

Introduction

Quakerism is often misunderstood. Images of the eighteenth-century Quaker costume, or a focus on pacifism (or even porridge oats!), predominate in the popular imagination, as do confusions between this group and other sects. All too often, Quakers (or 'Friends') are confused with Jehovah's Witnesses or the Mormons or Shakers for example, or are believed to have died out. Equally, within Quakerism, only a minority realises the complexity of the worldwide picture, each of the branches seeing its own version of Quakerism as normative; or caricaturing or conflating Quakerism elsewhere as simply 'other'.

This book, divided into two parts, one of history, one of present-day practice, presents a clear and accessible outline of the history of the Quaker past, as well as clarifying the diversity of the Quaker present. Unlike other books on Quakerism, this volume mixes these two aspects equally. It also dwells less on the lives of individuals. Informed by a sociological approach to theology, the book blends the theological claims of the various types of Quaker encountered with the everyday consequences of these ideas. Thus Quaker history sits alongside the attempt to show how present-day Friends express their interpretations of context, tradition, and corporate vocation.

This introduction outlines the historical context for the beginnings of the Quaker movement (see Box I for the variety of academic interpretations of the beginning of Quakerism), describes the three theoretical threads used in this volume, and outlines the contents of the book.

QUAKERISM AND THE RADICAL REFORMATION

When Henry VIII created a national 'Church of England' separate from papal authority in 1534, it was a political reformation as much as a theological one. Indeed, the religious history of England in the following century and a half can be viewed as an attempt to settle the true nature and extent of the Reformation, theologically, and of campaigns to achieve a full

Box 1 Quaker Studies

Modern Quaker Studies began with the work of Robert Barclay of Reigate with his unfinished 1876 publication *The Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth*. Barclay was an evangelical Friend who used his own reading of the early history to justify the form of Quakerism he most preferred (Hamm 2004, pp. 11–18). However, his history was also to prove seminal for Friends of other persuasions, as they came to review the past (2004, pp. 11–18). Liberal Friends such as J. W. Rowntree believed an understanding of Quaker history was the key to a (Liberal) Quaker revival (Hamm 1988, pp. 154–5). When Rufus Jones and W. C. Braithwaite took on Rowntree's vision for a comprehensive and complete history of Quakerism as a means to this revival, the Victorian Barclay was the author they used as both a foundation and a departure point for their own interpretation of the essence of Quakerism. Rather than posit Quakerism as essentially evangelical, with George Fox and the early missionaries as proto-pastors, as Barclay had, Jones in particular presented Quakers as essentially, and foremost, mystical (Braithwaite 1912, p. xxxiv).

Jones' view has since been much challenged. Wilmer Cooper is lucid on the history of ideas of Quakerism and Jones' place within it (1994) and Melvin Endy concisely summarises the competing interpretations of Quakerism in his article in *Quaker History* (1981), between Jones' view which located the beginnings of Quakerism with church mystics and the Geoffrey Nuttall/Frederick Tolles/Hugh Barbour (1946, 1948, and 1964 respectively) view that Quakerism can be best understood as a wing of puritanism (though Tolles also suggested that Quakerism was neither Protestant nor Roman Catholic but a third way: 1948). This view of a Quakerism rooted in puritanism, the 'Puritan School', gathered pace in the middle of the twentieth century and Hugh Doncaster wrote a new introduction to replace Jones' for the 1955 edition of Braithwaite's *Beginnings of Quakerism* (1955).

A third strand of interpretation emerged in the 1950s when Lewis Benson began a lifetime's work of trying to communicate a more prophetic understanding of what Quakerism was about. Drawing on the writings of George Fox, Benson argued that to see Friends in terms of mysticism alone was insufficient. Quakerism, Benson argued (1968), was about the inward experience of the Light of Christ *and* the universal mission which was led and fed by this experience. His prophetic Christianity was about a dialogical relationship with God, of hearing and obeying, and he framed Quakerism within a more biblical sense of history than Jones.

In the seventies and eighties, in counterpoint to previous 'insider' accounts of Quakerism, Christopher Hill (1972) and Barry Reay (1985) presented Quakerism from a Marxist or materialist perspective.

Richard Bailey established Fox's concept of 'celestial flesh' as a way of describing divine indwelling. Bailey also offered a theory of the divinisation of Fox in the 1650s and 1660s and the de-divinisation of Fox after 1670. Fox was

brought down to the level of an Apostle, other Friends to the state of believers (Bailey 1992). His work has been partnered by that of Michele Tarter who has looked in particular at the experience of early women Friends (1993, 2001, 2004). In this, she is part of a movement which has rightly placed the experience of women at the heart of Quaker history. Other scholars in this vein include Maureen Bell (1988), Patricia Crawford (1993), Catie Gill (2001, 2005), Elsa Glines (2003), Elaine Hobby (1989, 1995), Sandra Holton (1994, 1996, 2005, and with Margaret Allen, 1997), Bonnelyn Kunze (1994), Rebecca Larson (1999), Pam Lunn (1997), Phyllis Mack (1989, 1992), Elizabeth O'Donnell (1999), Sally Padgett (2003), and Christine Trevett (1991, 2000). Together with Hobby and Gill, Margaret Ezell (1993), Elspeth Graham (1996) (see also Graham *et al.* 1989), and Hilary Hinds (1996), Tarter engages literary theory, significantly bringing those tools of analysis to the study of Quakerism.

If Jones, the 'Puritan School', and Benson were the key Quaker theorists of the first half of the twentieth century, Douglas Gwyn has emerged as the fourth main Quaker theorist of Quakerism in the second half of the century. His doctoral work on 'apocalyptic' and his complementary and contrasting approaches to understanding the nature of Quakerism (1986, 1995, 2000) have been seminal to most of the more recent scholarship. Gwyn alone, though with later agreement (Dandelion *et al.* 1998; Moore 2000), argues that early Friends felt they were living out a 'realising eschatology', i.e. an unfolding endtime. In all of his work, Gwyn is similarly trying to understand how Friends compensated for the defeat of the 'Lamb's War' and how they sustained themselves following those early years.

Not all scholars agree with this view of early Friends and few place the same emphasis on eschatology. Most argue that Friends were talking *not* about the second coming when they claimed 'Christ is come to teach his people himself' (Nickalls 1952, p. 107) but rather about a mystical experience appropriate to (one of a number of) Christian revival movements. John Punshon, for example, claims that early Friends' use of Scripture was symbolic and that 'millennial speculation has never been a prominent feature of Quaker thought' (2001, p. 309). Additionally, Punshon sees the early Quaker experience as individualised rather than an unfolding of global change (2001, p. 311). Carole Spencer is another of those who wishes to play down the central emphasis Gwyn gives eschatology and the apocalyptic. For her, this is only one element of seven which characterise early Friends' theology, a collective group of characteristics which she sees as unmistakably 'Holiness' in character. Spencer argues that early Friends preached a radical Protestant holiness which in time was imitated by Methodism (although Barbour (1994) identifies five distinct ideas of perfection and distinguishes Wesley's from Friends'). Spencer claims that this Holiness theology is a thread which runs throughout Quaker history (2007). The Holiness Revival of the 1880s is not foreign to Quakerism, as Hamm suggests it is in his *Transformation of American Quakerism* (1988), but rather an explicit return to essential Quaker beliefs. Only the outward form is

different but, she argues, form is of secondary importance in Quaker tradition. Her work rewrites the family tree of Quakerism as she places the Revival as central in the genealogy of the Quaker traditions. Carole Spencer's work is exciting because of this consequent and latest rewriting of Quaker history. However, Gwyn's framework is compelling, particularly when laid out across time to explain the current challenges facing Quakerism, and is the one adopted here.

or radical reformation (Gwyn 1995, p. 68). Catholic Queen Mary, and the reigns of episcopalian Elizabeth and James, sent many reformers overseas but to return all the more zealous (Gwyn 1995, pp. 70–4). The availability of the Bible in English, particularly after 1611, democratised the interpretation of Scripture and diminished the authority of the clergy and the rule of expertise. The advent of the printing press and the unprecedented sense of possibility brought on by the English Civil War raised hopes in every theological direction. Groups that had separated from the national church or who had set up as independents, such as the Grindletonians, Levellers, Diggers, Ranters, Seekers, Fifth Monarchists, and Baptists, all pursued their own vision of the coming kingdom that would surely emerge from the interruption of earthly monarchical rule. They were largely to be disappointed, partly in that their own views of religious settlement would not be more widely adopted, but also by Cromwell's moderate alternative (Gwyn 1995, pp. 82–8).

Read Fox's *Journal* (Nickalls 1952), the account of the life and work of the early Quaker leader George Fox, and you could be forgiven for thinking that there had been no Civil War. George Fox was a part of the debates of the 1640s, but it was in the 1650s that Quakerism as a movement emerged into this arena of disappointment as a fresh and powerful dynamic that was to become the most popular and successful sect of the decade. Timing and, as Moore argues (2004), the depth and quality of the leadership were critical to this Quaker success.

With their open 'unprogrammed' liturgy based in silence, the free ministry of all, and the primary authority of revelation over Scripture, these early Friends can be seen to be both an alternative to Protestantism (Tolles 1948) and the logical consequence of the impulse to complete reformation (Barbour 1964). However, the passing of time, and their own sense of eschatological disappointment, would temper and formalise the movement (Dandelion *et al.* 2004, chapter 2). In the nineteenth century, theological dispute would become internalised, and Quakers, in all their varieties, took their place amidst Christianity rather than as its vanguard.

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THE APPROACH OF THIS BOOK

In this volume, three over-arching frameworks are used to approach the history of Quakerism. The first is to do with 'time', the second with 'spiritual intimacy', the third with the definition of 'the world's people', that is those outside of Quakerism, and in particular those seen to be in need of Quakerism.

Christianity was created as a religion of waiting. Founded on the promise of the second coming of Christ and the end of the world (the endtime), the history of Christianity, as Schweitzer noted (1968, p. 360), has been about delay. Similarly the history of Christian diversity can be charted as a story of differing perspectives on the timing of the end of waiting (what I will call the culmination of God's plan for the world), or on the best ways in which to wait. Christianity has seen itself as a temporary institution, helping humanity remain faithful in the meantime, in the interim.

Liberal Christian groups often have a particularly non-literal reading of Scripture. The book of Revelation may be no more than a coded political apocalyptic, rather than a prophecy of Christ's second coming. The 'meantime' may be the *only* time for these kinds of groups. This is true for at least present-day Liberal Quakerism. However, early Quakerism, I argue, as per Gwyn, was built upon an understanding/experience of an unfolding second coming (experienced inwardly), and the history of Quakerism is best understood in terms of its changing relationship to this founding experience of endtime and the necessary internal shifts which take place as a sense of endtime is replaced by one of meantime.

The second theme is one of spiritual intimacy, of direct intimate relationship between humanity and God and Christ. The sense of endtime experienced by early Friends was founded upon a more fundamental experience of spiritual intimacy and direct divine revelation. This experience continues to run through all six Quaker traditions today even though it no longer accompanies an immediate sense of endtime. The way notions of intimacy are negotiated and presented is a running theme of the book.

The third theme around which the history and current practice of Quakerism is organised in this volume is the sense each Quaker group makes of the non-Quaker world and the criteria used to define what counts as 'the world'. Sectarian groups such as early Friends typically talk of the apostasy (the falling from the faith) of other believers and of 'the world'. For early Quakers, everything which was not Quaker had fallen from the faith and was part of 'the world', thus requiring redemption. Over time, what constitutes this pejorative sense of 'world' shrinks and this change is

charted alongside the Quakers' changing relationship to endtime and meantime.

THE SHAPE OF THE BOOK

The first half of the book, 'The history of Quaker theology', is itself divided into three sections: 'The single Quaker theological culture', 'The beginnings of Quaker diversity', and 'Quakerism and modernity'. In turn, each section is divided into sub-sections to aid accessibility and readability.

'The single Quaker theological culture' charts Quakerism from its origins in the post-Reformation bid for full reformation in England, through to the 1820s when Quakerism ceased for some Friends to represent the one true church, and began to schism in a major way. Three main periods of Quaker theology are considered within this section, following a sub-section on the origins. These are: 'The first Friends, 1647–1666', 'Restoration Quakerism, 1666–1689', and 'Quietism, 1690–1820s'. 'The first Friends' concentrates in particular on the number of grand claims made by the first Quakers and by George Fox, an early leader of the movement. These Friends claimed an intimacy with God and acted as if they were co-agents with God over and against 'the world'. Many had undergone a powerful 'convincement' experience. This involved a conviction of the erstwhile sinful life, repentance, being born again, being gathered into community, and the consequential mission work which accompanied the clarity and certainty these Friends felt about being part of the only true church. Direct revelation, the inward Light of Christ, had replaced scriptural authority and these Quakers claimed they had been set free from sin, a vanguard people heralding the global transformation that would follow when all had experienced the inward second coming of Christ as they had. The eschatological understanding underpinning the radical message is brought to the fore, as are its consequences, particularly for liturgy (early Friends worshipped in silence and claimed communion was inward) and ecclesiology. The 1660s was a time of persecution and a need to negotiate with the authorities. As the sense of unfolding second coming diminished, Quakerism needed to organise and re-present itself to the world. Robert Barclay (1648–90) systematised (and altered) Quaker theology during this period. The third period, Quietism, is framed within a further development of how Quakers thought about their place in 'the world' and a more anxious spirituality. Empowering eschatological understandings were replaced by fearful anxiety about missing the possibility of salvation which Barclay claimed came only once (2002, p.119).

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The children of the first Friends knew their hope for salvation lay in the kind of conviction experienced by their parents. All lay in faithful waiting. 'Peculiarities' of dress and speech and rules about marriage and outward life in general acted as visible signs of difference between the faithful and 'the world'. Meetings disowned those who broke the 'discipline'.

'The beginnings of Quaker diversity' charts a nineteenth century characterised by schism and innovation. Evangelicalism was to bring new energy and new ideas to a Quakerism much depleted owing to disownment and voluntary departure. Evangelicalism was also to challenge traditional Quakerism with its emphasis on scriptural authority. In 1827, the 'Great Separation' began in Philadelphia, eventually affecting 'Yearly Meetings' throughout the USA. The two parties were called the Hicksites and the Orthodox Party, the latter representing the new evangelical persuasion. British Quakerism was clearly Orthodox by this time and was frightened by the spectre of Hicksism. However, the evangelical elements of British Quakerism were themselves divided, and in 1836 Isaac Crewdson led 400 'ultra-evangelical' Friends out of British Quakerism. Crewdson wanted to drop the idea of the 'inward Light' as unscriptural and in this parted company with other evangelical Quakers. This latter group remained and in the next thirty years opened British Quakerism up to a wider Christianity of which it began to see itself as a part. The peculiarities were largely abolished, resulting in a small conservative schism in the late 1860s. In the USA, Orthodox Friend John Wilbur led a campaign against the teachings of Joseph John Gurney, leading British evangelical Quaker. When Gurney toured the USA between 1837 and 1840, there was a further set of schisms along Wilburite/Gurneyite lines on the role of the inward Light and the degree to which its authority was equal to or greater than Scripture. Gurneyite Yearly Meetings suffered further internal divisions in the 1860s and 1870s, between 'renewal' and 'revival' tendencies. Holiness revivalist influence led to experimentation with forms and a new emphasis on expression. Silent worship had become formulaic or legalistic and an influx of new converts created the need for a teaching ministry. This led to pastoral committees and eventually the adoption of pastors. In turn, this led to 'programmed' worship with hymns and altar calls as well as the silence of inward communion. This innovation sparked further conservative separations. For some Revival Friends, only the outward ordinances separated them from other Christians and David Updegraff led a bid for 'water-tolerance'. This was generally unsuccessful, and in 1887 the Gurneyite Yearly Meetings drafted the 'Richmond Declaration' maintaining the historic testimony against outward baptism. For the Hicksite tradition, the years following the

Great Separation had also seen some schism, not in terms of doctrine, which was not definitional for them, but in terms of form and testimony, which was. The 'Progressives' were more politically radical than many Hicksites, were more prepared to work with the world's people, and were congregational in ecclesiological terms. Beanite Quakerism was a Gurneyite offshoot in the 1880s, but modernist in tone, and symbolised an approach which allowed some Hicksites and Gurneyites to regroup in the twentieth century.

The third section of 'The history of Quaker theology' focuses on the twentieth century and on Liberal Quakerism and mission in particular. Liberal Quakerism in Britain was the fruit of the opening up of Quakerism to the world by evangelical Quakers in the 1850s. Fuelled by Darwinianism and biblical higher criticism, John Wilhelm Rowntree and others led the campaign for a modern and progressive Quakerism in which experience rather than Scripture was primary. This form of Quakerism claimed to be open to new Light, and in time it would cease to be a wholly Christian group. Today, this branch, which is the dominant one of the 'unprogrammed' tradition, is permissive in terms of belief, centred rather on a conformist attitude to forms, worship style for example, as well as a distinctive approach to the nature of theology. A historic meeting between Rowntree and American evangelical Quaker Rufus Jones in Switzerland in 1897 converted Jones to this modernist approach. In the ensuing fifty years, Jones worked hard to spread this modernist interpretation of Quakerism and to forge unity between Hicksites and Gurneyites on the basis of it. In the twentieth century too, Conservative Quakerism, comprised of Wilburites and conservative schisms since, emerged as a unified body. The renewal/revivalist tendencies within Gurneyite Quakerism eventually led to two main evangelical traditions within Quakerism, one more modernist than the other. Mission work by both groups has led to a huge expansion of Quakerism, particularly in Kenya and Bolivia, whilst the interpretation of the degree to which church life is distinctively Quaker varies enormously, with some churches now practising outward communion and seeing themselves more as a community church than as a Quaker one.

A 'family tree' of Quakerism is included to help the reader follow the complexities, as well as a chart giving numbers for the different kinds of Quakerism worldwide, leading into the second part of the book, 'Worldwide Quakerism today'. This part is in three sections: 'Theology and worship', 'Quakers and "the world"', and 'The Quaker family'.

'Theology and worship' is itself divided into three sub-sections: 'Authority', 'Belief', and 'Covenant and practice'. In 'Authority', the relationship of the different branches to the first Friends is considered as well as

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different systems of legitimising divine authority. Different approaches to the nature of theology are also considered. 'Belief' includes ideas of God and Christ and eschatology, as well as consequent ecclesiology. The third subsection considers the theological basis and understanding of the different forms of worship within worldwide Quakerism.

'Quakers and "the world"' has three sub-sections: 'Testimony', 'Mission, membership, and diversity', and 'Ecumenism'. Each of these looks at the contrasts between different branches of present-day Friends. How separated should Friends be and how do they mark any differences today? How is Quaker identity constructed and maintained within different branches? What emphasis is placed on mission, what is the understanding behind it, how is church membership approached and what are its limits? How do the various Quaker groups see themselves in relation to other churches and other faiths? Who is kin, who is part of 'the world'?

The final section, 'The Quaker family', considers the relationship between different kinds of Quakers, and the challenges and opportunities facing the movement. Thirteen key differences between Liberal and Evangelical Friends are set against three historic and ongoing commonalities. Numerical prospects are discussed for Evangelical and Liberal Friends. A chronology of Quaker history, suggestions for 'Further reading', and a full list of references complete the volume.

SUMMARY

In summary, this book offers a comprehensive history of ideas of worldwide Quakerism and a digest of present-day statements of faith on key issues both to amplify and to nuance the differences between different types of Quaker. Three themes are followed throughout, that of the relationship to endtime, spiritual intimacy, and notions of 'the world'. Scholarship from all over the world is used to draw out the clearest understandings possible of Quaker history and thinking but also to outline debates in this area of the academy. Boxes elucidate key concepts in greater depth and diagrams are used to help convey critical ideas. The aim of the book is to increase the understanding of Quakerism, its varied history, and its fascinating and unique set of theological complexities.

NOTE

All biblical quotations are from the Authorised Version.

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