

THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS IN BRITAIN

The Religious Society of Friends in Britain: Simple, Contemporary, Radical?

Simon Best

Introduction

Three years ago the slogan for the first national Quaker week was:

Quakers: Simple, Contemporary, Radical.

When I first saw the posters I thought it was brilliant. A week later I was having a Meeting for Worship with four other Friends, all of us aged about 30, in a basement flat in Bristol and I realised that it wasn't brilliant and it wasn't even true. Since then I have become increasingly aware that the Religious Society of Friends is not simple, it is not contemporary, and it is certainly not radical.

We are not simple. We have a complex organisation, not just at the centre but at all levels. Local and Area Meetings are struggling with bureaucracy and as a result placing large demands on the time, commitment and energy of members, and drawing this energy away from growing our meetings spiritually. Our structures are archaic, evidenced by the rules about which committee or group or meeting can communicate with which other committees. We are not contemporary. While I believe strongly that Quakers have a message for today's society, how it is presented does not fit with the contemporary, post-modern, post-Christendom society in which we live. We are not radical. Although the Religious Society of Friends has undergone some organisational changes our structure and our practice is very similar to that of 300 years ago. There are, of course, exceptions that can be cited in an attempt to refute the premise of this essay, in particular the decision on same sex marriage taken by Yearly Meeting this year. However the focus of my argument is instead the general, overall trend of British Quakerism.

If we are not simple, contemporary or radical what are we? I believe we are scared. We are scared of falling numbers; we are scared of being so

THE FRIENDS QUARTERLY

small and of disappearing entirely. We are scared of excluding people, so we end up saying, in relation to belief, that 'anything goes'. We are scared of being too religious. We are scared of requiring people to act in particular ways that maybe they don't like and by doing so lose them from our meetings. We are scared of spiritual intimacy. We are scared of talking to each other for fear of what we might find out about what other people believe. We are scared saying what we believe for fear of offending other people.

However it is not all doom and gloom. Falling membership and predictions of Quakers disappearing by 2032ⁱ are contrasted with sparks of great vitality; tales of ignorance of the business method are contrasted with the potential to approach discernment in new ways. If Quakers are to be around in 40 or 50 or 100 years time as I very much want to be the case then I believe that there is a moment to be seized. We need to decide if we are a group where in terms of our belief and faith 'anything goes' and where our values are indistinguishable from secular values, or if we are a vibrant religious community which speaks and acts in today's world.

Theological Change in British Quakerism

In his book *The Silent Revolution* Ben Pink Dandelion outlines six theological ages of Quakerismⁱⁱ. The first period covers the very early years of the Quaker movement, where the idea of the Inward Light was central. The second period, from 1662, was marked by the introduction of structure and consequent conservatism. This was followed in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by a period of Quietism which emphasised fervent self-discipline and disownment of those who transgressed. In the Quietist period, direct revelation was emphasised and mutual help in religious discovery was devalued. From the 1830s there was a turn against Quietism and towards evangelism. Evangelicals emphasised the authority of scripture and believed that salvation was proven through good works.

The demise of evangelism marked the onset of a liberal theology. The Manchester Conference of 1895 was a key point in this, the speakers at that conference advocated an adherence to Bible scholarship, liberal theology and a return to the early teachings of Friends. The concept of the Inward Light was reemphasised, as was the concept of religious authority founded on personal experience. Dandelion argues that, at the time he was writing (1996), British Quakerism is in a sixth age, a pluralistic the-

THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS IN BRITAIN

ological paradigm in which the influence of Christianity is diminished and there is a permissive attitude towards the language chosen to express spiritual experience. In her Swarthmore Lecture, Janet Scottⁱⁱⁱ clearly articulated that this was of secondary importance to the experience itself. Dandelion suggests that the advent of a seventh theological age of Quakerism, an age of 'greater plurality' may occur sometime around 2020. However I argue that this process has been considerably quicker and that we are on the verge of the seventh theological age, if not already in it. The seventh theological age is evidenced by pluralism of belief, a plurality of the enacting of Quaker values, the individualisation of understandings of worship, a changed understanding of Quaker discernment together and an overt de-theologisation of Quakerism.

In the Religious Society of Friends in Britain, belief is largely invisible. Plurality of belief is conceded and accommodated to the extent that anything goes, that people can think what they want and still be part of the Quaker ethos. In belief terms at least, pluralism has become the "ultimate reality".^{iv} Although the Quaker testimonies provide "a template for action"^v there is also a great variation in how each individual enacts their Quaker values. One Friend may show the importance of the Quaker peace testimony by attending anti-war demonstration, while another may demonstrate this through a refusal to pay a percentage of their income tax, and yet another through seeking non-violent solutions to problems in their own lives. One Friend might think that the emerging testimony to the earth and sustainability is the most important, and demonstrate their commitment to it by choosing not to fly; another may think this testimony is important, and show this by recycling and using environmentally friendly washing powder.

While these examples may appear simplistic they demonstrate that there is a pluralisation of values which motivate Quakers, to the extent that "what any part of Quaker testimony means, whether on peace or integrity or gambling or moderation is now up to the individual".^{vi} The influence of Christianity on contemporary British Quakerism is vastly diminished from that of previous generations. There is also 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 feeling of the meeting'. British Quakerism has moved away from a scriptural understanding of the basis of the unprogrammed worship,

THE FRIENDS QUARTERLY

theological understandings of worship are now individuated in the Quaker group, this has led to the demise of a sense of collective intimacy with God. Today Quakers can 'choose their Gods and choose their intimacies.'^{vii} The de-theologisation of Quakerism is marked by individuals no longer seeing their Quaker involvement as a religious exercise.

This may be even more pronounced amongst Quaker teenagers, as reflected in this extract from a recent Junior Yearly Meeting epistle:

One idea was that Quakerism is the philosophy and way of life whilst Christianity, Buddhism or Atheism, for example, is the theology.^{viii}

In Britain Yearly Meeting there are Buddhist Quakers, Muslim Quakers, Jewish Quakers, atheist Quakers. The advent of the seventh theological age of Quakerism will have far reaching consequences for us, including the disintegration of the Religious Society of Friends to the extent that, as Gay Pilgrim predicts, by 2050 "there will certainly be two yearly meetings in Britain and it is likely that there will be three".^{ix}

We could become a group that is in many ways akin to a secular pressure group or we could, once again, become a radical religious group that speaks to the condition of our world and people who live in it. If we are to do the latter, then Quakerism is in need of a spiritual renewal and organisational revival. By spiritual renewal, I mean that we need to return to a position where there is a spiritual orthodoxy and coupled with this we need to embrace new forms of Quaker practice. When I talk of organisational revival, I don't mean a change of name to Area Meeting or the introduction of trustees, I mean a radical shift in how the Religious Society of Friends operates, how it is structured, where authority lies and how we function as a spiritual community.

Spiritual Renewal

By trying to become all things to all people we have become nothing distinctive to anyone. We don't talk about what we believe or what is expected in terms of behaviour in worship or meetings for worship for business. Quaker meetings, and the Quaker way, are often presented as a welcoming place for seekers. That is fine. However when we have reached a place where Friends are "intolerant of certainty other than the certainty that religious truth claims cannot be held with any intellectual honest certainty" and where there is "a constant reinforcement" of this uncertainty and a mistrust of certainty^x, then perhaps we have gone too

THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS IN BRITAIN

far. When we have reached a position where talk of God is diminished – if it is mentioned at all – in the public discourse of Friends both during Meeting for Worship and outside it, then perhaps we have gone too far. When we hear of Friends criticised for reading the Bible or giving ministry that is ‘too overtly Christian’ in Meeting for Worship, then perhaps we have gone too far.

In *Listening Spiritually*, Patricia Loring writes that “the consequence of having no standard [for membership] is that the meeting conforms to the vision of those it has admitted”.^{xi} The question and challenge for Friends today is where we draw the line? What are our standards for admitting people to membership? If the only apparent standard is that they want to join, is that sufficient?

There is an argument that Quaker theology, with its emphasis on continuing revelation and change, is inherently radical. However I suggest that rather than being radical, having a theology so open that people can believe anything and still join shows that we are scared of having a tradition, and of being faith based and spiritually grounded. By being totally open, by accepting all theologies, and even those with no theology but a philosophy, we may include people but we also exclude others. British Quakerism has become an *orthopraxy* rather than an orthodoxy. For Quakers “it is the way in which Quakers practise their religion which is definitional” and which acts to ‘generate unity and maintain cohesion’.^{xii} The way we behave outwardly, both in worship and amongst Friends, is emphasised over what we believe. In religious groups a strong surface culture can disguise an absence of deep faith.

If the Religious Society of Friends 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.^{xiii} In contrast to liberal individualism, post-liberalism tends toward 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.

The Religious Society of Friends needs to recognise and adapt to the age we’re living in, one that is post-modern and post-Christendom. We are living in a society that is hostile to and suspicious of religion. We need a Quakerism of “progressive orthodoxy”.^{xiv} Progressive orthodoxy is

THE FRIENDS QUARTERLY

about a faith that is fed and nurtured by a rootedness in past events, but which is also shaped and energised by a dynamic interaction with the world of the present. It may seem that Quakers exemplify this dialogue between traditions of the past and the insights and struggles of now. However, Quakerism is actually split between belief which is overly progressive and has lost connection with the past and with structure, and practice that – outwardly at least – has barely evolved. While continuing revelation is of critical importance to Quakers, and we need to have an awareness that divine revelation is a constant process, we also need to emphasise the importance of the past in giving us shape and form and content. As Friends it is important that we have a conversation between sources from the past and experiences from the present. Our past needs to be part of who we are as Quakers, and the fact that early Friends had a faith that was radical and contemporary can help us to be radical and contemporary today.

If we can move to a position where we are able to clearly articulate what being a Quaker actually means, in terms of both faith and practice, then while some people who are currently involved will feel uncomfortable and leave, others will find it resonates with them, that it speaks to their condition, and join us. We are so scared of losing people that we can't see that there are people who are attracted to the Quaker way and would join us if they knew more clearly what we were about.

New Forms of Practice

We have lost many of our links with the past, in relation to theology and faith, but steadfastly refuse to update our practice. We need to move away from our rigid adherence to the silent form of Quaker worship and explore new approaches to worship, including semi-programmed worship that enables different types of people, and people of all ages, to engage with Quaker worship. In religious groups, a strong or distinctive outward expression – such as that of silent worship in the case of Quakers – masks a lack of examination of the basis of behaviour. How many of those attending our Meetings for Worship know why Quakers worship in silence, or that Quakers elsewhere in the world do use programmed worship. In semi-programmed worship as I have experienced it, silence remains the basis of worship, periods of worship begin and end with silence, programmed contributions are made out of the silence. Silence still marks “the boundaries of the collective worship”^{xv}. However it gives

THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS IN BRITAIN

religious and spiritual value to contributions through speech, music, song and other activities by making them an integral aspect of worship. I am as likely to feel connected with God on a hill side as sitting in a Meeting House, and early Friends were radical in that they worshipped when they wanted, how they wanted and where they wanted. Meetings for Worship do not need to be on a Sunday, and especially they do not need to occur in a Meeting House.

Organisational Revival

We have to realise that the society we are living in, in twenty-first century Britain, is one marked as an age of “post-Christendom”.^{Xvi} Christianity has become one faith among many and has moved to the margins of a society that is exemplified by pluralism and radical relativism. We must recognise that going to meeting is no longer the most important thing for people – there are many competing demands and calls on our time and conflicting engagements. We are not going to succeed in changing the way people live their lives, or make them give up other commitments (work, leisure, social, job and family) to come to Meeting on a Sunday morning.

Meetings need to meet the needs of different types of people, rather than forcing them to fit into the current Quaker model. They need to engage with them, exploring issues and undertaking activities they are interested in, with approaches that are relevant and at times that are accessible. In terms of gathering together we need to build dynamic informal networks. An example of one such network is the Junior Young Friends organisation. While formally centred on one Area Meeting (Central England), in practice it is a network that crosses Area Meeting boundaries and draws in Quakers from all over the Yearly Meeting. This happens because it is a spiritual community and those who attend are part of the same spiritual community and relational network. Friends attend because gathering together in this way meets their community and spiritual needs, and happens at times and in places that suit them.

The activities that are connected with Quaker meetings – Quaker Quest, Summer School, link groups, fellowship groups, study sessions and so on – are often assessed in terms of the effect they have on attendance at the traditional Sunday morning meeting for worship. These activities are seen as secondary to what happens on a Sunday. We need to evolve from being a church that is focused on what happens on a Sunday

THE FRIENDS QUARTERLY

morning to one that is relational and network based, with different activities that seek to meet the needs of different people and where all these activities are seen as part of meeting, as part of how the meeting is a church. Meetings may not often, or even ever, meet at one time under one roof. That is not important. What is important is that we are a religious community where our values are rooted in our faith and our faith is explicit in our action.

In the 1640s and 1650s the radical groups of seekers from which the Religious Society of Friends emerged were being 'church' in a very different way to that which their society was used to. They met in barns and fields, George Fox preached in pubs and people's houses. Society was changing; there was growth of social justice and both anti-establishment and anti-elitist thinking. The Quaker movement resonated with that. What Quakers have to say may still resonate with today's society but the way we say it, the way it is presented or 'wrapped', no longer does. People who are seeking are positive and, because of Friends' social witness and peace work, those who are unchurched often have positive experiences of Quakers. This group is fertile soil for engagement. Other churches are seeking to address this and to engage with society in different ways, to 'be church' in different ways, ways in which local congregations are allowed and enabled to work out the best way for them to reach new people.

Following the concept of "Liquid Church",^{xvii} in responding to this age of 'post-Christendom' what is crucial is being 'church' in different ways, at different times that fit with today's society and the way people live now.

In this context, 'church' is both a collection of people when gathered together and is also about mission, social action and evangelism. Mission is not about conversion, it is about what we do and why we do it. In these days of strategies and targets and objectives we must have one aim – to listen to the guidance of the spirit; and one intended outcome – a Religious Society of Friends that speaks to and for its time and place in the world. Quakerism started as a 'liquid' faith and became solid with the settling of Monthly Meetings and the codification of our faith and practice. As a church we need to become liquid again. Organisationally our structures need to serve and sustain local meetings and enable Friends to live as Quakers; and the Religious Society of Friends needs to become first and foremost a spiritual community. This is closely linked to social action. We need to reassert and in some cases rediscover the Quaker

THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS IN BRITAIN

basis for our social action. We need to discern what distinctive messages we as Quakers have to say – messages that come from our faith, our experience and our understanding of what God wants us to do rather than what we want to do. This would give us a truly faith based social action not just another, less well resourced version of Friends of the Earth. Evangelism is a very unpopular word amongst Friends in Britain but, at its heart it simply means clearly articulating and celebrating what we as Friends believe and what makes Quakerism unique.

Being a Faith Community

What does it mean to be a spiritual community, a community of faith? When we become part of a community each of us makes a sacrifice, we all give up something. That is the price we pay for being part of a community. I wonder how many Friends are truly prepared to make the necessary sacrifice or how many put their individual beliefs, needs and wants above seeking what is right for the community. We have a shared responsibility to each other as individuals, to ourselves as a community, and to God. We need to set aside our egos.

In communities we find people we're comfortable with, people who we enjoy spending time with. But just as significantly community is also about being with people that we don't get along with – people who don't agree with us, people who do things that annoy us. Part of the cost of living in a community is having to live with the other people. Community is both rewarding and hard-work; creating a community is about more than people being tolerant or people being nice. I reckon it is about valuing everyone's contribution to the community in whatever way they are made – and seeing that our contributions are valued. It is about seeking that of God in everyone we come into contact with. If we can seek that of God in other people then we may be able to understand them; not because they are like us or agree with us, or do what we want, but that they are true to that of God within themselves. If the whole of life is sacramental, where do our private lives end and our Quaker lives begin? What personal sacrifices are we called to make because we're part of an inclusive Quaker community?

Sharing is vital to our Quaker faith. It is vital that we live in Meetings and in a Society where there is a culture of contribution, and spiritual sharing, and where the theological diversity and new forms of individual belief don't remain hidden in the silence of meeting for worship or the

THE FRIENDS QUARTERLY

busy-ness of keeping the Meeting going. This sharing fosters spiritual communities and is vital in enabling us to be open to new leadings and the Quaker faith to develop and remain contemporary and open to new light. We need to foster a culture of contribution in our Meetings and our spiritual communities. We need to do less and talk more. Doing things can often be about avoiding having to talk. Some Friends might think that we do enough sitting and talking on committees and in business Meetings but I mean really talk, about our faith and what we believe rather than whether to have chairs or benches and what colour to paint the meeting house walls. If we don't then all our practice and all our witness is groundless. While this may not bring unanimity of faith or belief it could bring unity, but unity will not come from an organisational strategy or a framework or through doing things, without these being grounded in faith. Unity comes from sharing our faith with each other; and relating to each other so that we share and grow as individuals and as a religious community.

Quakers aren't good at sharing their faith or communicating it to others. The emphasis on silent worship means we don't often express our faith or articulate it. It means we don't know who or what (if anything) or even how the person next to us is worshipping. It can be difficult to talk about our faith, about what we value at the core of Quaker belief and practice. We might be afraid that we will discover that we share little, that there are no common Quaker beliefs, no shared understanding of Quaker practice, or of what happens in Meeting for Worship. Older Quakers find it very difficult to talk about what they value at the core of Quaker belief and practice. However amongst young Friends there are greater opportunities to share their beliefs and their individual faith stories outside worship but still within the Quaker group and this is often explicitly encouraged.

In my experience young Quakers talk more about their spirituality than adults, even though they may be more uncertain of their beliefs. The diversity of belief is embraced. They don't walk on eggshells because they know they're in a safe place and what they are sharing is personal. What is important to them is the opportunity to share with each other in a supportive community.

I am part of a Bible study group with a group of other Quakers in their twenties and thirties. We meet every couple of weeks, share food, read and discuss a passage. The group started because we felt there was something missing from the Meetings we went to or we weren't able to

THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS IN BRITAIN

go to Meeting regularly. In this group we don't just talk about what we've been reading we also talk about our own beliefs, our faith, our struggles, our joys. We pray together and for each other and during the weeks in between I feel genuinely upheld by that group. Through sharing with the other members of that group, through the gentle questioning and through hearing others sharing their faith, my own faith has grown and changed and developed. Being part of this group has helped me to realise the importance of sharing our beliefs. We don't have identical beliefs but we have realised what we have in common and there is a unity and a shared understanding within the group.

Leadership and Authority

A further aspect of organisational revival that is needed is to change current patterns of leadership and authority.

Amongst Quakers today there is an aversion to and a distrust of authority – both organisational and spiritual. We are content to have organisational 'leaders' who are mainly administrators or caretakers (in the broadest sense of the word): clerks, treasurers, overseers. In many Meetings, elders have had their responsibilities limited to the organisation of Meetings for Worship rather than the spiritual nurture and spiritual direction of the meeting. However there is also a tradition of Quaker spiritual leaders. George Fox, Robert Barclay, Rufus Jones and Thomas Kelly amongst others were spiritual educators and spiritual formators. I can think of Quakers living and dead who have provided me with spiritual leadership. That doesn't mean that these people are closer to God or more 'spiritual' or more 'Quakerly' but rather that they have had insights that have helped me. Significantly these have included people of all ages: Friends who are 14 and 45, Friends who are 8 and 80, Friends who are 12 and 20.

There is a natural connection in today's society between leadership and hierarchy. However it is possible to have leadership without hierarchy. The Religious Society of Friends is a priesthood of all believers; each of us has a ministry. We need to recognise and nurture these ministries, not because any one is 'better' than another but because, in our community, we need to be aware of who is gifted and talented in particular areas. The ending of recorded ministry, a decision taken to ensure equality and that we didn't develop what might be seen as a spiritual hierarchy, has done us no favours. As Friends, we need to reaffirm the place of spiritual

THE FRIENDS QUARTERLY

authority, direction and leadership in our shared life together. Importantly we need to ensure that this authority isn't necessarily conferred on those in positions of organisational responsibility but recognises the different ministries of individuals within our community.

There also needs to be a shift in relation to who holds authority. I was recently talking about the future of the Religious Society of Friends with a Quaker friend of mine who is thirty. He said: "In 40 or 50 years I'll be in my Quaker prime in terms of service." My response to this was horror. This is exactly the problem with the Religious Society of Friends, that someone who is a skilled, committed, enthusiastic, and experienced Quaker, someone who has already been involved in organising an international Quaker gathering, is not considered to be in his prime when he is in his thirties. This is roughly the same age as George Fox was when he began preaching, it is the age most of the early leaders of Quakerism and the Valiant Sixty were. Just as many of the early Quakers were young people, so the theology and spirituality of early Friends was young and vibrant. Young Friends today are positive and enthusiastic about their Quaker identity and spirituality. They are articulate, committed, involved Friends with things to say about the Religious Society of Friends and about what Quakers should be doing in the world. Yet many young Friends feel there is no way for them to voice their concerns and that they don't have the confidence to do so, because they wouldn't be listened to by older Quakers.

It is time for the power authority and responsibility for the Religious Society of Friends to be handed over to those in their teens and twenties and thirties, to allow them to articulate their vision for Quakerism in Britain. There is a saying that Quakerism is caught and not taught, but how will young people catch Quakerism if older Friends do not pass it on to them?

Friends may be afraid of what might happen to the Religious Society of Friends that many of us feel so comfortable with, we might be concerned with the future direction that the Society may take, we may be scared of changes to what we know. We may be concerned that young Friends lack the experience or skills or commitment to take on this leadership. However, for many young Friends Quaker work and service is important to them and they are committed to it; perhaps other Friends in the Yearly Meeting aren't aware of this. Young Friends, even in their twenties and thirties but most often those in their teens, are patronised. They may be

THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS IN BRITAIN

asked to speak and what they say might be listened to, but is it really heard and heard as ministry? I'm concerned that a lot of Friends think young people just sit around and play games and aren't serious. Yes, they do have fun and yes they do spend time talking to each other but they are also serious about being Quakers and serious about being part of the Yearly Meeting, with the responsibilities and benefits that that brings. They do give serious consideration to issues, they do have experience of Quaker worship and the Quaker business method. They do have experience of discerning and following the will of God. They are moved by the Spirit and feel God's presence in their lives. They have experience of living as a Quaker community and of caring for one another.

Friends are frequently confronted by statistics that show membership is falling, and by the reality that young Friends may not attend Meeting regularly. However for them living as a Quaker is more important than going to Meeting on a Sunday. Young Quakers live as Quakers every day. For them the Quaker testimonies of peace, equality, truth and simplicity are not old-fashioned concepts, but ones that are relevant for today and lived out in their lives.

The Religious Society of Friends needs to acknowledge the experience, skills and passion of young people and draw on this. Most importantly of all, in handing over the responsibility to them we must trust that God will guide them. Several years ago I was with a group of young people at Yearly Meeting who took part in an exercise on testing concerns which involved role-playing a Quaker Meeting for Worship for Business. Although they were role-playing, they knew how to do it without adults needing to tell them. They knew how to listen carefully, they knew how to contribute worshipfully, they knew how to consider the issue prayerfully, they knew how to discern a decision, they knew how to write a minute and approve it. I don't believe that this group of young Quakers was remarkable. Many teenage Friends have experience of using the Quaker business method from link groups and summer schools they are involved in. Watching this group of young people involved in a session on testing concerns, hearing them speak in worship and seeing the care with which they wrote their minute and conducted their nominations procedure I had a strong sense that God was guiding them.

It is the responsibility of older Friends to pass on the principles of Quakerism, to let go and ensure that young people have the chance to hold it and to shape it in the light of their experiences and their own

THE FRIENDS QUARTERLY

discernment of the will of God. If we cannot or do not do this then the future is very bleak indeed.

Conclusion

There is the potential within the Religious Society of Friends for it to be as vibrant, radical and vital as it was in the 1650s, if it operates in a way that is appropriate to today's society. We need to meet in ways and at times that fit in with people's lives. We need to be Quakers in ways which are, at once, both more open and more definite; more open in terms of practice and behaviour and more definite in terms of theology and belief. Within the Religious Society of Friends in Britain although there is an openness to theological change, there is resistance to structural and procedural change.

For this to happen, substantial cultural change is needed at all levels within the Religious Society of Friends. Change is difficult. Changes in the society and culture in which we live affects us whether we like it or not. There is security in what we know despite any shortcomings. Yet change and evolution is part of our living Quaker faith. Continuing revelation is applicable as much to practice as to faith. Our task as Friends is to be led by the promptings of God not only in the work we do but also, importantly, in the way we do it. Our structures and processes should seek to make God visible in the world around us. Change is a process of evolution and we should not strive to achieve perfection in our structures, rather we should ensure that they are good enough.

REFERENCES

- ⁱ Chadkirk, Bill. 2004. 'Will the last (woman) Friend to leave please ensure that the light remains shining?' *Quaker Studies* Volume 9 Issue 1. page 118.
- Chadkirk, Bill and Ben Pink Dandelion. 2008. 'Present and Prevented: A survey of membership activity in Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)'. *Quaker Studies* Volume 12 Issue 2. pages 253-263.
- ⁱⁱ Dandelion, Ben Pink. 1996. *A Sociological Analysis of the Theology of Quakers: the silent revolution*. Lampeter, Lewiston and New York: Edwin Mellen Press. pages 6-14.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Scott, Janet. 1980. *What Canst Thou Say: Towards a Quaker theology*. London: Quaker Home Service.
- ^{iv} Hobday, T. 1992. 'Faith: universal truth or private possession?' *The Friend* Volume 150. pages 1167-68.
- ^v Coleman, Simon and Peter Collins. 2000. 'The "Plain" and the "Positive": ritual, experience and aesthetics in Quakerism and charismatic Christianity'. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* Volume 15 Number 3, page 322.

THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS IN BRITAIN

- ^{vi} Dandelion, Ben Pink. 2006. Foreword. Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs, *To use or not to use: Quaker values on alcohol, drugs and gambling*. Gloucester: Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs Gloucester, page vi.
- ^{vii} Dandelion, Ben Pink. 2005. *Liturgies of Quakerism*. Aldershot & Burlington, VT: Ashgate. page 114.
- ^{viii} Junior Yearly Meeting Epistle 2008 in *Proceedings of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain 2008*. London: Britain Yearly Meeting.
- ^{ix} Pilgrim, Gay. 2003. 'The Quakers: Towards an Alternate Ordering' in Davie, G. Heelas, P. and Woodhead, L. eds. *Predicting Religion: Christian, Secular and Alternative Futures*. Aldershot: Ashgate. page 156.
- ^x Dandelion, Ben Pink. 2004. 'Implicit Conservatism in Liberal Religion: British Quakerism as an 'uncertain sect.'" *Journal of Contemporary Religion*. Volume 19 Number 2. page 225.
- ^{xi} Loring, Patricia. 1999. *Listening Spiritually Vol. 2 Corporate Spiritual Practice Among Friends*. Philadelphia: Openings Press and Quaker Press of FGC. pages 43-44.
- ^{xii} Dandelion, Ben Pink. 2004. 'Implicit Conservatism in Liberal Religion: British Quakerism as an 'uncertain sect.'" *Journal of Contemporary Religion*. Volume 19 Number 2. pages 222-223.
- ^{xiii} Lindbeck, George. 2009. *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-liberal age*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- ^{xiv} Tomlinson, Dave. 2008. *Re-enchanting Christianity*. Norwich: Canterbury Press. pages 15-22.
- ^{xv} Dandelion, Ben Pink. 1996. *A Sociological Analysis of the Theology of Quakers: the silent revolution*. Lampeter, Lewiston and New York: Edwin Mellen Press. page 15.
- ^{xvi} Murray, Stuart. 2004. *Post-Christendom: church and mission in a strange new world*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press. page 19.
- ^{xvii} Ward, Pete. 2002. *Liquid Church*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press.