'everything' because it is the emptiness into which all ideas can flow.

I vividly remember a member of our Meeting ministering about how she sometimes came to Meeting and, in her mind, dumped all the 'stuff' from her life into the silence of the Meeting. She was surrendering her life to the hour in Meeting. She was saying 'Here is my life, here am I'. The empty space in the middle of the circle of people is perhaps a physical representation of the silence of the Meeting. It is a space/time in which people can throw all the stuff of their lives into a big heap and start to heal themselves and each other, if that is what is needed, or they can just sort through their pile and make sense of it; saving some things, but discarding others.<sup>220</sup>

Rose leads a life of silence, not a silent life. Here we see the genealogy of the life of silence. It is formed and shaped in the medium of silence itself in the playful place of worship where there was companionable silent play, playing with silence, where no one explained it away. Rose lived in it and it was allowed to live in her, she learned to 'hang' and 'hover' allowing silence to be the place of possibilities of creativity and discovery. Silence was the medium of the imagination in which one can be as silent as the dead, and in the silence feel them all around. So in silence she finds 'a vital aspect of my life both in and out of meeting'. The seamlessness of silence in life and worship is clear. This is not a monochrome silence of absent sound. Rose finds silence a spiritual vehicle. Actual perceived, felt qualities assist in its differentiation; it is

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<sup>220</sup> Fieldnotes: Text *Kindlers* Rose.

anticipative, expectant, it is rest, it is fullness, reverential, a place of awe. It marks and surrounds what is to come and the thing done. It is the space between one thing and the next; it is the unspoken 'and' which might be 'and not'. It is the surface upon which things happen; it is the space that lets them appear. These natural qualities Rose transforms into a kind of worship liturgy; silence is opening, a beginning in the meeting; it is the early light that confronts her; it is the setting in which worshippers make themselves available. Silence can be heavy with a single thought, it gathers speed, it takes Rose headlong through mud and mist but she is not lost. Thoughts of those present produce or fix onto some focus; energy constellates the group silence into some single thought. Worshippers are on the precipice of the cliff top like sky divers. Some take flight into the chasm of the unknown where words come from. Speech is like flight itself, always falling through the silence. The common air, the common thought has weight, inner silence and outer is one, yet for Rose silence is always substantial. In the end silence is not just the nothing that holds everything; it is itself, itself. This is as near Rose comes to an image of the transcendent and she gets there in Quaker fashion.

Silence is the nothing of all possibilities; if it is the place where all ideas can constellate it can be truly everything. Rose like all Quakers will never worship this as object and symbol or in her case as a person but hers is certainly a glorious, silent, unitive transcendent vision linked to being in the world and is true to her character. Here we see the organising principle of the pattern; the model of the Quaker way for one person; a practice that creates harmony and integration.

Silence is therefore the medium, space, place, practice into which Quakers place themselves in the hope of guidance. Pauline, Susan and Joe also gave me their understandings:

Meeting for Worship is an oasis of stillness, a still point in the turning world where we can be open to those promptings. When we go into the silent stillness we find ourselves in a well of swift flowing energy, where we are conscious of being in God and God being in us, We are open to receive guidance and understanding, to be given grace...for the Quaker way is to follow the promptings of love and truth in our hearts, which is the way of Satyagraha or non-violence; to confront without injuring, to offer love in place of fear, to see the other in ourselves, to speak truth with compassion, to find a connection with all.<sup>221</sup>

Silent worship is waiting upon God's word and guidance.<sup>222</sup>

I would say that the two things that in my experience, Quakers have to offer the world are 'Silence' and 'That of God in Everyone'. If I had to expand on these I would say that the realization of the unifying force of silent worship, and putting aside the ego to let God speak to us, is the greatest Quaker discovery and that all things flow from that. We realize that words can be divisive, and are likely to be ego driven-and we are willing to put the ego aside and let God speak to us and bring us together.<sup>223</sup>

Here Pauline, Susan and Peter amplify some of those features noted by Rose and add a divine source that communicates. They share with Rose certain kinds of images: 'oasis', of 'swift flowing energy', and they emphasise promptings, guidance and God speaking in a way that Rose does not. Rose structured her list of silence, simplicity, integrity, truth, and non-violence as

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<sup>221</sup> Fieldnotes: Text *Kindlers* Pauline.

<sup>222</sup> Fieldnotes: Text *Kindlers* Susan.

<sup>214</sup> Fieldnotes: Text *Kindlers* Peter.

part of her story of being always a Quaker. Pauline, Susan and Joe are all convinced Quakers and they list the kinds of guidance to be expected from promptings in the silence as:

God's word, letting God speak to us, non-violence, confronting without injury, love in the place of fear, seeing others in ourselves, speaking truth with compassion, and finding a connection with all.<sup>224</sup>

For them God is explicitly involved and that silence requires the ego to be put aside. They seem very confident and robust in these respects as compared to Rose's account. They are speaking to the expected content as well as the process of silent waiting. Here also there is the equating of stillness and silence with the group being in God:

When we go into the silent stillness we find ourselves in a well of swift flowing energy, where we are conscious of being in God and God being in us.<sup>225</sup>

Here therefore we see different patterns and understandings emerging around the organizing principle and practice of silence. For Rose it defines her history, shapes her temperament and is the way she worships. For Pauline, Susan, and Joe, silent practice is an engagement that also points away, it more particularly enables divine qualities to emerge and changes to take place. The paradox is that the common shared medium contains and even masks diversity.

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<sup>224</sup> Fieldnotes: Text *Kindlers*.

<sup>225</sup> Fieldnotes: Text *Kindlers*.

### 3.4.3. Silence and Stillness.

I have shown in the discussion about the body that stillness is the hoped for outcome of 'centering-down' in its various forms. Silence can refer both to personal stillness and to the silence of the Meeting. This meeting silence is both literal, and non-literal: in the latter it is the construction that is put on the conditions that exist by worshippers as life goes on audibly in the street. Noise, activity, even violence can be confronted by someone or a group falling silent, and sometimes also motionless.<sup>226</sup> Silence is a ready symbol for difference and challenge since the contrast of sound-silence is so marked.

For some Quakers silence is a characteristic and manifestation of spirit or 'God'. Pauline, Susan and Joe link personal stillness and the idea of 'that of God in everyone'. Just as 'I' and 'we' are in the silence, so we are in God. Here dualisms of interior-exterior, subjective-objective, literal-metaphoric/symbolic are problematic. They are distinctions that are not felt in practice. Pauline and others also speak of 'flow' and 'energy' rather than rest and this is related to the way in which these practices of stillness and silence are thought to enable change. They are not guaranteed always to produce specific results. Stillness and silence represent hopes for the gift of the spirit. Therefore failure, openness, gift, grace are entailed. The hope and faith is that they may not only manifest the spirit in silence but also empower the worshipper. Geraldine expressed these links:

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<sup>226</sup> This was illustrated by the silent witness in Trafalgar Square during a demonstration against the Iraq war.

My association to the word God has changed over the years, but I do believe that there is a presence and a reality, not that I always experience it in the meeting or for a whole hour. I can give no other name to that than God. And sometimes in other contexts also. We have a little group meeting now where we take it in turns to facilitate and we meet in a unstructured way, we were looking at 'that of God' as being that which allows us to change, I used to think the phrase was about 'goodness' but now I see it as the capacity to change, so when you look for that of God in the other or yourself you are looking for vulnerability, openness and the capacity for change...<sup>227</sup>

#### **3.4.4. Articulating Silence**

What happens in the silence in the Meeting for Worship is of considerable concern to some Quakers, not because they want to impose orthodoxy on others but because they worry about the survival of the tradition. Quakers like Caroline, commentators like Bodine, who exemplifies the canonical model, and Punshon consider that the Meeting can include and support many people who come for many diverse reasons and use the silent worship in their own way, but they consider that this depends on the maintenance of sufficient core activity that lies within the tradition. Silence may conceal many divergent practices, and in Meetings where there is little ministry, little of the silence may be articulated for discernment by the Meeting. Meetings may become spiritually impoverished or have unresolved conflicts within them and silence and keeping silent is not always the most effective way of being in community. There have therefore been attempts to re-energise silent practice and this was the objective of the *Kindlers* which I attended during fieldwork.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Geraldine.

<sup>228</sup> See Chapter 4 Section 5, for a full description of *Kindlers*.

Caroline is a long-time weighty Quaker who expresses her concerns, many of them related to the practice of silent worship:

*I am happy and absolutely committed to the idea that there is a 'spirit', between people that there is something between us, and in my other existence I would call that the 'Holy Spirit' between us. It is difficult because there are many Quakers who haven't even got that language and they back off and make their own construct of what God is. What I hope is that we can be influential as a group in any society that allows people to think for themselves about why life is sacred. Why, what it is that makes it worth saying that life is sacred? In order to live life to the full people's experience should be demonstrating that all the time. I still think that introductory pamphlet on Quaker meetings has got the classic phrase in it; 'We agree to be still together expecting the presence of God'; 'agree to be still'....., what does 'agreeing to be still' mean? What is it to keep silence to 'make silence', to inhabit silence the external and internal, and between me and thee? Why is it important, and can we generate a vocabulary for talking about it? It seems to me that this a core thing since we are part of the British tradition, having been to World Conference and been brought up short by Quakers who not only sing lustily but talk of the work of the devil, got me thinking. That difference stays with me.... What does it mean that you 'agree to be still'? Is that different from saying 'I am still'? 'Be still and know that I am God' that old thing.....<sup>229</sup>*

Caroline wants to open up the question of silence. She suggests that 'agreeing to be still' must entail common practice. Caroline has made a distinction between those present who might be individually 'meditating' or just 'going to meeting' and those who are properly worshipping. Caroline links the problem she sees to the lack of a language for articulating silent practice and to the trend towards creating diverse constructs of God. This in some way compromises the tradition which in Caroline's terms should be based on an explicit Christian formulation or at least open to discussion. Caroline hopes that the maintenance of traditional practices would prevent worshippers falling

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<sup>229</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Caroline.

into habits of individual meditation and maintain the orthodox corporate aspects of silent practice. She also sees silence as concealing and in some ways preventing the discussion of what Quakers are agreeing to do by being silent. Silent practice here conceals by preventing language about itself from being developed. Caroline thinks this conceals differences and thereby silently undermines the tradition. I found many Quakers who think similarly but hope that inclusiveness and the shared continuity of the silent worship will continue.<sup>230</sup>

In Quaker discourse on silence certain issues are finely balanced. For most but not all Quakers the medium of silence signifies a divine source. Stillness as an achieved interior state is nested in the corporate silence. The literal, constructed, exterior silence and the interior stillness become one. Silence is both a symbol of the manifestation of the spirit and a palpable sense of a shared indwelling presence in corporate gatheredness. Thus silent worship is not an individual activity.

Contemporary practice gives silence a masking function. Seeking together in a common non-language is seen as strength, tolerant, inclusive and consistent with the tendency of negation. It is as if doubt about making any religious claims, embarrassment at evangelical fervour and dogmatism, the traditional

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<sup>230</sup>This dilemma for contemporary Quakers is explored by Dandelion, 1996. A *Sociological Analysis of the Theology of Quakers. The Silent Revolution*. The dilemma is that silence may be the only basis for shared practice, it is the tradition's continuity of form and yet the diversity that it conceals is so potentially disruptive that, were it to be made explicit, conflict would result and therefore unity can only be maintained by keeping silent. This Dandelion refers to as 'a culture of silence' as a 'behavioural creed' whereby Quaker unity lies in silent orthopraxis not in shared substantive, discursive understandings.

proscription on proselytising and the increased diversity of sources have all combined to amplify the safety of silence and the tendency towards negation.<sup>231</sup> Negation takes several forms: the standard rejection of creeds; an unwillingness to make positive affirmations about the divine or the sacred; and an epistemic posture or attitude to language. So whilst silence is noted as the practice of continuity within the tradition it also conceals by its very nature certain aspects of diversity and difference, both about itself and what it contains.

Different writers about Quakerism arrive at different estimates of silence. I have been regarding it primarily as a medium, that through which one does something.....others however almost make silence an object, a thing to be experienced and taken on its own terms. The point here is that we accommodate ourselves to the absence of sound and allow it to mold our spiritual experiences. This has to some the advantage of doing away with the necessity of a specifically Christian spirituality and permitting other kinds of belief to take place within the overall pattern of Quaker worship. Indeed belief may be irrelevant. There are those who see silence as a sign or symbol...the silence actually proclaims the tradition, because no other practice is possible within it, to participate in the silence is to be a Quaker.<sup>232</sup>

Since silence is the form of worship then whoever is within the form and practices silence can be thought of as potentially within and immersed in the meaning of silence as it appears to the other. This can create conditions for seekers and frank non-believers to be included. However tensions are expressed by Punshon:

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<sup>231</sup> Dandelion suggests that contemporary Quakers have adopted a posture that he calls the 'absolute perhaps' from which they are certain that nothing authoritative can be established and that they are committed to 'searching where they will not find' (Dandelion, 2008:83-85).

<sup>232</sup> Punshon, 1987:74.

It is clear where Quakers stand. Silent worship is based on pentecostal expectation and has a biblical and theological rationale which will support a continued tradition. Failing this, worship in silence is possible, but it will be something quite different from what this tradition has normally understood meeting for worship to involve. It is the collective aspect that is at issue-whether silence alone is a sufficient basis for a worshipping community.<sup>233</sup>

This seems a clear statement of the relationship between the traditional form of the silent meeting and the underlying beliefs. However not all Quakers see it this way. Some like Susan have faith in the tradition to reproduce itself and stress the power of inclusion and seeking in silent participation as sufficient to describe anyone practicing with her as a fellow worshipper. She would not make the distinctions that both Punshon and Caroline make about proper worship:

*I do not see us in schism, or potential schism, however I do have difficulty with active non-theists because I think our experiential lives do not speak to each other. But I am always interested in whether they are as non-theist as they say they are. These are the Dworkin aggressive atheists, David (a well known Quaker non-realist) is not one of these; I have worshipped with him, and he is a good member of his monthly meeting, there is an awfully strong "seeker" element in David; when I see that, I think "You are looking awfully hard". There is something in you that feels that there is something to find. Even if your rational head says there is nothing.*<sup>234</sup>

Participating bodily in silence is sufficient for these attributions to be made.

The practice of keeping silent conceals a tension amongst Quakers.

speech is devalued as a consequence of the theological role given collective silence. The status of speech is diminished as a result of the popular semi-realist Quaker view on the possibility and the appropriateness of speech...words are not seen to be of practical use in expressing

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<sup>233</sup> Punshon, 1987:109.

<sup>234</sup> Fieldnotes: Text Tape Susan.

spirituality...God *an sich* is an utterly unknowable X and that what we cannot speak about of that we must remain silent.<sup>235</sup>

This relationship between silence and words, silence and speech, silence and text arises frequently amongst Quakers; ‘the spirit gives life and the letter killeth’ is a common Quaker aphorism.

The idea of silence as enabling the deepest wordless experiences is expressed in Quaker interests in mysticism:

For some the word mystic has an awkward ring. However I believe that Quakers are natural mystics. Mystic in the sense that our spiritual faith is grounded in our experience rather than in a faith we have received through teachings from outside...mysticism is simply a word, a symbol, which expresses something about our spiritual journey. Mystics yearn to know the true reality, a reality that is not literal but experimental, the reality of the unity of all.<sup>236</sup>

*The joining together of the Quakers in the Quaker silence-becoming one with I AM, becoming present with the presence, is very powerful when it happens, maybe even mystical. It is certainly beyond my understanding.*<sup>237</sup>

Quaker worship silence is ‘the place that words come’ from but also the place beyond words. The experience of being in a wordless place in a presence and a sense of unity is highly valued but so is the emergence of guidance, leadings, promptings, that is words and speech. The Meeting for Worship is a space in which these aspects interweave words/speech-wordlessness and individual-group. The quality that contains these is silence. Silence is also the source of both registers of experience — inexpressibility/ unknowing and promptings/ leadings. Silence relates the individual and the group in a shared practice with the possibility that the group will receive guidance through the individual. This, as Stephen has expressed, is a fragile creation, a glass bowl held aloft. Caroline’s

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<sup>235</sup> Dandelion, 2008:80.

<sup>236</sup> Jarman, 2006, 2010.

<sup>237</sup> Fieldnotes: *Kindlers* Elizabeth.

concerns about the lack of a shared language for the wordless spirit, people making their own constructs and individuals just being in the silence or individually meditating, show the strains within the practice. Susan attempts to deal with this difficulty by stressing the inclusive possibilities of silence in incorporating individualist atheism. There are even tensions between those on the theistic side. Punshon is at pains not to treat silence as an object but as a medium for the manifestation of the spirit which is in words as much as wordless presence and is located within a biblical tradition. Heals and Cook move closer to equating the quality of silence as that of God:

I have made a great issue of this absolute inner silence of God, because I believe that it is the matrix of true silence in Meeting for Worship and in the world. All human beings are at heart seeking for it, drawn towards it. It is our destination, and we have a special faculty that enables us to respond to its call.

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Silence can therefore be thought of and experienced as a sign or symbol of some presence, as the medium of that presence or as that presence itself. Some Quakers tend towards individual personal emptying in centering-down and find satisfaction in the depths of wordless silence. They may or may not give this depth the name God or Source as an entity. They are either experiencing God as silence or silence as void and cosmic unity or as a quality they do not define. They might project their practice onto the group. They may or may not speak of what they feel. Others might practice within a model such as that put forward by Bodine and Punshon with explicit traditions of Christian based language, with the iterative and developmental approaches towards worship, focussing on the emergence of speech (promptings, guidance and leadings) which is given to and for the group's discernment. The various

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<sup>238</sup> Heals & Cook, 1992:75.

meanings of silence run through all these different practices and in a sense manage the diversity in this ritual form.

### **3.4.5. Silence as Knowing**

Silence is a radical epistemic stance that Quakers adopt and runs through all these variations in practice. Knowing includes negation. Quakers constantly return to silent practice. Silence is the sole and ultimate way that anything can be known and that anything that claims to be known can be tested. It is this that unifies the tradition. Therefore diversities cannot be dealt with in any other way, and certainly not by philosophy or theology. This entails a rootedness in a historical tradition going back to Fox and Christianity and a commitment to the constant unfolding of the spirit which puts all matters into question. In that sense the substantive tradition is not the primary basis for practice, only silent practice can be foundational.

Deep silence is the very condition for religious experience...only those who try out this way of silence know how many shades of meaning this word can include. In this deep silence there comes a Silence deeper still which is religious experience in its purest form. I want to express this experience and so I seek for the right words. And the richest words I find are the simplest, the most silent ones; Presence, Inner Light, Love, Life. Yet I am still aware how much silence is to be preferred to words....God Himself [sic] is silence.<sup>239</sup>

### **3.4.6. Contested Meanings of Silence**

Attitudes to silence are closely linked to attitudes to language and to ideas about worship. Caroline raises a series of questions about silence and its capacity not only to contain practice but also to conceal differences that should be made

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<sup>239</sup> Lacout, 1969:7.

explicit. Caroline, as I have shown, comes close to suggesting that individual meditating in the silence or vacuous emptiness is not worshipping in silence.

*.....Are they worshipping or just 'going to Meeting'?....I think they think they are 'going to Meeting'. Probably if we have 30-35 there possibly there will be no more than five who are worshipping; that...I am making a judgement there...what is worshipping?...I would express it to do with those who are 'open to being in touch with something beyond themselves' who being in the group feel that they are connected with the group who consciously connect with others there who subsume themselves to the totality of the group there. Whatever 'spirit' they choose or whatever label they use for 'the spirit'<sup>240</sup>*

We have seen the different emphasis between on the one hand simply being in the silence and open to what arises (possibly just personally) and on the other expecting the silence to be a vehicle for guidance to the group as Punshon supposes. For Caroline, Pauline, Punshon and others there seems to be a relationship between the meaning of silent practice and some presuppositions about the nature of spirit. However these lines within silent practice are not neatly demarcated. Images of the spirit or of none do not determine the way in which silent practices are performed. For Rose the silence is 'everything and nothing'; for Elizabeth it is a wordless mystical sense; Jane just wanted to be in it as an undemanding accepting space. Martin experiences silence in these terms:

*Worship comes from 'worthship', what I find to be of the highest value. But I do not have to have a God because that is a meaningless word, but spirit runs through creation, constant and simple; I will be energised if I give it attention and am faithful. I feel it is one, and draws everything to unity.<sup>241</sup>*

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<sup>240</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Caroline.

<sup>241</sup> Fieldnotes: *Kindlers* Martin. See the etymology of this term on page 125 above.

Brian worships 'the wholeness of creation, but not a personal God.'<sup>242</sup> Pauline emphasises the role of the body:

*I know that I could not achieve stillness in certain postures, so there is something about being more present in your body, bridging faith and practice. So what else do we do to show people that stillness really does lead to something it is not just about silence for an hour on a Sunday. We feel refreshed and there are things we take through into the rest of our lives.*<sup>243</sup>

Stephen emphasises a posture of modesty and gift in the silence:

*sometimes I feel that nothing is going on. It is just a quiet time Walking up hills in a fog, why am I doing this? It seems hard work. But you get to the summit or the sky clears and you know why. At the end there was as if there was a large thin glass bowl, a precious object which we were all holding together, and this extraordinary feeling that says 'do not let this stop, no thoughts, just this'. I do not know what that thought/feeling is but it is one that moves me and is powerful. Sometimes you feel a quality of stillness together, why is that valuable? I do not know.....*<sup>244</sup>

Jane emphasises the reconciling aspect of silent worship:

*I read this little book the man had given me.. 'The Silence behind their Words' or some such title, I can't remember but at that time my mother had just died, and I felt that silence was the best way I could make sense of it.*<sup>245</sup>

Geraldine found that the hospitable silence enabled here to have a moment of insight:

*As soon as I went in and sat down I felt as if I had come home. This is where I want to be, this is where I belong; but I still considered myself an agnostic, but then something happened in one of the Meetings, I went into that Meeting as an agnostic, something happened I thought 'Now I know' a sort of Pauline Damascus Road experience, not as dramatic, but something happened and the*

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<sup>242</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Brian.

<sup>243</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Pauline.

<sup>244</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Stephen.

<sup>245</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Jane.

*scales fell off, something hit me inside, this is real, there is a God, there is something that is bringing people together here. And so the agnosticism fell away.*<sup>246</sup>

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Alec, like Punshon, is a realist in theological terms.<sup>247</sup> He worships in the presence of a Source that is not personal, or a God, and is creative and healing but he would not use Punshon's Christian language. Alec is worshipping, but not worshipping an object or person. It is possible to combine certain elements in different ways. Practices within the silence are therefore diverse. Images of the divine do not seem to determine silent practices but do influence the meanings that emerge from personal accounts. Punshon suggests that just waiting for something to arise in the silence without the framework of some prefigured expectations from the tradition is unwise. Yet that is common practice amongst many Quakers who will emphasize spontaneity, emergence and the movement of the spirit. Rose's account is rich and rooted, very embodied, tactile and inhabits the silence but has no central image of the divine. Rose refers to none of the concerns that Caroline and Punshon raise relating to the tensions in the meeting for worship between silence as object, symbol, medium, and experience, and between words/speech-wordlessness and individual-group practice.

Quakers therefore place the emphasis in different places at different times along the spectrum of meanings for silence; from the literality of experiencing it as presence and as of God, as God, to its function as a symbol and as a vehicle or medium through which communication takes place. All Quakers would however

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<sup>246</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Geraldine.

<sup>247</sup> Fieldnotes: Text Alec. Also see Alec Davison's overview account of Quakerism in Chapter 4 Section 5.

agree that in worship the literal figurative/metaphoric distinction is inapplicable on the grounds that the objective of personal stillness (being in touch with that of God within) and constructed corporate silence (a sense of presence) are elided. Inside and outside, felt sense and symbol are one. The one is the fundamental noetic basis of worship and is called silence. In that sense the only way of addressing the question of the meaning of silence is to experience it as embodied practice with others. It has no meaning apart from its animating work.

These strands of practice also reflect the contrasting views that Quakers have about the relation of speech/words/language to silence. Some see speech as the silence becoming intelligible; as expressing and articulating the tradition which itself has shaped understandings of silent practice. This is their base position from which they see promptings and guidance renewing the tradition. The emphasis of the priority of speech over silence is also an emphasis on continuity. By contrast others see silence as the quality of the foundational source of all knowing which puts all knowledge into question. Silence here is 'the place words come from', so silence is prior and foundational for speech. It is possible to rest in this silence as a noetic and unitive experience that need not be articulated, and for some cannot be articulated in language. All perspectives would agree that silent practice as a way of knowing is fundamental to Quakerism but they differ in the emphasis they give in the relationship of silence to speech. Some will say that silence is sufficient for worship as an indwelling in the spirit, others will say that silence and silent practice is only intelligible and made meaningful by the speech that emerges from it.

Barthes notes the primacy of speech over silence and the impossibility of the manifestation of the divine without it:

Silence is not a sign properly speaking; it does not refer to a signified, it is there like a tacet in a score (violin)...silere would refer to a sort of timeless virginity of things before they were born or after they have disappeared. This "silence" of nature draws near Boehme's mystical vision of God. For Boehme, God "in himself": goodness, purity, liberty, silence, eternal light without shadows or oppositions, homogeneous, "calm and voiceless eternity". However the silere of Boehme's God makes him unknowable, since silere is a preparadigmatic condition without sign. God deprived of a paradigm cannot reveal himself...God provides himself with a paradigm, clarifying light, the Son. This enparadigmization coincides with the apparition of the Word: there begins language, the act of speaking, the production of speech...which transforms production into product, utterance into statement, the speech act into speech-sentence. Tacere thus as silence of speech is opposed to silere, as silence of nature or of divinity; then last avatar, the two equalise, become synonyms, but to the benefit of tacere: nature is so to speak sacrificed to speech: there is no longer silence outside speech. (Barthes 2005:21).

Quakers would probably situate themselves on the rim of the fragile bowl held aloft in worship that Stephen describes or on the edge of the cliff as Rose imagines, poised between the unknowability of the spirit and the affirmation of speech.<sup>248</sup> Quakers like Punshon, Caroline and Pauline would tend towards Barthes view, that speech is the outcome of silence; others like Stephen and Jane would be less concerned to articulate the silence, as would Lacout:

Words split apart. Silence unites. Words scatter. Silence gathers together.  
Words stir up. Silence brings peace. Words engender denial. Silence invites

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<sup>248</sup> I shall describe in Section 5 below that this balance can be achieved through a performative speech act, speaking of the unsayable.

even the denier to find fresh hope in the confident expectation of a mystery which can be accomplished within.<sup>249</sup>

Susan reminds us of the inclusive, containing and unifying aspects of silence, when in the context of decision making for Quakers it is put to use. She emphasizes that part of the canonical account that stresses that what arises in the meeting arises in and for the group. Coming to unity around an insight emerging in the thoughts of one member but for the group is the true flowering of the corporate silence.

*When we really think about discernment then we are thinking of being led to do something together, in unity and with purpose that will be of service; and for Friends the unity and the purpose often come together. It is only going to be serviceable if it is done in unity, and is not ornamental. I think people feel that the risk is less in the task that comes out of the process than in the process itself. We are at most risk of failing to pass on not the results, but the understanding of how we arrived at the unity of decision. We must have had a common understanding to get there. I am someone who thinks in process terms I am not put off by it. I wear with it for a while the way it is and then be part of the process and then maybe say well we could do this a bit differently...I very rarely go in with the idea first.....I am much more likely to get myself into the particular situation at the moment. I would probably agree that that is a political way of working. At one level it is very pragmatic.<sup>250</sup>*

This is a form of continuity by containment of whatever arises by the same practice that gives rise to its appearance. Speech is taken up by the meeting whose silent discernment allows it to fade or enlighten. Jackson notes this aspect of silence for community:

Toward the end of his life, Merleau-Ponty spoke of a silence that was not the “contrary of language” but rather “envelopes speech anew”. In Bamana thought such a view is compellingly elaborated. In aphorisms enjoining silence, even speech-without which sociality is inconceivable-is sometimes seen as inimical to

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<sup>249</sup> Lacout, 1969:6.

<sup>250</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Susan.

society: speech builds the village, silence regenerates the world; speech disperses, silence makes whole; speech burns the mouth, silence heals it. The BaMbuti view is similar: quietness equates with social co-operation and ecological harmony while noise destroys both (Jackson 1998:14).

### **3.4.7. Summary**

Rose took us into the life of silence and the practices that embody it in worship. She gave us images of silence as opening, heaviness, mist, mud, the anticipation and completion of the pianist's poised fingers, balancing together on the cliff edge before the chasm which is both the place of unknowing and the medium for the flight of speech. Rose gives us the poetics of silence. Rose's silence and stillness is her character and linked to action in the world through testimonies. Her vision tends towards the aesthetic in contrast to the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Christian Quaker roots.

Pauline showed us how silence allows the thought to arise in the body in silence as the body prepares its stillness as the hospitable place for promptings to arise. She imagines silence as an oasis, a still point, a well of swift flowing energy. Pauline gives us the silence of the body.

Stephen told us how unsure and tentative even the most enduring and faithful silent practice can be. His modesty and his endurance, a walking up the hill in the mist, is rewarded by a gap in the clouds. Working with others, worshipping with others is a gatheredness which has the fragility of a glass bowl balanced

and held aloft by those present. Stephen, not wanting that to end, gives us the silence of fragile gravity.

Punshon speaks of silence, the medium in which the explicit Christian tradition expresses itself. He warns us of treating silence as an object, a possession, or relying on its emergent qualities. Silence is a symbol in a prefigured worship tradition where it is not just for you, it is for us. Punshon gives us the silence of the logos.

Jane reminds us that 'being there' in the healing silence of an accepting non-demanding Quaker community is, as the canonical account says, the upholding of both the person and the meeting. For Jane silence was the way she became who she is. Jane gives us the silence of charity.

Geraldine told us that the journey to silent worship through peace and justice issues did not prepare her for the event of conviction in the silent meeting. Something happened and many things were seen differently as a result. She spent the next 30 years sitting still, mostly silent, each Sunday keeping both her faith and the tradition alive. Geraldine gives us the silence of conviction.

Caroline draws back a veil which covers Quaker silence. She is troubled by what is masked, practices that are too different, individual, meditative and that can find no words to be brought into the discerning silent space. She defines

some aspects of worship as real worship. She asks what it means to agree to be still together. Caroline gives us an enquiring silence.

Susan brings a maternal inclusive warmth to those who find their way to the meeting. She takes them home to tea. She is an optimist. She takes the silent worship to its destination of unity in the unknown. This process is the folding back of everything into the search for unity and this corporacy is then serviceable. She shrinks from the possibility that silence masks practices that entail incompatibilities, for all can be included in the seeking. There are some things that it is wise to be silent about as well as the unknowability of the divine. Susan gives us the politics of silence.

These are witnesses to the scope of silent worship: silence as object, a real palpable presence of the spirit; silence as a sense of the character of God's stillness and unknowability; silence as a symbol of spirit; silence as a medium for words to constellate. These are all ways in which Quakers focus their practice in the silence. They accept an eternal movement between silence and language, for silence is the place words come from but cannot be fathomed. Some Quakers are split here in their emphasis: those like Pauline and Punshon expect guidance and give priority to disclosure. This is the tradition that makes the practice coeval with Fox. Others like Jarman, Martin, and Rose have a more mystical sense of the ultimacy of the silence in which it is possible to rest.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> It is this mystical interpretation of silence that may inform and be informed by, an interpretation of the 'point zero' in Douglas's 'grid-group' model on the basis of Thompson's (Thompson, et al. 1990) interpretation of it as the mystic's, hermit's or autonomous individual's escape from the pressures of grid and group. See Chapter 5.

Alan, Pauline and others stress an engagement in a personal conversation with their God. Others like Susan stress the holistic building of community that comes from the right corporate process of silent practice, and substantively coming to unity in speech out of silence.

Two strands of contemporary Quaker practices emerge. On the one hand silence as a practice that is foundational of all knowing, sufficient in itself, mystical and beyond words, which also contains and masks diversity. On the other, silence as human partaking in a divine manifestation that speaks, where leadings impact upon action in the world, where sense and meaning are sought through speech. Quakers are shaping their recognizable Quaker 'way' with different interpretations of this central element. Some Quakers commentators, particularly Punshon, articulate a position in which silence as symbol and medium, but not itself 'God' gives rise to speech but this is itself provisional in the face of the silent unknowability of the divine.

## Section 5: Speech, Ministry and Speech Acts.

...The spiritual question, that of the price the subject must pay for saying the truth, is that he can and has said the truth about himself (Foucault 2001a:30).

### 3.5.1. Speech as Ministry

Ministry is the term for speaking in worship. It is referred to as 'spoken ministry' since there is also a ministry of silence in being present at the worship. Speech, speaking and 'words' are intentionally problematised by Quakers. Spoken ministry is intended to manifest the spirit. Ministry is considered as authentically from the spirit when it is 'in the life,' wrought from experience. Quaker ministry is thought to emerge from the practice of centering-down, seeking 'the place that words come from', a space of emptiness and negation that is beyond categories. Speech is thought to arise as a gift whereby the inspired person is spoken through. Speech is always therefore coupled with the practices and references of silence that I have described above. Quakers are exhorted by Margaret Fell's question 'What canst [sic] thou say?' to articulate their faith and practice even if they are sometimes reluctant to do so.<sup>252</sup> Words and speech emerge from open receptive 'listening' which enables communication between spirit, the individual and the group.

All true ministry springs from the reality of experience, and uses our gifts of heart and mind as its expression. But ministry is not the place for intellectual exercise. It comes through us not from us. Although we interpret the Spirit, it is

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<sup>252</sup> *'I wish that Quakers would preach what they practice!'* A comment by a Catholic participant at an ecumenical meeting. Fieldnotes (Dunblane).

that Spirit that will lead us to minister. The Spirit will decide which experiences are relevant and which will speak to the condition of the meeting. If you have to decide whether it is right to speak, consider that it is not. If your words are important the meeting will find them anyway.<sup>253</sup>

George Fox emphasised the need for ministry to be intelligible. Early Quaker ministry was described as fractured, given in a nasal tone, sometimes disjointed, and 'like ropes of sand' but it was not speaking in tongues, glossolalia, that is, speech-like sounds in an unrecognisable language. From the 17<sup>th</sup>-Century until 1924 there were Ministering Elders in British Meetings and historically some persons were recognised as having this gift. In contemporary Meetings all are regarded as equally able to give spoken ministry. My experience during fieldwork is that few worshippers minister and that regular contributions by certain members are common.<sup>254</sup>

Punshon offers a view of spoken ministry:

it is important to enquire of oneself as to whether what one feels led to say arises naturally out of personal experience...is it grounded in life. Does it come from deep inside, do the words fit this gathering? These are the sort of concerns that arise naturally if one has time in ones life for reflection and prayer-a spiritual discipline. It is always possible that we can leave needs like this to be met by spontaneous and unpremeditated ministry that rushes over us all of a

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<sup>253</sup> QF&P: 2.60.

<sup>254</sup> Some Quakers consider that 'the ending of recorded ministry, a decision taken to ensure equality and that we did not develop what might be seen as a spiritual hierarchy, has done us no favours' (Best, 2010:59).

sudden, but I doubt it. Is it not necessary to prepare ministry...what counts is to recognise when God is calling upon us to give it.<sup>255</sup>

Punshon is wary of spontaneous and unpremeditated speech. There is a series of tensions here between being impelled and inspired to speak, the appropriateness of speaking and a reflective process before speaking. Punshon manages these tensions by preparation; a predisposition he calls 'spiritual discipline', or by thinking and reflecting before speaking, or both.

Some commentators have produced guides to speaking in worship.<sup>256</sup> Thornburg suggests eight filters through which the potential ministry should go in the mind of the potential speaker with each stage having a 'yes' or 'no' answer and 'no' answers creating an iterative return to 'the centre' :that is to silence. There have been attempts at typologies of ministry.<sup>257</sup> In my ethnography of worship both spontaneous and prepared, text-based, ministry can be seen. The spectrum of spoken ministry from spontaneous to 'called for' ministry has existed since the inception of the tradition, as has the shame of speaking inappropriately.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Punshon, 1987:83,84.

<sup>256</sup> See Appendix V, Figure 21. '*Deciding to Speak in Open Worship*' by Thornburg (Dandelion, 2005)

<sup>257</sup> Seven aspects have been identified, length, style, frequency, timing, content, thematic association and linguistic construction. The amount of ministry in Meetings ranges from 7 to 20 minutes, individual ministries from less than 30 seconds to 10 minutes. 70% of ministries were found to be less than three minutes in duration. Speech of more than 15 minutes is likely to be interrupted by an Elder. (Dandelion 2005:99).

<sup>258</sup> Testimony of John Woolman 1741, in QF&P: 2.57. There are sections in the two quasi-canonical books on the subject of the timing of vocal ministry (QF&P: 2.55ff, and A&Qs: 13) which note: 'When prompted to speak, wait patiently to know that the leading and the time are right, but do not let a sense of your own unworthiness hold you back. Pray that your ministry may arise from deep experience, and trust that

So whilst there is equality and freedom for participants to speak in worship, for the speaker the relationship between inspiration and spontaneity is mediated by a series of preparative disciplines and discerning filters. There are also criteria at work amongst those listening to ministry that determine their sense of its authenticity. There are therefore complex rules governing Quaker spoken ministry that are masked by the free, hospitable, inclusive, and egalitarian atmosphere of the worship.

What seems to be necessary for speech to be ministry is that it emerges from 'the life', that it be 'called for' and that it be appropriate and intelligible in the context of that Meeting. Use of text and prepared speech are subject to these criteria and may form part of authentic ministry. Words are secondary to the 'prompting' and the tradition holds that 'words will be given to you'.<sup>259</sup> So being impelled to speak is a form of inspiration prior to the eventual utterance. The meaning of ministry is formed by the promptings that arise for the potential speaker, the speaker's intention in speaking (which may be exploratory or unfocussed), and the reception of the speech by individual auditors, who hear it 'in a tender and creative spirit'.<sup>260</sup> There is no agreed collective final meaning.<sup>261</sup>

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words will be given to you. Try to speak audibly and distinctly, and with sensitivity to the needs of others. Beware of speaking predictably or too often, or of making additions towards the end of a meeting when it was well left before.'

<sup>259</sup> QF&P :13.

<sup>260</sup> See the first verbal ministry in the ethnography Chapter III.

<sup>261</sup> The important and contrasting exception to this is in the worship meeting for business, see Chapter 2 Section 2.

This symbolic act of speaking, breaking the silence and bringing words from the silence often takes place as a performative speech act. These actions and the tone of the delivery contribute to the construction and reception of ministry. Ministry is not therefore a communicative act intended mainly to convey a message,<sup>262</sup> instructions or even a set of coherent ideas. Ministry is heard, discerned and explicated but not in a sense of being decoded.

the urge to speak often comes welling up from a deep place, this order may not be fully grasped by the Friend speaking and may acquire shape as it is expressed. So we have to help it along by sympathetic understanding and imagination and try to be sensitive to what the minister is trying to say.<sup>263</sup>

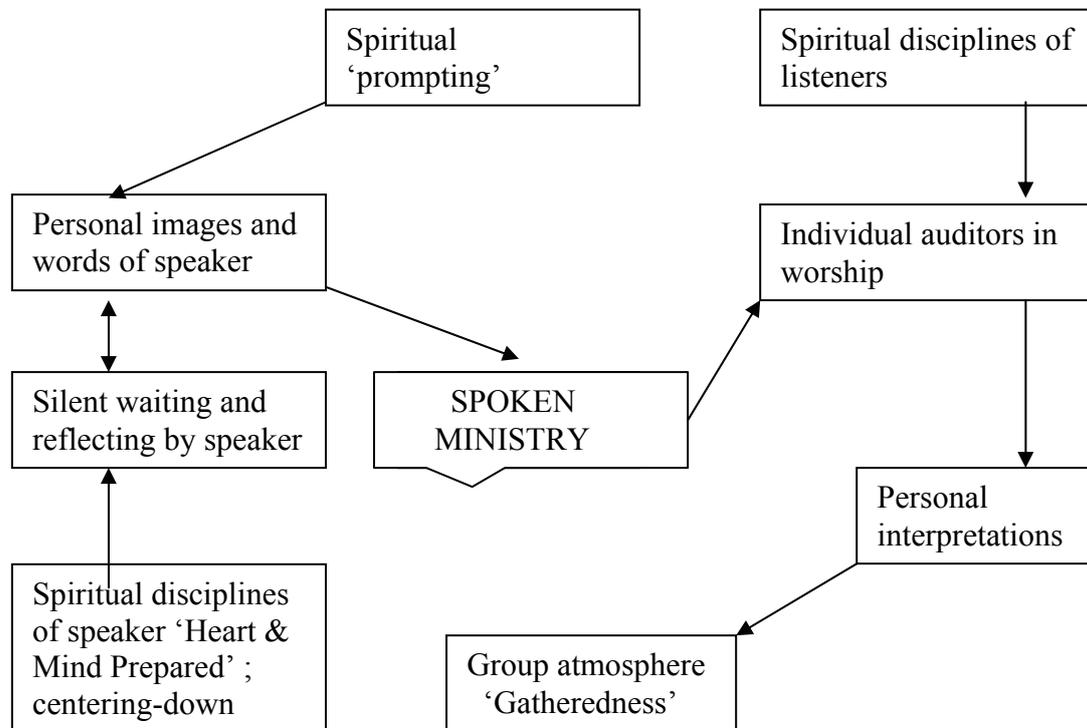
The basic elements and relations for spoken ministry can be represented as follows:

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<sup>262</sup> The concept of a message does appear in QF&P in 2.70 ‘...the cluster of messages, with a fair interval of silence between each of them to let its message sink in; the cluster that goes on down with each message deepening and intensifying and helping to light up a further facet of the communication’. It is clear even in this rare use of the word ‘message’ that reception and elaboration determine its meaning. Ministry is a communicative act not wholly defined by the content of a ‘message’ which has preordained content. Thus as in Leach, 1999 (Hicks,1999:176) Quaker ritual is ‘primarily a medium of communication’ but not by the decoding of symbols or the receipt of preordained messages. I suggest here that spoken ministry is a creative act that enables a social construction of its meaning.

<sup>263</sup> Punshon, 1987:88.

**Fig: 3. Elements of Spoken Ministry.**



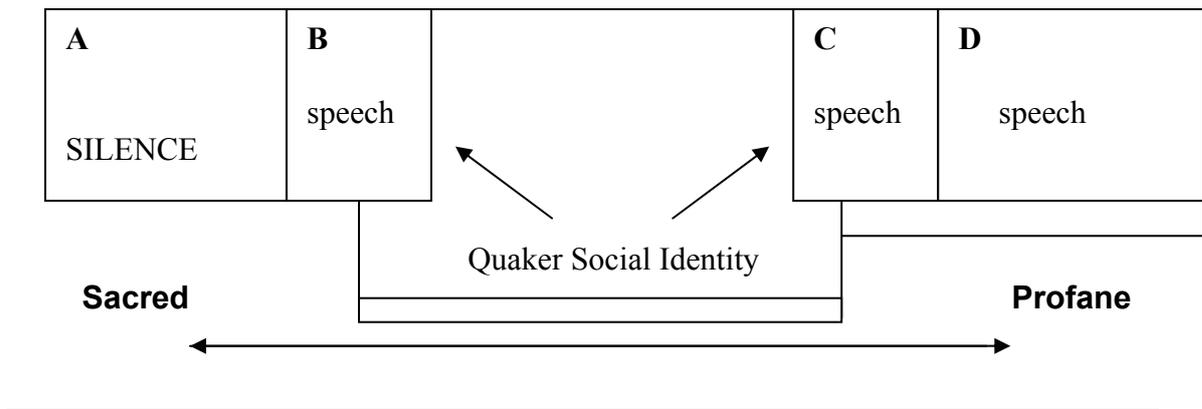
### 3.5.2. The Historic Roots of Ministry.

Contemporary spoken ministry has its roots in the earliest days of Quaker practice. The work of Bauman provides a description of this period. His approach was to explore,

the situated use of language in the conduct of social life....speaking as a cultural system (or as part of cultural systems organised in other ways)  
(Bauman 1983:5).

Bauman's findings show how Quakers positioned themselves between secular discourse and inspired speech. This can be seen in the following figure adapted from Bauman:

**Fig. 4. Bauman's Model of Quaker Speech.**



**A** represents the non-verbal presence of God or Inward Light; transcendence.

**B** represents the manifestation of the Light and the possibility of inspired speech; immanent manifestation.

**C** represents the symbolic public speech acts of ministry, preaching, refusal of oaths and testimony.

**D** represents rational, civil, political, and secular discourse.

Certain transitional states are represented by boundaries:

**A/B** boundary represents the emergence of words from the pre-verbal, pre-categoric silence which constellates in image, affect, words and thought and is experienced as disclosure and creative inspiration.

**B/C** boundary represents discernment of the personal material by the group and the process of corporate endorsement as the disclosure is added to the Quaker corporate identity.

**C/D** represents the point of transgressive symbolic speech which

challenges social mores and establishes the difference between everyday speech, of this world, and inspired speech.

Quaker social identity is established by the practices of **B** and **C** as speech acts generated by **A** and defined against **D**. Silence is the symbolic transitional signal that locates us in this speech economy; it tells us what kind of words are being used, their source and function. Silence is the container of the speech economy and functions at the internal boundaries of transition. The container for, and generator of, this speech economy is the ritual practice of ministry in the Meeting for Worship.

Bauman's theory shows a speech economy where there is a symbolic function of both silence and speaking, as acts themselves. Quaker speaking amplified and drew attention to its content by raising the question of what kind of speech was being spoken, and from where it was claimed to originate. So, fleshly talk — oaths, swearing, greetings, status attributions, and pronouns — were targeted by early Quakers as sites where the form and performance of speech as well as content marked off the sacred from the profane. The symbolic aspect and meaning of these speaking actions is co-dependent with the substantive inspired, given content as 'intended' and conveyed by the speaker.

I propose therefore that both the framework of Bauman and that for contemporary Quaker spoken ministry are consistent with each other.

### 3.5.3. Ethnographic Sketches of Spoken Ministry.

Further to the five examples of spoken ministry in the ethnography in Chapter 3, I now provide further examples from fieldwork.

(1) During a silent meeting Hannah rises slowly to her feet. She pauses and speaks slowly and quietly:

*'Friends, I want to share with you an incident that happened to me recently. Those of us who have been reading the Michael Main book will be aware of the discussion surrounding the question of why bad things happen to good people. Strangely I was in the local butcher's shop this week-a discussion started up about people caught up in the present financial problems through no fault of their own- when the butcher spoke of some family tragedy relating to his children.....the whole shop was very quiet and thoughtful, a rather sombre silence. The next day I was reading a review of Rowan Williams book on the Brothers Kamarazof and in it the encounter between Jesus and the Grand Inquisitor-in this the accusation is put to Jesus, but he says nothing, he keeps silent, then eventually he embraces the Inquisitor. So Rowan Williams was noting that whilst there may not be a solution to the question there is a way of being in relation with it and the accuser, or innocent sufferer.....and that is what is given us to do.'*<sup>264</sup>

Here we see the address to 'Friends' as a sign of sharing an intimate experience. The narrative unfolds describing an everyday situation and its characters who are to exemplify the dilemma 'why bad things happen to good people' which is also linked to the current concerns of the Meeting. Hannah tells us that the butcher spoke but not what he said, instead she tells us that the 'whole shop was quiet and thoughtful' in a 'sombre silence'. She then moves to

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<sup>264</sup> Headnotes (Meetings) Hannah.

describe two texts and again stresses the actions that result from facing responsibility for the dilemma; keeping silent and embracing the accuser. Hannah ends with two conclusions, that there is 'a way of being' in relation to the suffering of the innocent and that this way of being is 'given to us to do'. The latter phrase is in common use amongst Quakers <sup>265</sup> and means both the burden and the 'gift' of the capacity to cope.

Hannah is speaking but her tone and her disposition moves towards silence, towards mutual silence, to expressive action, the embrace, and to long term ways of being 'in relation with it', to an inspired and enabled long-suffering. Whilst she refers to texts, and indeed to the intertextuality of the dilemma, it is a picture of embodied enactment centred on silence that we are given.

(2) On another occasion at a Meeting for Worship:

*Robert a tall man in his sixties, gets to his feet slowly, even reluctantly. Falteringly he begins to speak about war, aggression and international terrorism. He speaks of the culture of fear that is created. He pauses, clearly moved by his thoughts and feelings, The engagement of the Meeting is palpable in both his spoken words and in his struggle. He continues saying that 'we need a new vocabulary to be able to talk about fear and oppression which can bring out the underlying fear which creates defensive aggression'. He pauses again as if actually trying to find the very new words. What comes to him is fragments. He speaks one or two words, 'fear', 'destruction', a 'cycle of claims', 'lives ruined', and the connections between them are not spoken. After a pause in which there is a feeling that these words are still in mind, providing points which might be connected by prayerful associations, he quotes some lines from the book of James; "But each of you must be*

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<sup>265</sup> Although it does not appear in either QF&P or A&Qs.

*quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to be angry. For a man's anger cannot promote the justice of God." After a pause it seems that what has moved the ministry may be anger, and we feel it too. We too can be caught up in the cycle of condemnation even in our desire to find understanding. The man sits down. The Meeting is suffused with a sense of the personal struggle which has been interwoven with the violence of the world and the injustice of war. The justice of God has been referred to as the transformative aspect of the divine which is beyond our horror, anger, and sorrow about the inhumanity of violence and war.<sup>266</sup>*

Here new words are sought to articulate new possibilities that would break the cycle of fear. These new words would express horror without falling into anger. The speaker's anger cannot find words partly because speaking hastily and expressing anger will not promote God's justice. The biblical injunction to be quick to listen and slow to speak is Quakerly; yet the worshipper is impelled to speak of the problem and ask how to speak about the problem.

These ministries address fundamental human dilemmas, the suffering of innocents, and the brutalising effect of violence and war. They both pose the question of speaking about and articulating these human dilemmas. In the face of the first challenge the speaker suggests that pain can be faced by an orientation, a relation and a posture that is beyond words. Even the accuser has to be embraced because we cannot justify innocent suffering. This taking in the pain, taking on the guilt is what the posture and engagement of silence vicariously achieves. Hannah the speaker herself has done this; she recounts the fact of others doing it. It is 'in the life' as a narrative.

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<sup>266</sup> Headnotes (Meetings) Robert

Each ministry gathers its power and authenticity as spoken ministry by presenting 'in the life' painful challenges, taking them into the body, and acting in listening and silence without falling into helplessness. They proffer no solutions or explanations but a physical, emotional and spiritual posture of engagement 'that is what is given us to do'. This activity entails silent listening and embracing the other. They both work at the level, almost visceral, of the actual loss, the actual pain, the actual anger and fear, because the speakers have the capacity and the experience of coping with these emotions and are able to convey it. The experience of the dilemma is re-enacted, embodied in the delivery of the ministry

As discursive practices they interweave a series of discourses, silence, the body, listening, the other. Significantly they do not envisage any divine presence as interventionist, and do not promote a notion of petitionary prayer in the hope of a solution. The masked intersubjective aspect of these ministries was also important. Most of those participating in the worship also knew details of the personal biographies of those who spoke; 'in all human societies, recounting one's experience in the presence of other is a way of reimagining one's situation and regaining mastery over it' (Jackson, 1998:23). The loss of the first speaker, and the anger felt by the second at injustice were known to those present and so they were also perceived as courageous in their ministry.

These ministries however point in somewhat different directions, towards silent action and towards words. This is a tension within Quakerism. Bearing in mind the combined historic and contemporary frameworks I have represented it is

possible to see how this movement between speech, words and silence takes place in a non-linear way. Quakers see and experience the relation between speech and silence as a constant movement. The movement is a hermeneutic circle and can be described discursively by looking at the phrases and aphorisms<sup>267</sup> that Quakers use to describe their practices and to give emphasis to speech and silence and to place them in dynamic relation.

So we may imagine a circle that begins with the posture of silent worship; 'turn thy mind to the light and wait upon God';<sup>268</sup> for 'true silence is to the spirit what sleep is to the body...'<sup>269</sup> which stresses silent waiting. Yet we may not dwell here. This is not sufficient because the question is 'what canst [sic] thou say?'<sup>270</sup> For 'the intent of all speaking is to bring it into the life'<sup>271</sup> which stresses the necessity of speech and witness. Yet even as you have formed the words a cautionary aphorism may be used, 'what thou speakest, is it inwardly from God?'<sup>272</sup> This invites pause and reflection on the true source of words. Even as confidence in the words increases Quakers are enjoined to 'think it possible that you may be mistaken'.<sup>273</sup> This gives further pause to consider the inadequacy of the words chosen. In the end, or is it the beginning, whatever is said only points to the 'place that words come from' and this is characterised as 'the end of words is to bring men to the knowledge of things beyond what words can utter'.<sup>274</sup> The speaker returns to silent waiting where the circle can begin again.

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<sup>267</sup> I discuss a genealogy of Quaker aphorisms and their function in Chapter 4.4.7.

<sup>268</sup> QF&P: 2.41.

<sup>269</sup> QF&P: 20.11.

<sup>270</sup> QF&P: 19.07. punctuated as in original.

<sup>271</sup> QF&P: 2.73.

<sup>272</sup> QF&P: 19.07.

<sup>273</sup> QF&P: 17.

<sup>274</sup> QF&P: 27.27.

The very inadequacy of words has allowed a non-verbal space to be opened up which like Mary's picture, described below, has a sense of possible presence.<sup>275</sup>

Quakers give different weight to different points on the hermeneutic circle in their personal models as a general orientation and at different times. Sandra tends in her spoken ministry towards silent practice and Robert struggles with the need for new words. Quakers also use these fragments of text, aphorisms to make their relations and the tradition dynamic. So all speech as affirmation or assertion can be met by phrases which point to the limits of words and to the source practice which generates and confirms true ones and which provides a confidence that cannot be put into words at all. Yet Quakers continue to speak.

#### **3.5.4. Ministry as Speech Acts.**

Ministry can be viewed as speech acts of various types (Searle, 1969). Speech acts are significant in that they embody, perform and bring about that of which they speak, as in 'Let us pray...' and 'we give thanks...' 'I promise...' They also 'create institutional reality by way of the performative utterance...we cannot create a state of affairs by thinking it, we can create a state of affairs by representing it as having been created' (Searle, 1969:151). Ministry as speech acts can be seen in the Chapter 3, ethnography of worship.

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<sup>275</sup> This stock of aphorisms is sometimes used to prevent discussion or criticism because if the speaker begins in the series, breaks into the circle, with an affirmation in words they can be prompted towards the cautionary features of the other aphorisms and it can be implied thereby that their statement has not come from the full authentic process of how true speech is produced.

The first verbal ministry during the Meeting for Worship (Chapter 3, above) was a 'directive' speech act, instructing the members to act in a certain way; 'we are required to read....we all share responsibility for the Meeting whether our ministry is in silence or the spoken word'; the second was an 'assertive' speech act expressing what the nature of creation and the world is believed to be like; 'when all things began, the word already was...' although it could be argued that the speaker here was quoting rather than asserting his own belief in a speech act, since the concept of the speech act is that it brings about by both the exhibition and embodiment of the matter being asserted. The third ministry was a 'commissive'; a vow on the part of the speaker to be and act in the way described; 'in the self disclosure of the world we become more of a passive recipient of knowledge...' The fifth ministry was 'expressive'; the speaker acting out in speech using another persons words, reciting her stance in relation to knowledge as 'answers'; 'I want to beg you as much as I can to be patient.'

Speech acts are essential to the rhetoric power of effective ministry. Ministry is a creative act of bringing to the group a way of giving an account of being in the world. The criteria that ministry be 'in the life' is close to the definition of a speech act, that the utterance should have illocutionary force, and 'intentional state which is expressed in the performance of the speech act' that is it should have sincerity.

During fieldwork I noticed a particular type of Quaker ministry which speaks of the unsayability of the matter spoken about. This is often linked to both a state

of not knowing and the creation of a sense of absence. Here I provide some examples:

*(1) A ninety year old member Mary rises with difficulty to give ministry. She speaks of her memory of being taken to the National Gallery by her parents and seeing a painting. She has revisited the painting many times since. She describes it as a scene of an empty room. The room has warm qualities of habitation and occupation, as if the subject of the painting has slipped out for a moment. She describes her sense of the presence of the person in the intimate place. The sense that one is looking into a private place. She speaks of being drawn into the painting. She felt on the point of the threshold. Yet one which entailed looking at an image imagining that the subject would return.<sup>276</sup>*

*(2) After some silence a young woman Sian, stands and describes Quaker worship and silence in terms of her art class. Here she told us that she was attempting to draw a cheese plant leaf. Her tutor looked at her work and suggested to her that she concentrate on the holes in the leaf, and attempt to capture a sense of the space, not-the-leaf. This she found liberating and reframed her perspective on the image she was trying to create. She spoke of the 'space between' as defining the object.<sup>277</sup>*

*(3) Two more people stood up and ministered; one a painter and one a writer. Both spoke about the act of creation and the necessity of allowing form and character to take shape in an emergent process, like the sculptor 'taking away' the stone; like music as a chosen 'limitation' of constant sound.<sup>278</sup>*

Mary begins by trying to put into words a sense of expectation of presence through absence. The possible presence has a hospitable and homely context for its portrayal and is experienced as a waiting and a possible return. The image functions as a symbol of presence, of affirmation, yet what is affirmed is

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<sup>276</sup> Headnotes: (Meetings) Mary.

<sup>277</sup> Headnotes: (Meetings) Sian.

<sup>278</sup> Fieldnotes (Meeting).

not part of the image. Every time Mary revisited the painting the person remained absent from the scene. The impossibility of the presence ever appearing is not decisive, Mary continues to visit the painting. The imaginary presence remains hoped for even in its permanent absence. This is a telling image of Quaker waiting.<sup>279</sup>

This speech act is one of 'performative apophasis'. Here a member of the group speaks of the unsayability of what they want to describe or affirm. They dramatize dependence on the spirit, and faith and hope for guidance, by speaking of the impossibility of putting certain matters and experiences into words. The ministry concerning the suffering of innocents above also has some of these qualities. This kind of speech act derives from the 'apophatic' tradition from the Greek 'turning away from speech' This 'performative apophasis' is key to the process of using words at all in the mystical tradition (Sells, 1994, Turner, 1995). Quakers speak from time to time in this way. They speak in faith in the mode of unknowing, where to speak is an affirmation even if it is to express only receptivity to the spirit within a sense of its absence. To enter into this 'knowledge of unknowing' is to use language which deconstructs itself even in the process of making affirmations, for example; 'the spirit is in nature but this remains an inadequate description of God'. The relationship of silence to speech, and the reference to the source of words can be made the focus by apophatic speech acts. This relationship appears in Quaker texts:

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<sup>279</sup> Dandelion, 2008:110.

It is communion. An opening of the door, and entry from beyond. This is the point at which secular language fails, for this cannot be spoken about at all: it can only be known.<sup>280</sup>

This fits into the hermeneutic circle I described above as Quaker knowing, or claims to knowledge in experiential mode, co-exist with negation in a discursive mode.

The apophatic nature of the speech is not a denial of the possibility or articulation, or speaking into or of some void. It is an unsaying as an act of humility. It rests upon the continual inadequacy of all attempts to speak of the divine but it refuses the offer of continual silence. Much Quaker discourse is in a language of unsaying; all words, affirmations fold back into the practice of silence.

### **3.5.5. Quaker Speech and Silence Acted Out.**

Quaker speech is linked to and expresses the elements of the tradition.

#### ***Silence.***

Quaker speech is inextricably linked to keeping silent. Silence contains all possibilities, and is both a ritual symbolic gesture, and a symbol pointing to sources of speech that would contrast with words of the world. So Quaker silence is itself a linguistic phenomena and has several layers of meaning.

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<sup>280</sup> Loukes, 1967 in QF&P: 2.23.

Ministry is speaking in, and to, the silence as well as breaking it. Silence symbolises waiting, possibility and is set against inappropriate talk. Silence may also symbolise absence or emptiness or the unknowable. So speech set against silence may speak of absence and the need to remain silent of what we cannot know. The latter is the speech of negation.

### ***Acting Out.***

Relations with the sacred through speech and silence are also acted out. Early Quakers engaged in such manifestations as nakedness, wearing and not wearing hats, rending garments, and re-enacting biblical scenes. These actions are intended to be grasped as representing the spirit and by contrast equated secular speech with impurity and lack of awareness. Here action functions as parabolic speaking.

This persists to the present day. During fieldwork I was present with Quakers on the steps of St Martin in the Fields Church in Trafalgar Square, London before the large march against the Iraq war. The group of about 100 Quakers fell silent and still. The silence became palpable across the square, passers by noticed it and slowed down; it spread; it was a silence full of sorrow, anger, disobedience, disbelief, well summed up in the slogan on the banners 'Not in my name'. It was a potent symbolic practice, uniquely Quaker.

### ***Communication.***

Bauman sets out the Quaker theory of communication. Instead of human verbal transmission from one person to another, the act of speaking is intended to bring from silence (symbolising presence and absence of the transcendent) material which is pre-categorical; an 'adamic' language. It is communication through the self not of the self. So silence rests upon what God has uttered in creation, and in the unfolding narrative of engagement with the world in the Spirit.

### ***The universal capacity for inspired speech.***

Quakers have always believed that all persons have an indwelling capability to perceive, recognise, respond to and be guided by the Inward Light. This provides the ability to access this pre-verbal, pre-categorical aspect of consciousness; the ability to articulate what arises when the pre-categorical constellates as words with semantic content. Quaker speech therefore is predicated on these understandings of silence that 'words will be given you'. These ideas and practices continue in contemporary Quakerism. Quaker speech and actions can be seen as the attempt to awaken this capacity by making speech strange in ways I have described, by its relationship to silence, the source of knowing, to being spoken through, and by social enactment.

### **3.5.6 Ministry as Parrhesia, Poetry and Mystic speech.**

Foucault refers to a kind of speech called parrhesia (Foucault 2001b):

Parrhesia, defined as true speech, but the true speech in which the speaker risks his life (this is the courage of truth of the final years)...as ethopoetic

truth such as is read in the weft of accomplished actions and physical postures rather than as deciphered in the secrets of conscience or worked out in the chambers of philosophers...it is a matter of 'transforming true discourse into a permanent and active principle' of the 'long process which turns the the taught, learned, repeated and assimilated logos unto the spontaneous form of the acting subject'.

Truth is not displayed in the calm element of discourse, like a distant and correct echo of the real. It is in the most accurate and literal sense of the expression a reason for living, a logos actualised in existence, which sustains intensifies and tests it; which verifies it.' (Foucault 2001a:528,529).

I have shown above that the ministry of Hannah and Robert in their different ways has this sense of courage and authenticity.

Contemporary spoken ministry retains the key features of the early tradition and the speech economy outlined by Bauman, but is less declamatory of 'God's word', a telos, assumed purpose or presence and is more nuanced. Personal narratives are now common and there is less emphasis on specific words being linked to a direct inspiration.<sup>281</sup> Today the speaker is more likely to use a story, a personal narrative, an image or a poem and be more central as the author rather than the conduit of the words from elsewhere. Guidance is referred to less in terms of specific words, as in the 'word of God' and more generally as 'concerns' or 'leadings'. The notion that speech is from elsewhere or that speakers are spoken through is also muted. The Quaker tradition is carried forward in ministry now more often by the courage of speakers in this way; by

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<sup>281</sup> This can be illustrated in the quotation from Punshon, 1987 above where he purposefully refers to the feeling that God might want the speaker to speak as distinct from God giving the words to be spoken.

participants in the ritual who exercise a form of speech as power which makes them courageous subjects speaking fearlessly and keeping alive the possibility of inspiration under pressure of uncertainty and negation.

I have shown in Chapter 3, Section 2, in Angela's ministry using the Rilke poem, and in Mary's use of a visual image in art, that speaking of the non-verbal experiential known as the spoken unknown, as a presence and a becoming, requires a style of communication that awakens the imagination. In both poetic speech and mystic speech words are given or arise. The muse is analogous to the spirit. Both types of speech share characteristics with Quaker spoken ministry, in that words and images arise, are given and bring some quality into existence, an awakening, often by naming.

This linkage between poetic and mystic speech is made by de Certeau.

Poetry is not born it gives birth. An approaching strangeness arrives, with an inevitability it finds and names at the same time; there is nothing outside it to confirm or authorise it. The poet, merely the utterer of this founding act of nomination, bends to its inevitability. He belongs to that for which it is necessary. He makes way for the event, of the advent of which time is robbed.

A stranger it comes  
To us, that quickening word  
The voice that moulds and make us human.

Dante recounts that 'my tongue moved of its own accord' and his verse arose like a musical air; he decided to 'to keep these words in mind and use them as a beginning' for a poem yet to come but which was there in the waiting. St John of the Cross says that sometimes God would give him

words to his poems and sometimes he would look for them, labouring to follow the track of the given words (de Certeau 2006:96).

Ministry is courageous speech because it is embodied in the way Foucault describes. It also has the qualities of poetry and mystic speech described and combined by de Certeau. Contemporary Quaker ministry resonates with these descriptions of courageous speaking subjects allowing words to form as it were an inspired poem, whereby ministry is an artwork of the spirit rather than ministry as the preordained word of God.<sup>282</sup>

### **3.5.7. Summary**

Quaker ministry is immediate, oral and provisional; it is not recorded or written down. Speaking is egalitarian in that anyone present in worship may speak. The role of Ministering Elders was 'laid down' in 1924. Ministry is effective during the ritual and subsequently in the memory of those present. Quakers retain many features of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century speech economy described by Bauman which informs the contemporary framework.

Speech content and the act of speaking in Quakerism is not ordinary speech. Quaker speech is conditioned by an attitude to words and to language as limited carriers of meaning. All speech, text, language and words are subordinated in their epistemic function to silent practices of centering-down, stillness, listening and waiting. These relations produce a hermeneutic circle, from silence to

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<sup>282</sup> See the connection with the Quaker mystic cosmology below in Chapter 5: 5.3.3. Quaker Cosmologies.

speech and back to silence which is the foundational practice and source of inspiration. Ministry considered as speech acts emphasises its performative and creative aspects. A particular type of speech act of unsaying, performative apophysis, can be identified which expresses and embodies the instability and provisionality of inspired speech. It also expresses absence and unknowability.

Quaker ministry in worship has a number of features: to speak is to be impelled, to be prompted; to speak is to be spoken through, to be a medium for guidance to the group as a whole. There is communicative intent by speakers but there is also an exploratory expositional sense in which speakers speak so as to discover and explore the meaning of their speech. This exploration happens in two senses: firstly the way in which speech might be thought to carry divine guidance, what the promptings are and secondly the understandings that emerge in the group from the reception of the ministry. The latter is hard to determine and may manifest itself in thematic resonance in other ministry and in atmosphere.

Quaker speech as ministry has an illocutionary dimension, the communicative intentions of the speaker, as mediator, and a perlocutionary aspect, the meanings that are discerned in the reception and further consequences of the speech. The group as individuals plays a significant part in determining the meaning of what is said, but in silence since no interaction or dialogue takes place in the ritual. Spoken ministry is not primarily propositionally communicative; as the promulgation of a 'message', speaking is a breaking of silence, being prompted, and is folded back into silence. Speech is therefore not

the linear articulation of the silence; speaking is a departure from and a return to silence rather than a summation. Quaker speech includes the use of aphorisms and fragments of text and oral sources which function as a hermeneutic circle, a closed epistemology, providing movement between speech and silence, between ways of knowing and articulation.

Contemporary Quaker speech as ministry can be described as parrhesia, fearless speech, and as poetic mysticism. These qualities and speech acts enable speakers and listeners to imagine the possibilities of inspired speech, breaking free from apophatic negation and the closed hermeneutic circle.

## **Section 6: Gatheredness.**

### **3.6.1. The Experience of Gatheredness.**

Gatheredness is a quality of co-presence, intimacy, solidarity and unity in the spirit experienced by worshippers as a group. The term is used in ministry but mostly used in retrospect, 'I enjoyed the silence I felt we were a settled and gathered Meeting today'.<sup>283</sup>

Gatheredness is an achievement of the Meeting. It has a sense of rightness about it. It is fitting; it is worship with a special atmosphere of mutuality that expresses a sense of presence. Yet it does not always happen. It is relatively rare, and in the opinion of some Quakers getting rarer. It is not a high point or

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<sup>283</sup> Fieldnotes (Meetings).

culmination of the worship as for example in an act of taking communion in a church; it is cumulative and the meeting may be 'settled' and become gathered.

Advices and Queries <sup>284</sup> instructs that by mutual endeavour there will emerge a 'gathered stillness'; the giving up of 'outward concerns' and 'yielding up'; and that these practices will enable members to find 'the evil weakening in you and the good raised up'. Here giving in, or up, with others produces ethically good impulses, and this enables participants to 'feel the power of God's love drawing us together and leading us'.

When Quakers speak of gatheredness they are referring both to the achievement of their practices and to the gift of a mutually held feeling of unity in the spirit. Gatheredness is created by the integration of a number of elements:

The ministry of silence demands the faithful activity of every member in the meeting. As together we enter the depths of a living stillness, the stillness of God, we find each other in 'the things that are eternal', upholding a strengthening one another.<sup>285</sup>

What seems necessary for gatheredness is that the practices of individuals, of each member, create mutual stillness. This is a quality of, and manifests, the spirit. We then 'find' each other here, as it were out of time, and this gives power and strength to the worshippers. This harmonious integration is not always achieved.

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<sup>284</sup> A&Qs: 8,9,10.

<sup>285</sup> QF&P: 2.01.

Many older Friends have commented that the gathered or covered meeting, that is a meeting in which the experience of the presence is shared is rarer today than it was in their youth (Hoare 1995:5).

This may be because worshippers find the separate elements sufficient, just being there, or being still, or that the transcendent element is missing as a shared possibility amongst worshippers.

Worship practices lead towards gatheredness by individuals allowing their concerns to be subsumed within the solidarity of the group and by 'handing them over' to the spirit:

...but this individual experience is not sufficient, and in a meeting held in the Spirit there is a giving and receiving between its members, one helping another with or without words. So there may come a wider vision and a deeper experience.<sup>286</sup>

Often I look around the Meeting and hold each person there in the Light for a short while. I may also observe the room, its history, the light and sounds beyond the window, and bring the wider world into the listening. This can help to ground me in the here and now, as a tiny moment in a beloved Eternity. If a particular concern or person comes to mind, I tend to hold them in the Light for a few moments, focussing worshipful attention on them. Then I let go, handing over to God. Though words aren't involved, this seems to be a form of prayer.<sup>287</sup>

This is a key transitional moment, a movement from being in relationships to 'handing them over' and this relation of the one and the many does not involve words.

Rose described gatheredness as:

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<sup>286</sup> Kelly, 1925 & 1994 in QF&P: 2.11.

<sup>287</sup> Fieldnotes: Text *Kindlers* Penny.

*This is what, for me, the 'gathered' Meeting is: when everyone's thoughts and focus seem to be settled, concentrated and even perhaps pointing in the same direction. We may all be contemplating different things, but we seem to have a common direction in the 'heavy' silence.*<sup>288</sup>

For Rose gatheredness is created as an emergent quality from practices in the shared silence. For Rose a transcendent presence is not critical to gatheredness in contrast to the canonical description of the ethical and transcendental aspects.

This transcendental presence has been described as a 'blanket' or a 'covering'

In the Quaker practice of group worship on the basis of silence comes special times when an electric hush and solemnity and depth of power steals over the worshippers. A blanket of Divine covering comes over the room, a stillness that can be felt is over all, and the worshippers are gathered into a unity and synthesis of life which is amazing indeed.....we stand together on holy ground. What is the ground and foundation of the gathered meeting? It is I am convinced the Real Presence of God.<sup>289</sup>

In the united stillness of a truly 'gathered' meeting there is a power known only by experience, and mysterious even when most familiar.<sup>290</sup>

So gatheredness is not entirely created by the group, although the corporate practices of those present are necessary for its emergence. It is a special 'time' and 'place' of unity that relies both on the cumulative effect of worship practices and some arrival of a divine covering. The 'synthesis of life' is created by this transcendent presence being synonymous with the indwelling spirit, light.

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<sup>288</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Rose.

<sup>289</sup> Kelly, 1940 in QF&P: 2.40.

<sup>290</sup> Steven, 1908 in QF&P: 2.39.

It is not just a matter of finding a welcoming group of socially compatible people who will provide an oasis of quiet in which we can do our own thing, it entails acknowledgement that since it is the one Light that is in each of us, God is transcendent as well as immanent (Hoare 1995:7).

I have shown above in Section 5, that the trajectory of all personal material is potentially towards articulation for the group. Prompts to individuals are given to the group as a whole:

Friends have never regarded worship as an individual activity. People who regard Friends Meetings as opportunities for meditation have failed to understand the corporate aspect. The waiting and listening activities in which everybody is engaged also produce spoken ministry which helps to articulate the common guidance which the Holy Spirit is believed to give the group as a whole.<sup>291</sup>

Each one of us must come expecting not only to receive but to be used.<sup>292</sup>

Here we can see therefore that gatheredness, the 'synthesis of life', integrates a number of activities: putting aside the ego, being co-present with others, reciprocity of personal stillness and group silence, thinking of others, not being on your own, not engaging in individualistic meditation, and being a potential conduit for the guidance that may come to the group. This intimacy and solidarity leads to, and is joined by, the indwelling light. The indwelling light both animates these practices and seems a spiritual presence; a quality of the group, the space, the event and of time. This 'covering' unifies and

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<sup>291</sup> Punshon, 1987 in QF&P: 2.37.

<sup>292</sup> Berks & Oxen QM, 1947 in QF&P: 2.45.

strengthens and is more a discovery rather than an arrival, that is, it is not felt to be discontinuous or separate from the inner light of worshippers. It is this sense that creates the effect, to be at one with the spiritual quality of the space, with others and with the centre of oneself. This is what I refer to as harmonic integration.

Quakers describe the spiritual presence in various ways:

*If I had to expand on silence and 'that of God' I would say that they are the realization of a unifying force of silent worship and putting aside the ego to let God speak to us is the greatest Quaker discovery and that all things flow from that.*<sup>293</sup>

The Power is as intimate to us as breath and blood: it is as intrinsically within us as we in all things, are within its embrace. The dynamic of the worshipping group makes that real, for in the Meeting's processes of centering-down there is drawn out of us a giving to the others as they are giving to us. As a community we are spiritually entangled beyond the place where any individualistic meditation might reach.<sup>294</sup>

God not only reveals himself in each individual but is in the midst of the group as well. Each one partakes from not only the good in himself but shares that with the whole body. Being a living member of this body he has joint fellowship and communion with all...<sup>295</sup>

*Quakerism is a faith. We fashion it for ourselves with the help of our collective wisdom...to find a connection with all where we are conscious of being in God and God being in you, to be given grace, and we are not on our own.....*<sup>296</sup>

I have noted how the term gatheredness is used by Quakers and detailed the elements that are necessary and sufficient for it to be achieved. It is not always

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<sup>293</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text *Kindlers*.

<sup>294</sup> Brown & Davison, 2009.

<sup>295</sup> Freiday, 1967 *Barclay's Apology in Modern English* in Lampen, 2008:26.

<sup>296</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text *Kindlers*.

achieved and there may be various reasons for this. It may be that the elements required for its manifestation are seldom aligned in a fully integrated way. It may be that individuals give different interpretations of these elements, for example they may prefer to reside in personal meditation or not have a transcendental image of the Light. It may be that not all the elements need to be present and active for gatheredness to be achieved. It may be that a sense of group intimacy without any operative notion of the transcendent is sufficient for the description to be used. It may be that gatheredness is a perception arising in individuals which although shared as a description may have a variety of ingredients and meanings in a particular event. At some Meetings some feel it and others do not. Gatheredness is an attribution made by an individual onto the group. As others share this articulated sense it becomes potent as an interpretation of the atmosphere.

### **3.6.2. The Creation of Gatheredness.**

I have shown that gatheredness is an achievement of the worshipping group by the integration of elements. This is not easily achieved. The desire for unity, at-one-ness with the group and the spirit, is strong since it surmounts differences and disagreement. However apart from its complexity there are differences amongst Quakers as to how intimacy, mutuality and gatheredness are achieved.

Put simply the real cleavage among Friends is between those who experience the gathered or the covered meeting and those who do not. The former can differ markedly in the language they use to verbalise the event. For one, the group is gathered in Christ; for the

other the force at the root of the universe; or in the depth of every human being is expressed in the covered assemblage. In either case the words and concepts are secondary; the event, the experience is what counts (Hoare 1995:4).

This suggests that gatheredness of this kind is the highest achievement. It also suggests that in order to work on and experience gatheredness certain perspectives are necessary. Words must be regarded as secondary, that is that differences of language are not a defining feature, and accounts must be regarded not as conflicting beliefs but simply different ways of verbalising an experienced event. Unity is achieved by giving up both words and differences. Epistemic priority is given to the experience of the event. Here the covering primacy of spirit is linked to the experience, to the non-verbal and to the event from the outset. Gatheredness is here more than the sum of its parts.

Gatheredness as unity has however to manage or subsume differences:

A gathered meeting has the strength to absorb the differences and support the needs of those who attend it.<sup>297</sup>

This is assisted by mundane aspects such as community, trust and shared experience:

it is easier when the meeting is a community of people who know and trust each other, who are not afraid to share their experience of worship and to learn from one another.<sup>298</sup>

A Quaker meeting may be a group of people who come together once a week to sit in silence during which several of them 'do their own thing'. Such a meeting will rarely be gathered, it will not come alive as a community until they have built up trust and are enabled to be open with one another. Trust is the cement of the community and is laid down through the members praying,

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<sup>297</sup> QF&P: 2.38.

<sup>298</sup> QF&P: 2.38.

working, eating and laughing together. Friends may then come to discover with whom it is safe to let down their barriers and to explore the deeper things (Hoare 1995:7).

This solidarity, as I have shown in Penny's description of her practice, is enabled by practices like 'holding others in the Light' and also by 'handing over' that is, giving up a grasp on those thoughts and feeling. I have also shown that trust and solidarity are created in the meeting for worship by co-presence and proximity of others in silence. Here the interdependence required for worshipping is expressed in both a nearness to and distance between people. This makes a certain space for the spirit.<sup>299</sup> The inability to speak directly to others accentuates this aspect. This co-presence is anchored in the perceptual and communicative modalities of the body:

The "full conditions of co-presence" are found whenever agents "sense that they are close enough to be perceived in what they are doing, including their experience of others and close enough to be perceived in this sensing of being perceived" (Giddens 1984:36,67).

The limitations on face-to-face encounters both visually and verbally create specific conditions in co-presence for interaction. Gatheredness is perceived by worshippers under particular conditions. Quaker worship may be thought to be an anti-group (Nitson, 1998) in that verbal interaction between participants is proscribed. Speaking may only be undertaken on one occasion and this creates a pattern of serial monologue (Neri, 1994) between participants. Contact, communication and relatedness between participants is therefore structured by these patterns. These conditions restrict certain activities of exchange and

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<sup>299</sup> Murgatroyd, 2010.

interaction and create the elements in which unity is sought and perceived. This makes space for the spirit but restricts exchanges that ‘experimenters with light’ participants <sup>300</sup> consider important to the creation of a gathered meeting.

So while gatheredness is linked to an acceptance that there is a transcendent aspect that ‘covers’ the group, it is also shaped by the ritual rules governing silence and speech and the availability of personal material.

Some Quakers regard other elements as significant contributors. Roger, for example, considers that a shared task or focus is a good basis for mutuality:

*In recent years the best meetings have been with people I am doing something with. Sometimes I would turn up at an Elders meeting and not have thought about the questions, rather tired, and we would work through the evening business and then we would have a Meeting for Worship as we had at the beginning, but the difference was extraordinary. In the first one we were getting rid of the world, at the latter end there was a large thin glass bowl, a precious object which we were all holding together; this extraordinary feeling that says “do not let it stop”. No thoughts, just this. I do not know what that thought, feeling is, but it is one that moves me and is powerful. Sometimes you feel a quality of stillness together, why that is valuable I do not know..... the silence was somehow what we were holding together.<sup>301</sup>*

So having a focus or a task can also create the conditions for the experience of gatheredness. The task might be gatheredness itself.

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<sup>300</sup> Ambler, 2001a. *Light to Live By. An Exploration of Quaker Spirituality* and Lampen (Ed), 2008. *Seeing, Hearing, Knowing. Reflections on Experiment with Light*. Participants often refer to themselves as ‘experimenters with light’. See Chapter 4.5.1.

<sup>301</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Roger.

The tension between these perspectives is between an approach that considers that gatheredness is made by, and emergent from the group as community, and the perspective that places all those endeavours already within the primacy of the spirit. Part of harmonic integration is to balance this tension and to combine the elements of practice I have described.

Therefore gatheredness can be seen as both an achievement and as a gift, as both something made by worshippers and a discovered quality of the spirit. These strands run through a series of intertwined elements each with their own emphasis in Quaker accounts. The first emphasises preparatory practices — centering-down, holding others in the light, and mutual endeavour. The second emphasises co-presence, trust, community, talking, sharing and vulnerability to the other. The third notes that differences are contained by the sense of unity. The fourth emphasises the ethical dimension where the ‘good will be raised up’ in worshippers. The fifth regards gatheredness as the non-verbal way the worshippers experience the divine. Balancing these elements and combining them such that gatheredness happens can be compared to a collective making of an artwork; a collage of these elements.

Since there is no single model of gatheredness, the aspiration to be gathered, to be one with oneself, the group and the transcendent, functions as a key operative myth within the tradition. From time to time gatheredness is exemplified yet the myth is always present in meetings as that quality which creates unity in the spirit.

What also emerges from this analysis is that the interactive aspects that seem to be important precursors of gatheredness such as trust, community, extensive sharing of personal experience are implicit, masked, or set aside in the Meeting for Worship. Their importance is shown by the Experiment with the Light. Jackson notes that these features are 'ambiguous' that is, they may not only be masked but also persist as unresolved understandings of oneself, others, the group as a whole and the work of the spirit (Jackson, 1998;8ff). Intersubjectivity is operative as it were below the surface and explicit in activities surrounding the Meeting for Worship relating to community, trust, and verbally shared experience.

### **3.6.3. Gatheredness; the transcendent, the community, the group and the Individual.**

Gatheredness is the sense of group unity and transcendent presence in the Meeting for Worship. Gatheredness has four basic dimensions: the sense of solidarity and intimacy of co-presence; precursory practices such as centering-down; implicit personal material and masked aspects of intersubjectivity below the surface; and the 'covering' by the presence of the spirit. It is a cumulative perceived feature of worship and not a high point in the event. Gatheredness is relatively rare and reported as becoming rarer. It is not assured by necessary disciplines and practices but felt as a spiritual gift for the whole group. Some Quaker accounts stress the importance of co-presence, others the practices of stillness and silence in creating the conditions for

gatheredness, others emphasise the transcendent quality of being 'covered' and contained, and the tradition's texts note an ethical dimension in what arises for worshippers. All are implicated in the term 'gatheredness'. The balancing and combining of these elements is part of the process of worship and is the mutual creation of a ritual artwork, requiring a modelling process I call harmonic integration. There is not an ideal type of gatheredness but there is a myth of gatheredness which is important and operative in all worship. There is a reflexive discourse amongst Quakers on the emphasis given to different components. The *Experiment with Light* links gatheredness with verbal sharing of personal experience. This practice makes explicit what is implicit in worship. These intersubjective aspects remain present, operative yet masked and occluded in and by worship practice. The contrast between the perspective of experimenters in the light and current practice reflects different emphasis on the creation and nature of gatheredness. Historically it has been thought a gift, a covering, a gain and more than the sum of parts; for experimenters it is emergent through articulated experience and intersubjective sharing. Both perspectives note the need for trust, community, and relationships between members. Historically these features have been considered precursors of a process towards gatheredness but set aside in worshipful relatedness in the spirit:

The beginning of this community bonding spills from our worship-from ministry, afterwords, the shaking of hands, from news and notices, refreshments and socializing...the integration of children and young people , the sharing of committee responsibilities ....a community, one founded in Spirit.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Brown & Davison, 2009:12.

Exploring the quality of gatheredness in this way therefore opens up a number of issues. The two strands described above reflect the image of Quaker practices as a moving ontological stance, oscillating between the Light and light, the transcendent and the immanent and their attendant epistemologies:

We dance round in a ring and suppose  
But the Secret sits in the middle and knows

(Robert Frost 'The Secret Sits') (Culler 1997:100).

For Quakers like Punshon the secret is not only an object to be known but a knowing object, what knows rather than what is known or not known. The light is capitalised, the object becomes a subject. The 'how' of any knowledge resides in the disclosure and manifestation by this subject. For experimenters the emphasis is more epistemic. The knowing human subject embodies what may be known, the sharing of which moves towards a possible holism. Quakers exemplify the constant relations and tensions between ontology and epistemology as noted by Toren & Cabral:

(the) epistemological and ontological are in each case best understood not as separable and dialectically related analytic entities but of aspects of one another, like two sides of the continuous surface that is a Moebius strip (Toren & Cabral 2009:11).

In the gatheredness of unity there exists diversity, not only of individual experiences but of the perspectives that frame those experiences. Collins notes 'It is clear, however that although participants look as if they are doing the same thing, they are not' (Collins 2002:85).

Quaker worship seems to be a 'way' that can include considerable diversity and difference yet create communality and unity of purpose. This contemporary Quaker form of life, this paradoxical unity through difference is thought to be nurtured by the Meeting for Worship.

*People find it very difficult to describe why they come to Meeting and what it is that they do. People are very shy about saying what they do in Meeting just in case it comes to light that they are doing something like thinking of the week that they have had....what is it about silence, since that is the way we meet, why do we meet in silence and what do we think is happening? I think the introductory pamphlet on Quaker Meetings has got the classic phrase 'We agree to be still together expecting the presence of God'....what does it mean 'agree to be still'? <sup>303</sup>*

#### **3.6.4. Summary**

In this chapter I set out a phenomenological, ethnographic, description of a Meeting for Worship. This attempted to evoke the sense of engagement and participation in the event. From this description I selected four key domains of Quaker practice – the body; silence and stillness; speech and Ministry; and corporate gatheredness – and drew on further ethnographic material to present a discussion of them. This analysis shows features of individual practice and interpretation. It shows a pluralism in both practices, the interpretation of the tradition,

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<sup>303</sup> Fieldnotes Tape Text: Caroline

and in meanings ascribed to the practices, amounting to a significant spectrum of meanings amongst Quakers for the concept of worship. The individual combining of these elements in a recognisable and normatively acceptable way for corporate worship I call 'harmonic integration'. The achievement of some corporate sense of gatheredness amidst this diversity I call an 'artwork of the spirit'. This can be expressed in Taylor's terms as creating the conditions for the possibility of religious experience and belief (Taylor, 2007). This analysis supports the explanations presented as the revised theory of secularisation. Individualism and pluralism in the cross-pressures of the transcendent-immanent dialectic (Taylor, 2007, Martin, 2005) are dramatised here. They give rise to diversity of practices, meanings and focal object(s) of worship. These are contained, even masked, by the invariant form of the ritual worship and create, when they are made explicit, a challenge for contemporary Quakers to create unity by managing and containing diversity. The analysis supports also the subjectivisation thesis of Heelas and Woodhead (2005) and the shift of focus it creates. However the material presented here does not show an overlap between Quaker practices and those of the holistic milieu. In each of the domains, the practices and their attendant interpretations of what worship is, shows the pervasiveness of the tension theorised by Taylor (2007) as a dialectic between transcendence and immanence. For some worshippers the creativity of the combining of practices and symbols, creates the possibility for the emergence of a sense of presence. They are under the pressure (of the immanent frame) to infer the light from a

natural state, presence is emergent and assisted by the group and its mutuality. Here epistemology precedes ontology. For others the ontological status of the Light is established a given before any practices. It is a presence into which worshippers come and may cover the Meeting from above. Here ontology precedes epistemology. To this picture we must add the spectrum of cosmologies held by contemporary Quakers and this may contribute to the explanation suggested here. I now proceed to examine these worship practices when they are put to work in social enactment, in discernment and decision-making in order to assess whether in that context this explanatory pattern that is emerging is also present.

## CHAPTER 4.

# INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES PROCESSES AND ENACTMENTS.

### **Introduction.**

Chapter 3, described how the ritual of worship performs certain tasks and constructs Quaker practice, a container that manages and masks diversity around an 'empty centre' (Dandelion, 1996:287) symbolised both by the circle and by silence. It is a set-apart (Pilgrim, 2008:61) place and space which enables the sacralisation of its elements by the participants. It is both in time and out of time. It allows traditional readings and disciplines to be followed, seeking a new light to take place, and requires the participants to constitute and uphold the event. It may be thought of as an inter-faith event that keeps open different understandings of the transcendent function – entailing many names for and interpretations of the Light – and in doing so dramatises the dialectics of transcendence-immanence (Taylor, 2007) and faith-nature (Martin, 2005). The cross-pressures of individualism and pluralism in the spiritual landscape show up in the diversity of practices. The combining of these elements of practice into a coherent whole, a recognisable Quaker shape, is the process of harmonic integration and the corporate effect of these is an artwork of the spirit. The ritual establishes a key practice of centering-down, which relates inner stillness to outer silence and then elides them. It is this relationship that reframes perspectives of the Quaker self and the world. It is the basis of ritual extension, that is to say, it can be carried beyond the ritual in two ways: first, by maintaining, at other times, the inner stillness in relation to the silence in the ritual of the transcendent function, second, by

perceiving all relationships within this relatedness – ‘answering that of God in everyone’. These are the signal achievements in the construction a Quaker ‘way’ – creating unity in diversity and providing reframing perspectives. The ritual creates conditions for the possibility of further enactments. I now turn to explore the way that Quaker practices are constructed by Quakers through institutional structures, processes and enactments, how it tells its story – constructs its narrative – and how it tries to renew itself. I explore how tensions and responses to cross-pressures emerge in these domains.

This chapter has five sections: Section 1 begins with an overview of sources of power; Section 2 presents an ethnography of Meetings for Worship for Business (Business Meetings); Section 3 shows how the enactments of testimonies are formed; Section 4 shows how the narrative maintains the Quaker tradition; and Section 5 describes the impact of renewal initiatives.

### **Section 1: Aspects of Power in Quaker Practice.**

This section focuses on aspects of power in Quaker practice and organisation: spiritual power, structural power, the power of processes (Gospel Order), and power relations between individuals and the group.

I consider the concept of power to describe a set of relationships in which structures, processes, agency, constraints, resources and unintended systemic consequences are implicated (Foucault, 1980:198). Power is not reified in structures. I adopt the approach to the concept of power outlined by Giddens, that it is ‘not necessarily linked with conflict’, and that ‘force is not the

paradigmatic form of power' but 'power is the capacity to achieve outcomes and is not an obstacle to freedom' (Giddens, 1984: 257).

#### **4.1.1. Power of the Spirit, the Light**

Quakers traditionally believe the spirit, the Light, reveals the truth, provides 'leadings' and through group discernment of its authenticity, gives guidance for action. Therefore, all structures and processes are subject to this foundational precept:

It is our experience that 'the power and reliability of God's truth....grounded in the sovereignty of God's word and spirit....works through, but if necessary also counter to, the given institutional structure of the church.'<sup>304</sup>

This spiritual power permeates all other forms of power, structures, processes and any agency deployed by those committed to Quaker practice:

The church is also community under the direction of the Holy Spirit which guides, leads, directs, inspires and empowers individuals and the gathered meeting.<sup>305</sup>

All others forms and manifestations of power are derived from the spirit. Spiritual empowerment emerges from an engagement with a transcendent function. This transcendent is, however, 'Other', has many names and is beyond words. It is possible to be guided to knowledge through this engagement and this is achieved through practices of dependency, emptying, inspiration, discernment and paradoxically, powerlessness. The

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<sup>304</sup> N&M, 2009.

<sup>305</sup> N&M, 2009.

transcendent power is thought to have an indwelling manifestation, expressed as 'that of God in everyone'. This Light cannot be guaranteed or conjured up; it has the sense of a gift. It is not, therefore, stable, but is enduring. It empowers and dis-empowers:

*Well I think I see God as a life force, a creative life force who is present in us all, in everything. I think force is an OK word you could use power, but it is present. I see it as essentially creative but it has a destructive aspect, creation does require discarding and renewal. It's a creative force.* <sup>306</sup>

The Spirit is totalizing, all matters are included in its scope and therefore all that is the case is related in some way to it: there is nothing that is outside it. Spiritual power creates subjects and a certain kind of authorised agency. Quakers 'answer that of God in everyone'<sup>307</sup> and consider that 'God has no hands but ours',<sup>308</sup>

Spiritual power manifests itself through inspiration, guidance through individuals to the group, and the empowerment of individuals by the group. This creativity entails differences between participants. Ritual practices require the submission of all these differences to the disciplines of silent worship. True spiritual power is authenticated by the emergence of unity, not conformity or voted agreement. This has critical consequences. It means that Quakers regard any human activity, institution, personal action, speech, in terms of its relation to the spirit. Quaker identity and daily lives are determined by an orientation or frame for seeing the world as well as specific

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<sup>306</sup> Fieldnotes Tape Text: Pauline

<sup>307</sup> The active verb is in the full version of the aphorism. See Hoskins in Lampen, 2008.

<sup>308</sup> Fieldnotes Tape Text: Martin

actions that they feel embody the spirit. The power of the spirit is glimpsed in its ability to enable a radical reframing of the world.

#### 4.1.2. Structural Power

Fox (1624-91) began by wresting away spiritual power from the structural aspects of the church. Contemporary Quakers similarly do not vest and locate spiritual power in ecclesiastical structures. Their images of the spirit draw on models of process, emergence and relationship. For Quakers, power is not in reified structures but in the processes and relations of empowerment. However, British Quaker activity is highly structured – geographically,<sup>309</sup> by 71 Area Meetings and 475 Local Meetings,<sup>310</sup> by myriad committees,<sup>311</sup> and physical structures.<sup>312</sup> There are 1,084 Elders and 1,172 Overseers for the 22,780 members. Quakers have survived because they have been and are, well organized.

There are some tensions between certain Quaker structures, in particular between local Meetings and Friends House in London which houses the employees and all central departments. This concentration of power is recognized in canonical text:

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<sup>309</sup> See map Appendix III.

<sup>310</sup> See map Appendix III.

<sup>311</sup> See Appendix III Fig.18: *Map of Quaker Life Operating Sphere* (2007), and the *Britain Yearly Meeting Committee Structure* (1998) in QF&P 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. These structures themselves have been subject to recent revision, see the *The Long Term Framework in A Framework for Action 2009-2014*, Quaker Books and the revised Edition of QF&P 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (Revisions approved 1995-2008) published in 2009, which contains significant changes but no updated diagram.

<sup>312</sup> *Quaker Meeting Houses in Britain and Ireland* Vols I & II.

It is sometimes complained that committees issue statements or initiate policies and work, of which local meetings remain largely ignorant. First, let us set our minds to see the committees not as some far distant 'they' with documents emanating from an impersonal 'Friends House'. It is we who compose the committees.<sup>313</sup>

Two important decision-making groups, the Trustees and the Meeting for Sufferings meet at Friends House. The creation of Trustees became a requirement under recent English Charity law. Since Trustees are Quakers it is assumed that they undertake their deliberations by the Quaker Business Method.<sup>314</sup> They are bound by legal reporting requirements and some Quakers think this compromises their inspired decision-making process.

Meeting for Sufferings exemplifies the use of the Quaker business method. It is made up of nominated members from the Area and Monthly meetings. Caroline, a Quaker involved in national work and a member of Meeting for Sufferings, spoke about the way in which power relations are shifting:

*..... it is in flux, we are in the unfreezing state, we are literally shedding power bases and networks. Sufferings has gone from eight meetings a year to four, and the position of Trustees has come in because of external pressures not of our doing. Now we hardly know what is going on. So where is the power? The Trustees and the power will become more and more vested in a small management group. Who is going to discern ways forward and finance them? Well, it will be the Trustees and management.*<sup>315</sup>

Caroline is describing significant shifts of power. Sufferings seems to have a declining influence. The Trustees and the central management of employees

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<sup>313</sup> QF&P: 8.25

<sup>314</sup> 'Gathered meetings, both of the Trustees and of other bodies, provide the religious discernment that guides our actions in the world' QF&P, 4th Edition 2008.

<sup>315</sup> Fieldnotes Tape Text: Caroline.

and programmes seem to be increasing their influence. Caroline suspects that this diminishes the practice of worshipful discernment by the many in favour of the more efficient managerial decision-making by the few at the centre. Caroline sees this as the consequence of pressure from the secular state.

Another feature of central structural power is the desire by Britain Yearly Meeting to create a national corporate identity. They have been concerned that members might identify too closely with local meetings and become too 'congregational'. Resources are allocated centrally by committees with members nominated from local meetings. 'The schedule' in which Quakers pledge their annual monetary gift is structured to enable financial decisions to be made by these committees. Quakers are a relatively small business. The income in 2008 was £9.4m and expenditure £8.7m.<sup>316</sup>

Other administrative features show similar control. Special interest groups, listed informal groups' are marginal and have to show over time that 'their credentials are established'.<sup>317</sup> They are regarded as independent bodies outside the structures of Britain Yearly Meeting, and have no right of communication by minute with them. They are charged for the use of rooms at Friends House. There have been, and still are, examples of the marginalization of significant groups.<sup>318</sup> Usually, these groups are concerned

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<sup>316</sup> As compared for example with the Church of Scotland which had income of £111.7m in 2008.

<sup>317</sup> QF&P 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. 13.19

<sup>318</sup> For example *Experiment with Light*, *Quaker Quest* and *Kindlers*. *Quaker Quest* has now been funded from the centre after seven years of establishing its relevance.

with some kind of renewal and this challenge is recognized by the central structures.<sup>319</sup>

Powers are vested in programmes which are administered centrally. These emerge through consultation processes as in the *Long Term Framework* consultation. They are subject to the business method at Yearly Meeting and are then returned to the network of local meetings as general guidance. This structure is a new development. It is thought by some to be managerialism, determining action by using a consultative rather than a ritual process. Some local meetings objected to this as not being a method sanctioned by Gospel Order and they spoke to this effect at the Yearly Meeting in 2008.<sup>320</sup> The focii produced by this consultation process are not binding on local meetings though a national network has been established to promote progress on these issues.<sup>321</sup>

We therefore are able to see significant institutional and bureaucratic power in the Quaker organisation in terms of legal Trusteeship, financial management, policies and programmes, listed small groups, branding, authorization to speak publicly, and managerial consultation. These are secular organisational and governance pressures upon the foundational tenets held by Quakers.

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<sup>319</sup> QF&P 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. 13.19.

<sup>320</sup> Fieldnotes: BYM 2008.

<sup>321</sup> The document *A Framework for Action 2009-2014* sets out the following list, which reflects the returns made to the centre by local meetings; (1) Strengthening the spiritual roots in our meetings and in ourselves; (2) Speaking out in the world; (3) Peace; (4) Sustainability; (5) Strengthening local communities; (6) Crime, community and justice

### 4.2.3. Power in Processes: Gospel Order

The main source for guidance in matters of process – Gospel Order and Church governance – is *Quaker Faith and Practice* (QF&P). This is supplemented by the received traditional sense of the way procedures must exemplify the work of the Spirit kept alive in the membership. Gospel Order applies to all meetings; local meetings for Worship, Business Meetings, Monthly Meetings, General Meetings and Yearly Meetings. All these meetings are fundamentally meetings for worship with additional scope. ‘Gospel Order’ is the term used for the ‘setting up and conduct of meetings for church affairs which are also meetings for discipline’, to ensure that they are ‘meetings for *worship* (my italics) for business’ (QF&P 19.00). Therefore all that is the case in the worship ritual is operative within Business Meetings. Gospel Order has been described as:

...the way in which meetings relate to each other; to the business, the maintenance of gospel life in the church and the world.<sup>322</sup>

This ordering requires:

...the surrender of personal will and opinion in order to discern the guidance of the Holy Spirit. When such a meeting is ‘gathered’ it can become a powerhouse of the Spirit; transformed, it becomes an instrument through which God can change the world.<sup>323</sup>

Thus the structures and the complex organization of Quakerism have no intrinsic authority but that which is created by the spirit in the work of the

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<sup>322</sup> N&M, 2009.

<sup>323</sup> N&M, 2009.

group. The procedures were set up because of the 'danger for any spirit led church, of individualism' (QF&P 3.11). Gospel Order entails a number of rules. Members (attenders with permission) should 'say what you want to say in as few words as possible, not speaking for effect, and eschew lobbying, rhetoric or clever argument' (QF&P 3.10). The rules also advise: 'do not repeat views you have already expressed, do not address another Friend across the room but address the meeting as a whole....be ready to submit to the direction of the clerk...and stand to speak if you are able (QF&P 3.10). Failure may happen, in that 'failure may well be in those who are ill prepared to use the method rather than the inadequacy of the method itself...troubles arise not from the system but from our human imperfections and the variety of our viewpoints' (QF&P 3.03). The objective of Gospel Order is to discover the 'mind of the meeting', the 'sense of the meeting' which in the tradition is synonymous with 'God's will' (QF&P 3.09, 3.06, 3.06). Here implicit norms of the meeting for worship become explicit rules in the meeting for worship for business, where content and decision-making rather than form predominate. Those who manage these rules and processes have significant power.

Pilgrim (2008) has identified a central group of Quakers whom she calls 'inclusivists' who are distinguished from 'exclusivists' and 'syncretists'. The inclusivists are mainstream traditional Quakers who preserve the balance between the exclusive theists and those whose primary preoccupation is with their personal spiritual quest for authenticity (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005). Inclusivists do this by being vigilant about process. This has the result, as Dandelion (1996, 2008) has noted, that Quakers become concerned with

process, both as the basis of their epistemology and in terms of the behavioural creed – conformity to the ways of knowing determined by the form of worship. Those who control processes exercise considerable latent power, as will be discussed in the meeting for worship for business ethnography below. They can create a high threshold for the sense of the meeting to have come to unity. These inclusivists are often Clerks and Elders and represent a significant silent majority of Quakers who do not want to create local conflict by stating their exclusivism (a strong belief in God for example) and are worried by the dilution of the tradition by syncretists. These I call ‘Quakers of the Book’ – QF&P. They place great emphasis on trust in the process. Gospel Order is, therefore, a very potent way of managing tensions and achieving unity in diversity.

#### **4.1.4. Power relations between the individual and the group.**

Taylor’s image of the ‘buffered self’ is an image of the person with personal autonomy, freedom from illusion, courage to face a Godless world (Taylor, 2007). This self is private, and gives epistemic priority to experience of the material givenness of the immanent world rather than any pre-existing universal or transcendent principles. For the buffered self, values follow after facts. Quakers have to negotiate the tension between this and a contrasting image of the self as flourishing through dependency on the spirit through the group. How are these cross-pressures played out?

Guidance through the Light is thought to be authentic when experienced by members of the group at worship. Personal promptings are subsumed in group gatheredness, and discerned by individuals in this context. They are vocalised but not discursively tested. In the Meeting for Business the outcome of the test of discernment appears in a very precise way, in a written minute. Tensions emerge between the individual and the group. The group determines the degree of legitimation necessary for action based on its authentication of inspiration. These pressures, on individuals, are part of what Douglas (1996) terms the constraints of group.

Amongst early Quakers, inspiration was often self-authenticating; it often took a somewhat confessional form of expressing the basis for the person's 'convincement'.<sup>324</sup> However after the problems of unbridled enthusiasm in the James Naylor incident, tighter control was exercised on personal inspiration (Damrosch1996). To-day, authentic inspiration is supposedly determined by the group process of discernment. This creates a kind of legitimised agency that might be called authorization. This process can be protracted, and to some Quakers, it is wearisome. Individuals now rarely submit their personal leadings to be discerned by the group. Discernment is now largely focussed on making policy-type decisions. So, one of the first relations of the individual to the group is for the autonomous individual to avoid being subject to its binding authority by not bringing concerns before it. This also contributes to the 'culture of silence' (Dandelion 1996, 2008) in the sense that this individualism leads to the protection of privacy and to disengagement.

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<sup>324</sup> This is the early Quaker term for conversion, see Moore, 2000:12.

#### **4.1.5. The mediating role of the Clerk.**

The individual's relationship to the group is enacted in both worship and in business meetings. In the latter, the key mediating person is the clerk.

The Clerk is a servant of the Meeting, who records what the whole community, met in worship, discerns to be the guidance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>325</sup>

In the discussion on discernment in the Business Meeting<sup>326</sup> the considerable powers of the Clerk are described. These include: keeping the proceedings worshipful, enabling verbal contributions to be made in order, calming any debates, feeling for a sense of the meeting, drafting a form of words, divining any unity in the spirit, reading back the minutes, allowing contributions for changes to be made, knowing when the matter is best left, coming to closure, and dealing with any lack of unity on an issue (QF&P: 3.12). The Clerk is also thought to be open to receiving inspiration:

If the Clerk's service is under concern in the certainty of God's presence and help in the meeting, then strength beyond her or his normal powers will be given.<sup>327</sup>

The Clerk is a servant of the Meeting, the conduit through which the spirit may be manifest in words, and a key test of this is that decisions should have

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<sup>325</sup> QF&P: 3.12.

<sup>326</sup> See Section 2 in this Chapter.

<sup>327</sup> QF&P 3.12.

a unifying result. The result, unity, is prefigured by the process criteria, coming to unity.<sup>328</sup> Susan describes below her experience of being a clerk:

*Power and authority are always linked. I have had the interesting experience of sitting at the table (where the Recording Clerk, the chief executive of British Quakers, sits during Yearly Meeting) in Yearly Meeting where Friends think there is authority. That does not give me authority, it gives the office I am holding authority. Clerks are there to discipline the meeting but I have seen a clerk told that he had 'done it all wrong' and 'could he change his mind please?' The clerk does not have the kind of authority that is ruling authority. It is assisting authority, it is in the servant leadership model. A meeting can go all over the place and (participants) not know they are all over the place and it is at least the responsibility of the clerk to point that out, 'It is time to stop, to gather again... are we really as all over the place as we thought?' The body relies on the person to do it for them. I think Friends are inchoate about authority. I certainly do not think they see it as something external and imposed. I think that when Friends forget that they are part of the power, they see it as something external rather than something of which they are properly a part. But a lot of Friends find internal authority difficult, too. And if they are playing their part then they are much less worried about it and see it as more internal. But that involves a different part of the discipline, the picking up and taking of responsibility. Sometimes they want to be lazy and not have to do (that). Because we are not a group that has recognised leaders, then this is dispersed over the whole group. We are weakened if there are those who do not do this, they are truly irresponsible, they are taking a free ride.<sup>329</sup>*

Susan expresses the complexities of the projections onto the Clerk, the divided tendencies of seeing power as external and internal and the irresponsibility of not engaging in the process of power.

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<sup>328</sup> This is a tautology in practice. That is, the criteria for deciding what is significant and to be recorded as a decision in the meeting, is what brings the participants to unity. This is a self-fulfilling criteria.

<sup>329</sup> Fieldnotes Tape Text Susan

The process of Gospel Order, therefore, includes two related nodes of power: Meetings for Worship and for Business. In the former, the possibly inspired verbal contributions, manifestations of divine power, are left, as it were, in the air. There is no normative procedure for discernment by a person or the group as to whether ministry is from the Light, Spirit or God. Ministry in worship is not arbitrated upon by Elders or by members of the group.

In the Meeting for Worship for Business where decisions are made, resources are involved and matters recorded, there is a method for discernment as to whether the meeting can come to unity as the spirit of the will of God. In the Business Meeting, the Clerk has a formal role to assist in such determinations within the Meeting itself. By Gospel Order, the power of the spirit is channelled and routinised. This takes place in the movement from silent worship to verbal and written discernment. In this way, the testing of the tradition is more acute in this type of Meeting than in worship. Putting the matter crudely, in worship members may think what they will, the power of the spirit is diffuse, potentially constellating in ministry and gatheredness, but in matters of business where resources and decisions are made, the group makes a decision through the clerk. This is supposedly the feeling of unity experienced by the clerk.

There is a shift in power relations within Gospel Order. Matters of faith tend to be in the power of the worshipper, while matters of collective and resourced action are in the hands of the group. Inspired action that claims to be Quaker may only legitimately be claimed from matters that emerge from

the business method. Worshippers may feel empowered by the spirit to lead their lives and receive their justification from their general membership and shared worship practices, but if they have leadings and concerns, these require group endorsement and legitimation and this is sometimes not forthcoming. The discussion now turns to the relations between individuals and the group.

#### 4.1.6. Personal Exemptions from Group Decisions

Quakers are encouraged to trust the process. Stephen notes:

*.. It is not the job of Quaker structures to tell me what to believe, and the authority there comes from good process. If the Business Meeting process is right, it is right to give it authority....*<sup>330</sup>

But some seem to reserve the right of personal exemption. Paul notes:

*I think many Quakers would see authority as primarily individual, and primarily in the individual conscience.*<sup>331</sup>

It is recognized that the authority or binding aspect of the Quaker method does not necessarily change people's minds.

We do not vote in our meetings, because we believe that this would emphasise the divisions between differing views and inhibit the process of seeking to know the will of God. We must recognize, however, that a minority view may well continue to exist.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text: Stephen.

<sup>331</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text: Paul.

<sup>332</sup> QF&P 3.06.

How does a personal exemption from the decision of the group operate?

Pauline's account expresses some of the tensions:

*.. Let us imagine a Business Meeting minute, what authority does that have? Not a lot ....do I feel that it should be trusted? It is just a guide, it does not have independent binding authority....Yes that is right, I'd need to check, but I think that is right. In the end it is, 'Do I feel that it is right?' I am not saying that I would not support it even if I was uncomfortable with it. Even though I trust the process, do I then trust the outcome? I think it must depend on....perhaps our business meetings are not about anything sufficiently meaningful....it depends what you mean by 'trusting the process'.*

Pauline is more ambivalent about the powers of a Business Meeting than is Stephen (quoted above) and yet they attend the same business meetings in North London. Tom, who works for Quakers, has a clear view of these tensions and their causes:

*We are not good at some of this leadership stuff, this group stuff, this leading stuff is actually because we attract people who do not like it, people who do not like being told what to believe.....That we do not like working together with others is almost a foundational aspect of modern Quakers. It did not use to be, but it is now. One of the things you will find over-represented in the Quaker population is an individualistic [sic],... they [sic] are awkward people because we [sic] are the only religion that an awkward person can live with.<sup>333</sup>*

This illustrates the tension between the individual and the group and the basis for the personal exemptions from its authority.

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<sup>333</sup> Fieldnote Tape Text: Tom.

#### 4.1.7. Speaking for Others

There are limitations imposed on speaking for, or on behalf of, others. This is dramatized by the problems Quakers have in deciding who can speak for them. QF&P provides specific guidance on this issue:

Individuals and groups must be careful not to claim to speak for Friends without explicit authority. Any activity or statement made in public which claims to be undertaken in the name of Friends and relating to the corporate witness of the Religious Society of Friends must be authorized by the appropriate meeting for Church affairs.<sup>334</sup>

However, in practice, this can lead to difficulties in communicating even important concerns. Paul, an employee at Friends House, noted:

*At the time of the Iraq war, who is it who has the responsibility to speak? Is it the Recording Clerk who can say something on behalf of the Society, is it the Clerk to the Meeting for Sufferings in Session, or is it the Clerk to Peace and Social Witness, is it the General Secretary to Peace and Social Witness is it the Clerk to the Public Affairs Group or is it the Parliamentary Liaison Officer, or what combination of people? The difficulty when you have no clear hierarchy, it is difficult to speak authoritatively; those issues are never satisfactorily resolved. Sometimes, you may get an individual who takes authority and builds an informal coalition - so that it was possible to write to Blair about the renewal of Trident but the internal liaison was complex, no one complained. There is not the kind of clarity like a Bishop speaking on behalf of a Diocese, or an executive on behalf of an NGO. I am not concerned so much that I do not have this power*

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<sup>334</sup> QF&P 3.27.

*but that no one seems to have it. We have a lack of connectedness. If you ask about the model of the relation of the centre to local meetings you could say that there is one model that sees staff as civil servants, but you cannot have a civil service without a government let alone one accountable to an anarchist organisation.*<sup>335</sup>

Paul touches on a series of power relations concerning decision-making procedures: the authority to represent; local-central relations and employee-members relations.

#### **4.1.8. Summary.**

Power amongst Quakers and in their practices is therefore generated by a series of relations that entail structures, processes and agency. In these relations the cross-pressures of pluralism are evident in diversity, and individualism is evident in the relations between the individual and the group.

I now turn to examine decision-making in Quaker Meetings for Worship for Business, (Business meetings or the Business Method) in the light of this review. Four related questions arise. How significant is the form and guidance of conduct in the process? How significant is the role of the clerk? Do the various business meetings represent a structural hierarchy? What are the criteria for discernment that seem to be applied and to what kinds of contributions?

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<sup>335</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape Text Paul.

## **Section 2: Meeting for Worship for Business.**

The rationale for the Meeting for Worship for Business (Business Meeting) is the articulation of unity, and when this is achieved, it is put on record in a minute which authorises action. It is a decisive moment when worship is articulated for enactment by the members and by the institution. The Business Meeting is the point at which what is thought to be known as spiritual guidance is made into statements. This is in contrast to the oral ministry in the Meeting for Worship which is not recorded. As a result of the 'business method'<sup>336</sup> knowledge and power are generated and resources are deployed. The empowered members as subjects are constituted by, and constitute, Quaker practice in a new way. Members subject themselves to the process as in worship and with the intention of discernment, that is, the seeking for an explicit public articulation of the will or guidance of the spirit. The procedures and process of the Business Meeting are strictly adhered to because right ordering is inextricably bound up with right outcome in the spirit. Quakers refer to the need to trust the process.

There now follows an ethnography of three kinds of Business Meetings, in parallel: first, a local Business Meeting in St Andrews; second, an Area Meeting in Hampstead London; third, a Britain Yearly Meeting that took place in Friends House, London. They are the three levels of Business Meetings in

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<sup>336</sup> The term 'Quaker Business Method' or 'business method' is common amongst Quakers see Sheeran (1983) *Beyond Majority Rule. Voteless Decisions in the Religious Society of Friends.*

Britain.<sup>337</sup> These ethnographic accounts were made using the same methodology that produced the ethnography in Chapter 3. above, that is to say a first person account which attempts to provide a record of what took place, the decisions made and also attempts to evoke participation in the Meetings.

#### **4.2.1. An Ethnography of Business Meetings.**

- (1) **Local Meeting:** *The small meeting room in our local meeting has been rearranged during the coffee after meeting for worship. The small table has been brought in from the library. The chairs have been placed in a fan facing the table, and a small slip of paper, the agenda, is on each seat. We leave our cups behind as is required and return to the worship space in silence. The agenda includes appeals for money, nominations for jobs, a report from a conference, the Long Term Framework and the Premises Committee. Few people from the meeting attend. In the end, we fall into silence with about 12 present.*
- (2) **Monthly Meeting:** *The Meeting room in Hampstead Meeting House seats about 40 people and is fairly full by the time I arrive for the monthly meeting. Everyone is still wearing their overcoats; it is cold. There is an expectancy in the air because the main item is the discussion of a concern about the Quaker response to the Iraq war. The clerks arrive and sit at a long table. A period of worship in silence descends but it is not settled: people seem expectant, things feel business-like, a 'let us get started' kind of activism prevails.*
- (3) **Yearly Meeting:** *The Large Meeting Room in Friends House London is vast. I am in the gallery looking down. Below me is seating for 800 people. It is filling*

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<sup>337</sup> The Meeting for Sufferings and the Trustee Meetings also use the business method. I was unable to gain access to either of these since they are closed and the membership is created from a strict nominations procedure. The General Meeting for Scotland also uses the business method.

*up rapidly and is quiet with some talking and people greeting one another. The stage has seats for the clerks for the session. One of them stands, the doors are closed. All are quiet and seated. He says 'Session Three, Sunday, on the Long Term Framework, welcome Friends'. He sits down and quietness descends.*

In all these kinds of business meetings the same process is adopted. They are for members.<sup>338</sup> Certain preparations take place before such Meetings as these. This is particularly the case with Monthly and Yearly Meetings, where matters are likely to have been subject to preparative Meetings at Monthly and local levels. I was aware of the preparatory work that had taken place on the concern, the Iraq war, brought to the Monthly meeting. I had attended the two local Business Meetings that had produced the concern. Likewise I attended the preparatory discussions at the local Meeting on the *Long Term Framework* that is finalized here at the Yearly Meeting. So, most of the people in the Monthly Meeting (2) and Yearly Meeting (3) would have arrived there having been part of a lengthy process of prior discernment on the issues at hand. The *Long Term Framework* took two years, from local consultation to the Yearly Meeting I describe. The Iraq war issue had been a concern of several north London Meetings – Muswell Hill, Finchley, Hampstead, and Winchmore Hill, each of which had had long Business Meetings about the matter. The Quaker business method is recursive and is a hierarchical process on certain issues, particularly when the intention is to encourage a

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<sup>338</sup> I had to obtain permission to attend all these meetings since I am not a member. For Yearly Meeting, this is done by writing to the Clerk of the Local Meeting who in turn writes to the Recording Clerk of BYM, who gives permission.

corporate statement to be made on behalf of all Quakers in Britain, or when long-term policy is being established.

- (1) **Local Meeting.** *The meeting room is warm after the worship. The silence goes on for about 8-10 minutes. The clerk opens the meeting stating the date and the number of people present. For some reason this is always stated as 'about' the exact number present. I notice that she is already writing. The agenda is referred to. Another silence emerges and lasts for a few minutes. The mood is relaxed. The clerk reads out a section from QF&P 3:10: 'If you want to speak, try to sum up what you have to say in as few words as possible. Speak simply and audibly but do not speak for effect. Do not repeat views which you have already expressed. Do not address another Friend across the room but speak to the meeting as a whole. Be ready to submit to the direction of the clerk. Except in very small meetings those able to stand to speak should do so'. The previous worship seems to have carried over into the business. The clerk speaks and says that the appeals for funds come from various places: a meeting house in Northern England that is in need of refurbishment, The Leaveners a Quaker Youth Theatre Group are in debt and the Friends School in Ramallah needs funds. Silence. A woman indicates her desire to speak and stands. She mentions the precedent of giving £50 to Meeting Houses. The meeting house appeal gets £50. A woman stands and speaks. I know she lived in Lebanon at one time. She offers to present the work of the school at Ramallah to the meeting for a 'special collection' after a meeting for worship in the coming months. There are some noises of support. These actions are agreed with little talk. The proposed decision, the minute is written by the clerk and read out. She asks if it, the text, can be agreed and there are murmurs of 'I hope so'<sup>339</sup>. Silence. A tall man indicates to the clerk his desire to speak. He*

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<sup>339</sup> This phrase indicates agreement with the minute and that it be adopted. It enables an expression of unity by those who may not have spoken. It does not appear in QF&P.

stays sitting. He says that the theatre group is very important in attracting young people to Quakerism, and that his children used to go to their summer school. After a pause the clerk reads from their appeal of the need to clear the debt.

(2) **The monthly meeting** is opened by the Clerk who has women either side of her side behind a table. I assume these are Co-Clerks. She suggests to the meeting that the first part be given over to the concern on Iraq. There is a murmur of agreement. The clerk explains that the monthly meeting has received a minute from a local meeting, Muswell Hill, which she reads out. It is a concern that expresses dismay at the war and asks that Meeting for Sufferings<sup>340</sup> put out a corporate statement on behalf of Quakers condemning the war. The silence is short. The clerk indicates to a person who has stood waiting to be called, near the front, that they can speak. He speaks passionately about the stupidity of the war and supports the proposal. This pattern continues for about 15-20 minutes. I begin to feel, like others I spoke to afterwards, that we are being pulled along by both outrage and powerlessness. The meeting feels more like a rally of a marginal group than worship. Some 'weighty' members stand and speak calmly about procedure, wondering if Sufferings is the right group to make such pronouncements and that they may not need to be asked to do so. A member of Sufferings who is present says she is fully aware of the need to express Quaker principles of non-violence.

(3) **Yearly Meeting.** The huge space of the Friends House meeting room has a grandeur and a distance for sound to travel that makes speech, amplified by roving microphones, stentorian, rising up into the cathedral-like height of the hall (See Appendix V. image IV.) Speech seems slower and seems also to linger. Usually in a large group, and here there are nearly 750 people, one can feel inconspicuous, but here the possibility that anyone even myself could stand and

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<sup>340</sup> Meeting for Sufferings is the longest-standing Quaker meeting from the 17<sup>th</sup>-Century and was created initially to respond to the privations experienced by the families of persecuted Quakers. It is formed now by nominations from each Area Meeting. Whilst BYM is the final decision-making body Sufferings does its work. Its power as a key decision-making meeting has been modified by the creation of Trustees for the Society. At the time of the fieldnote it was still a significant decision making body within BYM.

*could be called to speak gives an edge to being present. The clerk of Sufferings introduces the 'Long Term Framework' explaining its process, of local consultations and the findings from all the Meetings that completed the exercise. She returns to her seat when she finished and is not open to questions. The matter is 'laid before the meeting'. The matter is taken in by those present and silence ensues. After several minutes a woman is called and says that her meeting had thought the exercise not to be in 'right ordering' on the grounds that the way decisions should be made should be through worship whereas this matter had been worked up through a questionnaire and a 'management' process. Silence ensues. Several other people are called and complain of issues that are missing from the document which include 'caring for disabled people', 'rural poverty', and 'civil liberties'. The atmosphere is of a strong mass of people. I can look down upon the others who are below the gallery and see each person. I feel that each one of us is separate, single quiet voices when standing to speak but also part of a huge gathering.*

There are interpenetrating levels in each type of Business Meeting, for example the Local Meeting discusses local jobs yet sends its money to Palestine; the Area meeting is concerned to mobilize in relation to international politics yet is troubled about the right practices of those present from local Meetings; and the Yearly Meeting is concerned with strategic policy, yet open to the personal pleas and leadings of those in the room, some of whom express unease with any attempt at hierarchical decision-making.

- (1) *The **local meeting** settles and resembles the meeting for worship held earlier in the same room. Some of the older members are sitting where they were then. They may speak in the business meeting but do so towards the end of a series of spoken contributions. They have probably been clerks and are helping the movement towards a written minute. Or perhaps they listen to contributions and*

try to see a pattern. The next contribution asks for guidance on the amount of money required for the Leavers. It is in the region of a £30K debt. This changes the atmosphere. Silence follows and there is a depth of concern. The feeling I have is that this must be a significant matter for the future of what is an important part of Quaker work, with young people, outreach. I know that several people in the meeting, like me, know the man who founded the Leavers 25 years ago, Alec, who appears in this study. Several had children who benefited from acting with the Leavers. People are therefore touched by this. The meeting settles, taking the new information into itself and the associations that help us to think about the Leavers.

(2) **Monthly Meeting.** The contributions about the war, its illegality and the 'collateral damage' come with regularity. Little time is created between contributions which seem to be trying to build a case for a proposal rather than be the emergent leadings of worship. The calmer contributions are about process and address questions such as who might be the mouthpiece for a corporate statement. I sense that the clerks are uncomfortable and no draft of a minute seems likely. If this were a conventional meeting there would be no doubt about a description of the mood and content of the discussion. But there is unease about what is going on. The clerks look uncomfortable. I wonder if this is an internal political problem that the Monthly Meeting should not in effect instruct the Meeting for Sufferings?

(3) **Yearly Meeting.** In the huge open space about 9 or 10 people stand silently, mostly with heads bowed waiting to be called by the clerk. Some are called and small voices are raised and heard. One man is called and asks 'what is happening?' and 'why is such a document needed that says what it is we should already do, and asks why a circular process of consultation and then telling local meetings is needed?' Another, a woman complains that the document is too general and needs a sharper focus. There is a long silence and then one of the people at the 'top table' rises with a nod from the clerk and says that the work had been undertaken to produce a 'framework' and not a 'plan', and that

*the idea is to make local and central structures more sensitive to each other's capabilities. The weight of the document and the preparative processes of consultation seem to hover over the space, the process feels ineluctable. The document says who we are....is seems self referential, it is a kind of representation.*

The Local Meeting (1) seems aware that something bigger than usual is expected of them. In the Monthly Meeting (2) the clerks seem to have become the focus of the contributions, understandably since it is the institutional process that is the focus.

The Yearly Meeting session was part of a bigger process in which the canopy of the *Long Term Framework* seemed to be in some sense already in place. All 750 members would have read or at least scanned the document. They were being asked to accept not just the priorities for national and local action but to support the production of a document that would make a bold statement of Quakerism and its priorities until 2014.

All the members in these Business Meetings are supposedly engaged in worship practices. They are seeking above all the possibility of coming to unity in the sense of gatheredness I have described.

*When we really think about discernment then we are thinking of being led to do something together in unity, and with purpose that will be of service. For Friends*

*the unity and the purpose often come together. It is only going to be serviceable if it is done in unity.*<sup>341</sup>

Here in the business meeting what can be known by these worship practices is put to the test, the test of articulation and a text that creates the conditions for action.

The unity which we seek depends on the willingness of us all to seek the truth in each other's utterances; on our being open to persuasion; and in the last resort on a willingness to recognize and accept the sense of the meeting as recorded in the minute, knowing that our dissenting views have been heard and considered.<sup>342</sup>

So, in the tradition of Gospel Order, the Business Meeting minute is the best provisional understanding of God's will. The criteria for identifying God's will are those of unification of the group as sensed by the clerk. Then, its potentially binding qualities are significant. However, apparent unity can include disengagement.

*One "self-confessed cynic" believed individual reticence was more widespread than the group would believe, and claimed; "If Quakers voted, 22% would carry the minute. The other 78% are shy, fed up or not listened to". Non-involvement can masquerade as piety in a group where sitting in silence is so highly valued.*

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<sup>341</sup> Fieldnotes Tape Text Susan

<sup>342</sup> QF&P 3.06

<sup>343</sup> Dandelion 2005

There are also concerns about the binding nature and the authority of decisions made by the group in relation to the individual. I noted above Pauline's reservations above. These show the tension here between group and individual authority.

The clerks have been attentive in each meeting, feeling 'the sense of the meeting', beginning to find words that might be read back to the members as suitable. Sometimes some phrase used by a member can become the motif or the dominant metaphor for the minute.<sup>344</sup>

In a meeting rightly held a new way might be discovered which none present had alone perceived and which transcends the differences of opinions expressed<sup>345</sup>...the meeting places upon the clerk a responsibility for spiritual discernment so that he or she may watch the growth of the meeting towards unity, and judge the right time to submit the minute.<sup>346</sup>

Decisions are always provisional:

Friends should realize that a decision which is the only one for that particular meeting at a particular time may not be the one that is ultimately seen to be right<sup>347</sup>

I now return to the descriptions of the meetings.

- (1) **Local Meeting.** *Those present seem to be able to imagine the concern before them. They are in the familiar surroundings of the meeting room where they*

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<sup>344</sup> In the Yearly Meeting case such a quote was influential; 'Only when we go forward in discomfort can we hope to find our feet in a troubled world' which was spoken by Margaret Amor and quoted in the preparative papers and found its way into the final document of *The Long Term Framework*.

<sup>345</sup> QF&P 3.06.

<sup>346</sup> QF&P 3.07.

<sup>347</sup> QF&P 3.07.

worship. It is a domestic scene. The concern is about young people, the meeting is an aged one. The experiences that may be made possible are known to us. The clerk gauges the feeling of the meeting and offers a draft minute proposing that a donation be made. This receives quiet acceptance. A sense of unity has been established, but there is a further question of what difference a small group like us can make. I am not sure how the figure of £500 arose, which is a significant sum for a local meeting, but it is a sum that will make a difference. The words record the decision. Sometimes when a minute is read out words are picked over. Sometimes certain members wait until the minute is read out to make their only contribution to attempt to ensure that the minute reads as they would like – to influence the decision by seeming to be tidying up the text. Here the words are boldly generous.

- (2) The **Monthly Meeting** is in turmoil. The clerk is unable to draft a minute that reflects the contributions probably because they have been lacking in spiritual tone and coming out as speeches, and rather too glibly on the heels of another. There is a strong feeling that some key 'weighty' Quakers in the room are also unconvinced by the content and the process. They are giving the clerk considerable non-verbal support as she struggles to suggest a holding minute. A sullenness descends over the meeting, a feeling that passion has been spent and not altogether wisely.
- (3) **Yearly Meeting.** In the big hall a member of the 'top table' who is the Recording Clerk<sup>348</sup> rises and says that she has found the meeting helpful, that it has shown her how the needs of the local meetings and the centre can be balanced. She says that 'we do need priorities for the centre', that 'you can throw everything into the bundle, but choices have to be made and will be made. Nearly all local meetings in the country completed the consultation exercise and did so by the processes of discernment that we are using here'. The priorities for the Society are 'Strengthening the Spiritual Roots in our Meetings and in Ourselves; Speaking Out in the World; Peace; Sustainability; Strengthening Local

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<sup>348</sup> The Recording Clerk of Britain Yearly Meeting is the senior employee of the Society of Friends, in effect the 'Chief Executive'.

*Communities; Crime and Justice; and Using Our Resources Well. The minute is read out following this contribution. It is later added to the draft document and the final text published as 'A Framework for Action 2009-2014' by the Meeting for Sufferings. There is a sense that a large flag has just been unfurled, the banner under which we all will find a place and move forward.....It looks very like the old flag.*

This illustrates how Business Meetings have added to their foundational worship practices the role of the clerk, certain norms for vocal contributions, and the production of a text. I have illustrated its use at various levels of the Society of Friends. This then is a bridge between worship and action in the world, when what can be known in worship is articulated and made into statements that support action. From the review of power amongst Quakers and through their organisation I have identified four questions with which to address the ethnography of the business meetings.

The first concerns Gospel Order, the matter of form and advice on conduct. It is clear that the conditions from the meeting for worship were strictly applied here and were overseen by a clerk. These rules set the terms in which inspiration may be manifest, not by interaction and dialogue, not by rhetoric, persuasion, clever argument, or repetition. In the local meeting these conditions were even read out by the clerk. In the monthly meeting they were resisted from the outset, and in the Yearly Meeting there was a knowledgeable acceptance of them.

In response to the second question about the role of the clerk, it is also clear that these conditions are overseen and enforced by the clerks. They emerge in the ethnography as key actors in all the meetings. It is noticeable that they do not in any of the meetings explicitly refer to matters of inspiration but to procedures. The clerk in the local meeting focussed on right ordering and then on the wording of the decision. The clerks in the monthly meeting, (and there were several of them present, possibly because of the anticipated contention) were engaged in resisting the general feeling of the meeting and controlling the result. They allowed discussion to go on and expend itself. They thereby subdued the meeting. They also seemed unwilling to be drawn into writing a minute that would, in effect, instruct or strongly advise the next layer of the system, the Meeting for Sufferings, to act in a particular way. The clerks in the Yearly Meeting seemed much more like a board of directors, or the committee of a large voluntary organisation, seeing through a significant policy development without having to press for it, the work having been done in many prior meetings and consultations. One or two reservations were noted but the proposal seemed irresistible.

This leads to the third question, namely, the extent to which these Meetings represent a hierarchy. The matters they discuss do seem appropriate to their levels in the sense that the decisions of the local meeting were within its span of control and its own budget. It kept to its concerns whereas the monthly meeting attempted to press for the organisation to act corporately and this clearly required the matter to go upwards to the Meeting for Sufferings. The clerks responded by acting hierarchically by preventing this taking place. The

Yearly Meeting was clearly dealing with matters that affect the whole society and was the final point of decision-making. Therefore whilst there exists in Quakerism a principle of equality of participation and a common form based on the meeting for worship, there is a hierarchy in relation to business decisions. These three features of guidance on form and conduct, the power of clerks and the existence of hierarchy are in the tradition all in the service of enabling inspired speech and guidance to be articulated. However, this enabling of inspired speech seems implicit or even absent in the examples.

This leads therefore to the forth question of the criteria that are being applied in the process of discernment both by participants and by clerks? In the local meeting recourse was made to the criterion of precedent, 'we gave £50 previously...' and then to personal experience, 'my children attended Leavers...'. At the monthly meeting the contributions drew on criteria such as 'the stupidity of war', 'principles of non-violence' and there was a sense of outrage and powerlessness rather than any sense of inspiration. The resistance to the concern was also expressed by a senior person who was a member of the Meeting for Sufferings in terms that were not based in a faith framework; she noted that they were fully aware of 'the *principles* of non-violence' (my emphasis). The atmosphere did not feel like worship. It might therefore be argued that the clerks were justified in regarding the meeting as a failure of inspiration. However they did not articulate their resistance to the sense of the meeting in these terms. I therefore suggest that spiritual criteria were implicit, masked or absent.

In the Yearly Meeting it might be argued that the inspirational basis and criteria for discernment were known by all present and needed no explicit mention. However they did not appear in the criteria then being used. Their absence was noted by one participant who argued precisely that the process of which this meeting was the culmination, had itself been conducted as a managerial consultation and not in right ordering, that is, in the Spirit. Other criteria used included notions of betterment and utility concerning rural poverty and disabled people.

Therefore it seems that the vocabulary of the Light and cognate terms were absent, and that no explicit reference was made to the spiritual basis of discernment. It seems that in the meetings themselves other criteria were being used to inform decisions. These criteria can be seen as principles and values rather than expressions of faith. The criteria of discernment used in the three meetings for worship for business seem to be: the obligations of charity within a small budget; the legality of the war, its stupidity and its contradiction of the principles of non-violence; managerialism, business efficiency, utility and policy making by consultation. These criteria can be contrasted with the absence of any articulation or application of faith-based or spiritual criteria.

In the ethnography of meetings for worship for business, two shifts can be noted. First, from inspiration to a focus on form, and second, from the idea of the will of God' to the 'sense of the meeting'. When I asked my respondents whether this was the case, they generally agreed that such shifts have taken place. They speculated that it might be because Quakers do not want to be

seen as 'evangelical' or 'fanatical'<sup>349</sup> and that people conform 'because it is in the tradition but not many people actually believe it'.<sup>350</sup> They noted that the preferred expression for 'the will of God' is now the more neutral word, 'prompting'. This has canonical textual warrant namely, 'the promptings of love and truth in your hearts'.<sup>351</sup> There is another consequence of this trend for if 'not many people believe it' doubt is cast upon the group process being the basis for unity. The group process is therefore simply the manifestation of the many diverse cosmologies. The question arises as to what is happening in the Business Meetings. Are they special meetings for worship for discernment based on inspiration, or are secular criteria being applied? Best (2010) notes:

There is evidence of a shift in the understanding of the outcome of Quaker discernment from 'seeking the will of God' to an expectation that everyone will have their say and be happy with the outcome and where decisions reflect the 'will of the meeting' (Best, 2010:51).

These shifts have consequences. The ethnography shows that there was both an absence of claims to inspiration by the participants and an absence of spiritual criteria for discerning this aspect of the contributions. I therefore conclude firstly that the source of criteria for discernment may no longer be the Light or some shared transcendent function and instead has become the sense or feeling of the group, as interpreted by the clerk of the particular meeting. Secondly the criteria therefore being used by the participants and the clerk to discern this 'feeling' or 'sense' of the meeting must be drawn from

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<sup>349</sup> Fieldnotes: Peter.

<sup>350</sup> Fieldnotes Tape Text Leslie

<sup>351</sup> A&Qs 1.02.1 It also appears as 'promptings of the Holy Spirit' (A&Qs 9) and related to speaking as in 'when prompted to speak wait patiently to know that the leading and the time are right...' (A&Qs 13)

elsewhere. They may be drawn from the cross-pressures in what Taylor has identified as the 'spiritual landscape' and these include naturalism and utility. Put another way, the impact of both individualism and pluralism results in the necessity of including many 'Gods' or none at all in the decision-making process. This discourages a faith basis for discernment. These faith criteria are masked because they would refer to cosmologies, and because these are now so varied they might not be the basis for unity. This results in a shift in discernment criteria towards values and principles consistent with a process of secularisation. If this finding is correct, it may also show up another key basis for social enactment amongst Quakers, that is the Testimonies.

### **Section 3: Testimonies and Everyday Witness.**

Section 3 examines the Testimonies, their origins, their current formulation and their expression in the lives of Quakers. In doing so I address the question of the relationship of the Testimonies to a spiritual source, from which all faith-actions are thought to derive, and consider whether the Testimonies have become codified and have floated free from this source – becoming more closely related to secular ethics. In order to do this I first outline the historic roots of the Testimonies. In the sub-sections that follow, I describe their current formulation, the kinds of outcomes that result from their pursuit, their place in the daily lives of Quakers, and attempt to give an answer to the question posed above.

#### 4.3.1. The Origins of the Testimonies.

The Testimonies, as they are now known, derive from two sources. First, the general process by which individual conviction of Quakers led those individuals through their leadings to express the character of the Light in their lives; second, the 1660 declaration to Charles II of Quaker 'harmlessness', which both helped to ensure their survival and also established *Peace* as the central testimony.<sup>352</sup>

The first source shows that the root of the Testimonies is therefore the character of the Light, that is, conduct derives from worship and the discerned sense of the divine will. Action that results from engagement with this source would be inspired faith-action. The early dangers of this process of inspiration were noted through the case of James Naylor in 1666 (Damrosch, 1996). The outcomes of Quaker processes of discernment, practised at every point in the sect's activities, were slowly gathered together as collective wisdom and these collections became increasingly normative for Quakers. This is consistent with the routinisation of charisma thesis (Weber1947:361, Morris 1987:73ff). This cumulative process produced the Quaker *Book of Discipline* which first appeared in 1738. To this was added the returns to the regular questions to Local Meetings, asked from 1723 onwards, which became the pamphlet *Advices and Queries*, which began to be published in 1791. This

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<sup>352</sup> The full title of the pamphlet is: *A Declaration from the Harmless and Innocent People of God called Quakers Against all the Plotters and Fighters in the World.*

further laid down the general directions of Quaker social action.<sup>353</sup> This process continues in the constant collection and revision of Quaker material and in its publication as *Quaker Faith and Practice*.

The second source shows that the central and original testimony was to peace. This has an aspect of self-preservation and developed for some into pacifism and for others into a more elaborated set of ideas and practices that are commonly referred to now as non-violence.

This historical movement in Quaker practice, as it were from the spirit to the letter, from inspiration to written guidance, may be continuing today under the pressures of secularisation that I have identified, such that the criteria now drawn on for discernment are difficult to distinguish from secular ethics and values.

#### **4.3.2. The Testimonies Today.**

As a result of the processes I have described, five Testimonies have become established. They are the Testimonies: to Truth and Integrity; to Simplicity; to Relationships, Equality and Community (Social Justice); to Peace (and Non-Violence); and to the Earth and Environment (Sustainability). I now set these out to explore whether there appears to be a pattern whereby the spiritual source of inspiration has been displaced by secular ethics.

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<sup>353</sup> The third question asked was 'How has the Truth prospered amongst you since the last yearly meeting, and how are Friends in peace and unity?' A&Qs, 17.

### 4.3.3. Truth and Integrity.

The Testimony to Truth is based on the meaning of the word ‘truth’ from the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Quaker use of the term:

It is an alternative word for “Gospel” derived from the New Testament as “dwell in the Truth”, “walk in the Truth” (Moore 2000:82).

This would not now be regarded as the source of the Testimony. For example Pauline made the following observations about the word ‘truth’:

*I think there is personal truth – true for me – ...there is the truth in the process of working together...there is the truth of the testimonies about what is right, there are some universal truths, ‘that of God’ and I suppose there are truths beyond that...a creative force.*<sup>354</sup>

Here we see that Pauline associates testimonial truth with ‘what is right’ suggesting a moral sense as distinct from the inspiration and universal truth she associates with God. During fieldwork many Quakers emphasised to me, as Pauline does, that a key sense of what is true is what is ‘true for me’ and they link this to personal experience as the final basis of authority. At the same time they value mutual discernment. Though they asserted a universal truth about the human condition – ‘that of God in everyone’ – they were reluctant to associate truth claims with metaphysical matters. What is clear is that the notion of ‘truth’ has shifted way from its roots in the Bible and is now more associated with personal values, and the kind of distinctions Pauline makes.

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<sup>354</sup> Fieldnotes Tape Text: Pauline.

#### **4.3.4. Simplicity.**

Arriens and McNaughton (2009:8), two Quaker commentators, described simplicity as follows:

Simplicity was originally called plainness and it was about returning to the truth. It questioned and rejected false values and practices. In 1688 Fox warned Friends: 'keep your testimony against the world's vain fashions'....simplicity is essentially a spiritual discipline, we simplify our lives to come closer to the truth. A simple life may take us away from the greed that is the root of war. Simplicity is not about 'simple living' but about appropriate living, a source of values that can be a positive witness. <sup>355</sup>

This suggests an explicit awareness of the problem of the shift that I am exploring. It is further evidenced in the ethnographic work of Collins (Coleman and Collins, 2000:317). Here Collins claims that:

The testimony to simplicity is central to Quaker belief and practice ...but Quakers are more likely to draw on contemporary, rationalist and /or utopian ecological theories as sources of legitimation (Coleman and Collins, 2000:322).

Collins goes further and suggests that 'morality gives way to aesthetics' and refers to simplicity in this context (Coleman and Collins,2000:322).

#### **4.3.5. Relationships, Equality and Social Justice.**

By contrast, under the Testimony to equality there has been a recent decision to endorse, and potentially hold, ceremonies for same sex marriages. This

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<sup>355</sup> Arriens & McNaughton 2009:8 *Testimony to Simplicity*.

specifically notes that the decision was arrived at because it is now seen as 'the certainty that this is God's will for us'.

The decision of British Quakers in July 2009 to treat same sex marriages in the same way as different-sex marriages is the culmination of a long process. 'Towards a Quaker view of Sex' published in 1963 stated 'An act which expresses true affection between two individuals and gives pleasure to them both does not seem to us to be sinful by reason alone of the fact that it is homosexual'. Twenty two years later we considered a proposal that it was time for us to treat equally same-sex and different-sex relationships. We were not then ready but it started a process that led to the certainty that this is now God's will for us.<sup>356</sup>

Similarly, the Testimony to equality in general is traced back to equality in worship-based processes:

Meeting for Worship is based on the vital relationship between each single individual, the gathered meeting and God so that spoken ministry can arise in the heart of any and unspoken ministry is the expectation of all. The structure of the Quaker Business Meeting, where the clerk's role is to interpret for the Meeting where God's leading seems to be pointing, involves a deep listening to each and every one equally. This culture when it functions as it should, is still resistant to manipulation, power games and dominant individuals. It is an infinitely precious expression of the testimony to equality.<sup>357</sup>

#### **4.3.6. Peace and Non-violence.**

The Testimony to Peace and Non-violence is also linked by Steven, a Quaker activist, to the guiding notion of 'that of God' in the other:

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<sup>356</sup> Lucas 2009:12 *Committed Relationships*

<sup>357</sup> Dale 2009:14 *Testimony to Equality*

Many Friends are actively involved in campaigning against nuclear weapons particularly the British Trident system, and this has involved lobbying, tax-withholding, regular vigils, highly visible symbolic actions, and even non-violent civil resistance leading to imprisonment. The Peace Testimony is based on a belief that change is always possible, that it can happen in our interactions with other people, and that we can live the 'peaceable kingdom' now...putting faith into action is a respect for the dignity and worth of all human life and an attempt to reach beyond differences in love to find 'that of God' in the other.<sup>358</sup>

These latter two examples show that there is not a uniform drift away from inspiration to ethics in the testimonies but that the link with some notion of 'the will of God' is retained,

#### **4.3.7. The Earth and Sustainability.**

The Yearly Meeting *Long Term Framework* document notes that 'sustainability is an urgent matter for Quakers...and that we should take responsibility for our individual and corporate environmental impacts'.<sup>359</sup> The Swarthmore lecture of 2008 was entitled *Minding the Future* and developed the notion of 'stewardship' of both the environment and communities.<sup>360</sup> Dawes noted:

Green spirituality is a revitalising element, celebrating all life as connected and sacred, bringing together science, creativity, social action and the wisdom of spiritual traditions of all ages. It recovers wonder at the beauty of creation, reconnecting with the energies in the natural world and encouraging ecological awareness and sustainability (Dawes 2008).

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<sup>358</sup> Steven 2009:14 *Testimony to Peace*

<sup>359</sup> *A Framework for Action 2009-14* Britain Yearly Meeting.

<sup>360</sup> Davis 2008 *Minding the Future* Swarthmore Lecture.

These perspectives are far from explicit about the spiritual basis of the Testimony and, as Collins notes, depend on contemporary, rationalist and /or utopian ecological theories as sources of legitimation (Coleman and Collins, 2000:322).

The picture that emerges is mixed. The testimonies to Truth, Simplicity and Sustainability seem to be open to clear secular rationales, whereas the testimonies to Equality and Peace retain explicit reference to a spiritual source of guidance. The pressures towards a secular rendition of Testimonies is recognised as a danger by Quakers. Helen Drewery recently reported:

I was challenged recently to put in my own words the core of Quaker belief without using any words that carry religious baggage, such as 'divine' or 'sacramental'. I struggled and eventually came up with 'we believe that every human being has something within them that is capable of touching that which is at the heart of the universe'. I gave my usual warning that she would get a slightly different answer from every Quaker but I guess most of our answers would amount to much the same thing...every person is to be treated with respect and love. But to my mind the general belief is not enough, if we are to do more than live our own lives ethically, to improve the world. That is where the sense of leading comes in. Feeling that the spirit of God-or whatever you call it-can personally guide us is not just theory...that strong sense of leading is followed by a continuing feeling of rightness about the actions taken.....a corporate sense that it can be conveyed to others. <sup>361</sup>

Here the link between worship and faith-in-action is established as qualitatively and categorically different from ethical action. However the difficulty and challenge towards a secular version has been noted. To this mixed picture can be added the findings from the material on discernment practices, above,

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<sup>361</sup> Drewery 2009:12 *Living the Testimonies*

where Best (2010) charted a clear shift in decision-making criteria away from the divine will to the naturalistic criteria of the sense of the Meeting. We can also add the background finding that Quaker practices are now constructed with multiple cosmologies and none and so it is much less likely that recourse to a spiritual source for guidance associated with the Testimonies will refer to a shared understanding of such a source. This was noted during the fieldwork and the solution to this plurality was seen by some as greater emphasis on the Testimonies as the basis for achieving unity. Caroline, when commenting on sources of Quaker unity, said, 'I think the Testimonies still have the potential to drive us'.<sup>362</sup> For these reasons, I conclude that the Testimonies illustrate the pressures towards secularism and that this trend links with the way in which historically, they have become more codified. The interpretation that the Testimonies have become or are becoming a quasi-creed would be supported by this view.

#### **4.3.8. The Outcomes of the Testimonies.**

The testimonies give rise to actions that seem to fall into four types. The first kind is that of institutional action. This takes place when the processes of discernment have reached a point and level, usually Yearly Meeting, when they are articulated as definitive of Quaker practice. An example here is the agreement after twenty-two years of discernment to allow same sex marriages in Quaker meetings. This is in fact unlawful but represents the testimony of Quakers. An example of the failure of such a testimony would be the Peace Tax campaign in the 1980s. Here Quakers as employers agreed with their

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<sup>362</sup> Fieldnote Tape Text: Caroline

employees to withhold the proportion of tax owed equivalent to that spent on defence. The Courts ruled this illegal for an employer. The testimony was carried forward by individuals, some of whom were imprisoned whilst others were fined.

A second type of testimonial outcome is collaborative action with others that is considered to be consistent with Quaker Testimonies. An example here would be taking part in the demonstration against the Iraq war. Vigils in town centres, sit-ins at military bases, and the occupation of Barclays Bank would fit this type. In these kinds of expressions of Testimonies, Quakers are sensitive to working with others. They usually ensure that their action can be linked with Quaker practices. They are sometimes concerned that their presence might be used by others with whom they are not in accord on all matters.

The third kind of enactment is personal witness, authorised, as I described above, from a Business Meeting. The person may have taken their concern or leading to the meeting and received endorsement and support. This is agency that is vicarious for other Quakers; that is Quakers who support the leading may feel that it is being done on their behalf. An example is participation in the ecumenical accompaniers programme in Israel and Palestine.

The fourth kind is the everyday personal witness to the Testimonies in ordinary life. Collins notes many of these kinds of activities – heeding injunctions against gambling or the National Lottery, conserving natural resources, not buying what you cannot afford, eschewing ornamentation or excess, living

simply. He calls this approach to everyday life 'plaining' and an aesthetic of experience' (Collins 2002b:322).

So far, I have described the origins of the Testimonies as a cumulative process of collective experience preserved in text, QF&P, their codification into five topics, and their links with planned activity and budget allocations. I have suggested that they are vulnerable to the processes described as the routinisation of charisma and latterly to secularisation. Their disjunction from the source of inspiration, caused partly by the plurality of cosmologies and the problem of specifying a unitary shared source for them, has added to their free-standing aspect. Two consequences flow from this. They are seen as an independent basis for Quaker unity and they are open to expression in secular terms. I have noted that their enactment falls into four types. I now expand on the fourth type – personal witness – by reporting accounts of the relationship of Quakerism to the workplace, to public witness and give a specific example of the problems of religious and secular language in Testimony.

#### **4.3.9 Quaker Testimonies at Work and in Ritual extension.**

I report here conversations with Quakers at two local meetings, St Andrews<sup>363</sup> and Muswell Hill. Colin is a social worker, his wife, Genevieve, is a teacher. Robert is a local councillor and Laura is a doctor. Joyce is a retired business-woman who ran a multi-national company. They are all members of the Meeting. I asked them how their Quaker membership related to their work.

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<sup>363</sup> See Appendix I. *Dramatis Personae* for further characterisation.

All my respondents reported that their Quaker practice is implicit in their approach to their work and that their Quaker membership would not be known about in their work place. Colin said that his work was consistent with his Quaker beliefs and that the showing of care and compassion for others was part of his professional job. Genevieve was no more overt but indicated that sometimes the topics she uses in the primary class, especially the topic of respect for nature, are influenced by her Quaker practice and she thought this might enable 'respect for nature to be replaced by reverence'.<sup>364</sup>

Laura described being a doctor initially in similar ways to the way Colin described his social work. However she spoke of the way in which she sees people and patients at her work as having 'that of God' in them. She explained that this did not in any way affect her treatment of them as a doctor and that she would never make this view explicit in the workplace. She said that she sees people 'in the image that she has developed about herself'.<sup>365</sup> This means that she tries to maintain her stillness at work and sees this as some kind of indwelling sense of the sacredness of life. She tries to act through this and in doing so to see the other person as sacred.

Joyce told me about her media business. She said she was committed to promoting equal opportunities for women and young people. She said she believed strongly in a sense of fairness. She also considered it important to be scrupulous in matters of contract negotiations. Her style was unpretentious in

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<sup>364</sup> Field notes Tape Text: Genevieve.

<sup>365</sup> Field notes Tape Text: Laura.

the workplace and illustrated by the open plan office system with senior staff having few identifiable differences or privileges.

I now describe two examples of the extension of the ritual practices of stillness and silence to a testimonial context given by Helen, a Quaker volunteer with the Israel-Palestine ecumenical accompaniers programme, and Robert a local councillor in St Andrews.

Helen is a Quaker who has completed two tours on the programme. She described to me how she approached the tense encounters at the army check points, and referred to the description by one of her colleagues:

After the Separation Barrier was built 70,000 Palestinians with Jerusalem IDs found themselves on the wrong side of it. Qalandya checkpoint, between the cities of Ramallah and East Jerusalem opens at 4.45 am. Workers queue early to be sure of getting to work, since the time it takes to pass can be unpredictable. The Ecumenical Accompaniers Programme for Palestine/Israel (EAPPI) has started liaising with the UN and we now count numbers for their statistics. Also ex-Israeli Army women from Machsom Watch monitor their own soldiers' behaviour.<sup>366</sup>

Helen's task was to accompany Palestinians to the checkpoint and remain as an observer, a witness to the process. She described having to remain non-threatening, standing still at a distance but sufficiently present to be noticed by the Israeli troops. She described her approach as that of centering and of being still just as in the meeting for worship. This was more than just a technique, it seemed to enable her, she felt, to make the advocacy and

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<sup>366</sup> Wright 2009:15 *Middle East Witness* and see Images under 7 in Appendix V.

witness she was there to make. Being still and silent, yet explicitly present, was not just, in her view, to witness to the transactions between the travelling Palestinians and the Israeli army but it was to represent the presence of something greater, in a sense the eyes of God. Helen seemed to be extending ritual worship practices in a number of ways. Firstly by taking the still centre, paradigmatically related to the collective silence of worship, into the field, and secondly she was enacting the presence of a transcendent witness.

Robert is a local councillor in St Andrews. He was a founder member of the Local Meeting. He described a dilemma and its resolution, as follows:

*I was required as part of my duties to lay the wreath at the Remembrance Day parade. I was not at all happy about being a part of some ceremony with uniforms involved. In any event I would be wearing the white poppy indicating remembrance of civilians who have died in conflicts. So I declined to do it. However, over the year I thought about it and decided that I should be part of the public acknowledgement of sacrifices made without being thought of as glorifying war. I not only wore both poppies but I found I could use the silence in ways I understood from Meeting for Worship.<sup>367</sup>*

A further example was given to me by Quakers at Muswell when they described falling silent in Trafalgar Square during the demonstration against the Iraq war. Their symbolic action had the significant effect of slowing passers-by down and created a thoughtful atmosphere.

Paul works at Friends House for Quakers as a Parliamentary Liaison Officer. He described to me the way in which he works with Parliamentarians and

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<sup>367</sup> Fieldnotes: Robert.

NGOs on human rights issues. He said that the language of human rights was the necessary currency but that as a Quaker he did not understand the work in those terms. He said that people may have human rights because states or other human institutions had given them to them. He noted that in work on peace and social justice the reason Quakers think there should be fairness or human rights is because there is 'that of God in everyone' and that this is quite a different way of looking at rights. It uses the notion of gift, grace and the sacredness of life as its perspective and this is not a set of codified rules or rights. Quakers in this sense are not thinking within the framework of legality even though they have to use that kind of vocabulary.

#### **4.3.10. Summary.**

I have set out the five testimonies, identified four types and expanded on personal witness, particularly in the workplace. The key question I posed initially is: what is the relationship of testimonial actions to the meeting for worship, the spiritual source, from which all testimonies are supposed to derive, and have testimonies floated free and do they now draw on secular rationales?

It is clear that Testimonies have become codified and programmatic. This would not of itself be evidence for the disjunction I explore but might create the conditions for it. It is clear from the examination of the five Testimonies that they are almost all capable of being expressed in secular non-religious and non-Quaker language. Quaker commentators are aware of this problem. Quakers also admit that these could be used as the principle source or focus

of unity somewhat substituting for the absence of a shared spiritual source. It is however also clear that Quaker Testimonies can be present in the traditional way but in new forms. They can be implicit in the workplace and even knowingly masked whilst deploying an alternative secular rationale for an action which is perceived by the Quaker as radically reframed. It is also clear that ritual extension in symbolic actions maintains these links to religious practice and the basis of inspiration. The latter examples could be the basis for defining an action as a faith-action and not as ethics.

It is therefore sometimes difficult to pin down particular manifestations of Quaker Testimonies. Collin's view is this is because in Quakers' daily lives ritualisation is extended, life is ritualised in 'an all pervading aesthetic consistency' (Coleman and Collins, 2002b). He wishes to dissolve the boundary between ritual performance and everyday life. This may offer an explanation, and is also consistent with my findings, of the examples of simplicity and sustainability. But this experiential aesthetic does not explicate the actions of Colin, Genevieve and Joyce who could be described as acting implicitly with their Quaker practices as a general orientation not at odds with their approach to their jobs. It also does not offer a full understanding of the activities of Laura, Robert, Helen and Paul. In their actions they are taking on forms of a practice, and in Paul's case, a vocabulary, that are central and definitive of worship – centering-down, falling silent in a sense of presence and memory, holding others in mind, seeing others as having 'that of God' about them – and enacting them in a social situation. However they differ in the extent to which this is masked or explicit. I propose therefore than two features

can be added to Collins's practice of 'plaining'. Firstly, some enactments are not seamless with worship as in a general ritualisation of life but are very specific applications of ritual practice in a specific situation; secondly, these actions entail a significant reframing of the situation itself, and this may be hidden or masked from other actors. Robin, Helen and Margaret all adopt the practices of stillness from worship but they also hold other persons in mind, and regard these encounters as being between two people or more who have 'that of God' about them. This is a radical reframing of the situation. This perspective is itself masked from others. This way of working with two frameworks simultaneously is also illustrated discursively by Paul's use of language.

My conclusion is that Quaker testimonies have become routinised, codified and programmatic. They are vulnerable to interpretation and justification from secular sources. In some cases this compromises their spiritual roots. This is explained by the theories of routinisation and secularisation, and is a process that I have identified. Explicit faith-actions are limited, in the sense of being non-discursive symbolic actions, and are often covert or implicit. This in itself contributes to their masked aspect and to the potential for secularisation. I also conclude, echoing Caroline, that they may be usefully detached from the traditional and now pluralistic sources of inspiration and be a focus for unity. In Chapter 5, I take this approach to the Testimonies further and represent their free-standing position relative to the worship ritual.

## Section 4: Quaker Narrative.

This chapter has explored a series of elements within Quaker practice which have to do with the relationship between worship and action. The worship space has been described in many ways yet it is always thought to be the 'place that words come from' and Quakers are challenged by their founders in the phrase 'what canst [sic] thou say',<sup>368</sup> to speak of their convictions. Therefore the Quaker narrative, its story about itself, its self-representation, must make a series of connections: between current worship practices and the tradition; with Quaker forebears; with one another. It must achieve this through a shared vocabulary, through materials for personal practices, by articulating and empowering personal leadings, and by telling the world about the Testimonies. For an enclave which rejects creeds, doctrines, and proselytising this narrative has to be linked to activity, as in the injunction to 'let your life speak'.<sup>369</sup> The narrative makes sense of the way, it binds, holds and contains, 'the intent of all speaking is to bring it into the life'.<sup>370</sup> Quakers want to be part of the story of Quakerism. This section examines the following elements that enable Quakers to construct their narrative:

- 1 The 'canonical' text *Quaker Faith and Practice*, journal keeping, periodicals, programmes and courses
- 2 Quaker images of Quaker practices
- 3 Personal statements by adepts

I will consider these elements in turn.

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<sup>368</sup> In 1694 Margaret Fell, Fox's sponsor and later his wife, described a visit by Fox in the 1650s to Ulverston and this challenge he gave to his listeners. QF&P, 19.07.

<sup>369</sup> A&Qs, 27.

<sup>370</sup> QF&P, 2.73.

#### 4.4.1. Quaker Faith and Practice and Advices and Queries.

The 'canonical' (Collins, 1994, 2002b) book *Quaker Faith and Practice* (QF&P) includes *Advices and Queries* (A&Qs). The A&Qs derive from a process of returns that were made by local meetings to the Yearly Meeting – a process which began in 1682. The returns concerned information on membership and persecution but also the replies to the question 'How has the Truth prospered amongst you since the last Yearly Meeting, and how are Friends in peace and unity?' The *Book of Discipline* was first published in 1738 and it is now in its tenth edition. Editions entail significant ongoing revisions, updating and additions. At first the constituent parts of the *Book of Discipline* were separate publications, *Christian Life and Faith* and *Church Government* but in the period 1921 and 1959 these were combined into one publication. By 1985 the word 'Christian' had been dropped from the title but is retained today as the sub-title. These texts have a central place in the Quaker narrative.

The content of the QF&P divides into four areas. Firstly, A&Qs itself, followed by *Approaches to Worship*. This sets the tone and purpose of the text. The second section is a comprehensive guide to church governance and procedure – *Gospel Order*. This includes the right ordering of all kinds of Meetings, nominations to roles, membership, marriages, finance and funerals. The third section is concerned with 'living faithfully' and includes quotes, sometimes extensive, from Quakers on topics such as *Openings*, *Close Relationships*, *Faithful lives*, and to these devotional pieces are added material

on *Social Responsibility, Peace Testimony and Unity and Diversity*. The final section is a compilation of 93 *Well Loved Phrases* with references to their textual and oral origin.

QF&P is constantly in the process of being updated and edited and new material is added in each edition. All Quaker children are given a copy on their sixteenth birthday. Almost all members have a copy, usually well thumbed. It is always placed on the central table in Meetings for Worship and Business Meetings. Sections from A&Qs are required to be read aloud by an Elder each month at Meetings for Worship. Small pamphlet versions of A&Qs are placed on every third chair before each Meeting and these are regularly, though briefly, consulted by worshippers and often inform verbal ministry. It is regarded as a repository of Quaker experience, a guide to governance and conduct, a prompt to devotion, and a reference for words that assist in worship. The continuous strands of the Quaker story are brought together in the text, in its status and use.

Quaker tradition, that places inspiration as central, has considerable textual procedural advice to worshippers and pays close attention to form and process. I have noted that this is part of the management of diversity. QF&P is central to this management. Process, form and 'right ordering' are used by Clerks and others to contain diversity and potential conflict, and are also promoted as the most appropriate ways that the Spirit may be manifest. Quakers are encouraged thereby to 'trust the process' – accept the Quaker epistemology – which also mutes differences and promotes procedural unity.

In the section in QF&P on the problem of unity and diversity, concern over different perspectives between Christian Quakers and *Universalists* regarding the interpretation of the Light is noted, and the problems of creeds, sacraments, priesthood and the Bible are mentioned as is multi-culturalism. The tradition and its unity is hence significantly dependent upon the book QF&P and it is the constant source and the first point of reference for many Quakers. I have noted a dispersed group, Quakers of the Book who are particularly concerned with process, Gospel Order. These are Quakers who often take on tasks and roles to ensure correct procedure. They are also in Pilgrim's terms 'inclusivists' (Pilgrim 2008:61) regarding their cosmological orientation. Their regulatory role will be further discussed in Chapter 5. Section 3.

#### **4.4.2. Journals.**

Journal keeping is a Quaker tradition.<sup>371</sup> Peter, a member of the *Kindlers* group described his practice as follows:

When doing this exercise I allow myself time when I will not be disturbed. I usually find it helpful to sit in silence, perhaps for ten minutes, before writing down my responses to the questions. As I write I try not to think too much about what I am writing. I try to write from the heart, rather than from the head, so that my mind does not 'veto' anything.

(1) What do I appreciate? What makes my heart sing? When do I feel most

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<sup>371</sup> Brinton, 1972. *Quaker Journals. Varieties of Religious Experience Among Friends.*

alive?

(2) What would I do with the rest of my life if I knew I could not fail? If I was relieved of my existing commitments, how would I chose to spend the next year?

(3) Draft a mission statement, a living document that can be referred to but also rewritten every year.

(4) Personal creed

(5) Monthly examen; look back over the last month and ask yourself the following questions (a) What has been good about the last month? What have I appreciated? (b) What has been less good, what would I have preferred to have done differently? (c) How do I respond to these experiences both 'good' and 'bad' and what can I do to improve my experiences? What first steps can I take? What actions am I committed to making for the coming month?<sup>372</sup>

Here Journal keeping is a private, intimate conversation with the self, a caring for the self. This interior dialogue is prompted by text and produces text. Peter sees himself over time in his quest for purity and authenticity. He has a personal creed. This is a common discourse amongst Quakers, an essentialist mixture of self-conscious desire, pleasure in a state of nature, desire for a leading and for virtue, with a strong sense of autonomy; 'what would I do with the rest of my life if I knew I could not fail?' The transcendent is a shadow, unmentioned, as if the practices will somehow create the possibility of thinking of the outcome as somehow spiritually guided. This exemplifies the trend towards 'authenticity' that Heelas and Woodhead (2005) consider a feature of the 'holistic milieu' and a shift from religion to 'spirituality'.

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<sup>372</sup> Fieldnote Text *Kindlers* Peter.

#### **4.4.3. Magazines and Periodicals.**

*The Friend* is an independent weekly publication for British Quakers. It provides news and exchanges of views among Quakers particularly in its letters pages. Many short articles are carried from contributors, and book reviews are provided. Often there will be a theme that arises in the letters page and this usually develops into an important exchange; examples would be the agreement to hold same sex ceremonies of marriage in Quaker meetings, the Quaker response to sustainability and climate change, and questions of the interpretation of faith matters including difficult questions such as 'Are Quakers Christians?' Quakers tend to keep and circulate *The Friend* sometimes keeping a particular series of letters as an archive.<sup>373</sup>

*The Friends Quarterly* publishes articles of 3-4,000 words on a range of topics and some issues are given over to a particular topic.<sup>374</sup> These journals are often referred to over coffee after meeting and are available in the meetinghouse library. The *Quarterly* has recently made a significant intervention in Quaker discussion by sponsoring an essay competition on the future of the Society of Friends. I review the three winning entries below as part of a review of renewal initiatives.

#### **4.4.4. Discussions, Courses, Programmes and Pamphlets.**

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<sup>373</sup> A north London Quaker was able to send me the correspondence that appeared in the *Friend* over a period of several months in the 1970s on the topic of 'Are Quakers Christians?' which she had kept.

<sup>374</sup> For example *The Friends Quarterly* July 2006 *Aspects of Mysticism*, 2008 *The Practical Consequences of Faith*.

A member may join a small group meeting for discussion or attend a local programme that has been provided by the Quaker Study Centre at Woodbrooke. The St Andrews meeting recently undertook such a programme called *Hearts and Minds Prepared*.<sup>375</sup> Here participants were provided with short sections from Quaker texts and books relevant to each meeting's theme. The meetings of this group took place over a six-month period. Some new members of the meeting have attended an Enquirers Weekend at Swarthmore Hall in Cumbria and had their expenses paid by the meeting. They were expected to give an account of their experience on their return. Some members have attended a course at Woodbrooke Study Centre and presented papers at the Theology Seminar.<sup>376</sup> Members of the meeting as individuals can use the library and find there a raft of testimonial pamphlets including the annual Swarthmore Lecture.<sup>377</sup> At each Sunday Meeting 'Notices' are read out by the Clerk. These include all correspondence with Friends House in London and can include reports of meetings or pamphlets on various topics. After a Meeting, a member will present the financial appeal for the month which might involve placing some information on the central table about the project to be supported.<sup>378</sup> The librarian sometimes notes the purchase of a book and the Quaker Bookshop in London is well known to Quakers as is the central website [www.quaker.org.uk](http://www.quaker.org.uk).

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<sup>375</sup> The title comes from A&Qs 9

<sup>376</sup> Quaker Theology Seminar Proceedings 2005/6 Woodbrooke

<sup>377</sup> For example Davis 2008 *Minding the Future* on the topic of 'Sustainability'.

<sup>378</sup> Recent examples would be: the Peace Centre in Cape Town; funds to help rebuild a Meeting House in N England; and Quaker Housing Action a project for the Homeless.

#### **4.4.5. Biographies.**

The narrative power in Quakerism extends to the life cycle. The Testimonies to 'faithful lives' merits a chapter in QF&P. There is a custom of 'writing testimonies to the grace of God shown in the lives of Friends' when they die. These recount Friends living out their faith from day to day. It memorialises the completeness of a life lived. QF&P reproduces some of these testimonies. Lucy Harris (1873-1962) was a doctor 'a tiny slight woman' who sailed for China and became involved in the post revolutionary fighting in 1911. She is reported to have 'stood in a boat in the middle of the river, shouting to them, insisting that they stop fighting, and go their separate ways'. She refused to hand over her patients as prisoners.<sup>379</sup> There are mundane stories such as Katies's:

What Katie (Riley) was is written in the hearts of all who loved her, her hospitality...the neat garden providing rest and beauty, she regularly visited the lonely and the sick...she sent little notes, always decorated with an appropriate drawing, and hundreds of messages are treasured by many people.<sup>380</sup>

At Quaker funerals, held as silent meetings for worship, ministry often includes the words of the deceased. I attended three funerals during fieldwork and heard such contributions.

#### **4.4.6. Self-Representation by Quakers.**

Quakers occasionally attempt, or are called upon, to express the essence of

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<sup>379</sup> QF&P 18.17.

<sup>380</sup> QF&P 18.19.

Quakerism. I found a number of these nutshell accounts. These summations are not authoritative, they are always provisionally part of ongoing revelation, and they do not function as statements of belief, creed, orthodoxy. These are often attempts by groups or individuals to give a concise account of Quakerism to others. I provide two examples of such accounts from fieldwork.<sup>381</sup> They function as concise accounts of the main tenets of Quakerism, Quakers telling their story, and do so by using words and phrases that have become part of an oral tradition. I highlight two kinds of these references, firstly, those that are 'canonical' terms from QF&P, in italics, and secondly those that are *Well-Loved Phrases*, in bold because I wish to trace both their provenance and their changes in use.

The first 'nutshell' account of the Quaker 'way' comes from a group of Quakers attending an Ecumenical Meeting at which they were asked to spontaneously produce a description of Quakerism. They said that:

\* We engage in *silent waiting*. We are *open to new light* but we have no *creeds*.

\* We practice the *priesthood of all believers*; we are in *communion* with one another in *silence*.

\* We are *sharing experience* with respect.

\* We believe in *equal opportunities*, we invite people to join the party, we are a refuge from elsewhere, we have open boundaries, there is no need to convert we are *non credal*.

\* We believe that there is *that of God in everyone*. We have a complete respect for others'

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<sup>381</sup> The first is from an Ecumenical meeting (20/4/08) in which Quakers (12 representatives from meetings) were invited to spontaneously outline their convictions to the other denominations present; the second is from Fieldnotes Tape Text Gillman 2008. I also recorded such material from the *Kindler* groups which showed similar content.

faiths.

\* We ***speak truth to power***. We ***let our lives speak***. We *live our lives as testimonies*. We are ***travelling under concern with leadings***.

The second example comes from Gillman <sup>382</sup> introducing his vision of Quakerism:

\*That all people may have a direct awareness of the divine at any time and at any place.

\*That the relationship can be deepened by communal *listening* to the divine within, in and in between.

\*That our awareness of the divine has practical consequences in how we live our lives.

\*That the words with which this is expressed are secondary, it is the *experience* of the relationship that is primary.

\*Friends is a place of *hospitality*, of spiritual liberation, a people *travelling together*, ***open to truth***, bringing life and life in abundance.

\*It is a *pilgrimage* in which we tell each other our stories in many different languages of the spirit.

\*The spiritual life is not about what we believe it is about how we trust. The origins of the word 'credo', 'I believe' is 'cordo' 'I give my heart'. How sad that creeds as intellectual formulae have taken over from the ***promptings of the spirit***.

\*You have to say yes to something in the universe which I give my life to, religion should be about hope, Quakerism is about optimism.

\*We see as Fox did an ***infinite ocean of light and love which flows over the ocean of darkness***.

What is apparent in these short accounts of the Quaker 'way' is first that they are similar in the main elements that they describe. The narrative and the various discursive elements are enmeshed and are mutually interdependent.

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<sup>382</sup> Fieldnotes: Tape/DVD Text Gillman, 2008.

The media of practices (waiting, listening, being silent, remembering) are linked with content (statements, concepts, terms) and to fragments of text that have been subject to practices of oral exchange. The dominant metaphors are:

Being on a journey, seeking, travelling under concern and pilgrimage

Waiting, listening, communal listening

Being open, having open boundaries, being hospitable, inclusive, a refuge

Telling stories in different languages of the spirit,

letting our lives speak

Being all of one mind

An ocean of darkness and an ocean of light

These dominant metaphors relate to practices (waiting and listening) and to testimonies (being inclusive, letting lives speak) and to natural symbols that I have identified in Chapter 3, Sections 2-6. The words and phrases in bold are fragments that appear regularly in the Quaker narrative. As Douglas noted in *Natural Symbols* (1996) they,

...shorten the process of communication by condensing units into pre-arranged coded forms. The code enables a given pattern of values to be enforced and allows members to internalise the structure of the group and its norms in the very process of interaction (Douglas, 1996:57).

They have their own aesthetic, a metaphoric range of considerable power, simplicity and directness (Douglas 1996:35). These fragments can be traced to *Well-Loved Phrases* (QF&P:669) in the canonical text. How do these fragments, these aphorisms, constitute the Quaker narrative? I have shown how they appear in both collective and personal statements. I now examine

the latter in another example and consider these aphorisms genealogically. I have described the way that individuals create a personal way within and from the tradition. This is what I call 'harmonic integration' and it concerns the combining of the following elements: the body, stillness in co-sentience, silence in co-presence, identification with the group in gatheredness, discernment of promptings and some notion of a transcendent. Here I show how this has also a discursive narrative aspect.

***Pauline.***

In a taped conversation with Pauline about her Quaker practice she spoke with commitment and clarity about her faith. She ranged across Quaker practice touching on worship practices and on ideas and values that inspire her. We have already encountered Pauline has already been introduced and her commitment to the Alexander Technique and her focus on the body in worship and her deep concern with peace and non-violence. We know of her opinions on personal exemptions from group decisions and her nuanced views on the meaning of the concept of truth have been discussed. She is a highly articulate Quaker. When the tape of the conversation I had with her was transcribed certain terms and phrases, recognizable as fragments of texts, appeared in her account. These are noted in bold. I have minimally edited this transcript of a taped conversation.<sup>383</sup>

*...how do I build a bridge between my faith and my practice, how do I make it more real for me?.....What gives us [sic] meaning in our lives? We do not enable each other. We have **clearness** meetings.....so that we can find our*

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<sup>383</sup> Words in brackets are mine. ....represent real time pauses.

*leadings, our way.....I think Quakers have so much to offer, **living adventurously**...and I believe the **way will open**. The idea is you **wait**, look, reflect and **sit** with it,..... we could support each other with this kind of thing...I have read bits and pieces of Fox and Pennington, and how he talks of **life** and the **seed** growing through worship, and how you can make your life a garden. I think that is a good image....If someone had asked me about worship in Quaker Quest I would say I am not very happy with the word **worship**, I would prefer **waiting** and contemplating and **being open** and **being centred** so that.....well, I would still use the word 'thinking' but on a different wavelength; I am allowing, waiting, receiving and feeling and letting images come to me... Fox talks of being **patterns**.....**walking cheerfully over the world**. If you are at home in the world then this will shine through. I believe this is a **universal truth**...believing and embodying makes things different. It isn't always simple to do, it means unpacking it. It is interesting how we use phrases, in QPS <sup>384</sup> we say **speaking truth to power**, or 'with' or it became [sic] **seeking truth with power**, seeking truth together is what **universalists** are about, **seeking truths** that we agree on. Truths, like change, involves growth, (they) need more deep understanding, and you go down channels and dead ends. The nature of spiritual exploration is **universal**, (it is) the truth in common, of being human, of **spiritual truths**.*

In an account of about 350 words Pauline uses 16 key Quaker terms and phrases to express herself. Each of these words and phrases has a complex history and current usage. Their oral communicative and illocutionary power is enhanced by their history, their appearance in the canonical text (where they all appear in various places and in other texts) and by personal elaboration. This discursive pattern is also self-consciously reflexive; Pauline problematises the word 'worship' and notes the development of the phrase 'speaking truth to power', which is already an elaboration on the received aphorism 'speaking

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<sup>384</sup> Quaker Peace and Service Programme/Department

peace to power'. This is an example of a discourse that creates a form of life. Pauline is deploying a series of interpretive schemes implicitly in the terms and fragments of text she uses. These schemes are condensed and would require considerable explication for a non-Quaker. Pauline is moving in and out of practical and discursive modes of reference in her account – 'waiting, being open, sitting, being centred, and clearness' – and these modes are concerned with the practical search for 'spiritual truths in worship'. The phrases, 'living adventurously', 'being patterns', 'seeking or speaking truth', '*universalist*' are interpretive schemes underlying the testimonies

#### **4.4.7. A Genealogy of Aphorisms.**

What are the origins of the phrases that appear in bold italic font in Pauline's account and the nutshell accounts above? How have they changed in use over time and what is their function? These are all fragments of text that have been extracted from their original contexts. They have become sayings, maxims, and aphorisms. They are ubiquitous in Quaker speech, personal stories, and in the Quaker narrative. They also contribute to the Quaker epistemology through their use in the hermeneutic circle I have described above in Chapter 3. Section 5.

Sometimes, in voicing the aphorisms the speaker wishes to indicate their status as a Quaker. They are also used between Quakers to indicate an area of discourse or a topic. They are not however intended to be 'unpacked' for their specific meaning. They may also function as prompts or mantras which

give a focus to some meditation but where the precise sense is secondary. They are sometimes exchanged knowingly as agreed pieces of wisdom. They may have a regulatory aspect in reminding someone of a particular practice, such as; to encourage speaking the saying, 'what canst [sic] thou say' might be quoted. To inhibit speculation or talk the saying, 'think that thou mayest be mistaken' might be quoted. They offer a compressed code which is not examined in detail. This allows them to have a unifying function between Quakers as a set of basic and often unexamined assumptions or precepts.

This unifying oral practice also entails a functional ambiguity as to their precise meaning. The commonest Quaker saying 'that of God in everyone', found by Dandelion in his research to be the central tenet amongst Quakers (Dandelion, 1996) is, as I show below (Hoskins, 2008) interpreted in markedly different ways, reflecting the poles of Taylor's dialectic of transcendent-immanent (Taylor, 2007). These ambiguous meanings in use provide opportunities for both changes in meanings and in practices. These phrases began as parts of longer texts written by Quaker writers.<sup>385</sup> None of them are based on texts from the bible.<sup>386</sup> Here I can illustrate in three examples the genealogical process in which the meanings in use of these aphorisms is created over time. It is not my intention to argue for a particular meaning of these phrases or to suggest that the historical origins produce a prior claim to be authoritative, quite the contrary. I provide these illustrations and the genealogy to show the process of Quaker reproduction and change in

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<sup>385</sup> The single exception being the phrase 'the priesthood of all believers' which originates from Luther but has now been incorporated into Quaker texts. See Braaten 2000:403.

<sup>386</sup> Although the Light may be traced to the Bible.

practice. The meanings of the phrases are consequently the meanings in use in a particular context. This notion of meaning includes the way in which the phrases are used, such as ambiguous signifiers, where their precise meaning is not made explicit.

The examples I want to focus on relate to three domains of Quaker practice: firstly relations with the transcendent; secondly authority in worship, and thirdly faith in action in the world through the testimonies.

***That of God in Everyone.***

This has been shortened from ‘answering that of God in everyone’ and this is itself an extract from an original text. It is the single aphorism that most Quakers say they adhere to and yet paradoxically is a phrase that does not carry an agreed common meaning.

The original source is George Fox (1624-91):

And this is the word of the Lord God to you all, and a charge to you all in the presence of the living God: be patterns, be examples, in all countries, places, islands, nations wherever you come; that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them. Then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world **answering that of God in everyone...**<sup>387</sup>

The phrase ‘that of God in everyone’ depends in this original use, upon the ‘individual having turned to the Light’ and being able to ‘answer’, recognize that in the other. Here one aphorism, ‘that of God’ is dependent on another,

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<sup>387</sup> Nickalls 1997 *The Journals of George Fox*

'turn to the Light' where changes in meaning in use have also occurred.<sup>388</sup>The original meanings are both realist theological concepts referring to Fox's development of the notion of 'Christ'. Quakers are not unaware of the difficulties here;

'That of God', we learned was almost always misquoted and misunderstood. When you read Fox out loud (he dictated almost all his epistles and his journals), you can hear the eloquence and urgency, words tumbling out with earnestness and force...that of God was shorthand for 'that of God within you which....' Which shows you reality, which teaches you, which challenges. It should not be equated with 'something good', suggesting that all people are really good and nice, if only we cared enough...<sup>389</sup>

In present day Quakerism the idea of 'that of God in everyone' is taken to be a fact about human nature (a bit of good in everyone) Letter to The Friend 151 (1994). Thus a potential consequence of a profound religious experience has, in time, become a central concept of a received Quaker view of human nature. The idea has moved from one of consequence to one of concept...by being quoted so frequently and easily they [selected Quaker phrases] have acquired a kind of authority which suggests they are self-evidently true. In this way popular expressions constrict the new orthodoxy. Events in an organization's history are raw material that members of a culture can mould into a form that both reflects and reconstitutes the culture itself' (Dandelion 1996:268).

The ambiguity, and the way in which the aphorism is not unpacked for its specific meaning, is functional for Quakers. It enables the traditional vocabulary 'God' to be used and its co-evalness to be implied. It enables a non-realist and essentialist reading to co-exist with traditional interpretations.

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<sup>388</sup> For the basis of a genealogy of this term and its changes in use, see footnote in Chapter 1. on its first use in this thesis. See also Moore: "The 'light' was an overwhelming invasive force, not a vague mental illumination. It must be emphasized that the phrase 'the inner light' often used by modern Quakers never occurs in early Quaker writings and that 'inward light' is rare. The 'light in the conscience if it was not resisted involved a take over of ones personality'" (Moore 2000:80-81). See also Ambler 2001a&b for the development of the term and Meads 2008 in Lampen 2008 below Section 5 for 'experiments' in interpretation in contemporary practice.

<sup>389</sup> Hoskins 2008 *Longing for the Light*

Unity is generated in its use and diversity enabled by its ambiguity. This shows the way that the Quaker narrative adapts and responds to the 'cross-pressures' identified by Taylor (2007).

### ***The Priesthood of all Believers.***

Quakers have a commitment to equality. This social testimony derives from the equality before God of all worshippers and all people. Quakers also take equality to imply the authority of each person. A contemporary Quaker use of the phrase occurs in the paper *The Nature and Mission of the Church*:

The priesthood of all believers is a concept which has been central to Quaker faith and practice from the outset. In Britain, even the practice of recording as ministers those with a recognized gift for spoken ministry-prayer, teaching counselling, exhortation-during meeting for worship was discontinued in the last century...elsewhere pastors are employed they are not ordained but 'released for service'.....it is essential to our Quaker understanding of the Gospel that every member should undertake the responsibilities of the priesthood, all ministering to one another and 'answering that of God in everyone' (Nature and Mission of the Church, 2008).

Here the focus is on the rejection of a specific priestly role and the location of authority and responsibility in the individual. The origin of the phrase is the works of Luther c.1520. It has earlier origins in applying the idea of 'priest' to all believers in the Biblical text of Exodus 'you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a Holy nation' (Exodus 19.5). The church itself is called 'a royal priesthood' in I Peter (2.9). Christ was referred to as a priest. Fox noted therefore that:

Christ exercises the office of a priest. Where does he exercise this office, but in the midst of his people? – where two or three are gathered together in his name. It is the work of the priests to sacrifice and to offer offerings, first for their own sins and then for the peoples'. But Christ offers up himself. Therefore feel Christ the priest in the midst of you, sanctifying you and cleansing you and purifying you and making you clean-that he might present you perfect to God.<sup>390</sup>

The idea here is that everybody has a priestly function in so far as everybody recognizes the inner Christ, and that this exercised cumulatively and collectively constitutes the church. Amongst contemporary Quakers the idea that priestliness is a quality or function that is needed by worshippers and effected in a collective way is rejected and linked instead with issues of authority, individuation and autonomy. The phrase then accrues another meaning; instead of its original meaning of the corporate effect of all worshipers creating a church, it becomes atomized to mean the right of individuals to have their own interpretations – the priesthood of each believer. This was the meaning ascribed to the phrase by members of several Quaker groups during my fieldwork. No member of these groups was able to identify the source and original meaning of the phrase in either Fox or Luther.<sup>391</sup>

### ***Speaking Peace to Power***

From the early incident of Fox walking alongside Cromwell's carriage and assuring him of Quakers pacifism and from the Declaration of 1660,<sup>392</sup> Quakers have stressed their harmlessness to secular powers. This was

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<sup>390</sup> Pickvance and Ross, 1991 *Manuscript 53E Aa Annual Catalogue*.

<sup>391</sup> Fieldnotes: Text *Kindlers*.

<sup>392</sup> A Declaration from the Harmless and Innocent People of God called Quakers. Given to the King Charles II on May 21<sup>st</sup> 1660. (Nickalls, 1997:427).

necessary for survival. The use of the aphorism shows a particular development. It has been used as: a plea for survival, for facing up to powerful interests, as a description of ritual practice in conflict situations, and as a recruiting tool for those who seek a spiritual dimension to secular 'peace work'. The historical grounds on which this aphorism has developed are shaky. The phrase 'speaking peace to power' has been thought to derive from early Quakers. A pamphlet published in 1955 claimed that its title was 'taken from a charge given to 18<sup>th</sup>-century Friends'. A report of a working party in 1954 however noted:

We were in the midst of drafting a document on the relevance of pacifism in the modern world which was lately published under the title 'Speak Truth to Power'. Mayer was asked where he had dug it up. He could not recall beyond saying that he thought it was an old Quaker phrase. Since then a lot of people have tried to identify its source without success. No less a Quaker historian than Henry Cadbury turned his attention to it but had no luck in his researches. And there the matter stands to this day.<sup>393</sup>

Nevertheless the phrase is a potent and important one for contemporary Friends. It may be erroneously linked with primary historical Quaker social Testimony in the Declaration of 1660, but maintains the notion of Quakers as a prophetic people:

Quaker prophecy today, as in the Hebrew tradition, has the same dual purpose, the same triangular relationship with God. To enlighten, nurture and extend the spiritual community, and also to speak truth to those in power, to take prophetic action, to press for change.<sup>394</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> Bailey, 1993. *Swarthmore Lecture*.

<sup>394</sup> McNaughton 2007 *An Orientation to Prophecy* Paper given at Friends World Committee for Consultation Dublin 2007. Republished as Compilation for 'Being the Seeds of Change'. Recommended reading Yearly Meeting (Britain) May 2008 [quaker.org.uk/ym](http://quaker.org.uk/ym)

This is the simplest use of the aphorism, beyond survival, which is to confront powerful groups. Quakers do this by vigils, demonstrations and lobbying at Arms Fairs. However, it has been developed to refer to the quality of inner peace. The ability to embody, to speak peace by being silent and still in certain circumstances is a power derived from practices rooted in worship. It also challenges and confronts injustice or violence with an alternative. 'Speaking peace to power' is enhanced by the ability to be witness to aggression or injustice and not to be compromised or de-humanised by it. I have already shown in the faith-actions of Helen how she extends ritual practices of stillness into such situations. This internalisation and embodiment is elaborated further. Active non-violence is thought to have transformative possibilities as it is able to take in the 'other', both the aggressor and the victim, and contain and transform their predicament:

*The pain of the victim we see, actually, being in right relation to each other, is what peace work is about. So all these aspects are involved, pain seeing God in the other, taking on that pain, breaking the cycle of revenge (mimesis) and being related. In non-violence we do not make our opponent an enemy, we do not dehumanise them, you raise up their humanity and you treat them with respect and that is how you get transformation. This is different from a tactical or technique of non-violence this is more profound.*

*I would say that conflict is part of life whatever choice you take. It is how you do conflict, and looked at creatively it is a way of becoming more whole. Go anywhere, you will find conflict. It is how you approach it. We can do it in a way that diminishes us, or in a way that binds us together precisely because we are in conflict.*

*We are addressing the culture of violence that sees violence as the best or most regular method for dealing with problems. We are trying to broaden the*

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*solutions, and that is not just a passive pacifist position, it is active non-violence. Violence breeds violence in the long term. You can dress the question up but at the spiritual and religious level the position is the same. It is about respect for life.*<sup>395</sup>

Gordon told me that much of Quaker peace work is undertaken with other non-Quaker groups. He noted that many members of these groups find that their enthusiasm and energy wanes as they discover that little changes and their impact is slight. He told me that as a result a number become involved with Quakers because the tradition offers a way of understanding this frustration in terms of personal transformation, adopting a non-violent way of life and inner peace expressed towards others.

‘Speaking Peace to Power’ is an aphorism that emerged at a relatively late date in Quaker practice. It has become, with the aphorism ‘that of God’, a central Quaker expression. It has been relocated as it were in origins of the Quaker tradition and developed in five ways – for survival, to confront power concentrated in certain economic, military and political institutions, to embody and extend ritual practices of stillness and silence, to refer to transformations in relations, and to offer a basis for Quaker membership.

## **Section 5: RENEWAL INITIATIVES.**

There have been a number of programmes in the last five years amongst Quakers that have attempted to stimulate Quaker thought and practice. *Quaker Quest* was the first of these. It is an outreach, off-street, taster programme for

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<sup>395</sup> Fieldnotes: Text Tape Gordon.

potential newcomers. It later became popular as a kind of refresher course within local meetings. Its content was historical and inclusive of all Quaker traditions with presentations from Quakers about their practices followed by a question and answer session and 30 minutes of worship and refreshments. There is no formal data on its impact but anecdotal evidence suggests that it has had little effect on recruitment or retention of attenders.

Other renewal activities have been targeted on local meetings. Some of these, such as teaching packs for courses entitled, *With Heart and Mind Prepared* and *Becoming Friends*, have been distributed officially by Yearly Meeting to local meetings. These short courses usually bring groups or pairs together for discussion on a raft of Quaker topics and practices. They depend upon a local member of the meeting having a day's training in how to use the 'pack' that comes as the curriculum for study. I took part in the local *With Hearts and Minds Prepared* programme at St Andrews meeting. It struggled to create a group atmosphere of open sharing and began to disintegrate after conflicting views between members were expressed. The failure of the group was thought to have happened for two reasons, firstly that the members found the discussion of their personal beliefs painful, and secondly that it produced difference and conflict. The group limped on to the end of its allotted time by spending more time in worship and a pastoral facilitation was introduced to support members. As illustrated below these tensions that arise in the process of attempts at renewal are highly instructive in developing the argument of this thesis. I now focus on three renewal initiatives, *Experiment with Light*, the *Kindlers* and the *Friends Quarterly Essay Competition*.

#### **4.5.1. *Experiment with Light.***

I set out here the background of the *Experiment with Light*, a brief description of my participation in the experiment, the descriptions of it reported in the literature, and its reported impact on local meetings.

Rex Ambler considered that he had found, in the work of Gendling (1978), a 'focussing' technique that is an equivalent, a modern version, of Fox's practice of 'submitting to the Light or Inward Light' (Ambler 2001a&b).<sup>396</sup> Gendling's technique is a diagnostic approach based on relaxation and a bodily awareness, prompted by self-examination, of the 'felt sense' of a problem. Gendling's book is called *Focussing: How To Gain Access to your Body's Knowledge*. It is a secular therapeutic technique. Tapes of Ambler's meditation exercise are available and there are training programmes for facilitators of *Experiment with Light* sessions. These had some early popularity in local meetings but have now become mostly closed groups who do the Experiment. The project as a whole has not been given a formal status in the Society of Friends and remains marginal but important. The programme has been taken forward by Lampen (2008) and has been researched by Meads (2008a&b). There were estimated to be about 30-40 groups in 2004 in Britain (Meads 2008b).

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<sup>396</sup> There is debate about whether Ambler's historical interpretation is legitimate. This depends upon the answer to the question of whether early Quaker practice was focussed on 'Light' as God or 'the Light in their consciences' meaning a moral sense and innate capacity (Moore 2000). Fox in his Journals (Nickalls 1997) uses the notion of the Light on 124 occasions and always in the formulation the 'Light of Christ'.

## **Participation**

I attended a session of *Experiment with Light* as part of the *Kindlers* group. There were 14 participants. The session was guided by Elizabeth Brown an experienced practitioner, who runs retreats for Quakers and works closely with Alec Davison on *Kindlers* programs. The session followed the six-phase structure the *Original Light Meditation* set out by Ambler which I reproduce in full in Appendix IV. This is the same process and structure used by groups researched by Meads (2008a&b). Elizabeth's approach was taken from that of Gendling and the basic development set out as *Original Light Meditation*. She avoided any references to God and did not use any explicitly Christian language. She used the term 'Light' frequently. The session lasted just over one hour. The group began with 15 minutes silence then developed into a more structured version of a meeting for worship with the focus on the body and a topic of concern that might arise through or with it. The meditation was punctuated by prompts from Elizabeth. Contributions followed from the participants, for example:

*I feel a sense of acceptance....I want to be patient with myself, self accepting with no external judge only, ideally a perceptive loving community. I want to reflect inwardly, taking responsibility for my own feelings.*<sup>397</sup>

*In the Light I am listening with 'God's ear' ..maybe this is the most important thing for me. It has helped me in so many ways, an important*

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<sup>397</sup> Fieldnotes *Kindlers*: Wise.

*part of this is that everything can be weighed and included, and the way forward is recognised step by step not in some logical way...*<sup>398</sup>

*I want to get below the surface and feel at home...to receive friendship support and nourishment.....to be more confident in one's journey.*<sup>399</sup>

Most of the contributions were less spontaneously regarding peoples' immediate feelings and had a slightly detached feel of commentary about them. This may have been because the *Kindlers* group was supposed to be reviewing practices as well as undertaking them. There were also some tensions in the group between members. One member, Alex Wildwood had published reservations about the *Experiment* (Wildwood in Lampen, 2008). I was puzzled by the session and unclear what the focus of the 'focussing' technique was intended to be – the body, a personal concern or some notion of Light. It was clear however that the purpose of the meditation is to surface thoughts and feelings in individuals about worries or a problem which is noticed and objectified as bodily unease. The process then encourages the sharing of this material and intimacy within the group is supposed to result.

### ***Reported Descriptions***

The accounts from other groups researched by Meads using the six-phase meditations showed considerable animation and sharing of very personal material. The participants were described as 'trusting' and 'intimate' (Meads, 2008a:90-92).

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<sup>398</sup> Fieldnotes *Kindlers*: Murgatroyd.

<sup>399</sup> Fieldnotes; *Kindlers* Ruth Tod.

They exposed their vulnerabilities to others and expressed great trust in fellow Experimenters. When they shared with each other in depth their relationships changed and the combination of experimenting together and sharing amplified the experience. (Meads 2008a:90)

Experimenters consider that shared personal material and the deepening of interpersonal relations are central to the generation of inspiration in worship, and this, as I note below, is contentious. Meads reported that ‘they did not specifically seek “convincement” or encounter with God’. They thought that Meeting for Worship ‘lacks something that the experiment provides’ (Meads, 2008b:218). Some reported that there was a transition in the group from ‘dialoguing about personal issues’ to being ‘touched in a very, very deep way experientially spiritually in silence’ and that experimenters were in search of ‘intimacy through shared material’ but ‘reluctant to share their experience more widely’ and that ‘their experience is inherently invisible to other Friends in their Meetings’ (Meads, 2008b:224-226). Members of experiment groups ‘talk about ‘Light’ not the ‘Light of Christ’ and feel themselves to be different from the rest of meetings to which they belong’ (Meads, 2008b:226)

### ***Status of the Groups***

The *Experiment with Light* network is not a ‘listed informal group’ under Britain Yearly Meeting and does not wish to be so on the grounds that ‘it would demean its fundamental importance’ (Meads 2008b:225). Experimenters consider that it is ‘radical, in that it draws attention to spiritual experience and refers to the foundations of Quakerism [sic] and to early Friends’ experience

which is no longer felt to be important in Britain Yearly Meeting' (Meads, 2008b:229).

### ***Impact on Quakers and Meetings for Worship and Business***

The *Experiment* has had an impact on Quaker practice. Rex Ambler is a well-known and major figure and so the experiment's historical legitimacy seems to be established. However when I spoke to him about it he stressed his own personal therapeutic reasons for developing the technique during a time of personal crisis for himself.<sup>400</sup> This, and the secular nature of Gendling's technique, which Ambler imported, points to a primary focus on the individual rather than on an object of worship. The collective aspects of this tendency show up in a contrast between group intimacy achieved through sharing personal material (and the arousal that it creates) and the staid silence of the traditional Meeting for Worship. To experimenters this suggests that the energy flowing from the groups is what is lacking in the worship and business meetings.

It could be that there is a tension not just between Experimenters' spiritual experiences and the need to organise but also more generally between spiritual experience and the principles behind Quaker business structures. This may relate to the difference between whole ways of knowing (sudden and complete body, mind, heart, spiritual awareness) and rational, logical ways; perhaps it is so strongly held in British Friends' corporate culture that the discernment of the group is more valid than the individual's, especially where the individual's experience is radical spiritually. Maybe British Friends have such a strong corporate memory of the James Naylor incident that they fear the emergence of a maverick group and so constrain individual leadings too tightly (Meads, 2008:94 in Lampen, 2008).

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<sup>400</sup> Field notes: Ambler.

However, concerns have been expressed about the *Experiment*. These include the view that the focus of activity has been too immanent, too much on the individual, and not on the proper traditional interpretation of the 'Light'. The tradition may be expressed, both from the field and from the canonical text, as follows:

*The joining together of Quakers in the silence – becoming one with the I AM becoming present with the Presence – is very powerful...the 'I-Thou', the mutuality of God in me and God in you; for me the trinity is God in me, God in you, and God in the relationship between us...in a power coming through us.*<sup>401</sup>

I was not alone, but was held by a love which passes all understanding. This love was mediated to me, in the first place, by those with whom I worshipped. For my journey was not solitary, but one undertaken with my friends as we moved towards each other and together travelled inwards. Yet I knew that the love that held me could not be limited to the mutual love and care we had for each other. It was the signal of the transcendence that pointed beyond itself to the source of all life and love.<sup>402</sup>

Whereas Experimenters note that:

This sharing is radically different from the rest of British Quaker behaviour where Friends do not talk to each other of their unbidden mystical experiences and there is no structured opportunity to talk about what may have been happening to them in the silence of the Meeting for Worship (Lampen, 2008:91).

In the tradition, worship entails some kind of transcendent function and this 'could not be limited to the mutual love and care we had for each other' (Gorman, 1973). The fear of some within mainstream Quaker practice is that the experiment tends to locate the transcendent, if one is even imagined, as an interior and emergent factor and that this undermines the traditional

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<sup>401</sup> Fieldnote Tape Text: *Kindlers*

<sup>402</sup> Gorman, 1973, QF&P, 2.03

Quaker way. Whereas the experimenters offer a reply, seeing the issue more in terms of authority and a fear of inspired speech as being disruptive.

There is a concern therefore that this is not worship but that this personal sharing and intimacy is primarily a kind of group therapeutic activity.

Is it always made clear to participants that it is a spiritual process and not primarily a psychological one? How does a Light Group avoid merely becoming a poor kind of encounter group (which is how I have heard people describe the process of sharing after the period of expectant waiting)?.....Does it need to be something done under the care of the Meeting as a whole, with the awareness of and willing involvement of elders and overseers? Might people come upon insights and emotions which they do not know how to handle.....of course the fundamental question is do we really trust that it is God/Spirit guiding the process...(Wildwood in Lampen, 2008:84).

Other commentators have suggested that the experiment is at variance with the processes of Meeting for Worship. For example, it was reported to the *Kindlers* by the *Experiment with the Light* facilitator that Meetings which had undertaken the programme, did not find an increase in verbal ministry in their Meetings for Worship. This links with Mead's finding that experimenters are reluctant to share their material with others in Meeting for Worship.

For experimenters therefore it would seem that worship is interpreted as a process of sharing – the emphasis is on mutuality and intimacy as an outcome of a practice – and putting feelings into words, and what emerges is a quality of group life. Yet the intimacy created in the groups cannot find expression in worship. In the tradition, the source of the inspiration is thought to be 'God' or some transcendent, as well as being a quality that manifests itself in the

consciences and minds of worshippers. What the *Experiment with Light* programme suggests is that there is implicit and extensive material that is not articulated in the worship. Some conclude from their experience of the programme that this material should be articulated as the way 'gatheredness' can be achieved. Others are suspicious that this makes 'gatheredness' an emergent result of a 'psychological' process that elevates words and displaces the primacy of the covering spirit. Meads notes that 'the Experiment has more process structured into it and largely its focus is on the individual whereas Meeting for Worship is more communal' (Meads 2008:218). When this feature is added to the tendency of the meditation exercises to move away from the traditional notion of the Light to an essentialised and naturalistic light located in the conscience and the body, we see two difficulties that alert some Quakers to the *Experiment's* potentially negative impact.<sup>403</sup>

#### **4.5.2. Summary.**

The *Experiment with Light* dramatises key tensions within Quaker practice. The historical revisionism behind the *Experiment* supports an individualistic and naturalistic interpretation of early Quaker practice and a non-transcendent meaning of the concept of Light. These trends can be justified in the Quaker narrative as a form of continued revelation by the use of the Quaker aphorism – 'be open to new light'. Individualism in turn produces pluralism. Personal material that has been located in the 'felt sense' of the body is given more

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<sup>403</sup> The drift in the meditations away from the 'Light' understood as some kind of transcendent to the 'light' as a feature of individual conscience can be seen in the text itself correctly reproduced from Ambler's original (Ambler 2001a&b), used in the Experiment. This is set out in Appendix IV. Here it can be seen that the word 'L/light' is capitalised in the Quaker and Biblical prompts but de-capitalised in the Gendling version and in the basic Quaker version.

emphasis than inspiration thought to be given to the group as a whole. The personal validity and sincerity of this material is not in question but it comes up against the requirement of discerning the 'truth' in the traditional way. This way subjects the person to discernment. Persons in the tradition are conduits for the group, by contrast in *Experiment with the Light* they are too identified with their own experience, their worries, and these are held up to scrutiny by the group. This increases their sense of vulnerability. The vulnerable experimenters pull back to the centres of their groups of intimacy and the 'culture of silence' (Dandelion 1996, 2008) is reinforced. Therapy here becomes confused with worship.

This process of attempted renewal therefore sets up a complex response amongst Quakers. It also makes explicit the differences in interpretation between readings of the Light – transcendent or naturalistic, and this creates difference and potential division. Explicit differences undermine the ambiguity that Quakers tolerate for the sake of unity. The initial experience of failure in the *Kindlers* group *Experiment* points to the tensions of diversity, naturalism and pluralism that the *Experiment* makes explicit.

#### **4.5.3. The *Kindlers*.**

The *Kindlers* was created by Alec Davison in 2008. He had become worried about the lack of energy he experienced in Meetings as he travelling around the Society, the poverty of ministry, the lack of commitment to take up jobs in local meetings, and a general ignorance amongst Quakers of their own

tradition. He decided after having been co-ordinator of the *Quaker Quest* programme for newcomers to create a project that would 'kindle' or revitalise current members and the tradition. He focussed particularly on the Meeting for Worship and on what he called 'spiritual disciplines'. He contacted a co-worker Joycelin Dawes who was experienced in running groups and had recently published a book aimed at Quakers and other 'spiritualities' called *The Quest: A Sense of Soul*. I have noted her work above (Dawes, 2009).

Alec has been a schoolteacher, a theatre director, and a librettist, and is member of the Science and Medical Network which publishes research on neuro-science and 'spirituality'. He favours a somewhat didactic approach to learning, has firm views on notions of the divine which he calls the 'Source' and is impatient with group processes. He was attracted to working with Joycelin because she has a very different approach. She is comfortable with group processes, is patient, and holds a naturalistic conception of matters spiritual and is a Quaker *universalist*. I was invited to their five planning meetings which took place over three months, in which they set out a programme.

They recruited a group of 14 experienced Quakers from around England and invited them to join the first experimental programme of 12 four-hour evening sessions spread over six months. Details of the participants are set out in Appendix I. The programme was described as:

A concern to help the work of Quaker spiritual renewal. It is an experimental response to the central priority of Britain Yearly Meeting's

“Framework for Action 2009-2014 Together in Worship and Witness”. It is a project supported by NW London Area Meeting

It continued:

Through deep encounter we speak to the kin within another: we experience that we are kin. We learn to share a oneness, a fellowship of our human kind: it is our nature to do so. This fellow sharing is the first spark of a kind-ness which may move into a deeper loving-kindness. Fox called it ‘answering that of God in everyone. The act is one of kindling, of quickening the spirit in the other.’<sup>404</sup>

Alec was well aware of the need for the group to achieve what is called ‘recognised listed group’ status in order to attract resources from donors. The programme that was designed had the following 12 sessions:

1. Hearts and Mind Prepared – Thresholds – Knowing God
2. Place, Space and Time – The Creative Spirit
3. Practices of the Body – Human Consciousness
4. Stillness and Silence – Spirituality and the Arts
5. Inner and outer Awareness – Jesus
6. Waiting in the Light – Cosmic Christ
7. Words and Speech – Caging the Spirit
8. Rhythms and Responses – The Quaker Way
9. Gathered in the Spirit – Quakers Now
10. Artwork – Challenges Ahead
11. Going out into the World
12. Kindlers

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<sup>404</sup> QF&P: 11.48, Rufus Jones.

Each session was to have the following structure:

Arrival and Refreshments

Welcome and 'Go Round' the group – only listening no discussion

Input on the Theme – paper by Alec

Group Work in 3s or 4s

Input on the Theme

Plenary Discussion

Worship

Notices

The sessions started at 6.00 and finished at 10.00.

Alec also wanted to try to create from this group a small group of travelling facilitators who would take the Kindlers programme forward. He also wanted the members of this group to share ideas about how to work with other groups and to learn and share techniques and exercises, many of which were contained in Joycelin's book. Each member was given a copy. This they called the 'Tool Kit'.

In the early sessions it became apparent that the group contained experienced and strong-willed characters each of whom had their views of what is central and basic Quaker practice and what was needed to revitalise it. For Imran, it was to invest in *Young Friends*; for Ruth it was to learn to relax in meetings and be in touch with the body; for Peter it was to develop the self examination of Journal writing; for Margaret it was to reform the administrative processes

especially in the centre at Friends House; for Kaveh it was to find direct social relevance of Quaker testimonies; for Carol it was to explore the 'labyrinth' and get in touch with nature; for Maggie it was to embrace the Buddhist 'way'; for Linda it was about getting clear aims and objectives and; for Alex it was to return to the basics of Quaker practice and be open to new light. It was difficult for Alec and Joycelin to deal with these agendas.

The early sessions were described by the participants as, 'too stimulating' and 'a roller coaster', but there was energy and goodwill in the group, and the members appreciated the facilitator's hard work. However the different orientations between members became more pronounced and they disagreed about the way they wanted to work together, and these issues were linked. The different orientations were shown dramatically by an exercise proposed by Joycelin. Members were invited to situate themselves in the room, which was a large open space in Friends House, by orienting themselves to two walls one of which represented theism and the other atheism. Several members objected to this and one said there should be a wall for Buddhism and another for other faiths. This debate became a clear challenge to the facilitators' authority and the points were conceded by them. The group members arrayed themselves by these points of reference. The pattern was striking with a large spread of positions and few in the theist part of the room. Joycelin noted that this was the distance of the conversations that the members need to have. The group returned to their seats and were very quiet.

I had noticed in the preceding four weeks that the members were articulate and confident in the early 'go round' at the start but were increasingly diffident and even irritable in the unstructured whole-group sessions. They preferred working in pairs with someone they could chose. The whole-group sessions had started to show several patterns. Two strong characters Alex and Linda would regularly challenge the structure, and they circulated emails to the group giving their respective 'take' on what was happening. This was not coordinated and they did not seem to be particularly friendly towards each other. This meant that Alec and Joycelin were constantly having to justify and explain what they were asking the group to do before each exercise. I also noticed that the pattern of communication in the whole-group plenary sessions was not particularly interactive.

The group agreed to discuss the differences that had become apparent in the standing exercise. Alec asked them simply to talk about what they did in worship. The responses show the differences between members of the group.<sup>405</sup>

*Something that has an all-embracing love and purpose, but I see no value in trying to define it further...worship is about what that being wants us to be, but that is not Jesus Christ. Worship has to do with connectedness, here and with*

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<sup>405</sup> This was one of the few occasions in fieldwork when I took notes during an event. I reconstructed them soon afterwards and in one case one of the participants agreed to be taped. I met with several of them for conversations and confirmed the general content of what they had said.

*everybody else. I often wonder about the phrase 'you cannot worship both God and mammon,' but I think that is too narrow.*<sup>406</sup>

*I am not really sure whether I worship anything. I try to build on a connectedness, a continued awareness...it does not often happen. Worship is not Jesus centred, he was a remarkable man, but as for God, well..... 'be still and know that I am God'...I feel that I am still and with you, not the usual phrase....*<sup>407</sup>

*Worship comes from 'worthship', what I find to be of the highest value. But I do not have to have a God because that is a meaningless word, but spirit runs through creation, constant and simple; I will be energised if I give it attention and am faithful. I feel it is one, and draws everything to unity...*<sup>408</sup>

*I worship wonder and the wholeness of creation, but not a personal God. I find that if I let go, by letting go, things work out...also if I think, pray about others, even those doing evil things, then it may stop them doing them, make them better people*<sup>409</sup>

*I worship a reality, as it says in the Teilhard de Chardin phrase, 'the ground of my being', the beloved source of all, if I address it at all. In waiting I remember people in need, if I am in empathy with their condition, to help them, the effects of prayer, they are being worshipped*<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>406</sup> Fieldnotes *Kindlers*, Rose.

<sup>407</sup> Fieldnotes *Kindlers*, Peter.

<sup>408</sup> Fieldnotes *Kindlers*, Tom.

<sup>409</sup> Fieldnotes *Kindlers*, Kaveh.

<sup>410</sup> Fieldnotes *Kindlers*, Margaret.

*I am not sure I am worshipping a personal God..but unity through nature, I am worshipping a benevolent creator, 'God' is a shorthand rather than a Being...*<sup>411</sup>

*I feel a presence, a blessing, an omnipotence in creation which we are all formed by...*<sup>412</sup>

*I feel 'worship' is a difficult word, Meeting for "worship"? worship is an intransitive verb, but sometimes I feel there is something, but it is everywhere...it is life*<sup>413</sup>

*Worship for me is to open up, to go as deep as possible. Over the years I have found this experience to have three aspects; it is profoundly creative; if I am troubled, things will be given, patterns will emerge; it is healing; it relates to personal relationships and compassion, enlarging me to the others' condition; it has some wisdom, some deep knowing. The experience is intimate, and profoundly personal, but it is a source well beyond me, a power. God, a personal God does not mean anything to me...but the source has a healing dimension*<sup>414</sup>

*I am coming from a universalist perspective but I took the Christian path up the mountain, so I suppose it is Jesus whom I worship*<sup>415</sup>.

*I am a traditionalist, I see God as a person, as a man. I am very comfortable with early Friends. I worship Him in His presence in silence, and I wait to hear a voice as He speaks to me of His truth. This transforms me in the Light, kindles a tiny spark that becomes a living flame of God's love.*<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> Fieldnotes *Kindlers*, Carol.

<sup>412</sup> Fieldnotes *Kindlers*, Ruth Tod.

<sup>413</sup> Fieldnotes *Kindlers*, Alex.

<sup>414</sup> Fieldnotes *Kindlers*, Alec.

<sup>415</sup> Fieldnotes *Kindlers*, Maggie.

<sup>416</sup> Fieldnotes *Kindlers*, Ruth Serner.

*I have my values and I have a sense of where I want to go, but I have to be open to change and allow the way to emerge....I am just repeating myself. ....The thought becomes less intellectual and a bodily thought. A dream thought....the body opens with the thought...and worship is the full shape that it takes in embodiment, in fullness sense and maybe action.... what has it got to do with religion in other words...I will try this at various levels. I am not very happy with the word 'worship' I would prefer 'waiting' and 'contemplating' and 'being open' and 'being centred' so that.... , I would still use the word 'thinking' but on a different wavelength; I am allowing, waiting, receiving and feeling and letting images come to me.....and that is not 'worship' I do not think, and what has that got to do with God? Well I think I see God as a life force, a creative life force who is present in us all, in everything. I think force is an OK word, you could use power, but it is present.<sup>417</sup>*

The spread of cosmologies was striking. The differences in the group were now felt to be acute. A respect for difference seemed to inhibit any exchanges of views or any appreciation of others' contributions. The pattern of serial monologues became very pronounced with turn taking and no interaction between members. The session ended with the usual worship which was wholly silent.

I stayed behind to listen to Alec and Joycelin who were perturbed. They agreed to meet at Alec's house the following week to try to think through the way the programme was going. The emails from Alex and Linda duly arrived:

I confess I got caught up in this mental sparring, this heady exploration as much as anyone (after all it was how I was educated as a child; it is very familiar to me). But it is not really satisfying – certainly not to my

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<sup>417</sup> Fieldnotes Tape Text *Kindlers*, Ruth Tod.

soul. I have learnt that there are much more interesting, more important places to get to, spaces where the truth of our own experience need not compete with one another as voices tend to do. There is a way of sinking down, of sharing from the heart –much as we do in meeting for worship.....(Alex).

My difficulty is that I have no clear sense of process in all this. I feel I have made a considerable commitment of time and energy over the last few months but it has felt difficult to know how to engage constructively. Within our twelve week session for example, we have been told what happens to us and at other times that 'X' will happen; but much of the time there has been no opportunity or time for joint discernment. That may be due to the nature of the experiment, and pressure of time, but it has been frustrating at times (Linda).

At the next few sessions these patterns became more pronounced although Alec and Joycelin reduced the amount of didactic input, tried to get ideas flowing from the group in pairs, promoted working on ideas for the 'tool kit' and charting the members sense of what the Quaker essentials are – what they called the 'pearls of great price'. The latter were deeply felt convictions that were highly individual and I draw on them in other parts of this thesis. The plenary group sessions became increasingly fractious. Differences between members became acute. It was clear that they differed not just in terms of their background cosmologies but also in their ideas about worship and the best way forward. Some like Carol, Maggie and Ruth for example were more open to importing activities that were akin to alternative therapies. Linda was in favour of creative workshops, whereas Imran, Tom and Alec himself were focussed on organisational issues, young people and the health of local Meetings and allocating resources to activities. A group comprising Alex, Margaret, Ruth S, Joanna were convinced that the traditional Quaker way of

listening, discernment, silent worship should be strictly adopted for all problems. Linda proposed that the remaining sessions of the programme be turned over to the members for them to 'offer' their particular skills to the group. This was agreed but not with very much enthusiasm and Linda proposed that she would run a creative workshop at the next session. All these variants also masked the unsaid conflict between transcendent and immanent perspectives (Taylor, 2007) which were overt in the exercise of positioning described above.

Alec and Joycelin still tried to direct the group and to break into the recourse to serial monologue and turn-taking in the plenary sessions, but this stimulated irritability and contention such that Linda, supported by Margaret, introduced the 'conch' (which was in fact an apple) to determine that only the person holding it could speak. This solidified the pattern that the group had established. Linda did her workshop. Alex failed to come to the last two sessions, more time was spent in silent worship and the programme ended amicably. Alec and Joycelin felt they had learned much to help them design another *Kindlers* program, which they did.

The *Kindlers* programme dramatised some key features for contemporary Quakers. Firstly, very significant differences in basic foundational assumptions cosmologies became explicit and this situation was difficult for the members to work with. The problem was linked to the highly individual views about the essence of Quaker practice and therefore what needed to be renewed and how. Secondly these differences were felt to be potentially divisive. Some

strong members of the group held the view that nothing useful could be known except by the strict methods of Quaker worship and the lack of unity was felt possibly to be because these methods were not being used. The ritual pattern of serial monologue with no interaction emerged as the solution to the fractious sessions. Recourse to such a pattern by Quakers, when faced with unfamiliar challenges, has been noted by Coleman and Collins (2000:322):

...the Quaker group found it difficult to know whether to treat the conference as an 'academic event' or as a 'Quaker event'. The first plenary session began with a period of silence; after an introductory talk participants stood to speak and on no occasion were interrupted, and there was a feeling of unease among them in speaking more than once.

The members were concerned about the conflict within the group. The adoption of the patterns of non-interaction of the Meeting for worship and its ritual epistemology was a way of avoiding conflict but meant that the group could not work in the way envisaged by the programme. As the members felt anxious, so other solutions were sought. These presented themselves in the alternate leadership of the 'pair', Alex and Linda, who had different interests but could challenge and manage the facilitators, and the group encouraged this. Alex argued for the use of worship methods and Linda for creative activities. Some aspects of these dynamics were systemic and not conscious in terms of individual members' intentions. The fact that a group of seasoned Quakers could be so caught in the grip of these systemic features is evidence of their potency.

Tom described his experience of Quakers trying to have a discussion in the *Kindlers* group:

*actually our unity relies upon orthopraxis rather than orthodoxy. I think there is a lot of truth in that. If this is true there are not doctrinal norms, norms of belief, but here none of the norms of behaviour apply because you are trying to do something completely new.... Your Quaker norms relate to Sunday worship and coffee, whatever else you do, and then you are suddenly in a situation in which none of that applies. Would you necessarily know how to take a group forward? You are trying to produce new practice norms on the fly, which is really hard because we care a lot about our practice norms. If you had a doctrinal base to build it on you could say well the book says this....or Quakers strongly believe in.....<sup>418</sup>*

The failure of the group showed these aspects of Quaker culture to be very potent in shaping the way Quakers attempt to be reflexive and in their general corporate conduct. The renewal enterprise itself was subverted by the very problems it was set up to address concerning authority and relations between the individual and the group, the relationship of ritual form to content, ritual communication patterns as a defence, and varying commitment to a worship based epistemology versus other ways of knowing. Alex for example is committed to being open to new light yet was influential in convincing members of the group that this could only appear within the tried and tested methods of Quaker practice. The cross-pressures of combined individualism and pluralism identified by Taylor (2007) can be seen at work here. The way the *Kindlers* regained their equilibrium is itself a dramatisation of one way

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<sup>418</sup> Fieldnotes: Text Tape *Kindlers* Tom.

Quakers maintain their unity in diversity. The *Kindlers* was a group of long term experienced Quakers from many parts of England.

#### **4.5.4. Reflections on the Kindlers Group.**

This *Kindlers* episode therefore also provides a sense of what Douglas (1996) calls the pressures of 'grid' (the pressures of social categories relating to diverse cosmologies) and 'group' (the controls and conformance created by identification with the group and its norms) for Quakers, to which I refer in Chapter 5. below.

The 'failure' of the *Kindlers* had two effects on Alec. Firstly he redesigned the programme to ensure that the balance between input and plenary discussion was changed. He encouraged more of the participants' material to determine the shape of the discussion and he reduced the potential for face-to-face disagreement in a free-form group. In a sense he succumbed to the pressures of the group. The second publication was called *Breakthrough to Unity* and was about mysticism. Alec redesigned the programme so that participants could rehearse and then combine elements of personal practice – silence, stillness in their own ways. This is the process that I call 'harmonic integration'. The effects of individualism and pluralism can be seen at work in this development. Secondly he realised that coherence amongst Quakers through shared practices, in the face of so much difference and disagreement, may only come from a personal vision or version. He accepted that his contribution

might be more individualistic and 'prophetic'. It was his return to his centre, and he was stimulated to write his version of Quakerism.

The *Kindlers* with the *Experiment with Light* suggest that renewal movements in Quakerism adapt to and succumb to the pressures identified in the 'spiritual landscape'. Here individualism reasserts its dominance. Alec's version is a textual example of the process of individual harmonic integration of the elements of his Quakerism and I reproduce it here.

Quakers are **Friends of Truth**. Seeking wherever it may be found. Bearing witness against all dogma and creed, we are an open minded Society ready to explore not only the truth of our hearts in spiritual experience but also fresh thinking and research in all fields of human discourse in the sciences, arts and humanities. We affirm that the revelation of truth, the divine creative reality, has not been once and for all time, nor in one person but is continuing. Our findings are shared and questioned within our religious community for discernment, acceptance and inclusion in 'Quaker Faith and Practice' our book of inspiration and discipline, which in an unparalleled religious undertaking, is revised every generation.

The Quaker way is founded on **religious experience**. We reflect on these inward knowings and bring them to outward understandings — a dance of reality and mystery to deepen new experience. Our worship is a response to the Divine within us when we journey together through the gateway of silence to wait upon the Light, discovering its inward power in the midst of stillness. We reach for a gathered meeting where we all become committed to the life of the

community, laying down human power and hierarchy so that it may be Spirit led. From the promptings of love and truth we know the leadings of our Source calling us to speak to a world that needs healing.

Our Religious Society arose 350 years ago from within **Christianity**. The teachings of the historic Jesus remain central to our public testimony and life together today. But in trying to live adventurously we find that the Spirit is guiding us in new directions and we understand Christ in new ways. What was always a latent **universalist** dimension within the Quaker faith, under a growing global and multi-cultural consciousness, is now emerging more tellingly to the fore. We are enriched by insights and dialogues in the wider spiritual world. Those of all faiths and none are welcomed to worship and witness with us in our experiment to build new bridges and to seek for greater human unity

It is our discovery that there is that of **God in everyone**: each person is a unique child of the Divine and humanity is one family. In the Light of the Spirit all members of that family are equal. From our beginnings when we recognised women as fully equal to men, until today when gay and lesbian Friends are a fully integral part of our fellowship, this insight has impelled us to engage in shifts of consciousness and social change – to work for the abolition of slavery and also of torture, the relief of poverty, for penal reform, commercial ethics, the establishment of the welfare state and the initiation of new charitable enterprise. We aim to work that everyone may experience respect, dignity and justice, beyond all barriers of age, gender, race, class, ability and sexual orientation.

Born out of the experience of the seventeenth century civil war our Society has since taken a stand **against all war and violence** of any kind anywhere. This has led us to experiment at every level of community with its many alternatives, through mediation, dialoguing, civil resistance, conflict resolution, democratic perseverance, non-violent action and the building of civil society. We are

recognized as a peace church and these robust, well tried **peaceable processes** we offer, with the authority of long practice, to those in the global community now also seeking to create a world without war and division.

We try to work towards a simple lifestyle to ensure that there might be a sustainable world with a sufficiency for everyone's need. We join with others in the struggle for economic justice, fair trade and environmental care. The Quaker way is guided by our **sacramental vision**: we value all life on planet earth as an experiment of divinity. Together it is fashioned into an interrelated and interdependent fragile unity, which is set in a universe of awe, wonder and mystery. Each expression of evolving life, including our own, has a unique and transitory potential, seeking brief fulfilment. It is precious: it is sacred. We celebrate with joy its diversity and wholeness. (Emphases and punctuation as in the original).<sup>419</sup>

#### **4.5.5. The Essay Competition.**

I now turn to the third example of renewal activity, the essay competition. This was launched by the periodical *The Friends Quarterly* with support from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and was open to all Quakers in Britain. The three winning entries were published in 2010 (*The Friends Quarterly* Issue 2. 2010). They share many views about the problems facing Quakers both in the prevailing social conditions and in the internal organisation but differ in their foundational assumptions about what Quakerism is and they put forward radically different solutions to the challenge of renewal.

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<sup>419</sup> Fieldnotes: Text: *Kindlers* Alec Davison.

Murgatroyd (2010), the winner of the competition, exemplifies Heelas and Woodhead's (2005) thesis that there has been a shift from religion to spirituality. She writes of her Christian background, of difficulties with the Nicene creed, institutional sexism and the difficulty of making links with the 'rest of the world'. She notes that 'Yoga and music were my main sources of spiritual nurture'. She talks of a 'personal spiritual quest', and there being 'no need to be sure quite what one believes' (Murgatroyd, 2010:4-8).

I use the words God and Spirit interchangeably, and other terms besides and would not wish to define them too closely, as they refer to a power which ultimately is beyond definition (Murgatroyd 2010:44, footnote 1).

Murgatroyd's solutions emphasise Quaker practice as an artwork and talks of the creation of 'spaces' for various functions; spaces to be, for discernment and learning, for nurturing testimonies and for developing our visions. Her vision is inclusive and she sees little to be gained from a closer shared notion of the transcendent.

Best (2010) the second placed essayist, shares Murgatroyd's diagnosis noting aspects of secularisation, materialism, and pluralism, and interior problems like the lack of a shared language for discussion. His trajectory is different however. He suggests that Quakers are 'scared' of a range of activities, of 'being religious', of 'spiritual intimacy' and of 'saying what they believe' (Best, 2010:19-21). He also notes that the Society of Friends is a 'complex organisation' with 'structures that are archaic' and that the Quaker self representation of being 'simple, radical and contemporary' is a sham (Best, 2010:49). Best traces the problem to pluralism and relativism; 'pluralism has

become the “ultimate reality”. Critically this has led to a situation in which several features dominate. These include the view that ‘anything goes’ in terms of belief, that ‘our values have become indistinguishable from secular values’ and that there is,

evidence of a shift in the understanding of Quaker discernment from ‘seeking the will of God’ to an expectation that everyone will have their say and be happy with the outcome and where decisions reflect ‘the feeling of the meeting’ (Best, 2010:51)

This process means that Quaker practices are no longer seen by those individuals who act in these ways as a ‘religious’ activity (Best, 2010:52).

Best’s solution lies in the adoption of a ‘progressive orthodoxy’ which is rooted in the group and not in individuals. Worship should allow non-silent ‘programmed’ practices that articulate this orthodoxy. Quakers should not be afraid of a ‘spiritual hierarchy’, but youth should be given more of a voice because they are able to bring a fresh appreciation of communality and spiritual intimacy to Quaker practice. Best proposes the adoption of a set of theological categories to bind Quakers together:

If the Society is to avoid a seventh theological age of extreme pluralism, which offers at best merely continuation and potentially disintegration, then we must move beyond the current liberal theology to a theology of post-liberalism such as that advanced by Lindbeck. In contrast to liberal individualism, post-liberalism tends towards more tradition-constituted and communitarian accounts of human rationality and personhood. Theological rationality is not to be rooted in the authority of the individual but in the language and culture of a living tradition of communal life (Best 2010:53).

Best argues explicitly against the cross-pressures (Taylor, 2007) of individualism and pluralism in favour of a collective sense of Quakerism shared, almost as orthodoxy, by the group.

The third essay was by Kaal (2010). She proposes that Quakers articulate 'a second person concept of God that we can all be comfortable with and speaks to our present condition'. She characterises such 'second person' concepts as 'God is experienced as an external being – the divine Thou to whom I must surrender – a transcendent' (Kaal, 2010:66ff). Kaal proposes four levels of training for the 'spiritual journey' and asks whether completing the training at each level should be a condition of membership.

These essays add to the picture of renewal initiatives. Their diagnoses are not dissimilar and exemplify a number of features of the secularisation thesis developed by Taylor (2007) in this thesis. However the differing foundational positions of Murgatroyd as compared with Best and Kaal show the very pressures of secularisation which have been charted by Heelas and Woodhead (2005). Therefore the essay writers' solutions or visions for Quakerism are radically different. Murgatroyd's is consonant with the quest of the group that Pilgrim calls 'syncretists' (Pilgrim, 2008) who are individualists, interested primarily in their own authenticity and spirituality, and wary of authority or doctrine. Her position is also consistent with Collins's view of Quakerism that it is not primarily religious and that there is a seamlessness between worship and other activities of daily life. In Collins's case Quakerism [sic] is an experiential aesthetic (Coleman and Collins, 2002:317), however

Murgatroyd's sees artistic and creative craft activity as a 'space' which can be sacralised as a substitute for religion. Best and Kaal both take a critical realist foundational position in relation to Quaker ontology. They both propose a group-held orthodoxy which entails a 'second person concept of God'. They both put forward the idea of some kind of hierarchical authority and Kaal proposes that certain practices linked to certain tenets should become the tests of membership. Both would see the move back to discernment by the 'will of God' as replacing the idea of the 'will of the meeting', which they see as having made Quaker decisions ethical rather than spiritual.

#### **4.5.6. Summary.**

This chapter has shown how through institutional structures, processes and enactments Quakers construct their practices. I have shown how these aspects are historically rooted in the beliefs and practices of the meeting for Worship and in the origins of Quaker inspiration and power – a shared notion of the Light. I have shown how these foundational aspects come under pressures and cross-pressures that have been theorised as secularisation and I have charted the consequences for the tradition of the particular pressures of individualism and pluralism. Ethnographic evidence of the effects of these pressures has been illustrated in the shifting criteria for discernment in the Business Meetings and the drift in the Testimonies from inspired speech to ethical formulations. The Renewal Initiatives dramatise and illustrate these tensions, producing in turn more perspectives and competing interpretations of Quakerism. I have also shown how emphasis on process and form by those

concerned with Gospel Order, and the changing meanings in use of the traditional Quaker discourse (specifically illustrated in the genealogy of aphorisms), provide regulatory mechanisms to maintain unity in diversity.

I now deploy a model (Douglas, 1996) and its theoretical framework, Cultural Theory to explicate further these systemic relations within Quaker practice.

## CHAPTER 5.

### EXPLICATING QUAKERISM THROUGH CULTURAL THEORY

#### Introduction.

The ethnographic material presented here shows a Quaker economy that strives to achieve unity in diversity. It adapts, succumbs to and resists the cross-pressures that I have identified in the spiritual landscape. The pressures so far identified in a developed version of the secularisation thesis (Taylor, 2007, Martin, 2005) may also be theorised within Cultural Theory. To do this I use the anthropological model developed by Douglas (1996) and others as Cultural Theory (Douglas, 1982, Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky 1990, Douglas and Ney, 1998).

In Section 1, I set out the whole framework, that is, Douglas's model and the development of it as Cultural Theory.<sup>420</sup> In Section 2, I note particular aspects of the theory, certain assumptions behind the model and some critiques (Fardon, 1999, Spickard, 1989). In Section 3, I apply the framework – the developed grid-group model including the 'four cultures' theory (Douglas and Ney, 1998:103) – in three ways. First, I use it to describe 17th-Century Quaker practices. Second, I array contemporary Quaker cosmologies within the model. Third, I consider the impact of the pressures conceptualised in the framework on four key elements of Quaker practices that have emerged in the ethnography – ritual worship, decision-making in Business Meetings, the Testimonies and renewal initiatives. I contrast the contemporary picture with

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<sup>420</sup> The terminology I adopt is to use the word 'model' to refer to the grid-group diagram, 'theory' to refer to the full development of Douglas's thinking in Cultural Theory, and 'framework' to refer to the combination of both.

that of the 17<sup>th</sup>-Century and conclude that explicating Quaker practices through the grid-group model and Cultural Theory also shows the effects on Quakers of the pressures of individualism and pluralism theorised by Bruce, (1995, 2010), Martin, (2005) and the cross pressures in the spiritual landscape I identified from the work of Taylor, (2007) and Heelas and Woodhead, (2005).

## **Section 1: Douglas's model and its development as Cultural Theory.**

Douglas set out her model and theory in a number of publications (Fardon, 1999). For my purposes, I draw on Douglas's 1996 settled formulation of the model and theory set out in the 1996 edition of *Natural Symbols*, developed first in her 1982 *Introduction to Grid-Group Analysis* (Douglas, 1982) and later in her 1998 work *Missing Persons* (Douglas and Ney, 1998).

Douglas's theory is designed to address two questions. First, what are the social circumstances that encourage particular kinds of religious sensibilities? Second, what kinds of institutions do people of given sensibilities construct for themselves? I consider these questions and their theoretical aspects in Section 2.

There were two stages to Douglas's development of the framework. First, the development of the model's conceptual dimensions of 'grid' and 'group' and the pressures they represent (Douglas, 1996:59-71). Second, the

development of the concept of 'social bias', that is, the pressure towards the 'worlds, or cultural types' represented by the four quadrants of the model (Douglas and Ney, 1998:103). These social biases, conceived as pressures created by certain kinds of social organisation, also function as positions and preferences towards which individuals are drawn and which 'shape the thinking of individuals' (Douglas and Ney, 1998:103).

The vertical dimension grid represents the various constraints and pressures on the individual created by social structures in terms of rules, classifications and categories. Fardon (1999) noted the development of the concept of grid from the first formulation – 'grid consists of rules which relate one person to another on an ego-centred basis' (Fardon, 1999:111) to a definition whereby – 'grid has taken over the sense of value that was previously determined: *the coherence of the classificatory scheme*' (Fardon, 1999:115, my italics). By the 1996 edition of *Natural Symbols*, which I use, it is clear that the concepts, 'grid' and 'group' have settled meanings. Grid is defined as '*order, classification, the symbolic system*' (Fardon, 1999:115, my italics). The grid dimension focuses on an individual's obligation to others – the degree of social control that society exerts, apart from the control exercised by group membership. Here pressure is created on the individual not by group loyalties, but by the *set of rules which engage him/her in reciprocal transactions* (Fardon, 1999:115) (my italics). The concept and dimension grid therefore means: *the coherence of the classification system, its symbols and categories and the pressures that these create for individuals in terms of social controls, and reciprocal rules governing transactions* (Fardon, 1999:116) (my italics).

Grid also comes to include, in Douglas's writing, the means by which these pressures are applied through 'restricted and elaborated speech codes' (Douglas 1996:52). Grid also includes in Cultural Theory, through the work of Thompson, the development of 'ego-centred networks' (Thompson 1990:11, 197). Thompson also distinguishes the pressures of grid from those of group by making a distinction between the unique patterns or relations in ego centred network relations (grid) and the predictable patterns in group relations (group).

Group, the horizontal dimension, represents the variation in pressure on individuals imposed by their relationships with groups, the 'strength of their group ties' (Spickard, 1989:156) and this includes their sect<sup>421</sup> or enclave membership. Group indicates the pressures of collective organisations on the individual, *'the experience of having no option but to consent to the overwhelming demands of other people'* (Douglas, 1996:55) (my italics). Pressures from groups are created by both the individual's identification with the group and by the group's demands on the individual.

The intersection of the dimensions is a point 'zero', where Douglas considered that the individual is relieved of the tensions inherent in the interplay of the grid-group dimensions (Douglas, 1996:64). I discuss this in more detail below.

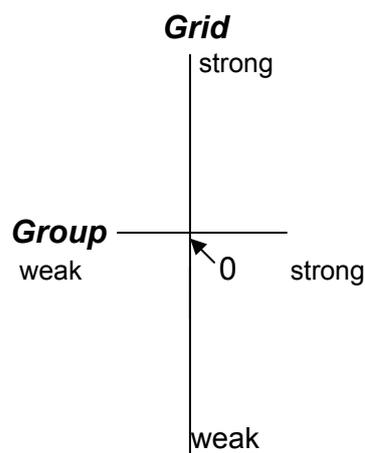
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<sup>421</sup> Douglas changed her usage from sect to 'enclave' in the 1996 edition (page xxi), but both words continue to be used. I follow Douglas in using sect to indicate a tightly bound separatist religious group and enclave to relate to a wider set of groups including non-religious ones who espouse egalitarian social organisation ideals. I also use her concept of 'latent groups' which she defines as enclave activity which struggles to coalesce as 'encompassing organisation' in a broader economy (Douglas, 1986:31ff).

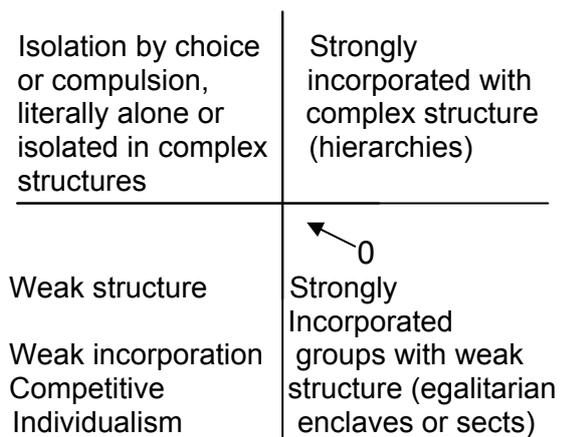
These stages in the development of the model, which were later combined, can be illustrated as follows:

**Fig. 5: The Grid-Group Model developed by Douglas.**

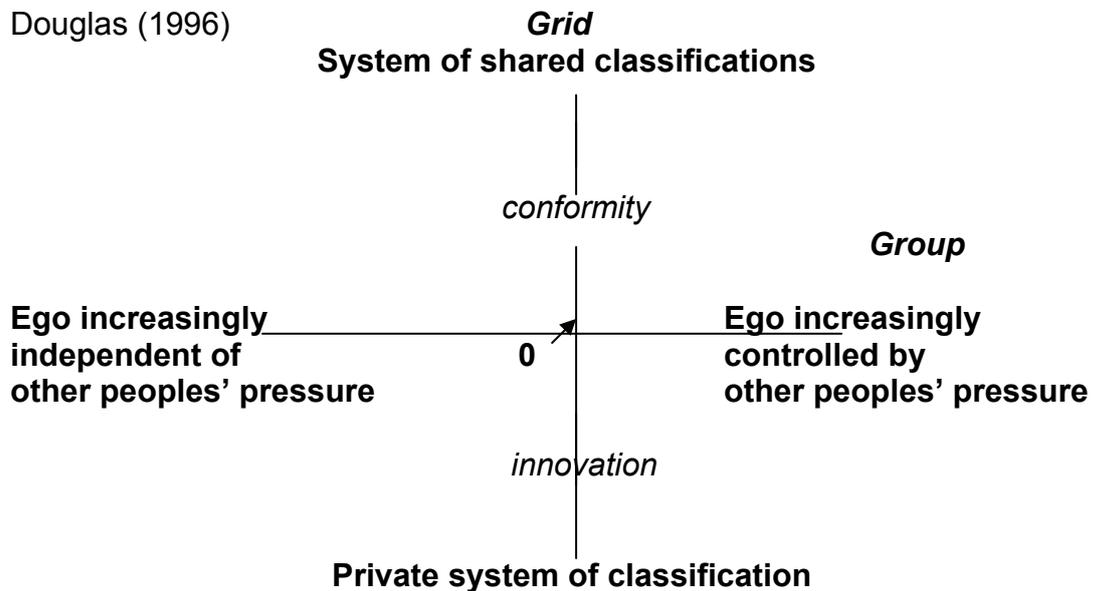
Douglas (1996)



Douglas and Ney (1998)



Douglas (1996)



In Douglas's early work the vertical dimension, grid, also represents variations in the strength of categorisation and classification in 'speech codes'

(Bernstein 1971) and the development of (natural) symbols.<sup>422</sup> Douglas links restricted codes, represented by the upper half of the vertical line and implying strong forms and control, not only to cosmologies but also to ritual practice.

The restricted code is used economically to convey information and to sustain a particular social form. It is a system of control as well as a system of communication. Similarly ritual creates solidarity and religious ideas have their punitive implications. We would expect this function to be less and less important the less is effective social coherence valued (Douglas, 1996:59).

The model suggests that the power of a cosmology as a given facticity bears down upon persons in and through the restricted speech codes that define and describe it. This code is reinforced by symbols and ritual practice. Bernstein provides Douglas with an analogous mechanism for the process from his description of communication in families and the controlling aspects of restricted codes. Douglas's model attempts to provide a way of examining how group practices perform the acting out of the cosmology as a reflection of social structures through speech codes, symbols, and ritual practice. The vertical dimension now entails restricted to elaborate speech codes. In the former, the speaker draws from a narrow range of syntactical alternatives

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<sup>422</sup> Fardon notes that in adopting Bernstein's concepts of 'personal control plus elaborated code and positional control plus a restricted code' (Fardon, 1999:108) Douglas 'effectively stands Bernstein on his head'. She does so in the following senses. First, she is positively concerned to defend ritual, and therefore the restricted codes implicated in it, whereas Bernstein is concerned that restricted codes are associated with the under performance of working class children. Second, Douglas considers that families who adopt 'elaborated speech codes and personal control' are not necessarily virtuous in all that they promote. They are associated by Douglas with the 'Teilhardist reformers' of Catholicism. These concerns relate to Douglas's own biases towards 'hierarchy' that she admits (Douglas 1994:266). However, in terms of the dimensions of the grid, Douglas retains Bernstein's distinction along that dimension between restricted (strong grid) and elaborated (weak grid) speech codes and this is retained here as relevant to my concerns irrespective of the positive or negative connotations that may have arisen.

which are rigidly organised so that they both convey information and express, embellish and reinforce the social structure. Whereas the elaborated code emerges as a form of speech that:

is progressively more and more free ...its primary function is to organise thought processes, distinguish and combine ideas. In its more extreme elaborate form it is so much disengaged from the normal social structure that it may even come to dominate the latter and require the social group to be structured around the speech (Douglas, 1996:25).

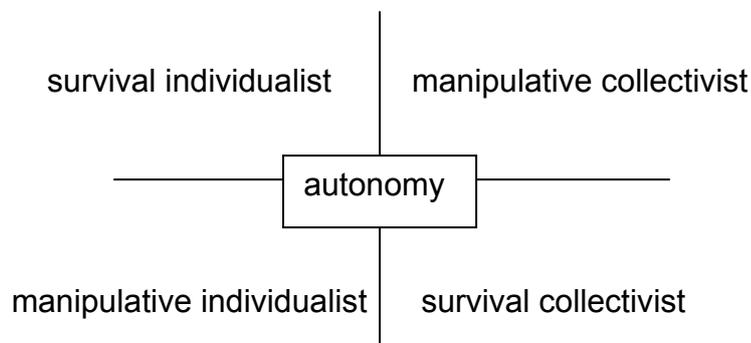
### **5.1.1. From Grid-Group to Cultural Theory.**

The development of Douglas's work into Cultural Theory was significantly advanced by Thompson's (1982) response to her work. He noted Douglas's view exemplified in the model, that society had become unbalanced, that good hierarchical models were in decline and that enclave membership, especially amongst young disaffected people, was on the increase. He saw that this transition could be charted both in terms of the pressures of grid and group and also in terms of the four cultural biases (see Douglas and Ney, 1998 in Fig. 4. above). However, he was concerned that Douglas's model was too static and he set out to make the model more dynamic. He achieved this by showing that the model can be used to assess 'dynamic disequilibrium' (Thompson, 1990:4). By this he meant that constant tensions are represented by the pressures from grid, group, and the biases and preferences of the cultures in each of the model's four quadrants – hierarchy, competitive individualism, enclave egalitarianism and isolation. He proposed also that the concept 'grid' could include a notion of 'network-building' (Thompson, 1982:39) and that the active competition of cosmologies entails 'manipulation' (Thompson, 1982:44). He also proposed an additional interpretation of the point 'zero'. Douglas had

conceived of this as a transitional point where individuals were released from the pressures of grid and group. Thompson conceived of it as the place of the 'autonomous individual', a person 'out of the fray' (Thompson, 1982:35). The person at point zero, following Douglas, has also been characterised as the 'hermit' and the 'mystic' (Fardon 1999:225).

Thompson's five-cosmology model is represented below.

**Fig. 6: Thompson's Five cosmology Model.**

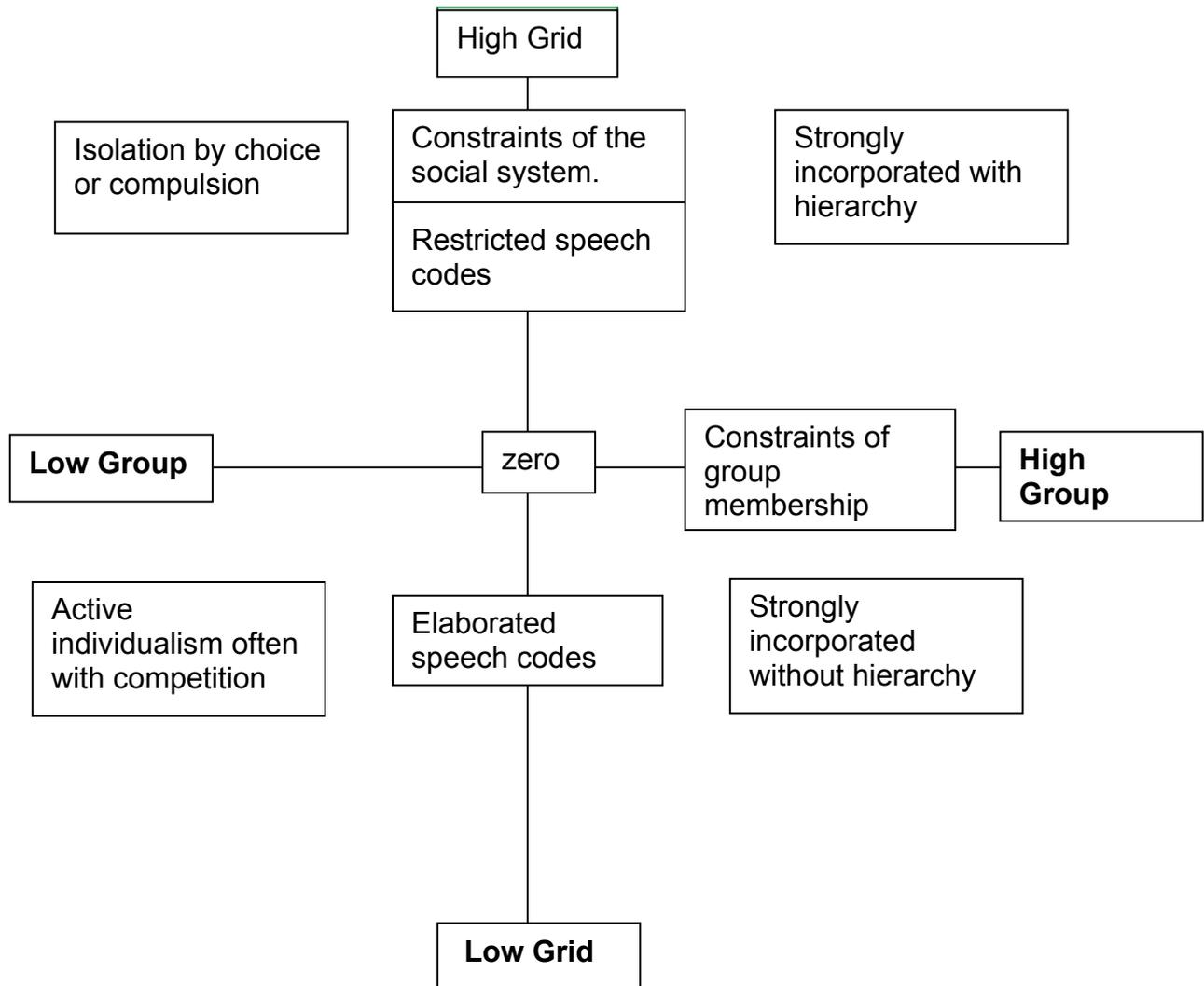


(Thompson 1982:55).

Douglas addressed Thompson's observations and responded by noting 'there are four stable organisational forms – the rest are transitional' (Douglas and Ney, 1998:100ff). I adopt Douglas's view and illustrate its relevance in relation to Quaker practice below. The point zero, therefore, becomes an aspiration in the Quaker case, a passing fulfilment of what I call harmonic integration and a transitional state usually associated with participation in the worship ritual.

Barnard (2000) also added some interpretations of the quadrants, which are consistent with Douglas's later formulation (Douglas and Ney, 1998:103ff).

**Fig 7: Douglas's model developed by Barnard**



(Bernard, 2000:154)

So far, I have described the phases of the model's development, what might be called the grid-group defining stage, and some of the ways in which it was developed into cultural theory. A key development in this is the more detailed

definition of the quadrants as positions and the competing cultural biases, and their interpretive extension to the individual as personal preferences.

Douglas contributed to the development of Cultural Theory with others (Douglas 1982, Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 1990). These developments established that each cultural type (quadrant) would be a distinctive worldview and that they would co-exist in 'contradictory certainties' and 'plural rationalities', (Thompson, 1982 in Douglas and Ney, 1998:104) and therefore that cultures are self-defined adversarially. These developments produced a number of versions of the quadrants pointing to the character of the culture, to the types of personal needs that would attract people to them and to the resultant kind of behaviours they might display.

These developments were accompanied by a shift in the way the model could be applied. Instead of trying to plot whole cultures within a particular quadrant, societies 'are now envisaged as scattered over the diagram' (Fardon, 1999:115). So in assessing Quaker cosmologies, for example, I plot these across the diagram both on the basis of their relation to grid and group pressures and the relationship of the character of the cosmology to the character of the quadrant. For example, a cosmology that entails a 'second person image of God' (Kaal, 2010), a realist ontology, (pressure of grid) and a test of allegiance (pressure of group) in relation to it would be plotted in the strong grid, strong group, hierarchical quadrant. However, in the diachronic analysis, where I compare the elements of Quaker practice – ritual worship, testimonies, decision-making – over time, I rely significantly more on the conceptual dimensions of grid and group than on the social biases of the four

quadrants. These two uses may then be superimposed. The additions of Cultural Theory to the grid-group model can be summarised as follows:

**Fig. 8: Characteristics of Quadrants and Persons in Quadrants**

**References: (1) Douglas and Ney, 1998 (2) Mars, 2008 (3) Thompson, 1982 (4) Schwarz and Thompson, 1990, (5) Fardon, 1999.**

<p>(1) Isolates, by choice or compulsion, alone or isolated in complex structures          (1) Person Unpredictable          (2) Isolated subordinates ('Donkeys')          (3) Survival Individualist          (3) Passive, millennialist          (4) Fatalist, nature capricious          (5) Atomised</p>	<p>(1) Strongly incorporated group with complex structure and hierarchies          (1) Person needs structure          (2) Tight Work Groups ('Wolves')          (3) Manipulative Collectivist, Ritualist with transcendental metaphysics          (4) The hierarchist, a place for everything.          (4) Nature perverse and tolerant.          (5) Bureaucracy</p>
<p>(1) Free from pressures of grid or group          (3) The Autonomous individual.          (5) The hermit or the mystic</p>	
<p>(1) Weak incorporation and structure, competitive individualism          (1) Person robust          (2) Entrepreneurial activity ('Hawks')          (3) Manipulative individualist, strong sense of history, intellectual rigour, separation of nature and society          (4) The Individualist          (5) Market</p>	<p>(1) Strongly incorporated groups with weak structures, egalitarian enclaves or sects.          (1) Person under duress          (2) loose work groups ('Vultures')          (3) Survival Collectivist, 'small is beautiful', 'us' and 'them', xenophobic, strong on custom          (4) The Egalitarian, tread lightly on the earth          (4) Nature ephemeral          (5) Factionalism</p>

I have now shown the development of Douglas's model as Cultural Theory and noted the applications that have been made. In her later work, Douglas returned to her concern with groups and how co-operation, solidarity and trust are created in them, particularly in groups in which members may 'suffer on behalf of the group' and where there is a social bond created in relation to some greater 'good' (Douglas 1986:31). Through this she considers the nature of 'enclaves' and 'latent groups', and I refer to this work below.

Douglas's theory and her grid-group model have had extensive applications and these in turn have contributed to the theoretical development of Cultural Theory (Thompson et al, 1990, Schwartz and Thompson, 1990). The domains of application include: political science (Thompson, Grendstate & Selle, 1999); public policy (Swedlow, 2002); public management (Hood, 1998); risk perception (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982); governance, crime control, and public policy (Perri 6, and Mars, 2008); and religion (Sivan 1995, Ostrander, 1982, Rayer, 1982 and Owen, 1982). With the exception of Sivan's (1995) work on 'enclaves', these developments do not relate closely to the focus of this study.

I have set out the elements of the model and theory, the framework that I deploy here. I now briefly consider some assumptions behind the model and some critiques of it as theory.

## **Section 2: Theoretical Background and Critiques of the Model.**

Douglas's work has been subject to critical assessment, for example, Fardon (1999) and Spickard (1989). Both note the changes that Douglas made to the model between its original publication and the 1996 version in *Natural Symbols*.<sup>423</sup> I note that Douglas refined her theory through the use of the model and was wary of pushing the predictive aspects of the relationships initially mapped in the model beyond the case studies that she used (Douglas, 1996: Chapter 6. *Test Cases*). She noted that classifying whole societies within the confines of a single quadrant was too restrictive and that scattered plots of social features across the model would map more diverse societies. She does propose certain relationships, such as: between cosmologies with strong personal Gods and ritual practices of purity and strong concepts of sin and punishment; between disorganised societies and arbitrary cosmological forces; and between open societies and privatised religious practices. However, Douglas moved away from attempts to make predictions about whole societies concerning for example, cosmologies and specific kinds of rituals, or individual symbolic actions relating to bodily states. Therefore it is not part of this study to critique the model's development in detail or to attempt to deploy its predictive aspects.

The macro-theoretical roots of Douglas's model lie in the work of Durkheim (1915) and his premise that cosmologies mirror social relations. Durkheim

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<sup>423</sup> Fardon (1999:211) advises, contra Spickard, that it is better to 'read with her rather than at her' and considers succeeding versions to be developments rather than inconsistencies in Douglas's thought.

outlined how two approaches to knowledge are connected in religious practice. The a priorist considers categories of human thought to be prior to experience whereas others, aposteriorists see concepts as 'having been derived from experience with the individual being the artisan of construction' (Morris, 1987). Durkheim's theory, as explicated by Morris, united these two views:

It was a form of rationalism that was midway between classical empiricism and apriorism. And with respect to the categories of understanding, it suggested that they were neither innate nor derived from individual experiences but were socially derived, the product of human groups, and the intellectual capital accumulated through centuries (Morris, 1987:115).

So religion is 'more than the idea of Gods and Spirits' and religion is:

a unified set of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite one single moral community (Durkheim 1964 in Morris 1987:115).

For Durkheim and Douglas the sources of religion are not intrinsic; religion is a system of ideas and practices with which individuals represent to themselves the society of which they are members. However, Douglas avoids determinism by allowing such social systems to include the impact of cosmologies, as Spickard notes:

...the experience of society is logically prior and to some extent generative of beliefs. People experience social control (described in grid-group terms) and then find explanations of the world plausible or implausible based on that experience. In applying the theory one first analyses social relations, and then one predicts cosmologies. In later versions of the theory people

can alter their social relations to fit with their cosmologies – otherwise there would be no revolutions (Spickard, 1989:159).

So actors are not 'judgemental dopes' (Spickard, 1989:159). The developed theory and model allows for a dynamic interplay between opposing pressures. Cosmologies may arise out of experience in many ways, and the individual retains a role in judging the plausibility of worldviews. Berger (1967) provides a way of conceiving of this process.

For Berger, people are the product of society as they produce that very society through collective activity and culture. This process entails three movements. The externalisation of human activity, the outpouring of activity into the world, which contradicts an image of the person, somehow 'resting within itself' in some 'closed sphere of interiority and then setting out to express itself in the surrounding world' (Berger, 1967:4). The person is thrown into, and acts in, a pre-existing world that has been made and this may lead to speculation about the a priori nature of such 'givenness' in mental categories. The second movement is objectification, the 'attainment by the products of human activity, both physical and mental, of a reality that confronts its original producers as a facticity external and other to themselves' (Berger, 1967:4). The third movement is the internalisation, re-appropriation, and introjection of this made world 'transforming it once again from structures of the objective world into the structures of subjective consciousness' (Berger, 1967:4). In Berger's terms the pressures of 'grid' and 'group' interact through this cycle by which subjects externalise-objectify-internalise models of society,

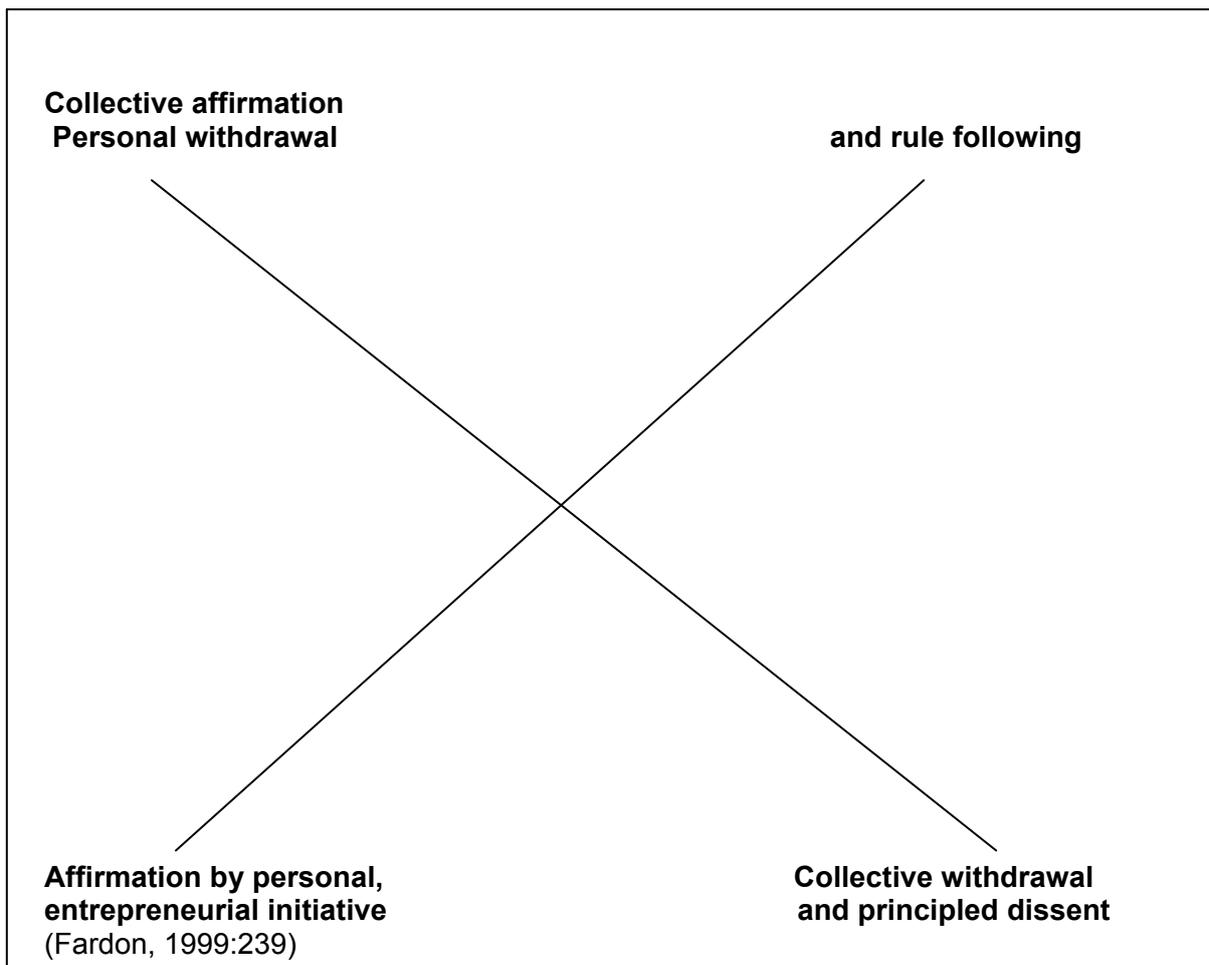
transcendent images, the sacred and their part in the relations of the social world and cosmos mediated by the group and its ritual practices.

Douglas's theory developed, therefore, from the earlier concerns with the resemblances between cosmologies and the individual's experience of society, through a development that stressed cosmologies as accountability devices to a settled, refined version (Douglas, 1996, Douglas and Ney, 1998) where a dynamic field or matrix is envisaged. In this matrix, the pressures of grid and group are clearly defined, as are the quadrants of the model representing competing worlds or cultures which are social realities that confront the individual and shape their preferences. Cultures such as the one contemporary Quakers occupy, are considered ones in which these cultural biases are contested and defined 'adversarially' (Douglas and Ney, 1998:103).

The theory has been developed not only by applying it to different domains, such as risk and public policy (Perri 6, & Mars, 2008), but also methodologically. Douglas also viewed the grid-group model as a heuristic device. Douglas intended this use and encouraged others to refine the model. Her reasons are set out in the section entitled '*From Static to Dynamic*' in the 1996 edition of *Natural Symbols*. Here she states that 'ideas emerge from the process of organising as also do classifications and values' (Douglas, 1996:xxv-xxxix). She sets out three tasks for researchers: to refine the comparisons of social organisations; to prevent the analysis from becoming static; and to find ways of 'checking it empirically' (Douglas, 1996:xxx). She

welcomed, for example, its use in the mapping of the culture of households (Drake, 1993) and also the creation of extra dimensions such as the diagonal lines of 'withdrawal' (top left to bottom right) and 'affirmation' (top right to bottom left) noted by Fardon (1999:239).

**Fig. 9: Lines of Affirmation and Withdrawal.**



Douglas described these developments as ‘exercises in methodology’ to the extent that she notes that in different applications the grid-group diagram ‘never looks exactly the same’ (Douglas,1996:xxvii). I consider that my use of the model developed within Cultural Theory is consistent with Douglas’ heuristic and developmental intentions.

I have presented the basic elements of the grid-group model, and its development through Cultural Theory into a framework for application. I intend to apply it to Quakerism in the following ways: first, by using it to describe early 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Quakerism; second, by plotting contemporary Quaker cosmologies; third, by making a diachronic comparison between 17<sup>th</sup>-Century and 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Quakerism using four key elements of Quakerism.

### **Section 3: Application of the Model and Theory to Quaker Practices.**

#### **5.3.1. Early Quakers 1562-1670.**

George Fox (1624-91) was the prophetic visionary of the early period. He moved around the English countryside and preached in public places. His message was of an immediate emancipation from the existing paths to knowledge and salvation offered by churches, and that ‘Christ had come to teach the people himself’ (Nickalls, 1997:12). This meant that there was

direct, unmediated and equal access to the knowledge and power of the divine life for every person. The opening of the self to the Light brought about a 'convincement' (Fox, Journal 1647 and QF&P,19.02/3). The 'letter' was to be set below the 'spirit'. Dogma, theology and propositional belief were to be set aside and inspired speech would be a guide to conduct. Equality was implied in this access but each person was to be able to speak in their own way. In Douglas's terms, Fox developed an elaborated speech code and importantly encouraged this practice in others. Fox rejected contemporary social and theological categories which would be represented in the model as the pressures of the grid. Fox was a character freeing himself from the constraints of the Puritan tradition and secular worldly practices. Courageous speech in form and content was the key medium for this emancipation. Fox's rejection of Biblical authority as primary was paralleled by his refusal to accept the constraints of the civil courts on his preaching. He is, therefore, located in the lower left quadrant of the model, low on both grid and group. His theology/cosmology was radical and intended as a recovery of primitive Christianity. The realist ontology of the Light as a transcendent and immanent power was an amplification of one aspect of the traditional Christian trinity and regarded as heresy. Fox's anti-clericalism is both a rejection of the spiritual authority of the Church and a rejection of the economic ties represented by tithes. Early Quakers developed their practices under changing conditions affecting key symbols and categories— the King, the Kingdom, sovereignty – and by key related events – regicide and the Civil War. These conditions are represented as pressures of the grid in the model. The way in which individual convincement was mediated through the body and how this became a site for

symbolic enactment has been noted above, in Chapter 3. Section 3. Fox's message, therefore, entailed individualism (personal direct access to the divine) and egalitarianism (all persons may gain such access). It entailed a release from certain structures of authority, Churches, and from their underlying categories (for example, the theology of the trinity). Fox did not preach an escape from all pressures. He proposed - as a visionary prophet - another dispensation. He is properly located in the model as an entrepreneur but proposed the creation of a sect (enclave) which would exert its own group pressures

In terms of the group dimension, a shared proto-ritual emerged. Silent gatherings took place in which inspired speech was expected and these practices were tied to the concept of 'worship'. Persecution created strong group ties. Continued radical elaborations and enactments such as James Naylor's (Damrosch,1996) pointed to a dangerous gap developing between normative social categories and continued Quaker inspiration. Meetings on hillsides, in houses and in secret were followed by the creation of 'Meetings' and, during the lifetime of Fox, the building of Meeting Houses.<sup>424</sup> Within 50 years, the movement had become a sect and could be considered strong in the group dimension. The group aspects emerged from a number of processes: aspects of the management of charismatic inspiration, the need for organisation for survival under conditions of persecution, and the need to

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<sup>424</sup> Meetings in the open air are still part of the Quaker tradition, usually associated with protest, for example that in Trafalgar Square against the Iraq war. See also the image of a Meeting at Fylingdales air base in Appendix V.

inform, educate, share and refine the initial outpouring of ideas and inspiration.

In Barnard's (2000) interpretation of Douglas, early Quaker group ritual would be placed in the lower right quadrant 'strongly incorporated without hierarchy'. In Douglas's terms, it was a strong group characterised by conviction, bodily inspiration, elaborated speech codes, pacifism, marrying-in and the disowning of transgressors. The cosmology, that of an immanent and indwelling manifestation of God, produced, as Douglas predicted in the model, strong control systems, a clear sense of 'sin' and accountability within the sect for conduct. Inspired speech, being spoken through, exemplified the development of elaborated speech codes. Early Quakers, under the pressures exemplified by the treatment of Naylor (Damrosch, 1996) responded to the need to protect and manage the consequences of such utterances. A strong enclave group emerged.

One can imagine a line from individual inspired acts and utterances in the lower part of the figure to the strong group boundaries of the anti-ritual Meeting for Worship. This line represents the routinisation of charisma. The proto-testimonies that emerged — non-violence, pacifism, equality of women, equal respect for social status, refusal of oaths or written contracts — were directly linked to the practices of worship, personally enacted and challenging to *societal* conventions. Other isolates and radical people, those in the strong grid, weak group quadrant, were drawn to the sect for survival, and can be

contrasted with other radical groups such as Ranters and Diggers who did not survive after the end of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century.

The cosmology of the early Quakers was a shared unifying force which they proclaimed was consonant with the God of the state.<sup>425</sup> This strong grid feature could, within Douglas's early version of her theory, be the basis for predicting the kind of ritual that might develop in an enclave group with sectarian features, that is, with high group pressures. The strong bounded membership group had here clear criteria for establishing the veracity of inspiration and discerning authentic spirituality through ritual form and process. In Douglas's terms the encouragement of elaborated speech codes was increasingly subject to the discernment process of the ritual where restricted codes re-emerged.<sup>426</sup> The egalitarianism that co-existed in the process combined with the strong cosmology and group ties to create a picture which is open to a reading within Douglas's theory. Hierarchy had been challenged both by the civil war and by the theology of personal, unmediated, divine inspiration and therefore the pressures of the grid had been loosened. However, control systems were maintained by a strong, shared cosmology, and these controls were enacted both in the ritual process and under the pressures of group illustrated through membership requirements – convincement and marrying-in. These elements of early

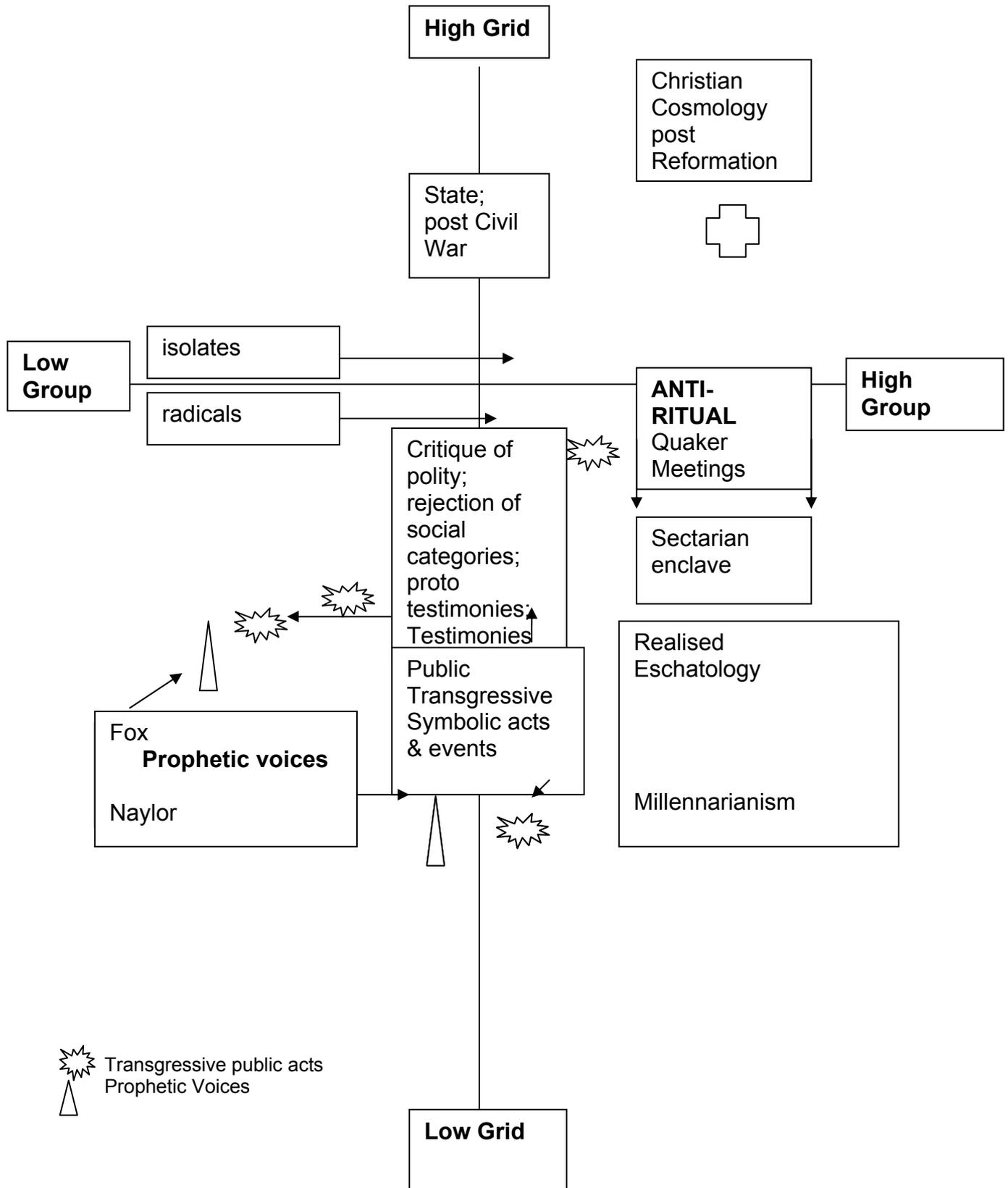
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<sup>425</sup> This is forcefully expressed in the Declaration to Charles I in 1660: 'God is the same as he ever was, that lives for ever and ever and has the innocent in his arms'.

<sup>426</sup> This can be seen in the late 17<sup>th</sup>-Century developments of a Quaker theology by Barclay, the spread of Fox's writing and key phrases (actually a restricted code) and the appointment of ministering elders to speak in Meetings, noted above in Chapter I Section 1.

Quakerism can be seen to reflect the pressures in the social system as theorised by Douglas. This picture is illustrated diagrammatically below:

**Fig. 10. 17<sup>th</sup>-century Quakers in Douglas's model**



These elements of early Quaker practice, can therefore be explicated in terms of grid-group theory. This analysis shows the egalitarianism of the members of the sectarian enclave, the maintenance of a strong shared cosmology with a distinctive interpretation, the control exercised by the ritual form, and the close relationship between these elements and the social witness of Quakers (the pacifism which paradoxically made them seem a danger to the state). This provides an important baseline picture of the Quaker economy and its original development of checks and balances that ensured the survival of the sect.

### **5.3.2. 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Quaker Practices represented within the Grid-Group Model and Cultural Theory.**

The picture of 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Quaker practices is more complex. I described the main features of Quaker history in Chapter I and this identified a series of internal developments and phases within the Quaker tradition. I also noted the function of the canonical text, *Quaker Faith and Practice* (QF&P), revised every generation, to conserve the Quaker oral and written materials/traditions over time. I also showed, in Chapter 4, how the Quaker narrative, its aphorisms and its hermeneutic circle of reasoning creates discursive formations which support its vocabulary in complex ways, and how that usage entails some ambiguity. These changes are intertwined with the pressures and cross-pressures identified in the theory of secularisation by Bruce (1995, 2010), developed by Martin (2005), Taylor (2007) and informed by the work of Heelas and Woodhead (2005). Here, two dominant pressures were identified:

first, the effects of individualism, pluralism, relativism and a shift away from religion towards spirituality; second, the cross-pressures in the nova, which can be expressed as two dialectics, that of the transcendent-immanent (Taylor, 2007) and that of faith-nature (Martin, 2005).

It is clear from the history and character of Quaker practices, and noted by Cannell (2006), that Quaker egalitarianism, tolerance and inclusion itself contributes to these processes. It would be a mistake, therefore, to conceive of these pressures, Quaker history and secularisation, as 'internal' and 'external'.<sup>427</sup> Here I initially focus on the effects of the first group of secularisation pressures which create conditions for the development of a wide range of cosmologies amongst Quakers. The ethnography has shown the development of diversity in both cosmologies and in the practices which reflect them.<sup>428</sup> A simple example which shows this relationship is the approach to centering-down in worship and the idea of group gatheredness (see Chapter 3, Sections 4, and 6). For those Quakers who hold a strong ontology as their cosmology, for example, those in *Friends United*, the *Christo-centric Friends* (Dandelion, 2007:203) and commentators like

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<sup>427</sup> This point is elaborated in Douglas (1986) and discussed by Fardon (1999:230ff) where they note that the relationship between cultural biases represented by the four quadrants of the model and personal preferences is not linear or deterministic. Put simply Quakers born or introduced to Quakerism during its history may encounter its cosmology (and develop a preference for it) and insofar as that cosmology reflects social categories and organisations, they encounter also that 'thought style' (Douglas 1986:36). At a personal level of experience (in the short run) Quakers have expressed a preference for a Quaker cosmology, and at the level of sociological analysis (in the long run) they have been subject to a mirroring of social categories. I have noted Berger's (1967) approach to this process and also Spickard's comments (Spickard, 1989:159) earlier in this Chapter.

<sup>428</sup> The spectrum of Quaker cosmologies is set out in: Chapter 2, Section 3, with respect to Quaker commentators and in Chapter 4, Section 5, with respect to their articulations in practice by *Kindlers* and *Experiment with Light* members.

Punshon (1987), it is clear that centering-down as a preparative listening practice is substantively focal towards an object of worship with a character that has been articulated by prior revelations. Whereas for other Quakers, the process of centering-down is based primarily on an emptying of cognitive activity and the idea of inspiration, as new and emergent, and often in a 'felt sense' in the body (Ambler, 2001a, Gendling, 1978). This would be the case for: members of *Experiment with Light* (Meads, 2008); those of a non-realist persuasion (Boulton, 2002); those interested in new light (Wildwood, 1999; 2009); those who seek a 'sense of soul' (Dawes, 2009); and the Buddhist Quakers.<sup>429</sup> Differences in practice, as reflections of different cosmologies, also reflect the working out of the dialectics noted above (Martin, 2005, Taylor, 2007). For example, in Chapter 3, Section 6, I showed ethnographically that gatheredness, the sense of profound shared corporate spirituality in worship ritual, is viewed by some as a top-down covering of the meeting, as it were, by a transcendent presence (Hoare, 1995:9). By contrast, it is understood by others as an emergent quality, a product of the group, and an immanent feature. It is experienced as 'intimacy' (Dandelion, 2005:114-118) and derived from individuals' shared experiences (Lampen, 2008, Meads, 2008).

The pressures of individualism and pluralism as theorised are significant therefore and show up in the range of Quaker cosmologies and in their different interpretations of worship and practices. This creates tensions within Quakerism. The maintenance of the tradition (Punshon, 1987) and other

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<sup>429</sup> Maggie Freak in *Kindlers* 1, see Chapter 4, Section 5.

strong ontologies (Davison, 2009, Kaal, 2010, Best, 2010.) compete with individualistic prophetic voices elaborating new perspectives. These individuals gather around them others who are drawn to their message and to the particular cultural bias it represents. For example, Boulton (2000) proposed a non-realist reading of the light as Love. Those attracted by this individualist and non-realist bias (weak grid and weak group, competitive individualists) still desired to be identified with Quakerism and so a sub-group formed, firstly identifying themselves with the *Sea of Faith* group<sup>430</sup> and latterly the Quaker *Non-realist Network*. A second example of this link is that of Ambler (2001a&b). He developed a highly individualistic meditative approach to worship which entailed a complex and ambiguous reading of the meaning of the word Light (see Chapter 4, Section 5). This single prophetic voice produced a group practice, *Experiment with Light*, in which the achievement of a group intimacy through the sharing of experience is central. These are examples of what Thompson called 'ego-centred networks' a feature of the weaker, lower, part of the grid dimension (Thompson, 1990:11).

The explanatory value of the Douglas model and of cultural theory is in the way it shows the pull towards the biases, the distinctive worldviews represented by the quadrants: towards hierarchy in the case of the strong ontologies of Punshon (1989), Kaal (2010) and Best (2010); towards competitive individualism in the cases of radical interpretations of Ambler (2001a&b) and Boulton (2000); and towards enclavism by the *Experiment with*

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<sup>430</sup> The Sea of Faith group is a national non-denominational network that was created in 1985 following the publication of Cupitt's book (Cupitt, D. 1984 *The Sea of Faith. Christianity in Change*. BBC) and television series of that title. Cupitt espouses a non-realist 'theology'.

*Light* group. Significant tensions in Quakerism can therefore be identified and expounded by the model and theory. These tensions represent the challenges for the survival of the enclave and address the central question of this thesis: how do contemporary Quakers construct Quakerism and manage to achieve unity in diversity?

Using the grid-group model and the developments in cultural theory I now order my findings in respect of Quaker cosmologies. Source materials for this analysis are as follows. In the review of Quaker commentators in Chapter 2. Section 3, I identified a range of cosmologies. In Chapter 3. I showed ethnographically how different worship practices reflect these cosmologies in their interpretations of the meaning of Light, of Silence, of centering-down, of gatheredness, the function of the body, and of the source of speech. In Chapter 4. Section 5, I further illustrated the different objectives and focus of worship held by Quakers by examining reports that members of the *Kindlers* group gave of their practice. From this material a range of perspectives can be identified amongst contemporary Quakers. I now discuss them and how they might be plotted within the grid-group model and cultural theory.

### **5.3.3. Twelve Quaker Cosmologies.**

1. Kaal (2010) argues that Quakers have a realist ontology of the Inward Light for which there are many names and these can be expressed and affirmed as the 'Spiritual Realm' (Kaal, 2010:59). This affirmation entails a "2nd person" view of God, experienced as an external being' (Kaal 2010:72). She considers

that people engaging with Quakers might progress through 'stages in the spiritual journey' at different rates and therefore supports 'teaching' (Kaal, 2010:69). By contrast, she considers recourse to Buddhist methods 'wrong' for her and that the *Experiment with Light* raises 'shadow issues' (Kaal, 2010:68) and brings inappropriate personal material into a worship context. Kaal espouses a hierarchical view of positive collective affirmation and a strong realist ontology. Kaal's perspective represents strong pressures on both grid and group dimensions.

2. Punshon (1987) argues from an explicit Christian base within the Quaker tradition. I have noted his approach throughout this thesis. He likewise would be placed in the model in the hierarchical, collective affirmation quadrant, high on grid and group.<sup>431</sup>

3. Davison (Davison and Brown 2009) whose work has been described here is an adept, prophet and entrepreneur. He has, however, a realist notion of the transcendent, which he calls the Source. He therefore must be positioned in the model towards the lower left quadrant but also in relation to a clear system of classification and close to the line of grid.

4. Best (2010) whose work I have described in Chapter 4, Section 5, argues that 'religious language is not to be rooted in the authority of the individual' (Best, 2010:53). He deplores 'pluralism and radical relativism' and desires a return to 'spiritual orthodoxy' (Best, 2010:52). He regrets that Quaker values

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<sup>431</sup> The group most closely associated with this perspective (but not specifically with Punshon) in Britain Yearly Meeting is the *New Foundation Fellowship Friends* who are often referred to as 'christo-centric Friends. The extent to which Quakers are still 'implicitly' Christian is the subject of continued debate (Mellor, 2008:70ff, and Scott, 2004). A small group *Friends in Christ* left BYM in the early 1990s (Dandelion, 2007:167). This suggests that Quaker Christians, described by Pilgrim (2008) as 'exclusivists' may be isolated, silenced within Quakerism and also schismatic. I will represent this on the Douglas model.

may become 'indistinguishable from secular values' (Best, 2010:50). He points to the passion and enthusiasm of *Young Friends* as exemplifying his aspirations in group terms. He is clearly located with Kaal and Punshon in the hierarchical collective affirmation quadrant with strong grid and an aspiration for strong group.

5. Murgatroyd (2010) who won the Quaker Quarterly Essay competition on the future of Quakerism <sup>432</sup> accepts that Quakers do not share a religious language. She describes a series of 'spaces' (Murgatroyd, 2010:34-36) in which dialogue can take place. She refers to the 'Light' and to 'spirit' and 'God' and the 'divine' but rejects any definitions for them. She considers Quakerism to be 'mystical' and proposes that 'arts and crafts' might be ways of holding a 'conversation with God' (Murgatroyd, 2010:21). She has a naturalistic, immanentist view of the spirit expressed in individualistic terms and in mystical experience and therefore would be positioned in the lower left quadrant. Her desire for a collective sharing of these experiences draws her towards the enclavist bottom right quadrant. Her proposals are similar in certain respects to those of Davison and his creation of the Kindlers group. Both accept a wide variety of Quaker practices and experience as inevitable, and whilst they differ in their views of the existence of some central ontological principles, they both want to create group experiences where the sharing of material becomes the rationale for group identification and membership. This I call an enclavist aspiration.

6. Ambler (2001a&b) whose work is described in Chapter 4, Section 5, is clearly located in the individualist, affirmative, entrepreneurial quadrant and

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<sup>432</sup> Murgatroyd uses this term, see Murgatroyd, 2010: 14,16,19ff. as synonymous with 'the Quaker Way' (p.8) and British Quakerism (p.6)

with weak grid pressures. As in several instances noted here, his work has given rise to an 'ego-centred network' (Thompson, 1990) within Quakerism, in this case the *Experiment with Light*, which seeks to create strong group affiliation and enclavism.

7. Boulton (2000) argues for an individualist, non-realist, atheist interpretation of the Light. He argues for freedom from the realism of traditional Quaker language. Worship practice is based entirely on personal experience. His perspective is located low in terms of grid, he rejects all forms of religious classification, and in the individualistic quadrant, he is low in terms of the pressures of group. He also exemplifies an elaborated speech code, redefining the word 'God' as human 'Love' (Boulton, 2002:83ff).

8. Dawes (2008) expresses a Quaker *Universalist* perspective. *Universalists* value insights from all religions, a 'collective perennial wisdom' a 'common core to all religions' (Dawes, 2008:6). She includes in universalism 'green spirituality, creation spirituality, evolutionary spirituality and process theology' (Dawes,2008:9). She holds an immanentist and naturalistic view of 'inductive' spiritual experience which is highly individual (Dawes, 2008:27). She stresses the group aspects of this Quaker perspective: 'the primacy of personal experience, going within to test oneself in the inward Light, the fruits of this mediated by discernment in company with like minded people' (Dawes,2008:27). She would be placed close to the line of grid on the grounds that her underlying philosophy entails an evolutionary perspective which is a well-developed form of classification but low down on that dimension because this cosmology is articulated by individuals in a personal,

naturalistic way. She aspires to group cooperation and like a number of commentators, also to enclave organisation.

**9.** Wildwood (1999, 2009) does not believe in a 'God out there' (Wildwood, 2009:105) but finds Buddhism and 'evolutionary' perspectives 'helpful starting points' (Wildwood, 2009:104). He believes that Quakers should be open to 'new light' and that there are 'wide variations in how Quakers describe "the truth in our hearts"' (Wildwood, 2009: 104). He developed a travelling programme which moved around Quaker meetings between 2001-4 called *Rooted in Christianity, Open to New Light*.<sup>433</sup> I place his perspective alongside that of Dawes.

**10.** There are Quakers who describe themselves as Buddhist. Maggie Freak in the *Kindlers* is an example. Wildwood mentions Buddhism as a starting point and it appears approvingly in Dawes's work (Dawes, 2008:23). This perspective is certainly non-theistic and without a strong ontological focus. As an individual meditative practice, it tends to the notion of the worship space as a void. I therefore place it as low group and medium grid and in the quadrant of isolates.

**11.** A number of Quaker commentators and worshippers refer to the mystical tradition within Quakerism (Jarman, 2010, Heals and Cook 1992, McNaughton. 2007) and this tradition has been reviewed by Gorbenko, (2007). It is noted by Jarman that Fox (1624-91) may have been aware of the work of the German mystic Jakob Boehm (1575-1624). Ambler, (2001:10) noted that 'Fox grounded faith on everyday life, avoiding the withdrawals of

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<sup>433</sup> Wildwood worked with fifteen Area Meetings and one Regional Meeting between 2001 and 2004. The current state of this network of groups is that they have contributed to local thinking but have not emerged as distinct groups (Fieldnotes: Wildwood in *Kindlers* )

classical mysticism'. Quakers attracted by the mystical tradition trace their roots through contemplatives such as Dionysius the Aereopagite, and Meister Eckhart. Turner (1995) has noted the problems associated with an interpretation of this tradition which stresses 'negation' without a return to 'affirmation'. As an orientation within Quakerism it is a distinctive cosmology, as expressed by Jarman:

Put aside your constructs, your ego, your notions, your concepts and concerns of self, and your occupation with self. Put aside your rationality and your sense perceptions and just 'be' and in that state you are receptive to the Divine [sic]. There you are pure and untouched...in that state the seed within you is complete...so that you can give birth to the Divine (Jarman, 2010:14)

This therefore is the cosmology that sees the point zero, a temporary freedom from both pressures in the grid-group model, as its goal and I therefore pace it there.

**12.** There is another cosmological perspective which is not associated with a particular individual or network. This includes Quakers who take responsibility for the creation and maintenance of Gospel Order. These Quakers have an implicit cosmology of the Light. In serving the Meeting they rely for this cosmology on the canonical books QF&P and A&Qs rather than on distinct personal views or specific definitions. Their use of language is traditional and inclusive in respect of the Light.<sup>434</sup> They have a strong commitment to the group, to the forms and processes of ritual and Business Meetings. They are

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<sup>434</sup> I argue that this practice also represents the management of ambiguity since the traditional language is now open to wide interpretation, see Chapter 4, Section 4 on Narrative.

keepers of the tradition.<sup>435</sup> They tolerate considerable ambiguity and variance amongst Quakers participating in meetings, especially Business Meetings. They have a particular commitment to 'right ordering' which has the effect of the management and containment of differences, especially in cosmologies. They avoid orthodox statements or definitions in spiritual matters. They are the group that Pilgrim (2008) refers to as 'inclusivists', wary of the fractious nature of the personal seeking of 'syncretists' (individualists, open to new light) and wary also of the potential dogmatism that might emerge from control by 'exclusivists'. These Quakers I refer to as 'Quakers of the Book'.<sup>436</sup>

I have identified a pattern whereby diverse cosmologies are associated with diverse practices. In some cases, they are closely identified with individuals and give rise to network groups which offer their particular enclavist contribution to the Society of Friends. The pattern also includes a regulatory, containing function, the preservation of right ordering undertaken by a

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<sup>435</sup> Sivan (1995:50) describes this enclavist feature and it is also noted by Douglas and Ney that: 'Who then is to constrain whom? How will virtue be maintained and strife avoided? To answer, Sivan points to the role of the authoritative sacred text that enables them to dispense authority and still make decisions without seeming to decide in a manner that will introduce as little institutional hierarchy as possible into the enclave, and thus disrupt that cherished asset, the intrinsic equality of the insiders' (Douglas and Ney, 1998:150-1).

<sup>436</sup> These Quakers are identifiable from the *dramatis personae* and in three sources in the thesis' ethnography where their characters can be seen. First, at St Andrews Meeting: Hannah Davis, Robert Grey, Gail Grant, Petra Scott Gordana Swan, Nan Stewart, Isobel Tait and Joyce Tait. These individuals share a concern with 'right ordering', read from A&Qs and minister to the Meeting along traditional lines and are well represented in roles such as Clerk and Elder (see Chapter 3, Sections 2 and 5). They have all been either educated in Quaker Schools, brought up as Quakers or been Quakers for a long time. Second, they can be seen amongst those who gave interviews: Susan, Caroline, Rose and Pauline all expressed concerns that Quakers should 'trust the process' (Fieldnotes Susan). Third, they can be seen in the description of the actions of the clerks in the Business Meetings in Chapter 4, Section 2. Their control of the process, their discernment of what is included in the minutes and their criteria of 'coming to unity' are key components in their inclusive achievement of unity in diversity. They are described by Pilgrim (2008:61) as 'inclusivists' – see Pilgrim's model in Appendix V.

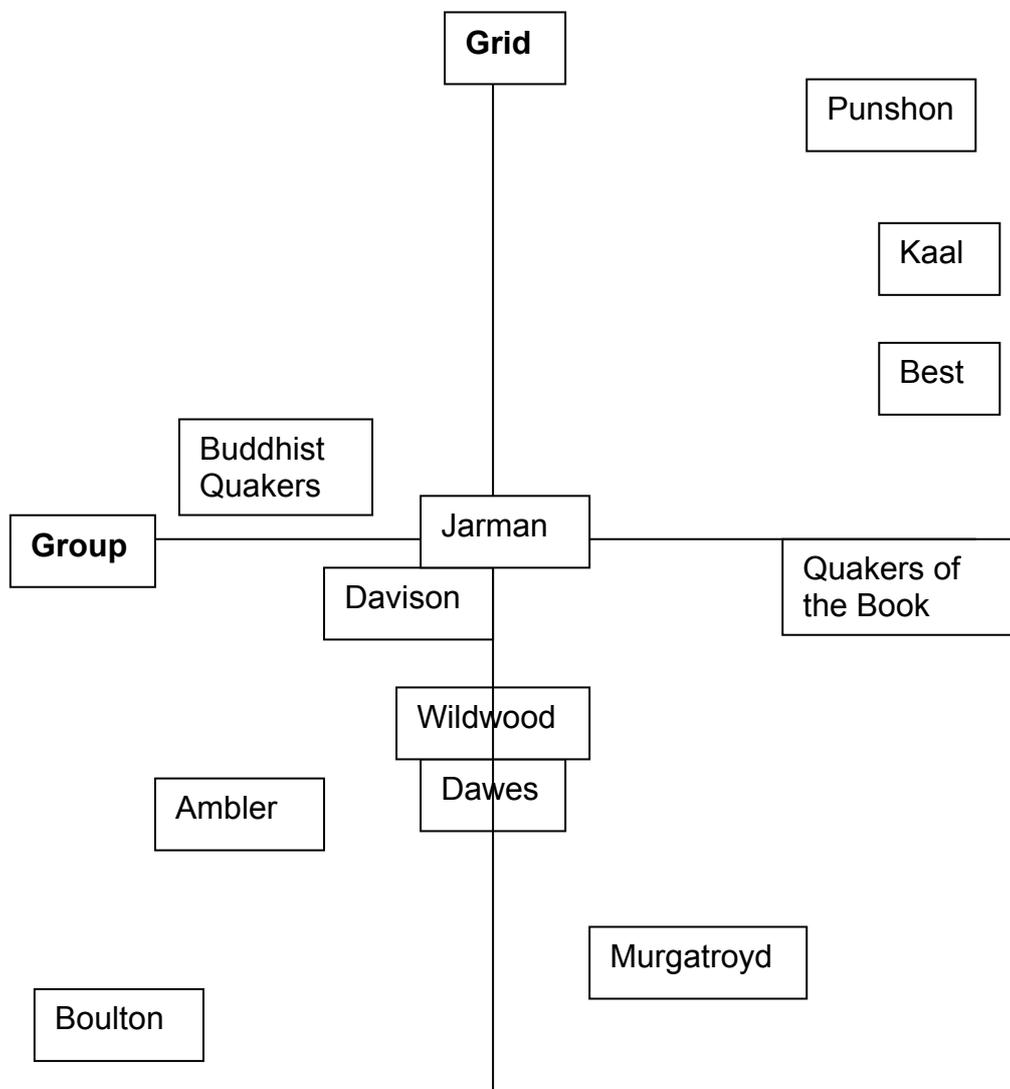
dispersed group of activists whom I call Quakers of the Book. This is not to assert that all Quakers can be so neatly classified but it is to suggest that for Quakers, active or passive in Quaker practices, these cosmologies and the associated pressures represented in the model and Cultural Theory are the main options open to them. The model also suggests (see Fig.10.) that there may be those who are 'isolates' in Quaker terms. Three types can be identified from the ethnography. First, those who are enquirers and seekers, for example, the many people who have taken part in *Quaker Quest* sessions but do not become involved in Quakerism, and those who come very occasionally to a Meeting or have a pattern of moving around different Meetings.<sup>437</sup> Second, those people who have engaged with a Meeting but rarely attend. Some of these have their names in the Book of Members and resist their removal even when they have not attended for some years. They have a slightly greater sense of the pressures of group. Third, those who identify with particular perspectives which do not form groups or identify with groups which are themselves isolated. Buddhist Quakers would be in the first category and some Quaker Christians in the second. These three types, all isolates by choice, but under various pressures of grid and group can be represented in the model.

I now set out the spectrum of Quaker cosmologies in terms of the grid-group model and Cultural Theory.

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<sup>437</sup> A member of Muswell Hill Meeting described it as 'a transit camp' (Field notes: Pauline) for people who had given up on formal religion and were trying to find some 'spiritual home'. In Cultural Theory terms they are under a strong pressure of grid, that is they are seeking within the category of religion, but do not identify with a group.

**Fig. 11: Quaker Cosmologies on the Douglas Model.**



The pattern that emerges from this analysis reveals contemporary Quaker practices as diverse in terms of their cosmologies and certain aspects of specific cosmologies incompatible with others. There are a group of realist perspectives, the proponents of which favour hierarchical approaches and are strong in relation to the dimensions of both grid and group. Kaal and Best

strongly support a shared, collective, even tested, cosmology for the group as an enclave. In Best's case, he points to a particular sub-group of *Young Friends*<sup>438</sup> who exemplify his vision (Best 2010:61). Punshon's Christian Quakerism is consistent with the *New Foundation Fellowship*, a conservative Christian group (Dandelion, 2007:167). Kaal proposes tightening the testing role for membership of experienced Friends. This group, Kaal, Best and Punshon, would be described by Pilgrim as exclusivists (Pilgrim, 2008:61).

By contrast, there is a scattering of individualists in the bottom left quadrant. They, of course, differ from each other by definition. They offer highly distinctive visions of Quakerism. They may be described as prophetic voices. Davison is strongest on the grid and group dimensions, offering a strong realist ontology of the Source. Ambler has a unique combination of historical revisionism concerning the meaning of the Light and a therapeutic practice that stresses a radical bodily immanence of light. Boulton proposes a language-based non-realism, which denies all references in Quaker language to theism or to any ontology. In these cases, a highly individualistic vision has been linked to attempts to create small sub-groups within the enclave culture. Davison created *Quaker Quest* and *Kindlers*, Ambler promoted the *Experiment with Light*, and Boulton established the *Non-realist Network*. These are what Thompson (1990) refers to as ego-centred networks. They are aspirational in respect of enclavism in that all their proponents value and

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<sup>438</sup> There is a Young Friends General Meeting within Britain Yearly Meeting (QF&P 10.25) and they hold separate sessions and events within and outwith it. Best researched this group (Best, 2010:61ff) and found that they adhered closely to Quaker methods and brought skill, passion and intimacy to the task: 'they knew how to do it without adults needing to tell them'. He values this freshness and vibrancy, and commends it to adult Quakers.

endorse the Quaker ways of worship and decision-making, and yet they are competing sub-groups. Douglas and Ney (1998:24) refer to these as latent groups which struggle to coalesce as a whole enclave. Ambler, Boulton, Wildwood and Dawes share an approach that Pilgrim (2008:61) calls syncretism.

Murgatroyd, in refusing any definition of the notion of 'spirit', is low on the grid dimension but is located in the enclave quadrant since she proposes collective arts and crafts work as a basis for mutual exploration.

Jarman occupies a unique position at the point zero representing the mystical tradition which attempts to be free from categories and 'rationality'. Wildwood and Dawes both draw on evolutionary theory and naturalistic approaches to the emergent universal spirit. They are, therefore, in drawing on an established set of categories, located on the dimension of grid. They are both individualistic and universalist in the ways in which they imagine that the spirit manifests itself. They express an openness to new light. Yet, in terms of the egalitarian enclave, they are both strongly aspirational. They support the mutuality of expressive processes within Quaker forms of practice. I therefore locate them as in the centre between the individualist and the enclave quadrants. They are syncretic in their cosmologies yet tend towards the inclusivism of form and process associated with Quakers of the Book.

Quakers of the Book are clearly strong on the group dimension and are attempting to balance the pressures from the different social biases represented in the other perspectives.

I have illustrated how the grid-group model and Cultural Theory framework illustrates the pluralistic nature of Quaker cosmologies. This analysis also opens up a further area of analysis concerning the networks associated with the competitive visionary individualists and other sub-groups associated with particular cosmologies. These differing cosmologies do not operate solely at the level of ideas; they also propose group practices: Punshon's perspective is associated with a group who have separated from Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM); Kaal wishes to strengthen existing traditional practices'; Best wishes to do likewise and points to *Young Friends* as an exemplary group; Davison founded *Quaker Quest*, and although this focussed on outsiders, and was relatively unsuccessful in recruiting members, it did develop a strong cadre of facilitators who also published a series of pamphlets.<sup>439</sup> (Davison also founded the *Kindlers* and Ambler's promoted *Experiment with Light*, both of which have been described in Chapter 4, Section 5.); Wildwood travelled Britain promoting the group *Rooted in Christianity, Open to New Light* although few now remain as distinct groups; Boulton and his followers have formed the *Non-Realist Network*.

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<sup>439</sup> Quaker Quest made 167 presentations over six years to Meetings in Britain and trained more than 50 facilitators. The 6 pamphlets, published by Quaker Quest were all entitled 'Twelve Quakers...' followed by the topics of God, Pacifism, Jesus, Equality, Evil and Simplicity (Fieldnotes: Davison)

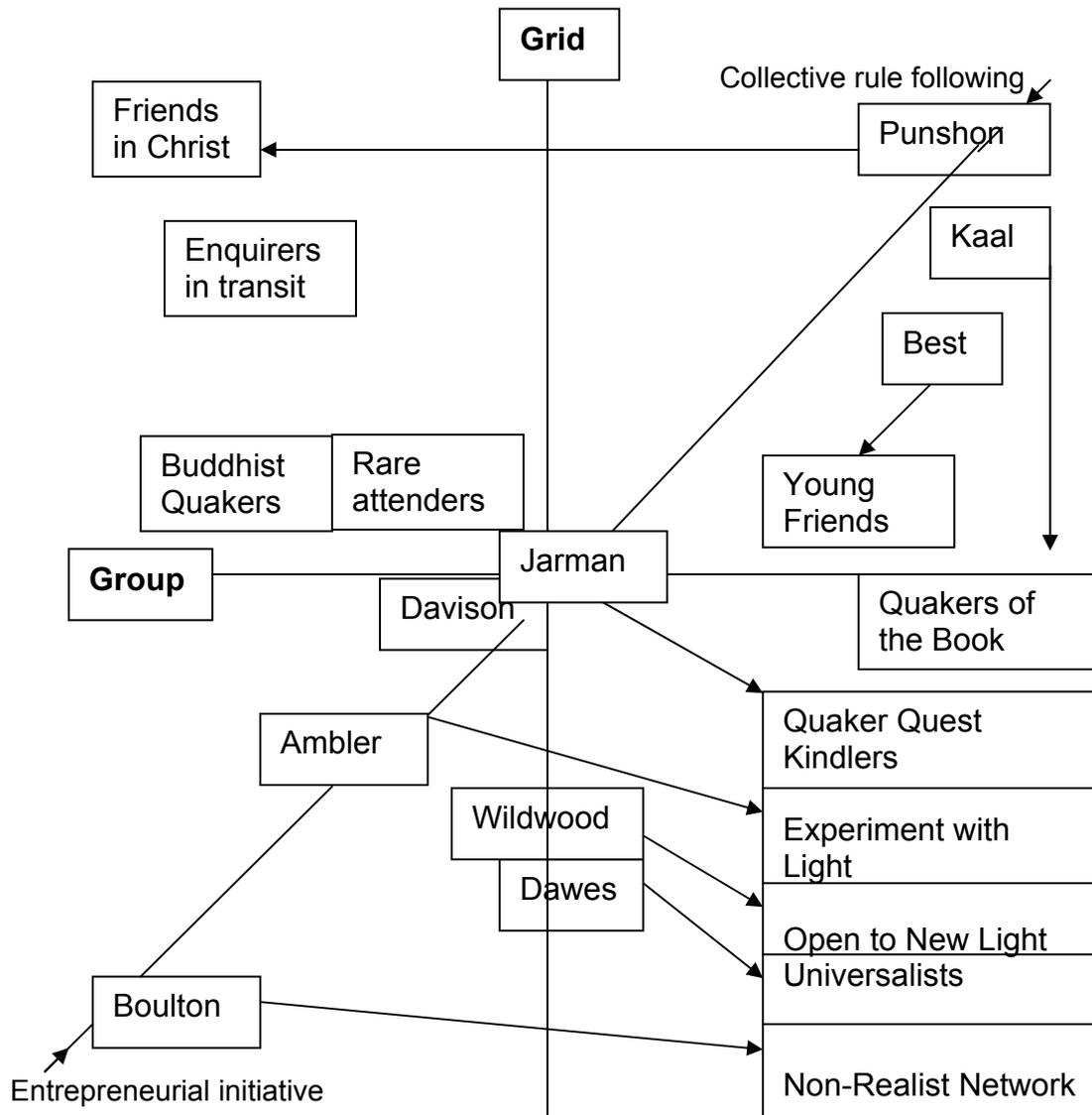
To these can be added the relationship between Dawes and the *Universalists*. All these groups are attempts to strengthen the enclave. They all promote Quaker worship and business practices. This shows that Quaker competitive individualism rebounds as aspirations for the strengthening of the enclave. The differences between the perspectives then persists, but in group form.

This analysis using Cultural Theory enables me to show the effects of the pressures theorised as individualism, subjectivism and pluralism by those theorists who developed the secularisation thesis (Bruce, 1995, 2010, Martin, 2005, Heelas and Woodhead, 2005, and Taylor, 2007).<sup>440</sup> It also enables me to show, by plotting these effects on the model, the challenge of pluralism faced by Quakerism. This can be shown to take place not only in terms of the competing cosmologies but also in the groups associated with them. These sub-groups are competing within the enclavist features of Quakerism and are unlikely to converge. They offer their contributions to the problem of coping with unity in diversity but do so by persisting in maintaining diverse perspectives. The Quakers of the Book appear to have a regulatory function. They maintain unity in this diversity by emphasising traditional process and form and maintaining the implicit meanings of the traditional Quaker language, the restricted code. These relations can be shown on the model.

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<sup>440</sup> I also consider that the dialectics of, Martin (2005), 'faith–nature' and of Taylor (2007), 'transcendence–immanence', which are implicated here, could be associated respectively with the dimensions of group and grid. A detailed exploration of these relations is beyond the scope of the present study. It is clear, however, that the 'line of affirmation' (Fardon, 1999:239) appears in Quakerism from Punshon to Boulton and that this can be explicated by understanding its relationship to the dimension of grid as representing the 'transcendent–immanent dialectic identified by Taylor (2007). Conversely, the spectrum of Quaker cosmologies, arrayed within Cultural Theory, exemplifies Taylor's theory that this dialectic does indeed appear to underlie and explain the spread of pluralistic cosmologies.

**Fig. 12: Quaker Pluralism: The Line of Affirmation, Enclave Networks and Isolates.**



The picture that emerges here is of contemporary Quaker practice and organisation as a complex pluralistic enclave. It is complex and pluralistic because there are many cosmologies and networked sub-groups and, as I

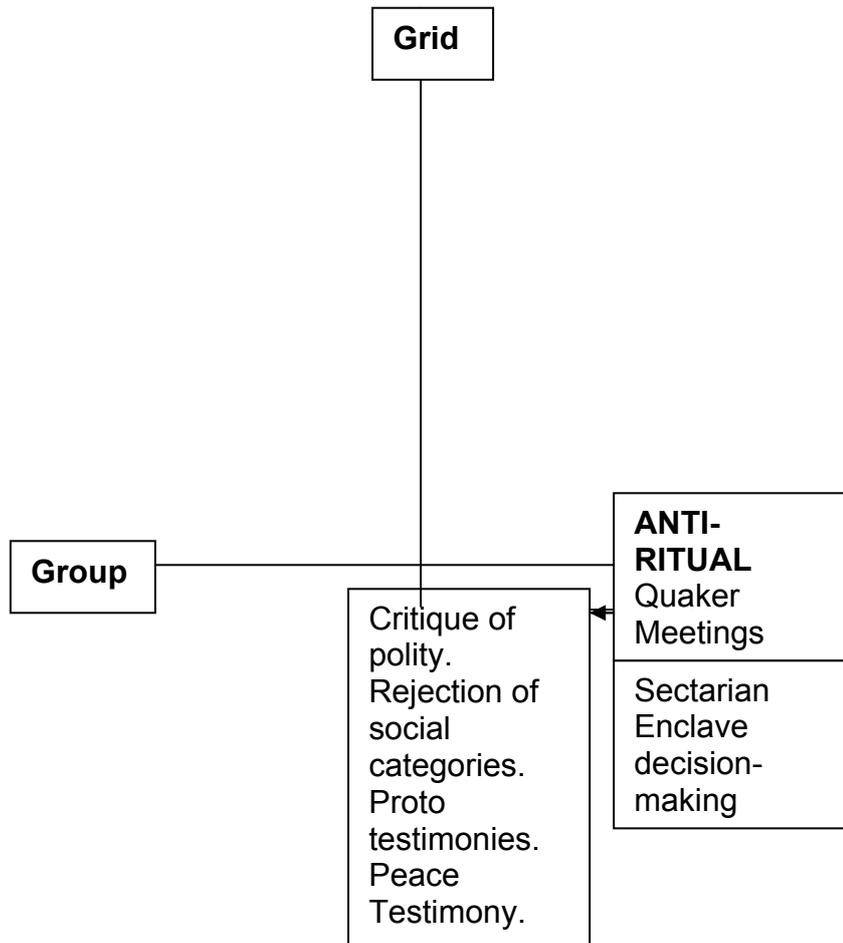
have shown in the ethnography, the personal practice of harmonic intergration (the personal combining of various elements of the tradition) mirrors this diversity. It is an enclave because this diversity is contained and managed as a dispersed community of practice by a set of corporate forms, processes and themes, namely the Meeting for Worship ritual, the Business Meeting ordering, and the Testimonies. I now turn therefore to another approach to the use of the grid-group model and application of Cultural Theory to Quaker practice by comparing four key elements over time.

#### **5.3.4. A Comparison of 17<sup>th</sup>-Century and 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Quakers.**

Here I take four key elements of Quaker practice – the ritual worship practice, the Testimonies, the Business Meetings, and the renewal initiatives – and consider how they appear in a diachronic comparison of 17<sup>th</sup>-Century and 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Quakerism.

How should the early Meeting for Worship, the Business Meeting, and the Testimonies be represented in the model? At the outset, these elements of Quaker practice were homogenous. The worship ritual was not only strong on the group dimension but all decision-making was contained within its form. The single criterion for all activity was a shared notion of the Light. The enactments that flowed from this source of inspiration were unpredictable and challenging to the prevailing social norms. This can be expressed as follows:

**Fig. 13: Elements of 17<sup>th</sup> Century Quaker Practice.**



By the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century, these elements show a very different set of relations both to each other and in terms of the pressures and biases theorised in the model. These elements have also been subject to the cross pressures theorised by Taylor (2007). Before I plot these on the model, I note the effects of these pressures on each element.

***Testimonies.***

The codified Testimonies are the strongest link Quakers now have with their social environment. I have shown in Chapter 4, Section 3, the tendency for testimonies to become codified and programmatic, and to adopt a vocabulary

of ethics rather than inspiration. They are no longer therefore distinctive to Quakers but are a set of normative social criticisms: the world should be simpler and lived in more sustainably; it should be more egalitarian; it should be more peaceful; honesty and personal integrity should be valued, and these can be thought to relate to a sense of the value of life in relation to nature, referred to as a 'spiritual dimension'. Thus, the Testimonies have become subject to the pressures of grid. These social categories bear down on Quakers' articulation of their faith practice and require, even enable, faith action to be framed - inappropriately in the view of some Quakers - as ethics.<sup>441</sup> Testimonies are, therefore, plotted more centrally on the model as less distinctive of the group and further up on the dimension of grid, reflecting secular social categories.

### ***The Business Meeting***

I have shown in the ethnography of the Business Meeting (Chapter 4, Section 2) that the criteria for decision-making are now wide and varied and not limited to a single shared sense of the guidance of the Light. The strong role of the clerk and the formal requirement to come to unity emphasise a hierarchical bias which is reflected structurally in the movement of concerns up the Societies' structures. For these reasons, the Business Meeting is placed in the model under strong pressures from both grid and group.

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<sup>441</sup> Bartlett discussed this in his book on Quaker ethics (Bartlett, 2009) and in a Fieldwork interview on the use of the language of 'Human Rights'. He noted that Quakers may use the language of ethics but have a distinctly different underlying rationale for action. In this case, Quakers treat people as if they have 'Human Rights' and may use that language, but their reason for doing so is because they consider that they should 'answer that of God in everyone' (QF&P, 19.32).

### ***The Meeting for Worship***

Meeting for Worship remains the central ritual of Quaker practice. Participation in the event is characterised by diverse notions of the transcendent and a range of personal spiritual practices. This ritual space has remained corporately constituted but is now characterised by very varied practices and implicit cosmologies. These variations in practice have been examined in detail in Chapter 3, Sections 1-6. Other trends include greater porosity – fewer attenders becoming full members - and more universalistic inclusion. Hierarchical features have declined, for example, in the loss of formal roles for Elders who gave ministry. Meetings are inclusive of outsiders, tolerant of widely different beliefs and of none. These trends lessen the pressures of group. However, the ritual form, the unprogrammed silent tradition has remained largely unchanged since 17<sup>th</sup>-century. This form now contains and manages diversity, thus maintaining some pressures of group. I place the worship ritual, therefore, more centrally in the model, indicating the diversification of the tradition by its content and composition, the pull to low group, but through its form, maintaining some pressures of group.

### ***The Point Zero***

I noted above the discussion between Douglas and Thompson concerning the point zero on the model. Accepting Douglas's interpretation of this point as a transitional possibility, I link this to the aspiration in Quaker ritual of achieving freedom from the pressures theorised in the model. Douglas asked of the point 'zero':

.....what absence of classification might mean. The zero would represent a blank, total confusion with no meaning whatever. Rulelessness would be anomie, the suicide's doubt. It could be the mystic's moment of dissociation when all classifications are in abeyance..the child's first undifferentiated awareness (Douglas, 1996:62).

I suggest that this can be thought of in a number of ways in Quaker terms. First, Quaker silence, as I have shown, ethnographically, entails centering-down and the suspension of preoccupations, thought and therefore, categories. Gatheredness as the result of co-presence and mutuality arises when this sense of suspension is shared. This shared sense is beyond words. It is the source of mystic speech. It is the culmination of personal practices, that is, the combining of the elements that I have called 'harmonic integration'. These personal and corporate practices are, from time to time, sufficient to allow the combining of elements to create a sense of the Quaker 'way' as a shared coherent practice, experience, and life-world. Therefore, I define 'zero' as the at-one-ness felt when harmonic integration is achieved.<sup>442</sup> Second there is a significant mystic Quaker tradition (Jarman, 2010, Jones 1909) which I have noted appears as a distinctive cosmology amongst contemporary Quakers. Drawing on these sources it is clear that the point zero represents an aspect of Quaker practice.

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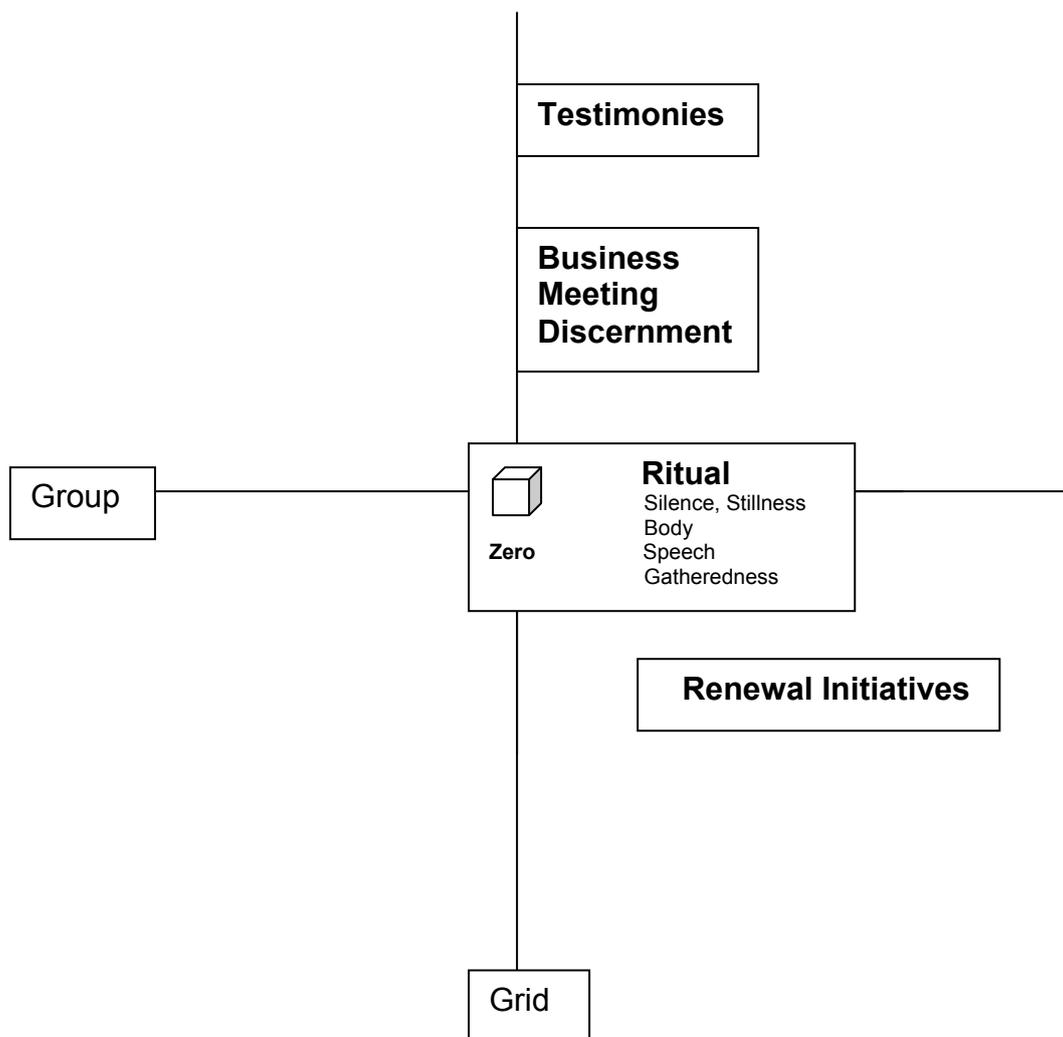
<sup>442</sup> I would also theorise that the proliferation of cosmologies in Quakerism, and the extensive (ambiguous) vocabulary for the transcendent undermines a shared core sense of the focus of worship. This is the effect of what Taylor (2007) calls 'fragelisation' of all 'adversarially defined positions' (Douglas and Ney 1998:103). The result is that the shared space of worship has been hollowed out and to fulfil its corporate function has to be empty of any particular content. This has been noted by Quaker commentators and graphically expressed by Warren (Dandelion 1996:299), see Figure 17, a&b. in Appendix V. below.

**Renewal Initiatives.**

I have shown how these networks are, in most cases, linked to the individualism of a founder or prophetic voice. They strive to enhance the enclavism of the group in that they all propose collective, egalitarian, shared practices. However, they remain as distinct perspectives and therefore, competition between them persists.

These elements can now be plotted on the model as follows:

**Fig. 14: Elements of 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Quaker Practice.**



This analysis has enabled me to show a number of features of contemporary Quaker practices by comparing them with early Quaker practice. The elements which were homogenous for early Quakers have now become distinct functions and respond differently to the pressures theorised in the framework. Indeed, Quaker practice as a whole could be considered to have moved away from its origins as a sect to a complex enclave characterised by a plurality of cosmologies, a number of renewal groups, and the different elements noted above.

#### **5.3.5. Summary.**

I now return to the two questions posed by Douglas. First, what are the social circumstances that encourage particular kinds of religious sensibilities? Second, what kinds of institutions do people of given sensibilities construct for themselves? The grid-group model, the application of the developed framework of Cultural Theory, and the cross-references to secularisation theory have permitted an analysis of the ethnographic and related material in this study to display the following patterns which address these questions.

The pressures of individualism and pluralism have created a highly differentiated set of cosmologies amongst Quakers. The corollary of this is that there is no longer a shared belief in a single guiding transcendent entity, traditionally known as the Light. Quakers have adapted to these pressures and sought ways to preserve their enclave features. This can be seen in the function of the key elements. The Testimonies now offer a shared set of values and a codified quasi-creed thus relieving the pressures created by the

plurality of cosmologies. The Business Meeting allows for these values to replace the criteria that traditionally were thought to flow from inspired guidance from the Light. There has been a flight to form and process and away from content, and this is exemplified by the key regulatory role of clerks and those Quakers who are concerned to preserve right ordering and their key criteria of 'coming to unity'. These inclusivists perform a key containing function and balance the forces of exclusivism and syncretism. Renewal initiatives offer competing solutions to the problems of shared practices with diverse cosmologies but in doing so, paradoxically, form competing sub-groups and networks. Under these pressures, the Meeting for Worship becomes a key paradigmatic event of Quaker commonality.

The 'social circumstances', Quaker history and the 'four cultures' that bear down on individuals have produced the following pattern of change in Quakerism: the power of hierarchy has diminished, as has accountability to the group; individualism and pluralism have increased; gone are the public expressions of conviction, accountability to the group for personal conduct, closed formal membership, marrying-in, and the endorsement of leadings by the group based on shared faith criteria emerging from of a common understanding of the Light. Quaker sensibilities have led them to construct a pluralistic, inclusive, complex enclave, within which private practices can be pursued. A wide diversity of worship practices have emerged and individuals combine new and traditional practices as harmonic integration, providing they fit within the ritual form of worship. Many cosmologies co-exist. The ethnography shows in detail how this is achieved.

Critical to this economy and central to the argument of this thesis is the place of the ritual event, the Meeting for Worship. Quaker tradition has happily given contemporary Quakers a ritual form well-suited to making the adaptations required in response to the pressures noted above. Quakers are preserving a space in which many hypotheses concerning transcendent notions can be entertained. The focus and culmination of Quaker worship practices, a shared sense of silent, still, wordless engagement with 'the place that words come from' is expressed in Cultural Theory in Douglas's formulation of the point zero, a transient state akin to that of the mystic, where all categories and pressures are, for a while, suspended. The ritual form connects Quakers to their past, which is reinforced by the ritual's current usefulness. The form of the ritual and its norms of conduct, especially in relation to speech and non-interaction, enable both the containment and management of diversity.

I conclude, therefore, that when the ethnographic and related materials in this study are analysed within the framework of Cultural Theory and with respect to related theories of secularisation, then explanatory patterns emerge charting the movement of Quakers and their practices from a sect to a complex pluralistic enclave.

## **CHAPTER 6.**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **6.1. Introduction**

I began this thesis by posing two questions. How do contemporary Quakers construct their practices, a Quaker 'way'? How have they responded to the prevailing conditions for the possibility of religious experience?

I addressed the first question – how do Quakers construct their practices – by presenting an ethnography, and thematic discussion of Quaker worship ritual, personal and collective spiritual practices, decision-making, and social enactment. Through the discussion of this material a number of subsidiary questions were also addressed. These were: what are the collective practices and personal spiritual disciplines that Quakers enact in their worship, and beyond, to achieve a recognizable Quaker 'way'? Is the spiritual source of the Light still the predominant shared guiding force or has its status been eroded by recourse to other criteria for worship and conduct? What relationships exist between the key elements of the Quaker tradition – collective worship ritual, cosmologies, the Testimonies, decision-making in Business Meetings, and renewal initiatives? Have these relations changed over time? Do Quakers consider themselves to be practicing a religion? Do Quakers have beliefs?

I created a framework to address the second question by theorising pressures

towards secularisation, derived from the work of Bruce (1995, 2011), and Martin (2005), which include individualism, pluralism, egalitarianism, naturalism, the loss of community and the teleology of decline in religious practice and belief. From the work of Taylor, I identified a number of cross pressures which shape attitudes towards religious experience, and create the conditions for its possibility. Notable amongst these were the concepts of the immanent frame (in relation to naturalism), the portrait of the buffered self (in relation to individualism) and fragelisation (in relation to pluralism). This context for Quakerism I refer to, following Taylor, as the spiritual landscape (Taylor, 2007).

I identified two dialectical tensions at work in the spiritual landscape, from the work of Taylor (2007), an transcendent-immanent dialectic, and from Martin (2005) a faith-nature dialectic. I also noted from the work of Heelas and Woodhead (2005) a cultural shift from religion to spirituality supported by a theory of subjectivisation.

I now present my findings and conclusions. I begin with an overview of the pressures towards secularisation and Quaker responses to them. These are laid out in Figure 15.

**Fig.15. Quaker Responses to the Pressures of Secularisation.**

<b>Pressure of Secularisation</b>	<b>Quaker Response</b>
Naturalism (immanent frame)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Increased emphasis on experience, particularly of the body/posture/breathing.</li> <li>– The interpretation of silence and Light as natural symbols. Eco-spirituality.</li> <li>– inferring the sacred only from natural immanence.</li> </ul>
Pluralism (The Nova)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The emergence of many cosmologies given equal standing in an orthodoxy of relativism.</li> <li>– Shifts in criteria for discernment and the basis for Testimonies towards ethical action and away from faith-action based on a shared source of inspiration.</li> </ul>
Individualism (The buffered self)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Increased diversity, personal patterns of worship, harmonic integration, privacy and respect for it.</li> <li>–Autonomy and experiential foundationalism, whereby truth is determined by the individual.</li> <li>– Exemption claimed from group decisions.</li> </ul>
Egalitarianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Universalism, gender equality, no formal Leadership.</li> <li>– The relaxation of boundaries and membership criteria.</li> </ul>
Loss of Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Creation of fellowship, co-presence in ritual.</li> <li>– Hospitality, tolerance and inclusion.</li> </ul>
Teleology of decline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Renewal networks.</li> <li>– Continued visibility in events, vigils, non-violent action, ritual extension.</li> <li>– Continued radicalism.</li> </ul>

I further conclude that there is a pattern of responses within this overall picture. Quakers construct their way under the pressures within the spiritual landscape and in terms of its own traditions, in four simultaneous and

interpenetrating ways: first, by having contributed to the creation of secularisation within its own tradition's history; second by becoming vulnerable to certain of these pressures and succumbing to them; third, by resisting them and conserving the tradition; and fourth, by adapting to them, and by testing their authenticity as new Light. These responses are intertwined in practice. The process of secularisation is not therefore best understood as a dualistic process of between polarities such as the sacred and the profane.

I conclude that the central challenge for contemporary Quakers is the management of unity, within the terms of the tradition, and the containment of diversity amongst its participants. I conclude that the Meeting for Worship is the key to this endeavor. In its invariant form it is the *sine qua non* of Quakerism, and the site of greatest resistance and creativity. Set apart from everyday life, it creates a space, a habitus (Bourdieu, 1990, Coleman and Collins, 2000), which binds participants to norms of worship and thereby worship-based decision-making. This habitus contains, and masks, differences and also, by adaptation, enables an expanded repertoire of practices to be available to participants. This is itself a complex reflexive process in which individuals, elaborating the Quaker tradition under contemporary conditions, import these perspectives and practices into the Quaker habitus, and the traditional forms and processes of discernment sift them, and resist, or adapt to, them.

I now draw further conclusions regarding the construction of Quaker practices

in terms of these four patterns of responses.

## **6.2. Quakers are implicated in the Process of Secularisation.**

Quakers can be seen as actual contributors to the process of egalitarianism (Cannell, 2006) and individual autonomy through their insistence on the equality of access to the sacred and the sovereignty of the individual. This is not solely historic, for contemporary Quakers continues to insist, for example, on the right to same sex marriages in religious ceremonies and in this matter they are ahead of current social policy. Other examples of contributions can be seen in the connection between the Quaker focus on personal experience and the process of subjectivisation that Heelas and Woodhead (2005) theorise as a key determinant of the shift from religion to spirituality. Also the Quaker focus on the body in worship contributes towards naturalistic interpretations of the sacred. I conclude that the concept of secularisation and its theorised processes need not be defined as necessarily compromising of religious experience, it may be possible to imagine Quaker practice as a secular religion.

## **6.3. Quaker Practices are vulnerability to Individualism, Pluralism and Naturalism.**

I showed in the ethnography of the Meeting for Worship that personal practices and their privatisation give rise to an epistemic stance of experiential foundationalism. Here the individual and bodily, felt senses, are the primary

sources of authority and truth. Here the individual is less porous to the influence of the otherness of the spiritual realm and its mediation through the group. I also showed the increasing variety of personal practices and their independence from group pressures (Douglas, 1996, 1998). The Quaker tradition of personal, direct and unmediated experience of the Light, the working out of the logic of the initial charisma, has therefore combined with the pressures towards individualism and amplified its effects amongst Quakers. The increased individualism within Quaker worship also accentuates the tension between the immanent and transcendent. Individualistic practices tend to be associated with a, hoped for, emergence of a sense of the Spirit, from a personal inner felt sense, as in the *Experiment with Light*, and certainly locate discerning authority within the individual. By contrast, practices which depend upon the discernment of the group, stress the priority and transcendent givenness of the Light, as it covers (Hoare, 1995) the Meeting for Worship as a whole. So the combined pressures of individualism and pluralism introduce variations in practices which are in tension with the traditional rationale of worship as a corporate mutual endeavour. Individualism locates authority primarily in the person, pluralism creates diversity, and naturalism provides, in the body, an immanent source for the Light. These combined pressures tend to undermine the authority of the group, as the representation of a single shared transcendent Light, and its role as the arbiter of the authenticity of inspiration.

#### **6.4. Pluralism and Quaker Cosmologies.**

I have identified twelve cosmologies or perspectives that are active amongst contemporary Quakers. The range of, and tensions between, these perspectives has become problematic for Quakers. Arrayed within the terms of Cultural Theory (Douglas 1982, Thompson et al. 1990) these cosmologies show a spectrum from: explicit non-realism and atheism; through process cosmologies that stress nature, evolution, ecology and a perennial 'sense of soul' (Dawes, 2009); to those with stronger, but non-personal ontologies such as, the Source; and through to traditional readings of the Light and Christian rooted theologies. These cosmologies plotted on the line of affirmation (Fardon, 1999) in Douglas's (1996,1998) model are also associated with individual commentators' expressions of these perspectives.

The effects of individualism and pluralism has been expressed by Pilgrim (2008) as syncretism. My findings reflect a more differentiated picture, of separate competing cosmologies, rather than a syncretistic combining of different perspectives. Individualism and pluralism also combine in their effects in the way that personal, prophetic, visions for the future for Quakers, held by individual adepts and commentators, produce networked renewal initiatives. These initiatives persist in being competitive even as each promotes its own vision for all.

### **6.5. Individualism and Pluralism impact on Decision-making.**

I have shown how decision-making takes place in the Business Meeting. I identified a form of exemption, claimed by individuals, to the authority of the

group in these Meetings. At the same time the criteria for discernment, used by both clerks and participants in decision-making Business Meetings, have shifted. This shift has been expressed as seeking unity not through discerning the 'will of God' but by perceiving 'the sense of the Meeting' (Best, 2010), and was confirmed in my ethnography. This is a direct consequence of the pluralistic cosmologies – where there is no shared understanding of the character of the Light, as the source of inspiration and guidance, then the seeking for 'the will of God' is supplanted by the search for group unity. I have shown similar effects upon the Testimonies. They, too, have both loosened their links to inspiration and developed as a unifying focus by a process of codification, almost as a creed, in the absence of a shared cosmology. They have thereby become capable of expression as ethical action rather than faith-action.

Here the Quaker enclave in succumbing to the pressures of individualism and pluralism, which undermines a collective, shared, sense of the source of inspiration, seeks to find other collective and egalitarian rationales for group unity and decision-making. These rationales, such as consensus and the sense of the Meeting, further compromise the tradition.

#### **6.6. Naturalism and the Immanent Frame.**

I have shown from the work of Bauman (1983) how Quakers made the body, and especially the act of speaking, critical to the manifestation of the spirit. Fox referred to the body as a temple. I showed how this medium has become

elaborated in contemporary practices, through concerns with breathing, listening, posture, and felt sense (Meads, 2008a&b). I have also shown, following Martin (2005) and Douglas (1996) that key symbols in Quaker practices – such as, silence, Light, space, and co-presence – have been given a status *per se* as sources for a sense of an indwelling generic Light. This diminishes their metaliteral (Coleman, 2007) function as symbols pointing away to a transcendent reading of the Light. This focus on the body, and the felt sense of the Light, benefits from a naturalistic backdrop of concern with the environment.

This eco-spirituality has both a concern for the natural world's sustainability and its providential relationship with humanity. For these Quakers (Dawes, 2009, Wildwood, 2009) to be in harmony with nature and in a right relation to it, is to be in right relation with the Spirit. For some Quakers this right relation is linked to the fulfilment of a process of evolution (Wildwood, 2009). These perspectives entail the view that the transcendent may only be inferred from the natural and this perspective is what Taylor (2007) describes as the effect on patterns of religious thought created by the immanent frame.

### **6.7. Quakers Resist the pressures in the Spiritual Landscape.**

Quakers resist these pressures and defend their tradition by preserving the form of the Meeting for Worship ritual, by attention to form and process – Gospel Order. This is achieved through the work of a dispersed group I identify as Quakers of the Book, who rely, for guidance, on the canonical text

*Quaker Faith and Practice*, and take roles such as Clerks and Elders. They manage an inclusive balance between syncretists and exclusivists (Pilgrim, 2008). The tradition is also defended by institutional processes, namely, the strong central apparatus in Friends House and the hierarchical structure of Business Meetings.

The Meeting for Worship is the key site of resistance. The invariant ritual, the Meeting for Worship, constant in its form since early Quaker practice, has a stabilising and containing function. It requires of its participants that they maintain the historic norms of practice. Its features are such that it is capable of containing and masking diversity. The result of this conservation is that Quakerism has, at its centre, a ritual practice which still enables a transcendent religious perspective to flourish.

The space, the empty centre of the worship, is still capable of being understood as discontinuous with everyday life, and experienced as a manifestation of transcendent presence, a sacred space, apart, and with silence as an image of divine stillness (Heals and Cook 1992, Jarman, 2009). The engagement with 'the place that words come from....' is still a central focus of Quaker practice. This mystical experience, or rather the suspension of experience, described as the point 'zero' in Cultural Theory by Douglas (1998) and Thompson et al. (1990), signifies what is still a potent focus of Quaker participation in ritual. I have noted other practices that contribute to the creation of this empty centre: the rhetorical devices of performative aphophasis; the closed epistemology of the hermeneutic cycle of Quaker

aphorisms, which defers affirmation; and an approach to ritual described as intentional unintentionality (Humphrey and Laidlaw, 1994). All these practices that take place within the worship space have the potential for openness to what Taylor refers to as the transcendent (Taylor, 2007). Quaker worship ritual dramatises the dialectic, between transcendence – immanence, of which Taylor speaks.

Thus, Quakerism still offers a way of reframing the world and interpersonal relationships within it, the latter stance is expressed as ‘answering that of God in everyone’. It does so through a vocabulary of the Light which links it to George Fox, its founder. The ritual of worship is therefore still significantly a religious event, set apart, as a key source of corporate inspiration and discernment and is not simply seamless with a Quaker lifestyle (Coleman & Collins, 2000). Seekers, interested in Quakers come ‘home’ to Quaker practices largely through encounter with the ritual worship. However compromised the Testimonies and the Business Meetings processes are by the pressures of individualism and pluralism, the paradigmatic case of the emergence of inspired speech from a silent practice that relates to some transcendent source, ‘the place that words come from.....’, is still the template for contemporary Quakers, even if they hold this construction more in hope than certainty.

## **6.8. Quakers Adapt creatively to the pressures in the Spiritual Landscape.**

Although the pattern of resistance to the pressures in the spiritual landscape focuses on the conservation of form and process, the Quaker 'way' is none the less also creatively constructed by Quakers. The Meeting for Worship is constructed as an artwork, and supposedly moved by the Light, to engender new understandings and new light. The tradition, the received vocabulary, is reinterpreted. Renewal initiatives compete between new readings of the tradition, and a reflexive literature supports this. These adaptive responses to what may be perceived as social pressures co-exist with the view that these pressures may be promptings of the Spirit, and new Light. The central tenet, and practice, shared by Quakers is that there is a spiritual vantage point from which to make discernments between pressures that are new Light, to which the enclave may adapt, and those which compromise the tradition.

I have shown that the Meeting for Worship is able to adapt to these pressures because of certain features of the tradition and the norms for worship. These norms, based primarily on sitting in a group silence and observing the conventions of speaking and interaction, inhibit contention through interaction. They allow wide interpretations of meanings which attach to the elements of: silence; the role of the body; the practice of centering-down; the understanding of gatheredness; and the nature of spoken ministry. Unity is achieved through attention to form and process, and adaptively masks different cosmologies and the spectrum of different practices. The ritual worship form has proved capable of providing an empty centre (Dandelion 2007, Tabor, 2007) in which many names of the transcendent and none may

be used.

The paradox of the ritual worship, in practice, is that its participants achieve unity by participating ostensibly in the same, shared, public worship and yet they may differ markedly in their cosmologies, their personal practices, and even their understanding of the nature of worship (Collins, 1994, 2002a). Some Quakers see this adaptation as a signal achievement of inclusion and tolerance, and as the proper irruption of new light and spiritual creativity prefigured by early Quaker practice. Others see this adaptation as a hollowing out of the tradition and a dilution amounting to not only a departure from the original charism of Fox, but to a movement away from religion itself – towards secular humanism. This may be an anthropological, empirical, question for the future. For the present, the Meeting for Worship manages to include considerable variety, whilst maintaining a space for its traditional understanding of worship. This space is characterised by an openness to the possibility of the ontology of the Light (and other cognate terms used for the transcendent), and the emergence of affirmative speech about the Light from silent practice.

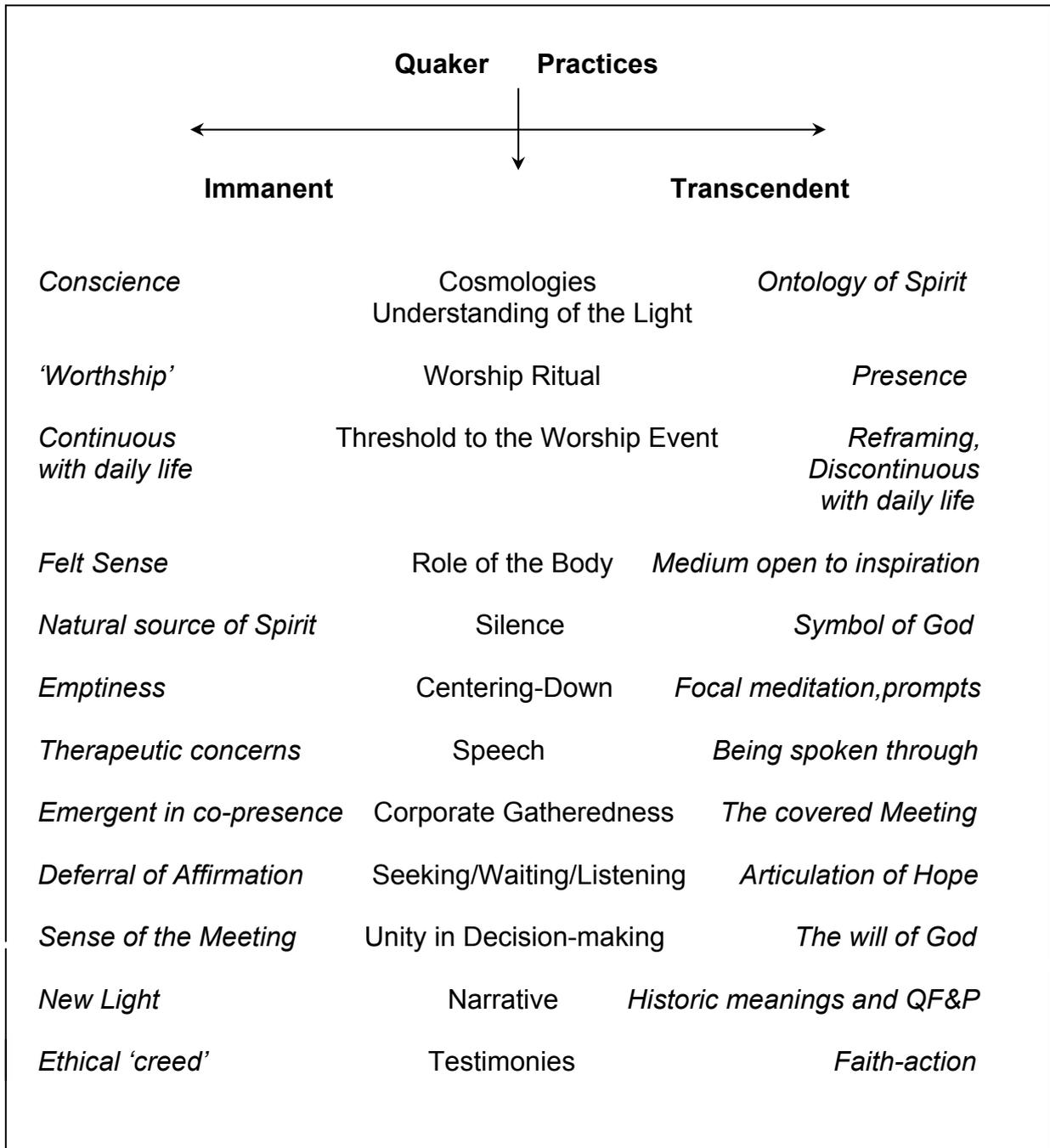
Individual worshippers are able to combine a personal set of practices that enable them to participate. Worshippers combine the possible variations and interpretations of key worship practices: the practice of waiting, seeking, listening, generally referred to as centering-down, as focal meditation or as an attempt to empty the mind of its contents; the understanding of corporate gatheredness as a transcendent covering or as an emergent property of

group intimacy; the role of the body as the conduit for inspiration, or as the very source of inspiration through a felt sense of the Light; and speech as being 'spoken through', as gift, or as way of describing experience and giving an account of sacralised daily life. The grounds upon which these variations in practices are built are personal interpretations of the shared vocabulary of Quakerism – the Light, Seed, Truth, Love, Spirit, or God. This use of traditional terms, is refracted through personal cosmologies.

This adaptation by the practical combining of these possible variations in practices, I have called harmonic integration. Worshippers combine these practices along two dimensions: the vertical dimension includes twelve practices – the grounding cosmology or transcendent function, a role for the body, a way of centering-down and so on; positions on the horizontal dimensions are influenced by reference to the pressures of the dialectic, that is between immanent and transcendent perspectives (Taylor, 2007). This dialectic manifests in each of the practices. This field of knowledge practices can be schematically expressed as follows:

**Fig. 16: Harmonic Integration of elements of Quaker worship practices**

within the Transcendent-Immanent dialectic.



Here I show how the transcendent-immanent dialectic is dramatised in the repertoire of practices available to Quakers. I have shown, in the ethnography, how individual Quakers construct their Quakerism from these elements and lean towards a particular polarity in respect of each one. The key to the process of harmonic integration is to have, as a practice, a way of

working with these twelve dimensions of Quaker practice so that they are in a coherent relation, and function as a personal model. Becoming Quaker means engaging in a process of learning these spiritual disciplines, inhabiting the habitus, and forging a personal model. This is harmonic integration, the culmination of which is an engagement with the ritual silence and the emergence of inspiration constellating in language and speech.

Whilst I have shown that Quakers differ considerably amongst themselves in what they say they are doing in worship, and that this may be connected to the pluralism of cosmologies, I do not conclude that harmonic integration is a process simply of taking up a perspective that is simply linked to a particular cosmological preference. The cosmological preference, the personal view of the image and status of the Light, may emerge from the dialectical tension between transcendence and immanence being operative within the practices of each of the twelve dimensions. This is what defines Quaker practices as experiential not propositional religion (Best, 2010, Needham 1972). The construct of transcendence emerges, post hoc, from experience and practice. Quaker practices may be becoming by adaptation, yet plausibly consistent with the tradition, a set of practices that explores rather than asserts the possibility of the transcendent – a laboratory of the Spirit (Davison, 2009).

Patterns of harmonic integration may show different preferences on each practice dimension, and adepts may develop a shifting repertoire of practices. For example, many worshippers who would espouse a strong ontology for the Light, see the transcendent-immanent dialectic as a movement from the

immanent to the transcendent and therefore accept the necessity for worshippers to start to seek from where they are, in Quaker language, from their condition. In other examples the practice of centering-down may be used in a focal way, using a fragment of *Advices and Queries*, or a poem, for example, without that focus being towards a transcendent. Furthermore, some Quakers give a clear account of their focus on a notion of God in worship, yet in seeking unity in decision-making, they may prefer to refer to the sense of the meeting rather than God's will. These adaptive responses to the pressures in the spiritual landscape have therefore widened the repertoire of practices available to Quakers in their worship and social enactment, and these practices depend on the form and process of the Meeting for Worship for their containment.

Harmonic integration is therefore a way of combining different emphases in both perspectives and practices along the dialectic of transcendence-immanence and within the twelve necessary elements, in a recognisable Quaker way. These personal orientations create the conditions for the silence to be fully appreciated, in the sense of balance, right relations and the search for a reframing of the human condition in terms of the Light. This engagement with 'the place that words come from....' I conclude remains the central practice for Quakers. In terms of the pressures and cross pressures that I have identified, I conclude that Quakers, in adapting to them, create a wider repertoire of perspectives and practices which may be combined to enable participation in the tradition. Renewal networks enable attenders to join and identify with sub-groups which reflect their preferences in terms of cosmology

and social organisation. The extensive reflexive Quaker literature also plays a part in expanding these interpretations of what Quakerism can be. This dispersed, pluralistic and developing community of practice is held together by the persistence, and the form and functions, of the Meeting for Worship.

I have also shown how the Quaker narrative adapts under the pressures of pluralism, notably how ambiguity and changes in meanings in use in the oral tradition, by the use of aphorisms, enables inclusiveness, and avoids explicit disagreement. This is exemplified in the case of the central tenet held by Quakers, 'answering that of God in everyone'. This polysemy and ambiguity is also reinforced by the hermeneutic cycle of aphorisms in use in which a *via negativa*, an epistemology of deferral of affirmation, is favoured, particularly in approaching the character of the Light. This entails a deferral of affirmation, a practice of seeking and waiting, and it makes all manifestations of guidance always provisional. The refusal of affirmation, is further justified by reference to the Quaker historical rejection of creeds and doctrines. This part of the narrative tradition readily adapts to the prevailing pressures for personal and pluralist meanings.

I have also shown how Quakers adapt to the pressure of secularisation by masking their beliefs when in certain environments, especially the workplace, when they collaborate with other organisations, and when a secular vocabulary is required for communication, as in matters of human rights (Bartlett, 2009). These adaptations however do not appear to compromise the central tradition and could be described as tactical.

I have established these various findings through a methodology which includes a range of engagements with Quakers and their practices – the evocation of participation in ritual worship, participant observation of renewal groups and Business Meetings, the transcriptions of personal Quaker accounts, and a review of Quaker literature.

### **6.9. Cultural Theory Analysis.**

The framework of Cultural Theory (Thompson et al.1990) and Douglas's grid-group model (Douglas, 1996, Douglas and Ney, 1998, Fardon, 1999) enabled me to show the changing pattern and relationships over time between key elements of Quaker practice – collective worship ritual, cosmologies, Testimonies, decision-making in Business Meetings, and renewal initiatives. The ethnographic material was thereby subject to a theoretical analysis that elucidates a complementary picture. The social biases towards hierarchy, individualism, egalitarianism, and isolation and the pressures of grid and group were shown to expand further the explanatory value of the theorised pressures of secularisation and the cross pressures in the spiritual landscape.

The analysis showed that the centrality of the worship ritual and the search for the mystical experience represented by the point zero have been maintained over time by Quakers. It showed that the Business Meeting and the Testimonies have become differentiated from, and less dependent on, the worship ritual in terms of decision-making criteria. Their discernment criteria

have become increasingly related to social categories and biases and less dependent on inspiration for guidance. Cultural Theory also enables the pressure or bias, towards hierarchy (and its function in resistance and renewal) to be added to the picture of the spiritual landscape, and points up a tension with the egalitarian aspirations of the enclave.

The analysis showed that cosmologies were associated with the competing visions of individuals and renewal groups. These groups themselves dramatise a critical tension for Quakers. Whilst aspiring to generate unity, and providing a wide range of options, they also factionalise the different perspectives created by the pressures of pluralism and individualism, whilst remaining subject to these pressures.

#### **6.10. Quaker Practice as Religion and as Belief.**

I now turn to a subsidiary question posed at the outset. Do Quakers consider themselves as engaged in religion, and do Quakers have beliefs?

Quakers have moved under the pressures of the spiritual landscape from having a unique claim, which places them as radicals outside mainstream religions, to being an inclusive group with features of a denomination (shared and non-unique faith claims), that is, an enclave which is pluralistically legitimate (Bruce, 1995). In Warner's (1990) terms Quakers have become nascent liberals rather than nascent evangelicals. Their membership is declining slowly, but patterns of affiliation are changing – fewer people who

attend Meetings for Worship formally join the Society but attendance at Meetings is declining less slowly than full membership. This suggests that individuals participate in worship on their own private terms and increasingly decline to submit themselves to the authority of a religious institution. In Douglas's terms this is a diminution of the pressures exerted by the enclave group on individuals (Douglas 1996, 1998). There are some Quakers who wish to remove the word 'religious' from the formal Quaker title, *The Religious Society of Friends*.

The place assigned to Quakers in the spiritual landscape as between congregational church religion and the holistic milieu (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005) has been confirmed. It is also clear that Quakers though interested in some practices characteristic of the holistic milieu, do not significantly overlap in practices or membership with it. However Quaker practices do exemplify the general thesis of subjectivisation and the shift from religion to spirituality in their discourse and in their practices. There are therefore some trends that support a view that Quaker practices do not function or become represented as a religion in the sense inherited from their Christian roots (Asad, 1993).

However the centrality and importance of the Meeting for Worship is conserved and there persists, in relation to it, a raft of strong realist ontologies, some theist. Furthermore the character of the worship event, established by the ethnography, points to a significance for the ritual as a sacred and set-apart event which is discontinuous with everyday life; that is it is heterotopic (Pilgrim, 2008). Whilst there are interpretations of the precise

meaning of the word 'worship', the paradigmatic Quaker descriptions of worship, particularly in *Quaker Faith and Practice*, remain consistent with its Christian roots. This reading contrasts with the interpretation that Quakers have sacralised daily life, as an aesthetic of experience, and that the worship event is seamless and continuous with everyday life, such that the Meeting is not best understood as a religious event (Collins, 1994, 2002a, Coleman and Collins 2000).

I conclude that the Meeting for Worship is a set-apart event, constructed as discontinuous with daily life, such that notwithstanding its adaptive containment of a range of perspectives and practices, it remains best understood as a religious activity. That is, religious in the sense of the term religion that persists in the Quaker tradition from its Christian roots. Here I conclude, consistent with the interpretations of Asad (1993) and Ruel (1982), that as Quaker links with Christianity become more tenuous, so the desire of Quakers to define their activity as religion will decline – the definition of religion being tied to a Christian paradigm. However the redefinition could move, as I have suggested above, in another direction by Quaker practices becoming regarded as secular religion.

On the matter of beliefs, it may seem that because Quakers do not 'believe in belief' and 'believe differently', they exemplify Needham's (1972,1981) perspective. However this does not rule out Quakers believing in a number of senses – particularly in respect of ethical concerns and some residual commitments to certain cosmologies. Certainly the word 'belief' is polysemous

in Quaker usage, and includes notions of trust, values and moral commitments, authority and orthodoxy. When Quakers reject the notion of 'belief', it is usually a rejection of propositions that claim external authority. It is, however, clear that in entertaining concepts such as the Light, the Source, and God, ontological claims are being made and some kind of trust or faith is placed in their character. It is also the case that Quaker Testimonies are, even when they are separated from specific inspirational sources, a set of ethical principles which entail belief commitments.

So whilst there are beliefs held by Quakers, I conclude that Quaker practice does exemplify Needham's findings that religions need not be defined by the necessity and centrality of the concept and practice of belief, in the sense of shared orthodox commitment to a propositionally defined truth claim about the world.

### **6.11. Conclusion.**

I have shown ethnographically how Quakers construct the diverse Quaker 'way'. I have shown that it is possible to refer to a set of practices described here as Quakerism without essentialist or reified readings of the movement but that the term refers to a wide range of perspectives, not all of which are shared and some of which show certain tense relations. I have analysed the ethnographic material in terms of two complementary theoretical frameworks and they provide a consistent set of findings. I have, I submit, established that

contemporary Quaker practice and organisation is embodied in a dispersed community of practice and a complex, pluralistic, adaptive, religious enclave. This community of practice is subject to pressures towards secularisation and to cross-pressures concerning the conditions for the possibility of religious practice. The pluralistic Quaker 'way' is constructed by Quakers in relation to these pressures and conditions in a spiritual landscape. Quaker traditions and practices contribute to these pressures in the cases of egalitarianism and subjectivisation. The tradition is vulnerable to, and succumbs to, pressures of individualism, pluralism and naturalism. It resists these pressures through the preservation of the ritual worship form, its set-apart quality as an event, its openness to possible transcendent perspectives, and through maintaining an institutional hierarchy in worship based decision-making. It adapts to the pressures in a number of creative ways, in particular by the expansion of the repertoire of practices available and consistent with the tradition. The combining of these different practices on the twelve dimensions of Quaker practice I describe as harmonic integration.

Contemporary Quakers face a set of internal tensive relations which create a challenge for the tradition. The critical challenge is to retain unity without orthodoxy and to retain diversity without fatally diluting the tradition. These challenges include the following tensions: the dialectical relation between cosmologies and practices which tend to a transcendent source and those which tend towards immanence; the maintenance of an coherent shared vocabulary in the face of a plurality of cosmologies; the factionalism of competing renewal networks; the competing understanding of the nature of

religion and the sacred as continuous, seamless with everyday life or discontinuous; and the relationship between interpretations of the past tradition and the authenticity of new light from various sources.

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## **Appendix I: Dramatis Personae**

There are three sets of people who are described or appear by quotation in this study and whose profiles are set out here. The St Andrews Local Quaker Meeting, (25 profiles), the *Kindlers* (15 profiles) and individuals who agreed to engage in conversations and interviews during the fieldwork period (18 quoted persons). St Andrews Meeting participants are given false names. Real names are retained in the case of the *Kindlers* since their membership of this group is a matter of open record. Individuals interviewed and taped are given false names. This is not necessary in all cases, for example Alec Davison did not wish anonymity. All individuals who were taped, or whose conversations I noted, were offered an ethics form to sign. Some wished to do this and kept a copy, others for Quaker reasons (not believing in oaths and trusting my integrity) did not wish to sign an ethics form. Some respondents sent me text. If this was a personal communication from someone I had taped then I reference it to the name I have given them. If the text was from a publication that they had written, as in the case of Linda Murgatroyd or from text they gave to other members of the group, as happened in the *Kindlers*, then I reference it to their real name. The purpose of these lists is to personalise quotations in the text by providing some background and to create thereby some continuity to their voices. The list of people in St Andrews Meeting comprises those who were present at the Meeting that is described in the ethnography in Chapter 2, Section 2, and should be read with a view to obtaining an understanding of the knowledge that worshippers have of each other during a Meeting for Worship.

**St Andrews Meeting Members and Attenders who were present at the Meeting described in the Ethnography in Chapter 3. Section 2.**

**Robert Grey** is a long-standing member of the meeting. He holds a PhD in mathematics. He was a teacher and is now a local Councillor. He spent several years in Africa on VSO. He has been both the Clerk and an Elder of the meeting. His ministry is always thoughtful and valued by the meeting, and he is quoted in this thesis. He is the Clerk to the General Meeting for Scotland. Robert is very experienced in Quakers matters. He is committed to a direct sense of the spirit. He is wary of traditional Christian doctrine and ecclesiastical structures; he is inclusive rather than eclectic. He exemplifies the group in this thesis that Pilgrim (2008) calls 'inclusivists' and I call 'Quakers of the Book', that is they hold a traditional use of the concept of Light without defining it theologically, are concerned with Gospel Order and the way worship and discernment is organised and chary of the group of non-realists within Quakerism.

**Laura Smith** is a doctor and the Director of Public Health. She has interests in Sufi meditation. She is an Elder of the meeting and regularly ministers. She is eclectic in her views and open to new light.

**Hannah Davis** was a nursery teacher. She is a member of Meeting for Sufferings on behalf of the Area Meeting. She regularly takes the responsibility to read from A&Qs at meeting. Several pieces of her ministry are used in this thesis. She like Robert, uses the traditional Quaker

vocabulary, resists theological debate and attempts at definition, and is both inclusive of others but very clear about the proper way in which Quaker activity should be structured for worship and business. She was the Co-Clerk.

**Mary Barclay** is the partner of Robert. She has interests in African countries particularly in Ghana, and Ruanda/Burrundi. She works for a Womens' Aid organisation. She is a qualified accountant and does the accounts for the meeting. She is a tireless worker for the Meeting particularly in administrative and financial matters. She was the other Co-Clerk of the Meeting at the time the ethnographic description was written

**Sue Slack** is a retired academic who has travelled widely. She is now elderly and finding it hard to cope. The meeting is concerned about her health. She openly expresses her view that there is no 'God' in the sense of a personal mind or force.

**Rita Common**, from the USA, works in Edinburgh in events management and corporate development. She is currently (2011) Co-clerk. She worked in Lebanon for a number of years and is very concerned about the Israeli-Palestine problem. She supports the boycott of Israeli goods.

**Jade Turner** is an academic sociologist from Manchester. Her work has been on adopted children in a long prospective national study. She was a Catholic. She is an overseer. Her husband, who does not come to meeting, has a degenerative illness and she is slowly becoming his carer and this is a

concern for her. She thinks she will have to give up her formal academic work. She describes herself as a 'contemplative' and having joined the Society about 5 years ago still finds the business processes cumbersome.

**Fraser West** is a retired philosopher who still does some teaching.

**Gail Grant** is a retired medical historian from Sussex who moved to St Andrews to be near her family because of her own medical problems. She is not mobile and there is a rota for getting her to meeting. She has a special seat by the door of the meeting room. She is frustrated by her ill health and fearful about the future. She is a concern of the Meeting. She ministers from time to time. She would like to do more for the Meeting but is unable to do so.

**Matty Tuke** is Australian, a teacher who is an attender. She has participated in a *Kindlers* programme and is developing it in the Dundee area. She is the correspondent for the meeting and reads out notices, keeps a 'what's on' list updated and ensures the notice boards are tidy and up to date. She also runs a singing session before the Meeting for Worship once a month. Matty is becoming an important activist in the Meeting. She once belonged to an evangelical Christian group and is afraid to become a full member of the Meeting. Her activities with the *Kindlers* are supported by the Meeting.

**Lester Tuke** is a retired educator and researcher. Lester and Matty have come to the meeting in the last four years and have become very active members. Lester is on a number of committees for the Meeting.

**Michael Gilt** is an along standing member. He served in the Friends Ambulance Service during WWII and has written a book about it. He was also a musician and still plays. His occasional ministry, always grateful, hopeful and witty is valued by the Meeting.

**Francis Spencer** is a retired teacher who lives alone, comes on a long bus journey to the Meeting and greatly values the community of the Meeting.

**Steph Musto** is a teacher who is well versed in the Old Scots language and is also a storyteller. She sometimes reads from the Psalms in Old Scots. She travels to do storytelling workshops. She is the clerk of the Premises Committee that looks after the building.

**Colin Abram** is a mental health social worker. He runs retreats on Sufi meditation. He is very concerned to oppose the developing Quaker interest in assisted dying. He is an attender.

**Genevieve Abram** has recently become a member. She is a teacher and she and Colin have two children, Peter and Miranda, who come to the children's meeting.

**Petra Scott** is a birthright Quaker who was educated in a Quaker school. She is an artist and poet. She has an interest in Celtic spirituality. She has been an Elder and currently looks after the library. She has very traditional views on Quaker form and process.

**Kate Foley** is an artist and dress-maker. She is an overseer. She also manages the Doorkeeping rota. Kate is modest, quiet and reluctant to express her views; however, when she does so they are always appreciated by the Meeting since they are likely to be well thought through.

**Jean Marsh** is retired and involved with the University of the Third Age. She has a developing interest in the Peace Testimony and has attended several courses on Quaker non-violence. She is becoming a very regular attender at the Meeting. She and her partner (Betty) represent a certain demographic that is attracted to Quakerism, (women between 35-65). Jean has found Quakerism to be a balance of serious worship and active concern with ethical and political matters and this appeals to her.

**Betty Morris** is retired and also with Jill involved in Quaker Peace work. She has run several workshops on the peace Testimony for the local meeting.

**Angus Luard** is a retired philosophy lecturer. He attends the Quaker Theology Seminar and is the meeting representative on the St Andrews Ecumenical group of Churches. He runs discussion groups from time to time usually on Biblical topics.

**Gordana Swan** is the Co-Clerk of the meeting. She was brought up a Quaker and went to a Quaker school. She is concerned that the Meeting functions in a proper procedural way.

**Tuven Shostac** is a pastoral counsellor and works for the Student Advisory Service of the University. She also attends an Anglican church in the town.

**Sylvia Stewart** is in her early 90s and has been a Quaker since 1950, and member of this meeting since it began. She is committed to left wing politics and to the Welfare State. Her late husband who was also a member of the meeting was the Labour Party Agent for Dundee.

**Katherine Tait** is also 90 years old and has been a Quaker since 1948. She has been a member of this meeting since 1986. She is widely travelled and particularly in the USA.

**Joy Tait** is a media executive who also works for the Regulator OFCOM. She has travelled widely and worked for many years for an American company. She has been the Clerk of the Meeting.

**Angela Rice** is a science PhD student at the University. She has been attending the Meeting for several years and lately more frequently. She is graduating and leaving and this may be her last Meeting.

### ***The Kindlers.***

**Margaret Amor** is a retired librarian. She is a Trustee of Woodbrooke Centre for Quaker Studies. She is a member of the Meeting for Sufferings. She is concerned about the dilution of worship practices particularly into forms of meditation. She is keen to preserve traditional language. She is critical of the

introduction of Trustees and concerned that this compromises the Quaker business method. She lives in Birmingham.

**Elizabeth Brown** is retired. She is the co-ordinator of Quaker Retreats and co-author with Alec Davison of the Kindler publication. She is an experienced facilitator and led the Kindlers group in the Experiment with Light. She is a very patient person, quiet and thoughtful in groups. She has interest in mysticism and in Meister Eckhardt.

**Maggie Freake**, a Buddhist Quaker, is a teacher. She is interested in meditation and in non-violence,

**Joanna Godfrey-Wood** is an Editor. She was one of the few birthright Quakers in the Kindlers group.

**Kaveh Guilanpour** is a lawyer in his 30s. He has developed an interest in Quakers and comes from a Catholic upbringing. He was challenging to many members of the Kindlers group and asked searching questions. He was frustrated by the way the discussion in the group was controlled by certain key members.

**Tom Harris** is a young employee in Friends House. He recently moved from Doncaster. He is a Quaker. He feels that employees are not well supported in the organisation and that they are also under constant pressure from Quakers around the country who constantly email and ring to demand resources for

projects, resources that he does not control. He was also frustrated with his superiors.

**Linda Murgatroyd** was an academic sociologist at Sussex University. She is bi-lingual (French/English). She has deep interests in art therapy and spirituality. She won the Quaker Quarterly Essay Competition on the future of the Society. She was an articulate and key member of the Kindlers group and continued meeting with some members after the programme. She led the group in an arts workshop during the Kindlers programme.

**Peter Parr** is a transport engineer from Brighton. He was about to reduce his working week to four days to undertake some Quaker work locally. He was interested in Journal Keeping and led a session on this topic for the group.

**Ruth Serner** is a retired administrator living in Surrey. She was the oldest person in the group and aged about 70. She was concerned about the loss of the tradition in local meetings and the lack of spoken ministry. She had contributed to the *Quaker Quest* Programme with Alec whom she knew well.

**Ruth Tod** is recently retired from working in Friends House and is now an Alexander Teacher. She lives in North London. She is interested in Fair Trade and ethical economics. She is a member of Meeting for Sufferings. Her mother was a German refugee in WWII and she has recently had to care for her towards the end of her life. Ruth is very committed to a holistic approach to worship.

**Imran Tyabji** lives in North London and is a member of the Rowntree Trust. He was until he recently retired a mathematician for a major security company. He has an interest in Young Friends. He is the Treasurer of his local Meeting in Muswell Hill.

**Alex Wildwood** lives in Banbury and is a well-published Quaker whose work includes an appraisal of Quaker links to Christianity. He ran a national programme called 'Woodbrooke on the Road' which was a travelling project for local meetings. He has recently written an overview of Quaker inclusiveness. He takes a universalist and evolutionary perspective towards issues of religion.

**Carol Wise** is an artist living in Yorkshire. She is interested in many alternative therapies, dance and spiritualities.

**Joycelin Dawes** was parliamentary researcher and lecturer. She has been a member of the Wrekin Trust and active in the Findhorn Community. She has written on contemporary spirituality and her book 'The Quest: A Sense of Soul' was used by Alec as part of the *Kindlers* programme. She is a *universalist* and takes a process and naturalistic view of the notion of the 'Light'. She co-facilitated the first *Kindlers* programme.

**Alec Davison** was an English teacher, theatre Director at the Cockpit Theatre London and worked for some years in Friends House. He has a long track record of creating projects, obtaining funding for them, establishing their

effectiveness and moving on to new initiatives. He created the *Leaveners* which is a Theatre Group for Young Quakers. He also developed *LEAP: Confronting Conflict* which was a project that worked on Bullying in Schools. He also created the outreach programme Quaker Quest. *Kindlers* was his idea.

**Individuals who were taped or provided text and whose anonymity is preserved.**

**Susan** is a national figure in British Quakerism having been a Swarthmore Lecturer and Trustee of a number of Quaker concerns. She currently chairs the Joseph Rowntree Trust. She attends Dunblane Meeting. Susan is a 'political' Quaker and is very influential. She is concerned about the future of Quakerism but is far from traditional in her outlook. She believes there is a place for open non-theism within Quakerism.

**Caroline** is a retired librarian. She is a member of Meeting for Sufferings. She is concerned that the formal and traditional understanding of worship is being diluted by individualistic practices of meditation. She is also wary of the new powers being given to new Quaker Trustees under Charity Law. She is a member of Oxford Meeting.

**Tim** is an employee at Friends House. He works on Quaker Life issues which are concerned with the wellbeing of Local Meetings and their outreach activities.

**Stephen** was about to retire from working on the African programmes at Friends House. He has a deep interest in matters of equality. He was brought up a Quaker and attended Westminster meeting.

**Geraldine** is a senior social worker and family therapist at the Tavistock Clinic. She has been the Clerk of Muswell Hill meeting. She joined Quakers as a student having been active in the Trade Union movement and in peace campaigning. She and Roger have two sons, both of whom are now adults and engaged in Quaker activities.

**Roger** is married to Geraldine and works in the Audit Commission. He has been the Treasurer of Muswell Hill Meeting and of the Quaker Centre in Birmingham. Both he and his wife are musical and he sings in a number of choirs. Roger grew up in an evangelical Christian setting which he began to find restricting and too Biblical.

**Rose** is a publisher and birthright Quaker, she is described in some detail in Chapter 3, Section 3. She is a member of the national steering group of the *Kindlers*.

**Martin** is the Director of Quaker Social Action on Housing. He is an entrepreneur and has developed a number of housing and welfare schemes in East London. He is a firm non-theist.

**Kate Jane** is a painter, art therapist and singer. She was born in S. Wales and brought up in a traditional Jewish household. She found home restrictive and left to live in London. Her mother died and she came to the local Quaker meeting to find support. She has been at the meeting for 10 years and runs a number of groups.

**Pauline** is a retired employee of Friends House. She is active in local politics and has led many delegations of Quakers to see various politicians. She has a wide knowledge of Quakers and also an eclectic approach to her faith. She is rooted in traditional Quaker practice but is also interested in alternative therapies. She also has interests in fair trade and ethical economics.

**Brian** is the secretary to the Recording Clerk in Friends House. He is completing a Masters degree in Business Studies and has made a survey of attitudes to Quakers in the general population. He believes strongly that Quakers must change radically and get rid of all references to Christianity in order to appeal to a wider population.

**Sophie** is engaged in arts administration in Northern England. She has interests some alternative therapies.

**Alan** was a policeman in the Far East until his retirement to Scotland. He was a practicing Catholic but on his return began a search for another church. He encountered Quakers and has become an attender at Dunblane meeting. He is questioning of Quaker practices but is very keen on the Peace Testimony.

He has had recent difficulties and has found the local meeting very supportive.

**Penny** is a retired academic. She is a deep thinker on Quaker matters and writes and publishes in Quaker journals.

**Mary** was in her late 90s when I met her. She has since died. She had been a refugee from Germany in WWII. She often ministered in Muswell Hill meeting. She is quoted in this thesis in Chapter 2, Section 5, as giving an example of verbal ministry in worship that I have identified as the speech act of performative apophasis.

**Sian** is a professional singer who was brought up a Quaker and attends occasionally.

**Helen** lives in North London and has been engaged with the Ecumenical Accompaniers Programme on the Israeli-Palestine border for some years. She is in her 30s and has been a Quaker since her teens.

**Paul** is the Parliamentary Liaison Officer for the Society of Friends. He has extensive knowledge of the political system. He undertakes lobbying for the Quakers in both Houses. He has recently took a sabbatical at Clare College Cambridge where he completed a book on Quakerism and Human Rights. He is an Anglican by background and regards himself as a 'visitor' in Friends House. He expressed frustration at the Quaker Business method.

**Gordon** is the full time co-ordinator of Peace Work in Friends House. He has extensive experience of working in areas of non-violent action and reconciliation, particularly with other non-Quaker groups. He is often engaged in discussions with participants in peace work who are not Quakers and reported that he finds that they are attracted to Quakers because their practices provide a sustaining 'spiritual' dimension to what is a thankless task. He is very interested in the work of the philosopher Rene Giraud.

**Leslie** is an employee in Friends house working in the Quaker Life department.

## **Appendix II. Fieldwork Chronology and Contacts.**

The fieldwork for this thesis took place mostly from October 2008 to the end of 2009. However I have drawn on Quaker events which I attended, and for which I have notes which go back to 2005/6. I also attended Muswell Hill Meeting from 1993-2001 and St Andrews Meeting from 2001 to the present and I also drew on those experiences and contacts made over that time. My approach to a dispersed community of practitioners was threefold: firstly to find ways of joining them when and where they get together in a variety of programmes and meetings; secondly by making contacts with individuals and gaining agreement to visit them for conversations/taping – in their homes when that was acceptable; thirdly by keeping an ongoing relationship with two local meetings, principally St Andrews and also one in North London, Muswell Hill. I have provided short profiles of these contacts in Appendix I which

details the three groupings of people with whom I had the greatest contact during fieldwork. These contacts lasted from 2008 till the end of the research write up and some continue. Here I set out a chronology of the contacts during the fieldwork with a brief description of the nature and purpose of the contact.

### **Quaker Quest**

During the early period, four months 2008/9, of the fieldwork in London I established an exploratory pattern. As part of this I attended Quaker Quest Meetings to try to establish contacts. These were off-street meeting in the early evening once a week. They were usually well attended by interested people but there were few established Quakers at them except for the organisers whom I came to know. I discontinued these meetings having made few useful contacts.

### **Friends House**

As part of my exploratory pattern in London from January till May 2008, I went, usually daily, to Friends House. I was living off Baker Street a 15-minute walk from Friends House on Euston Road. This is also conveniently near the British Library. I adopted two strategies. First, to contact employees and to try to get introductions to Departments and individuals. To do this I made myself and my status known to the Recording Clerk who manages The Society of Friends. I was given permission to make contacts and to spend time in Friends House. Secondly I established a workspace for myself in the Café/Bookshop area or in one of the corridors and make contacts with people

using those areas. The worship space is close by and I would also go there for worship. The manager of the bookshop would often point people in my direction since he knew of my interests. I visited a number of Departments and made 25 contacts. I was able to use the library in Friends House to write notes. As in the case of *Quaker Quest*, not all activity is fruitful for research purposes. Two leads in Friends House were of limited value. I spent considerable time with the staff member responsible for the development of the building on the grounds that part of the work would be to make a survey of Quaker needs. This did not materialise. I also, through the Secretary to the Recording Clerk, was asked to assist with the analysis of the returns from Local Meetings of the Consultations on the Document *The Long Term Framework*. This did not turn out to be possible. I spent most time at Friends House between October 2007 and June 2008, and latterly for the second *Kindlers* programme in September-October 2008. Employees at Friends House were sometimes anxious about being in conversations or being taped. At the time of the research it became clear in discussions with them that there was considerable unhappiness amongst staff. This was particularly focussed on an emerging central managerialism that had been brought in by the new Recording Clerk. This was symbolised by the development of the *Long Term Framework*, the introduction of Trustees, corporate 'branding', and expenditure on Friends House refurbishment. These issues are discussed in Chapter 4, Section 1. The Recording Clerk gave me two interviews and was a member of the second *Kindlers* group. She became increasingly aware of the disquiet in the Society and resigned suddenly in 2010.

### **Integral Spirituality Course**

During this exploratory period Alec Davison allowed me to join him in his planning for the *Kindlers* group that he was setting up. At this stage he thought that the work of Ken Wilber could form the main part of the programme. Wilber had just published a book *Integral Spirituality* (Wilber 2007) and an evening course was being run by Jonathan Males in North London over three months (10 meetings) starting in January 2008. I attended this course with Alec and another Quaker. Unfortunately Alec was not convinced by the material and decided to plan his own content. The group was ecumenical and there were some interesting views expressed about Quakers.

### **Contacts for Interviews/Conversations/Taped Sessions**

Gradually I established contacts with Quakers in Friends House and at the various London Meetings I visited: Winchmore Hill, Muswell Hill, Finchley, Hampstead, Friends House and Westminster. Many dozens of contacts were made and 29 of these agreed to establish an ongoing conversation with me for the coming months, to keep in email contact, to send me text if necessary and to have one or two taped sessions. About half of these sessions took place in Quakers' homes. The session lasted usually 2-3 hours with taping for about half of the time. A small Edirol R-09 recorder was used. The transcribed tapes are a major source of data for this thesis. I did also begin to record Quakers in the local St Andrews meeting and completed one (with ethical agreement) – of Sylvia who appears in this thesis. However it became clear that this would be seen as intrusive of the Meeting and would create

difficulties in my position in the Meeting if people shared critical material about the Meeting, for example attitudes to others' ministry, with me.

## **Quaker Meetings**

### **St Andrews Local Meetings**

During the whole period of the research 2007-2011 I kept in close contact with the local meeting in St Andrews. My pattern of engagement was to attend the Sunday meeting for worship when I was in town. Over the research period I attended approximately 50-60 meetings and 6-7 business meetings. I also took part in other activities. I joined the *With Hearts and Minds Prepared* group for their 12 sessions over three months in 2007. I attended two-day sessions on the consultation on the *Long Term Framework* and two Away-days on the *Peace Testimony* in 2010. I attended the St John discussion group noted in the ethnography in 2008. I attended the Area Meeting in Dundee in 2008. I attended many other meetings on for example, Burundi Quakers, 'Just War' and on Sufi meditation. During this period my partner was the Clerk of the Meeting and I had access to the workings of this role. This was useful in appreciating the challenges of Clerkship and these issues are discussed in Chapter 4, Sections 2 & 3.

### **Muswell Hill Meeting**

During January to June and September to December 2008 I went to various London meetings and to the Woodbrooke and Cardiff meetings. Mostly I went to Muswell Hill where I made a number of contacts and where I knew many

Quakers. It was also the meeting where I could meet Alec Davison. I attended the Area Meeting in Hampstead.

### **Britain Yearly Meetings**

I attended with permission the 5-day Yearly Meeting on two occasions 2003 and May 2008. At the latter I made extensive notes of large sessions and in particular of those covering the Long Term Framework which was being taken through the Quaker business process and was contentious and strategically significant. I was able to have brief contact here with some key Quaker writers such as Ben Dandelion, Rex Ambler, Felicity Kaal, Linda Murgatroyd, and Christine Davis. Christine, the Swarthmore Lecturer of 2008 BYM agreed to be taped and Linda became a member of the *Kindlers* and a key correspondent. Alec Davison conducted a workshop to recruit people to *Kindlers* at BYM.

### **Ecumenical Meeting Scottish Quakers from 12 meetings**

This was a day-long meeting which proved fruitful in many respects. Quakers from a variety of meetings in Scotland talked frankly and openly about their Quakerism and responded to searching questions from members of other churches. It was helpful in showing the problem that Quakers pose for religious groups who use the Bible and theistic concepts at all times. The issue of the meaning and reference of the term 'Light' was discussed and the problem with the meaning of the Quaker phrase 'that of God in everyone'. A Quaker from Edinburgh Phil Lucas also gave a defence of Quaker non-realism and the work of David Boulton which is quoted in this thesis. I was

able to note the 'nutshell' account of Quakerism which the Quakers present were challenged to produce and which is quoted in Chapter 1.

### **Theology Seminar at Woodbrooke**

This was a three-day seminar on the topic of *Christianity and Quakerism*. It was useful in clarifying the lack of passion on the issue and some of the difficult and even obscure theological issues that might be addressed. It also addressed the fact that Christianity itself is not homogenous, and this connection is taken forward in this thesis in Chapter II, Section 2, on the relationship between Christianity and Anthropology. The seminar also enabled me to have contact with Rex Ambler and to discuss the *Experiment with Light*. I was able to discuss the points of interpretation that I raise in Chapter 4 Section 4.5.1 with him. I was able to satisfy myself that there is indeed a set of questions to be addressed about the relationship between 'therapy' and 'worship', and concerning the ontological status given to the "L/light" in the *Experiment's* meditation guidance.

### **Kindlers**

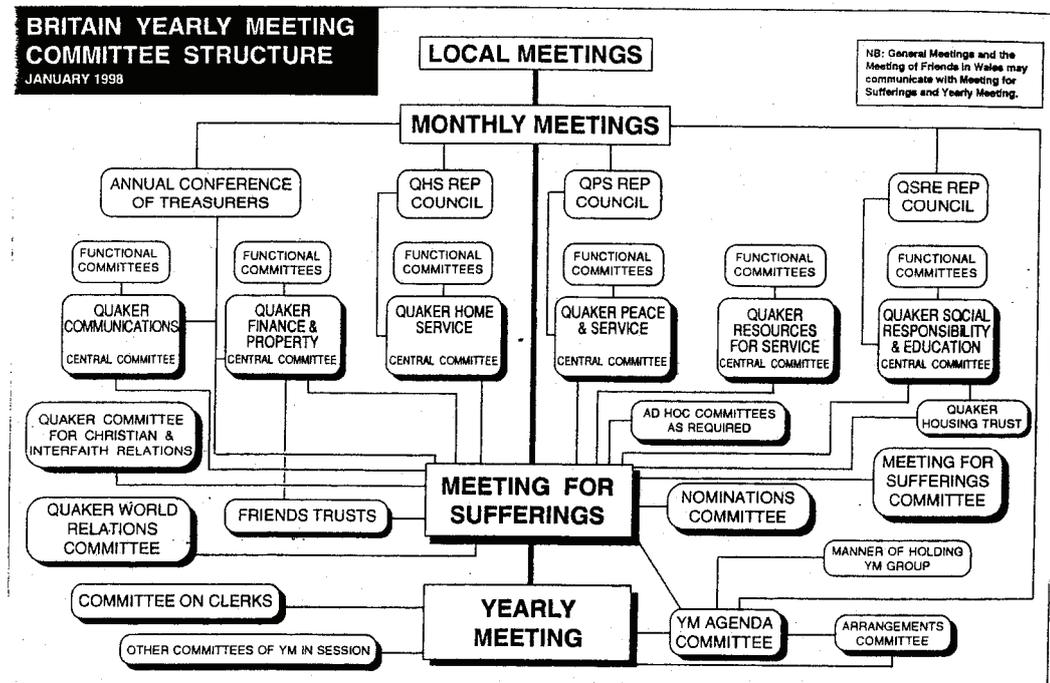
I was in contact with Alec Davison throughout the research period from 2006-2010. He shared his thinking on the shape of the proposed programme, on his choice of facilitator partner and to their planning meetings for the *Kindlers* group 1. I was given membership and access to the *Kindlers 1* and visited *Kindlers* group 2. I was given access to the Support Group that was set up to assist Alec in 2009/10 and which also planned *Kindlers* publications and fund-raising. I was also able to engage in the *Experiment with Light* through the

*Kindlers*. The programmes, which ran from January to May and from September to December 2008, are described above in Chapter 4, Section 5. My engagement was to attend all the planning meetings (6 in total) before the programme 1 began. I attended the planning session between Alec and Joycelin for each session and also sat in on any subsequent reviews they had (there were in fact four such meetings). The sessions took place in Friends House on 12 evenings and each lasted four hours. The membership of the group and the range of interests and the spread of Quaker meetings made *Kindlers* an important source in my fieldwork. I took notes of all meetings and sessions, had regular correspondence with the members, some of whom agreed to be taped.

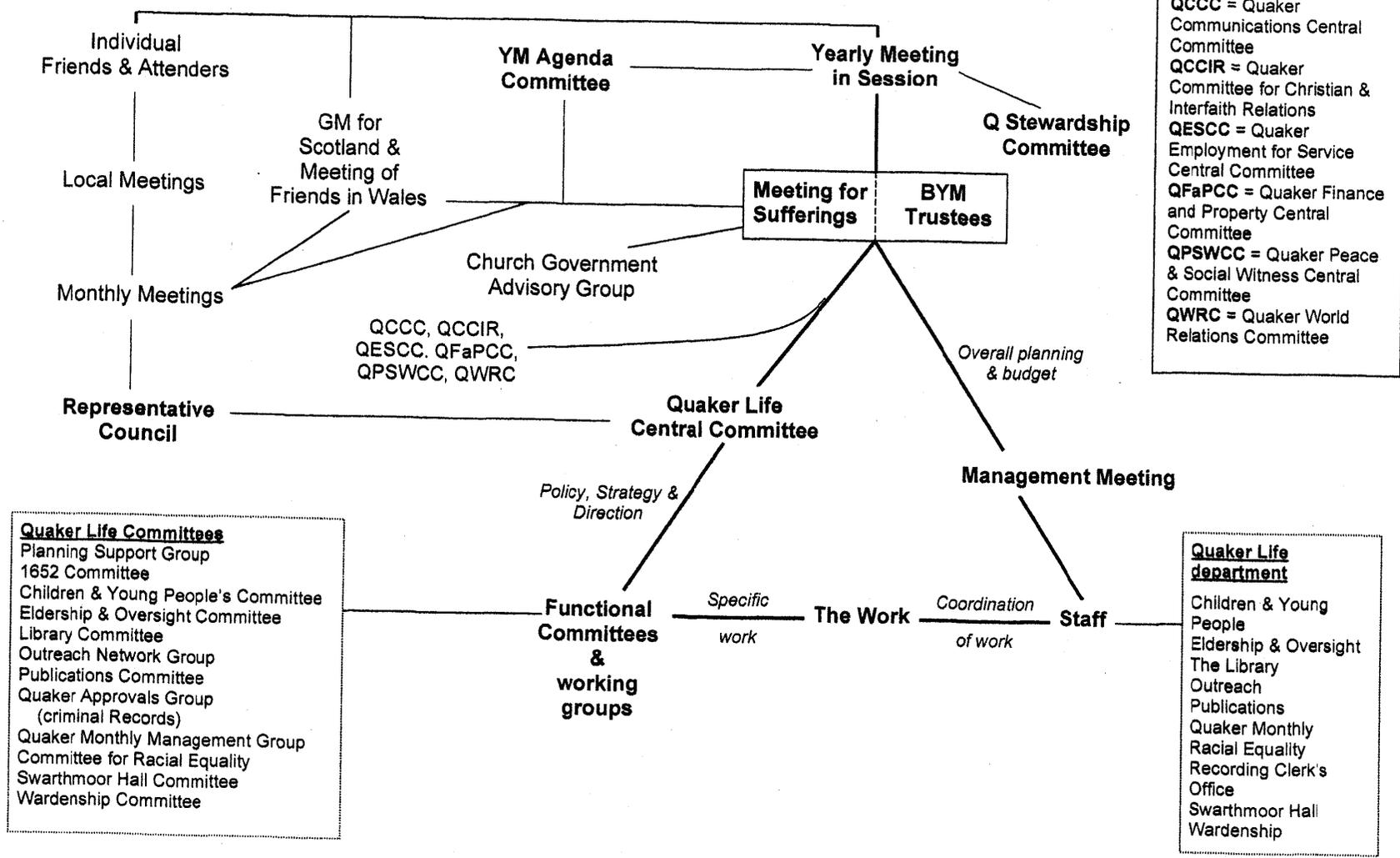
## Appendix III Quaker Structures.

Figures 17. & 18. show the committee structure of Britain Yearly Meeting and an example of the 'operating sphere' of a single department. Figure 19. shows the reach of Quaker local meetings in Britain and Figure 20. shows trends in membership 1935-2009.

**Fig. 17. Committee Structure of Britain Yearly Meeting 1998.**

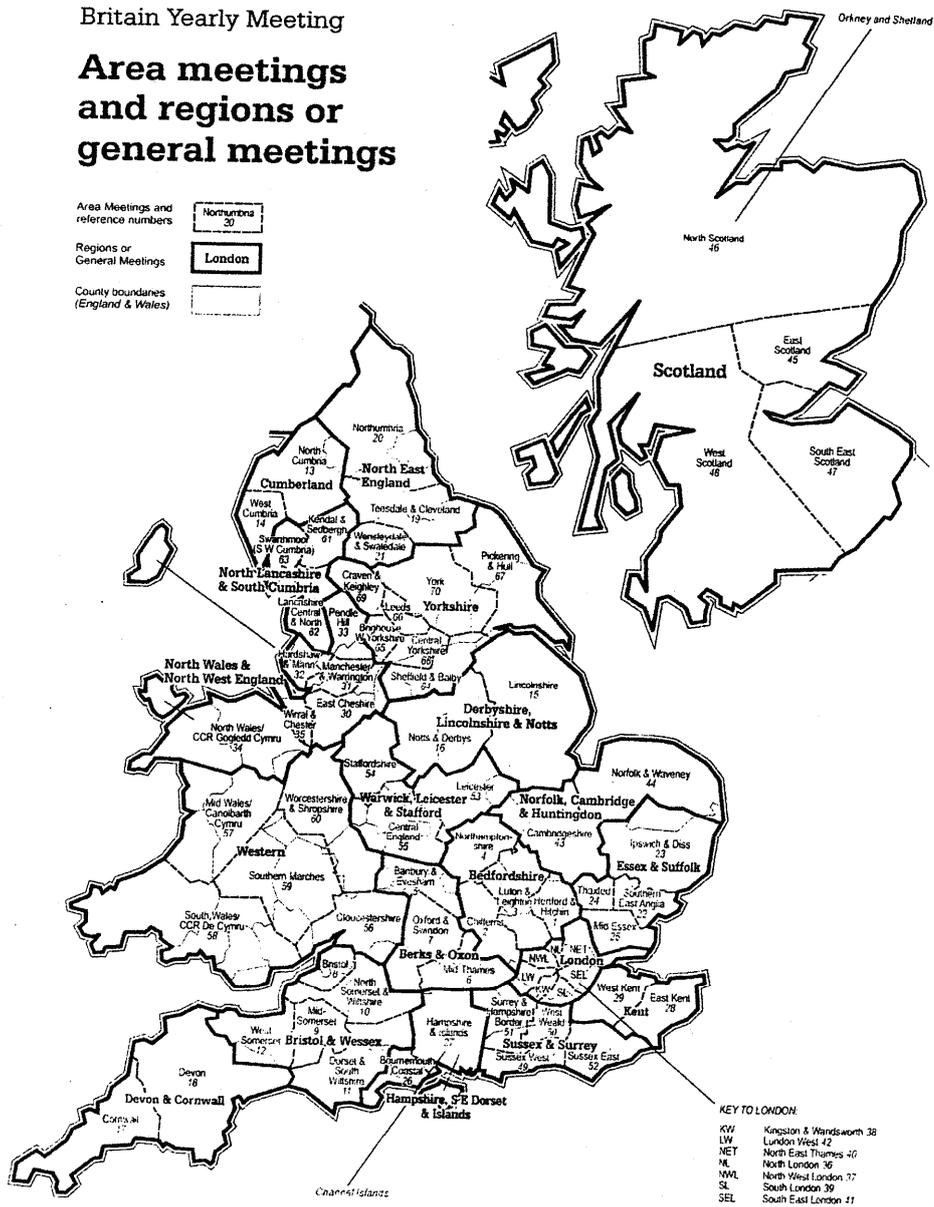


**Map of the Quaker Life operating sphere**



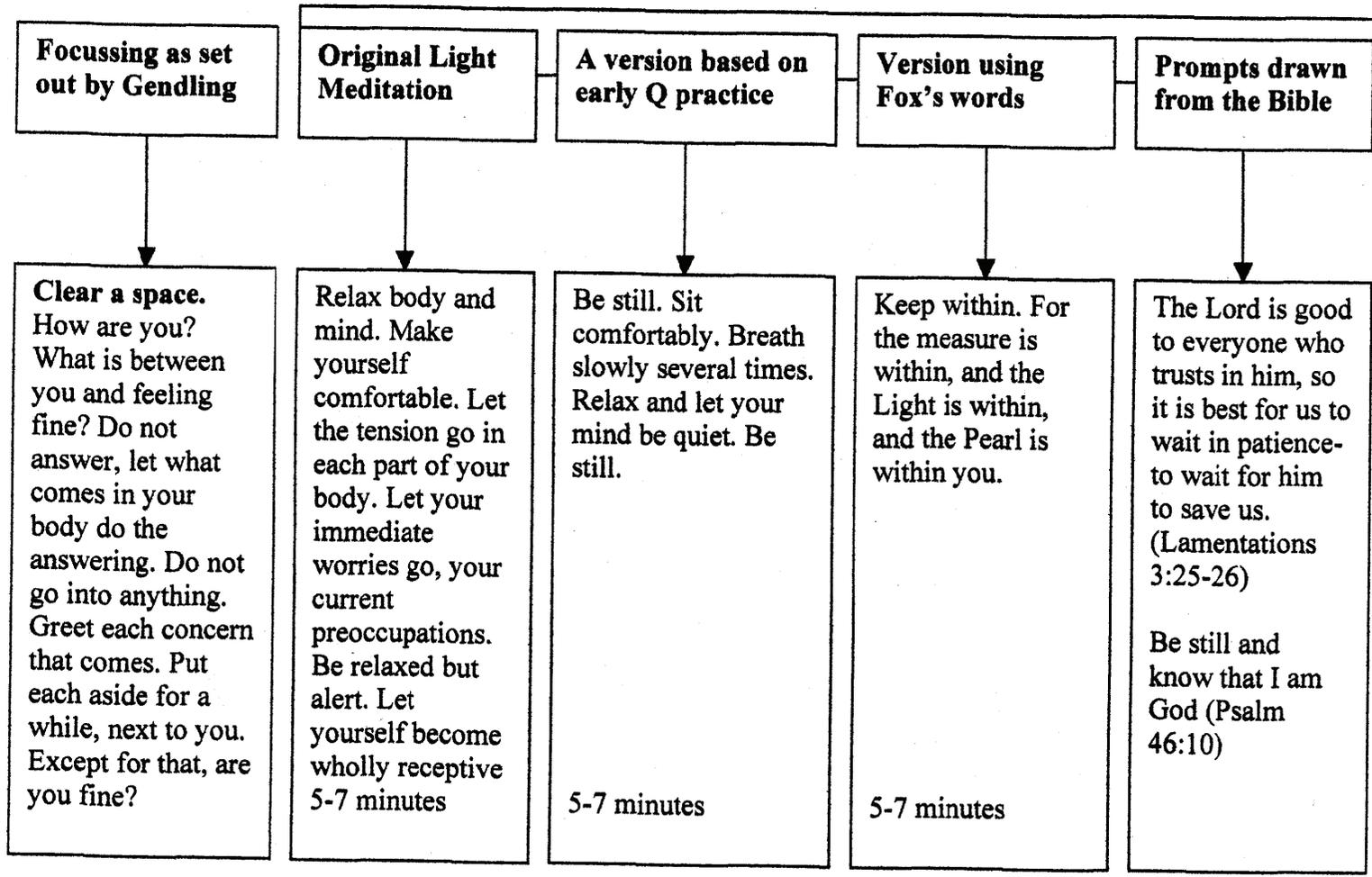
**Fig. 18. Map of Quaker Life Operating Sphere.**

**Fig.19. Area Meetings under Britain Yearly Meeting.**





**Resume of Experiment with Light from Ambler (2001a&b)**



PAUSE-----

(Lampen, 2008:98-111).

**Appendix IV: Experiment with Light Meditation Guidelines.**

**Felt Sense**

Pick one problem to focus on. Do not go into the problem. What do you sense in your body when you recall the whole of that problem? Sense all of that, the sense of the whole thing, the murky discomfort or the unclear body-sense of it.

In this receptive state of mind, let the **real concerns of your life emerge.**

Ask yourself what is really going on in my life, but do not try to answer the question. Let the answer come. You can be specific: what is happening in my relationships, my work, my Meeting in my own heart and mind; Is there anything here that makes me feel uncomfortable, uneasy? As we gradually become aware of these things we are beginning to experience the light

Wait be receptive.  
Turn to the Light

Let the Light that shines in every one of your consciences search you thoroughly, and it will let you clearly see. As the Light opens and exercises your conscience, it will let you see invisible things, which are clearly seen by that which is invisible in you

Come to me all whose work is hard, whose load is heavy and I will give you relief  
(Matthew 11:28)

PAUSE-----

**Get A Handle**

What is the quality of the felt sense?  
What one word, phrase, or image comes out of this felt sense?  
What quality-word would fit better?

Now **focus on one issue** that presents itself, one thing that gives you a sense of unease. Try to get a sense of this thing as a whole. Deep down you know what it is all about, but you don't normally allow yourself to take it all in and absorb the reality of it. Now is the time to do so. You do not have to get involved in it again, or get entangled with the feelings around it. Keep a little distance, so that you can see it clearly. Let the light show you what is really going on here. What is it about this thing you can ask, what makes me feel uncomfortable? Let the answer come. When it does, let a word or image also come that says what it is really like....

**Allow the Light to show you your real concerns**

As the Light appeared, all appeared that is out of the Light-darkness, death, temptations, the unrighteous, the ungodly; all was manifest and seen in the Light.

The Lord answered her: "Martha, Martha! You are worried and troubled over so many things, but just one is needed" (Luke 10: 41-42)

**Resonate**

Go back and forth between word, phrase, or image and the felt sense. Is that right? If they match, have the sensation of matching several times. If the felt sense changes follow it with all your attention. When you get a perfect match, the words (images) being just right for this feeling, let yourself feel that for a minute.

Now ask yourself **what makes it like that.** Don't try to explain it. Just wait in the light till you can see what it is. Let the full truth reveal itself, or as much truth as you are able to take at this moment. The answer will come.

**Be cool.**

Keep a little distance as you focus on something which is significant for you. Let the Light show you what is really happening there. If feelings or questions arise, hold then in the Light. Wait for clarity

Do not look at the temptations, confusions, corruptions, but at the Light that discovers them. For looking down at corruption and distraction, you are swallowed up in it; but looking at the Light that discovers them, you will see over them. There is the first step to peace.

'I will lead my blind people by roads they have never travelled. I will turn their darkness into light and make rough country smooth before them'  
(Isaiah 42: 16)

**Ask**

“What is it, about the whole problem, that makes me so.....?”

When stuck ask:  
What is the worst of this feeling?  
What is really so bad about this?  
What does it need?  
What should happen?  
Do not answer; wait for the feeling to stir and give you an answer.

When the answer comes **welcome it**. It Maybe painful or difficult to believe with your normal conscious mind, but if it is the truth you will recognise it immediately. You will realise that it is something that you need to know. Trust the light. Say yes to it. It will show you new possibilities. It will show you the way through. So however the news seems to be at first, accept it and let its truth pervade your whole being,

**Open yourself to what is being shown.** Wait, and trust the Light. Wait for clarity

The Light will lead you out of darkness into the light of life, into the way of peace and into the life and power of truth.

“Peace is my parting gift to you, my own peace, such as the world cannot give. Set your troubled heart at rest and banish your fears”  
(John 14:27)

PAUSE-----

**Receive**

Welcome what came. Be glad it spoke. It is only one step on this problem, not the last. Now that you know where it is you can leave it and come back to it later. Protect it from critical voices that interrupt.

Does your body want another round of focussing, or is this a good stopping place?

As soon as you accept what id being revealed to you will begin to **feel different**. Accepting the truth about yourself is like making peace. Something is being resolved. If none of this seems to have happened, do not worry. It may take longer. Notice how far you got this time and pick it up on another occasion. In any case this is a process we do well to go through time and again, so that we can continue to grow and become more like the people we are meant to be.  
(Pause)

When you feel ready, open your eyes, stretch your limbs and bring the meditation to an end.

**Submit to what you are shown.**

Accept it and welcome it. Continue to wait in the Light. Be open to new possibilities. Be thankful for your experience, whatever it has been.  
(Pause)

When you feel ready, open your eyes, stretch your limbs, and bring the meditation to an end.

Living in the truth ye in the love and unity. In the Light walk, and ye will shine.

(Pause)

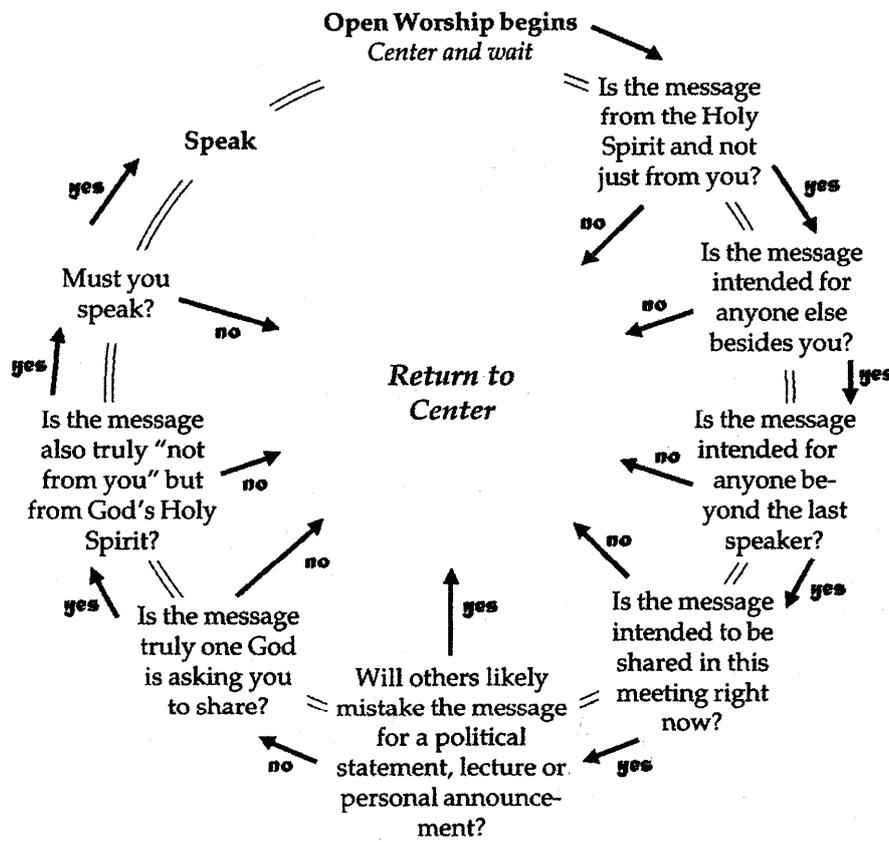
When you feel ready, open your eyes, stretch your limbs, and bring the meditation to an end.

Thy instruction is wonderful; therefore I gladly keep it. Thy word is revealed and all is light.

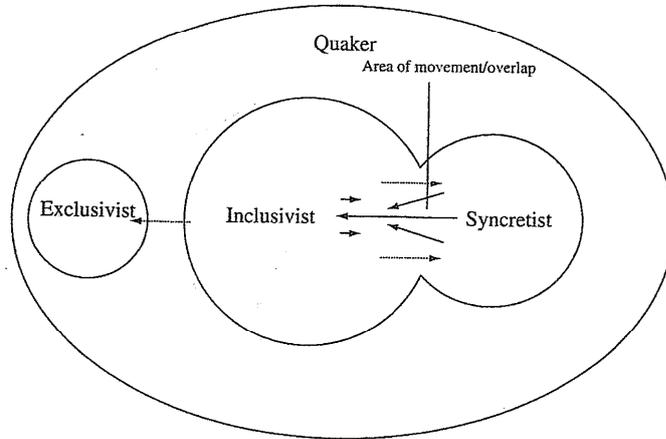
(Psalm 119: 129-130)

**Appendix V:**

**Fig. 21: Deciding to Speak in Open Worship from Thornburg (Dandelion 2007:215).**



**Fig. 22: Pilgrim's model of Quakerism (Pilgrim 2008:62)**



IMAGES

(1) George Fox 1624-91.



GEO. FOX



(2) St Andrews Quaker Meeting House 2009.



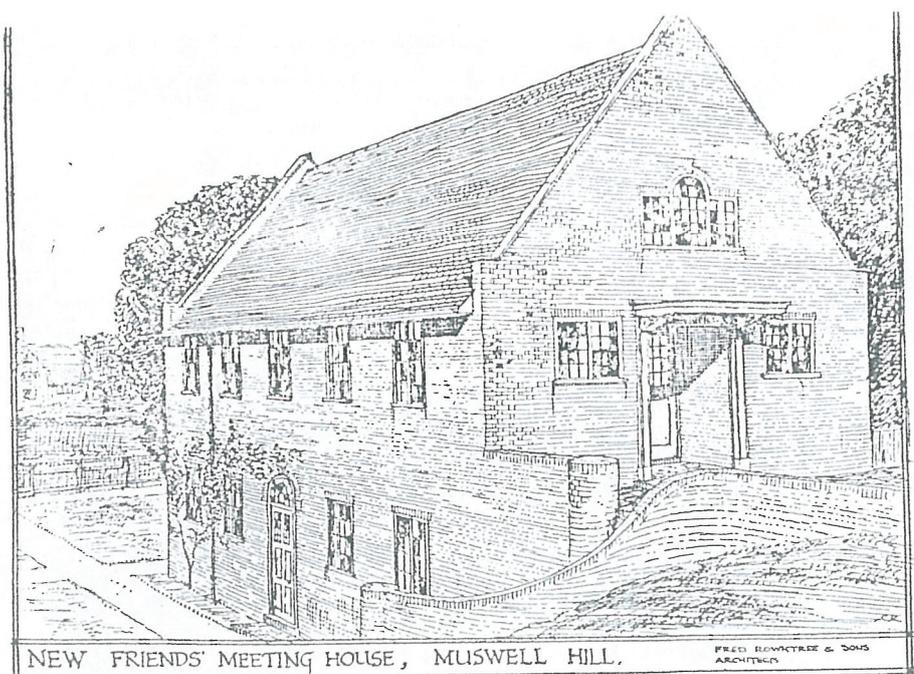
(3) Muswell Hill Meeting House 2009.



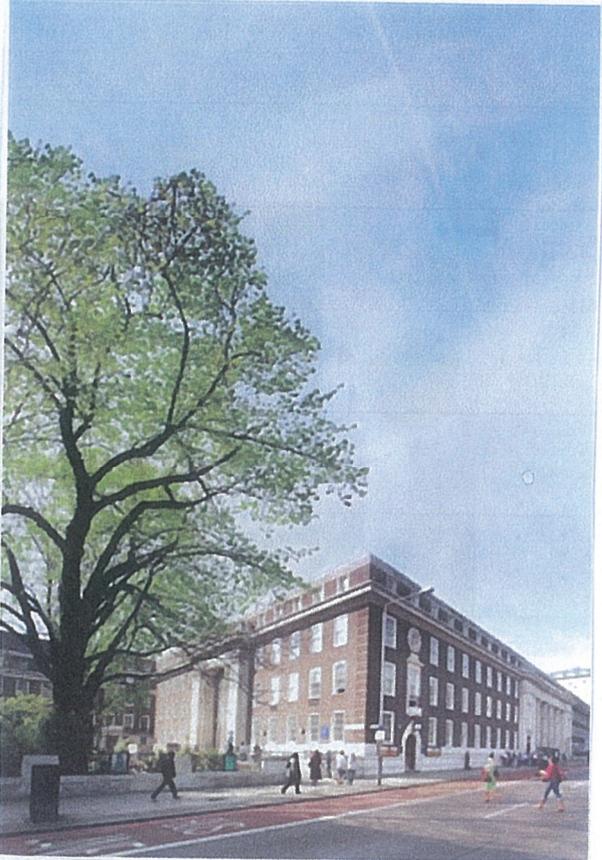
**Muswell Hill Quaker Meeting c1955.**



**Original Architects Drawing for the Meeting House c1910.**



**Friends House London.**



**Large Meeting Room.**



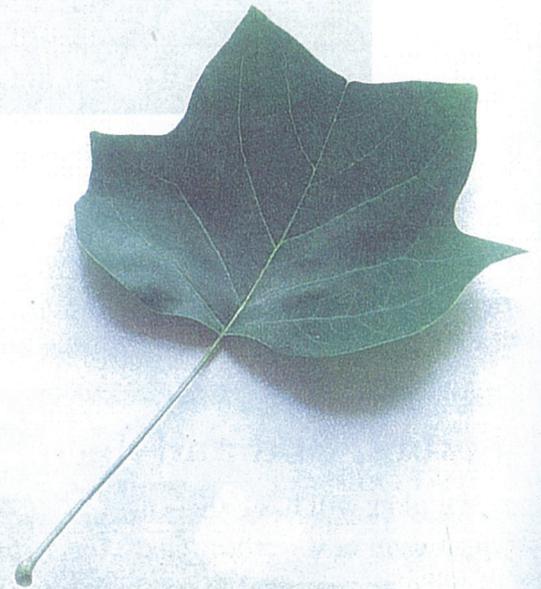
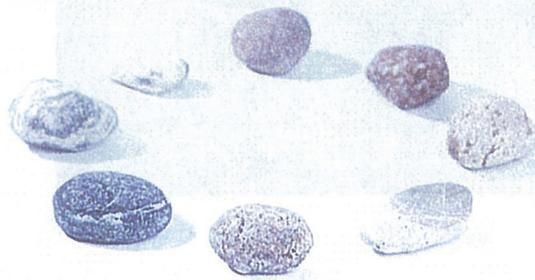
**The place near the Cafe I used for contacts and some interviews.**



**(5) Quaker Meetings in Friends House and at Fylingdales.**



**(6) Quaker 'brand' images used for pamphlets.**



**(7) Quaker Ecumenical Accompaniers on Israel/Palestine border.**

