Radical Quakerism

A Political Anthropology of Postmodern Religion

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Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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Date: 19th May 2021

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Abstract

This thesis presents an ethnographic case study into the political anthropology of contemporary religion. By exploring the ‘liquid’ faith of participants in the Religious Society of Friends (‘Quakers’), it carefully examines the social and political practices that constitute the ‘postmodern’ religious subject. Drawing on poststructuralist theory, the research combines critical ethnography with discourse-theoretical analysis. It is framed by a conception of politics as a historically-contingent process that orders human coexistence in conditions of difference and disagreement (Mouffe 2005). Religion is thus always ‘political’ insofar as it is the site of a struggle to stabilise meanings and identities. The resultant ‘politics of religion’ are the practices, discourses and institutions that construct a contestable social form and define its relation to ‘the world’.

We discover amongst Friends a regime of practices that, following Foucault, may be called a ‘political spirituality’. Radical Quakerism emerges as a *particular* form of political dissent practiced as an ethics of self dis-enclosure. It entails a spiritual self-discipline that resists closure, refuses power and subverts the threat of conflict. Conditioned by contingency, its spatial and signifying practices are a movement *towards* meaning that does not claim the finality of a ‘truth’. It produces instead a gathered ‘sense’ of what *can* be said and of what *may* be. The spiritual practice of political action is therefore the articulation of hope with the uncertainty of faith. An encounter with the ‘other’ exposes the subject to an event that opens a horizon to social and personal transformation. Consequently, we find a ‘spiritual politics’ bequeathed by the Quakers is a pluralistic politics of becoming one-self. It is practiced as a *fugitive* political spirituality that may escape and evade any particular form but permanently haunts the social as the *spirit* of change.

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1. Political Anthropology of Religion

The research presented in this thesis is about ‘religion’ and ‘politics’ in postmodern society. I am not however using these terms to designate separate spheres of life, particular organisational forms, or a specific set of institutional arrangements. Rather, ‘politics’ here refers to the organisation of a ‘society’ as a whole or to any subset of social relations. It is *how* sociocultural forms of life are ordered, including those we call ‘religious’. Thus, the ‘politics of religion’ frames this inquiry into the construction of meanings and identities, the operations of power, and the distribution of agency. The aim is to understand the role religion plays in contemporary society; the extent to which its practices are responsible for, or responsive to, social change.

I have explored these questions through an ethnographic case study of a particular ‘faith community’ that calls itself a ‘religious society’. Before we meet these ‘Quakers’, this introductory chapter will establish the terms of our inquiry and its methods. In order to further set the scene, this chapter will conclude with a survey of the evolving literature on ‘postmodern’ religion and spirituality. A microcosmic illustration may provide a useful point of departure.

1.1. The Meanings of Church

The present study was motivated by a more limited inquiry undertaken for an M.A. in Engaged Anthropology. Entitled *A Place to Belong? The changing place of church in rural life* (Evans 2018), this dissertation examined the place-related meanings, attachments and identities attributed to a church building by those who experienced the space in different ways. The fieldwork was centred on a medieval parish church that had been repurposed as a ‘community hub’. While continuing to function as a place of worship, the building was spatially and discursively divided into a ‘church’ and a ‘centre’. The latter, subsequently renamed *The Hub at St Peter’s*, hosted local groups, a public library, and a pop-up weekday café in a space hitherto reserved for Holy Communion. Some café customers described

how much they appreciated the ‘beauty’ and ‘peace’ of this hybridised setting. One described an evening of African music and dancing as ‘the most spiritual experience ever’. But others insisted that clear lines be drawn between the ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ space. While the latter had been cleared of religious symbols and literature, some of the faithful sought to replace them.

Invited by the vicar to act as a ‘bridge’, I was co-opted onto the parochial church council and tasked with assisting with the development of the ‘Hub’ project. I had some prior experience with faith-based NGOs and had previously conducted research into the social capital mobilised by inter-organisational networks (Evans 2009). I was, however, a newcomer both to the Church of England and to rural village life. As both an insider and outsider, my role was both ambiguous and precarious. Although most of the parochial church council (‘PCC’) members regularly attended Sunday services, attitudes towards the community project varied. Disidentifying with the latter, one PCC member declared, ‘I’m not part of *The Hub*’. Another worried that the ‘church’ was literally being ‘squeezed out’. Yet others envisaged a new future for the building as an inclusive, multi-functional space. One long-standing church member acknowledged a creeping process of ‘secularisation’ was well underway. My respondent nevertheless believed a ‘beautiful harmony’ was possible. A Diocesan officer agreed, advancing the hybridised concept of a ‘Hub Church’ to model a new role for increasingly redundant buildings at the heart of village communities.

There was, however, considerable ‘political’ resistance to the blurring of established boundaries. Strong feelings were expressed on both sides concerning place-related identities. People had formed strong emotional and symbolic attachments. Someone threatened to resign from the project team if *The Hub* ‘brand’ name was used for a café-style church service. ‘The Hub’ was no place for religious ‘ideology’ or ‘missionising’ activity, it was claimed. Another exasperated PCC member took an opposing view. Responding with some force to initial proposals for a weekday café in the chancel, she protested: ‘But this is a church!’ Eventually, as tensions began to surface, the vicar intervened by calling for silence. By the time my fieldwork came to an end an uneasy peace prevailed.

1.1.1. The Politics of Religion

I concluded my previous inquiry with the observation that if there was a prospect of a new unity, it would need to emerge in the linguistic space *in-between* two antagonistic but unstable discursive frontiers. An interdiscursive exchange of signifiers may have led to the emergence of a new 'thing'.[1] However, a closer examination of how a rearticulation or new inscription of the space might be accomplished was beyond the scope of the study. Insofar as any social formation is a site of hegemonic struggle, an exploration of these possibilities would have required close attention to 'political' practices.

Since discourse can produce or reproduce 'religious' meanings and identities, we can speak of a 'politics of religion'. In anthropology and social sciences "to invoke a 'politics of' very often relates to an explicit or implicit use of discourse analysis, a thematic focus on discursive power and discursive practices by means of which concrete phenomena are unmasked and heavily criticised. This has often involved a critical stance towards centralised or institutionalised forms of power and modes of representation from the vantage point of peripheries" (Wydra and Thomassen 2018: 11). This 'politics of' is how a 'religion' is ordered as a social form and defines its relation with the wider world. As such, the 'political' is not a domain separable from either the 'social' or 'religion' but pertains to the structuring process itself. From the standpoint of political anthropology, therefore, the *perceived* autonomy of the 'political' is an ideological artefact or imaginary of Western modernity. To speak of the 'political' either as a separate sub-system or organisation is an objectification: "a way of representing power relations that obscures their social foundations and the way they work in practice" (Gledhill 2000:ch. 1).[2]

Chantal Mouffe therefore offers a useful clarification of these terms. The 'political' refers to "the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations, antagonism that can take many forms and emerge in different types of social

[1] The notion of being a 'good neighbour' contributing to a stronger community figured prominently in the 'ethical' narratives of volunteers. This signifier may have bridged the 'church' and 'centre' discourses to produce a hybrid place-identity that united participants.

[2] A similar argument may be made concerning the apparent autonomy of the 'private' and 'public' domains which, as discussed later, a distinction also central to the secularisation thesis as well as its 'postsecular' critique. Similarly, the distinction between the state and civil society.

relations” (Mouffe 2009 [2000]: 101). Thus, to speak of a ‘political religion’ is to refer to the antagonistic dimension of a discursive formation.[3] On the other hand, ‘politics’ is “the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and organise human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual” (ibid.). With these distinctions in mind, the politics of religion therefore concerns a particular ‘ensemble’ to which ‘spiritual’ or ‘religious’ significances have been ascribed in the context of difference and disagreement.

1.1.2. The Political Condition

By framing the present study with the ‘politics of religion’ its scope is considerably wider than my earlier inquiry. The earlier study concerned ‘church’ as the site of contested articulations and inscriptions of *place-related* meanings, identities and attachments. The aim of the present study is to explore social and discursive practices that, in seeking to establish an order to relations of coexistence, *may accomplish* sociocultural change. I have in view the articulation of differences that may be described variously as religious, cultural, or social; as well as change that may be experienced at the level of the individual or the group. This brings larger questions concerning subjectivity and agency within the wider scope of inquiry.[4]

The contemporary *experience* of difference and change are the salient features of what has famously been called the ‘postmodern condition’ (Lyotard 1984). Difference, flux, instability, and the rapid pace of socio-cultural change are the hallmarks of late- or post-modernity. Those incredulous at the metanarratives of religion are found to be immersed instead in “flexible networks of language games” (Lyotard 1984: 17). These fluid conditions are generative of a plurality of different narratives: “the multiplicity of heterogeneous discourses, ideological perspectives, religious sensibilities, moral positions and social identities that make up contemporary societies” (Newman 2007: 19). Conversely, the

[3] A term I shall define later with reference to Torfing (1999), as a configuration of differential elements arranged into a *relatively* unified ‘whole’.

[4] I am referring here to the processes of social engagement by which temporally embedded individuals can both shape their world and ascribe significance to their activities within it (Bandura 2000, Emiirbayer and Mische 1998). Postmodern life is often thought to pose a problem for agency: “the notion of agency, centred on a self with the capacity to effectively act upon the world, ostensibly dissolves and is replaced by floating signifiers, transforming agency into a cacophony of language games in which ‘all that is solid melts into the air’” (Gubrium and Holstein 1995: 555).

‘post-postmodern’ reaction of actors wearied by difference, heterogeneity, displacement, and uncertainty may be to cling instead to established identities or seek stability on firmer moral ground (Newman 2007: 17).

Consequently, we may refer instead to a postmodern *political* condition as the abandonment of the rational, autonomous and self-willed agent; the dethronement of rationality and morality as the foundations of political or ethical judgment; and the breaking down of traditional sites of decision-making as the social field fragments into incommensurable identities (Newman 2007: 24). These are the political conditions in which ‘postmodern religion’ may emerge either in response or else in reaction *against* these instabilities. The politics of ‘postmodern religion’ therefore refers to an attempt to arrest the flow of meanings in ‘liquid modernity’ and to construct something more solid (Bauman 2000).

1.1.3. In Search of ‘Religion’

This may, nevertheless, be an elusive goal. Critical approaches to the study of religion have problematised the category of ‘religion’. Craig Calhoun and his colleagues (2011) point out that the term ‘religion’ was not in frequent use until the Enlightenment sharpened the secular/religious distinction. Thus, in its modern usage, ‘religion’ has come to be understood as an ideological construct of beliefs attached to an institutionalised community unrelated to public life. The term was used to demarcate the ideas, beliefs and institutions in relation to particular faith traditions, such as Christianity that, at the same time, limited its scope (Calhoun et al. 2011:ch. 1). Indeed, Jonathan Z. Smith has argued that religion is not a native category but one imposed from the outside on some aspect of native culture (1998: 269).

Talal Asad (1993) makes similar claims concerning the Western construction of ‘religion’. In his genealogy he insists that we must reject an essentialist definition that fixes or stabilises religion as an object and recognise instead a contingent historical-discursive process. In general terms, this is also the approach taken by Brown (2001) and McCutcheon (1997). The latter cautions against the abstract and reified category of *sui generis* religion commonly employed by scholars. He

notes that “the meaning of the category of religion is intimately linked to the social and material interests of the institutionalised observer-interpreter who defines, circumscribes, and creates this cognitive category” (1997: Introduction). Religion, in this regionalised and demarcated sense, is — like the ‘political’ — a construction of modernity. Henceforth, the “end of religion indicates the end of referring to this one portion of historical, human existence as if it were a self-evidently and ontologically distinct, unique, and autonomous portion of life and action, exempt from sociopolitical analysis and critique” (ibid.).

Hent de Vries (1999) states this position clearly when he writes that modern scholarship no longer disputes that “religion can no longer be regarded as a phenomenon belonging to a distant past” or that it is “transhistorical or transcultural" (1999: 1). Instead, multidisciplinary studies have emphasised its “social, anthropological, and intertextual overdeterminations, the *discursive formation* of its empirical and symbolic power, and the transformation of its private and public functions" (ibid. emphasis added). Thus, Clayton Crockett (2011) states that the term ‘religion’ is increasingly recognised by scholars today as “a modern Western construct that is imposed upon widely diverse phenomena and should be seen as an essentially political and contested term” (2011: 27).

According to these postmodern critiques, ‘religion’ constituted in discourse is thus historically, linguistically and culturally-bound. Furthermore, as a socio-cultural production, religious beliefs, practices and traditions involve power relations. As such, they can therefore be studied paratactically as ideology or as theology, the two poles around which ‘religion’ oscillates (Crockett 2011: 26). As a consequence of these de-essentializing analytical moves, religion has been caught in a postmodernist pincer movement. On the one hand, postcolonial critiques have challenged the applicability of religion to non-Western practices and phenomena (2011: 27). And, on the other, “postmodern analyses have deconstructed the essential autonomy of the concept of religion” (ibid.). Turning the problem around, we may ask what, if anything, does ‘religion’ now mean for those living with the destabilising conditions of postmodernity?

1.2. The Politics of a Religious Society

In order to address the question of religion in postmodernity I have embarked upon an in-depth ethnographic case study of a particular group that calls itself ‘religious’ and can also make a reasonable claim to being ‘postmodern’. We should note from the outset that scholars of religion have offered various definitions of ‘religion’, while others—as we have just seen—are critical of the construction of this category. Although a case study of Quakers may make a useful contribution to these important debates, this is not my principal aim (see sec. 1.3). I shall however return to these broader themes in the concluding chapter. Arriving at our final destination, I shall offer there a reflection on political and spiritual practices we will have discovered en route. To get our journey underway, I shall accept for the time being the emic self-designation of my object of study. A group or movement that calls itself *The Religious Society of Friends*.

Otherwise known as ‘Quakers’, this group emerged in the mid-seventeenth century following the English civil war (see for example, Angell and Dandelion 2013; Braithwaite 1912, 1918; Dandelion 2007, 2016; Moore 2020). Amid a time of social and political upheaval and “great religious confusion”, the movement’s founders disputed the clerical order and hierarchical structure of the dominant established church (Pilgrim 2004: 209). George Fox roamed the Midlands and north of England looking for an alternative. According to his journal writings, a personal breakthrough came in a moment of insight, a visionary experience in which he heard a voice say: “there is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition” (Nickalls 1952 cited by Pilgrim 2004: 209). His insight that ordinary believers may have direct experience of God, unmediated by either scripture or a priest, formed the basis of the Quaker’s ‘radical’ faith.

From their earliest beginnings, Quakers were motivated by a belief that they had been called to recreate society as God intended (Pilgrim 2004: 210). In their transgressive and dispersed “places of otherness”, Friends waited for the promptings of truth they accepted as the authoritative Word of God (2004: 212). Their organisation later developed out of an early need to contain the potential *anarchy* of individualised expressions of God’s call to action (Pilgrim 2004: 221). This alternative ordering both consolidated the movement and secured its survival

to the current day (ibid.). In Don Cupitt's estimation, Quakers are a notable surviving group from that period, advancing a post-ecclesial type of religion (Cupitt 2001: 61). Its 'gift' to late modernity has been described both as 'networked authority' (Tickle 2008) and a method of collective decision-making that has informed the 'anarchic' practices of radical democracy (Graeber 2002, 2004). As a result, Quakers have influenced both emerging forms of contemporary Christianity and new political movements.

Collins and Dandelion (2014) describe contemporary Quakerism as a "Liquid Religion" that balances heterodoxy with orthopraxy (2014: 293): "Liberal Quakerism has developed, simultaneously, a distinctly open attitude towards beliefs and a relatively closed or conservative attitude towards practice" (2014: 297). They note that, "while wider Christianity may be in transition, British Quakers see perpetual modulation of faith and practice as both logical and faithful" (2014: 296). Hence, Quakerism is "fundamentally liquid" (2014: 296). Friends practise an individualised faith within a traditional institutional setting that facilitates "an ongoing dialectic between change and continuity" (ibid). The Quaker form of silent worship provides cohesion for the group, despite religious differences, as evidenced by hybrid identities such as Pagan-Quakers (Vincett 2008).

Nevertheless, Quaker's "varying interpretations may at some stage begin to unpick the form" (2014: 296). Quakers may "adopt rituals and other modes of behaviour that are outside of what might be called mainstream Quakerism" (2014: 298). Collins and Dandelion insist therefore that "the movement remains just that: a movement" (2014: 299). This is because Quakers are: "increasingly reflexive and self-critical, continually adapting to the social, political, and economic environment—a disposition that is the epitome of the liquidly modern" (ibid.).

1.3. Research and Method

In order to assess the claims made for this nearly 400-year old yet ‘liquid’ form of institutional religion, I have engaged in an extended period of ethnographic fieldwork with a community of Quakers known as the Southern Marches Area Quaker Meeting (‘SMAQM’). The inquiry into Quakerism is a case study intended to shed light on broader questions of contemporary religion or spiritualities. Two research questions can therefore be stated.

Firstly, what political practices and discourses constitute Quakers as both a faith group and a collective movement? [RQ1]. Second, what does this particular discursive formation tell us about the role of religion or spirituality in contemporary society? [RQ2]. With these questions in view, the specific objectives of the ethnographic fieldwork can be stated:—

I. To analyse the social and discursive practices that order social relations both within the Quaker group and in relation to the wider ‘world’.

II. To understand how subjectivities and identities are produced, contested and sustained in social spaces and practices within and beyond the Quaker meetinghouse.

III. To explain the processes of continuity, change and differentiation of contemporary Quakerism in terms of the social, ethical and political logics of its discourse.

Combining participant observation with a particular approach to discourse analysis, my methodology can be described as a ‘multi-discursive ethnography’. In this research method, “scholars conduct fieldwork and other research procedures to be exposed to divergent discourses about a subject matter under inquiry, and then write up ethnography by assembling various (kinds of) texts or text fragments to represent or re-order the discourses they have found” (Hou and Wu 2017: 77). Discourse analysis is then used to “uncover the underlying stance, values, ideology, cultural way of thinking, and the constructing work it does” (Hou and Wu 2017: 77). Based on the results of this analysis, researchers can then select text

fragments for use in the written ethnography, “weaving together selected texts or text fragments for dialogue and diversity” (ibid.). Multi-discursive ethnography also strives to make marginal voices heard and to promote alternative ways of speaking/thinking. By celebrating the co-existence of, and dialogue between, divergent or even contradictory discourses, the goal is to facilitate diversified and dialogical and reflexive understandings of “who we are and what we do” (2017: 78).

Both ethnographic methods and discourse analysis have been advocated in the study of religion. I shall briefly examine these methods before setting out my approach — a critical discursive ethnography that combines ethnographic fieldwork with Discourse Theoretical Analysis (DTA).

1.3.1. Ethnographies of Religion

In her introduction to what she calls ‘critical ethnography’, D. Soyini Madison (2019), says “ethnography is generally defined by its aim to engage, interpret, and record the social meanings, values, structures, and embodiments within a particular domain, setting, or field of human interaction” (2019:ch. 1). It is of course the preferred research method of anthropologists who engage in long-term fieldwork and participant observation.

Christian and other congregations have attracted the attention of anthropologists (e.g., Coleman 2000, Csordas 1994, Luhrmann 2012, Robbins 2004, Schmidt 2008) and the anthropology of Christianity has emerged as a vibrant sub-field (Cannell 2006, Robbins 2007, 2014). The decline in church attendance has also provided an additional impetus to the closer study of local congregational life by other religious scholars (Scharen 2004). As Chambers (2005) says in the introduction to his study of religion, secularisation, and social change in Wales, his aim was to “demonstrate how empirical data can aid our understanding of religious decline or growth by identifying those factors most likely to inhibit or promote congregational growth” (2005: 9). For similar reasons, practical theologians have also begun working at the interface of ecclesiology and ethnography (see for example, Scharen 2012, 2015; Ward 2012; Wigg-Stevenson 2014). This approach

acknowledges that “in order for scholarship *about* the church to be most helpful *to* the church’s missional engagement in daily life” a “rapprochement is required between empirical and theological understandings of the church” (Scharen 2012: Introduction). One advocate of ethnographic theology observes: “congregations differ, often quite intensely and extensively, in their ‘life and language’ and in what they do, and thus in their understanding of the meanings of the word ‘God’’ (Healy 2012: 185). Ethnographic inquiry thus reveals “far fewer commonalities *within* each congregation than one might expect” (2012: 186, emphasis in original). Moreover, the life and language of a particular congregation can only be understood in the light of its place in its “host society” (2012: 187).

Other religious scholars have focused on the subjective, everyday lived experience of diverse religious actors (Ammerman 2007; McGuire 2008). Rather than looking at religious affiliations or group participation, the ‘lived religion’ approach focuses squarely on individuals, “the experiences they consider most important, and the concrete practices that make up their personal religious experience and expression” (2008:ch.1). It is at this level that McGuire suggests we may “think of religion” as an “ever-changing, multifaceted, often messy — even contradictory — amalgam of beliefs and practices that are not necessarily those religious institutions consider important” (ibid.). Put another way, “while belief and membership...are certainly part of what lived religion entails” to begin with everyday practice means “not taking the experts and official theology as definitive” (Ammerman 2014: 190). Instead, lived religion “happens beyond the bounds and often without the approval of religious authorities” (ibid.). It is found instead in the material, embodied aspects of religion as they occur in everyday life and in how people explain themselves.

1.3.2. Discourses of Religion

The successful integration of ethnography and discourse analysis depends on the exact methods of discourse analysis chosen. Hammersley (2005) suggests that ‘micro’ textual or linguistically focused methods of discourse analysis may mark a significant shift in focus for ethnographers and away from the traditional approaches to ethnographic fieldwork. He notes that, “where linguistic discourse

analysts are often concerned to identify the rules that generate particular discursive patterns, ethnographers are usually more concerned with what the discourse is being used to do, with the social factors that drive its use as part of patterns of situational and institutional action, and with the social consequences of that use" (2005: 8). Furthermore, ethnographers — especially if they are not specialists in the subfield of linguistic anthropology — are likely to combine textual materials with a much wider range of data, including those gathered in field notes from participant observations.

Titus Hjelm (2014) reaches a similar conclusion and advocates the use of *critical* discourse analysis in the study of religion. He has made a compelling case for the use of discourse analysis by scholars of religion as a method of empirical research, although it has not been widely taken up (Hjelm 2011: 134). This is curious since, as Wijsen (2013) notes, there has been dissatisfaction for some decades with objectivist definitions of religion and positivist methods of studying it (2013: 1). Drawing a distinction between "*discursive* and *discourse analytical* approaches" (2014: 857, emphasis in original), the former includes what Moberg (2013) calls "first- and second-level approaches that discuss metatheoretical and theoretical issues but provide little practical advice on doing analysis" (2013: 16). The discursive study of religion is "a research perspective, rather than a single method to study religion" (von Stuckrad 2013: 7). On the other hand, the discourse on religion is "the societal organization of knowledge about religion" that is interdiscursively entangled with other discourses (2013: 17). In addition to these approaches, 'third-level' approaches focus instead on "conducting actual discourse analyses" using empirical materials (Moburg 2013: 16). The latter typically take the form of textual material, for example transcripts of interviews or naturally occurring language used in conversations recorded during field work.

1.3.3. Narratives of Lived Religion

Individually 'lived' religion is fundamentally social, built on "shared meanings and experiences, learned practices, borrowed imagery, and imparted insights" (McGuire 2008:ch.1). The stories or narratives provided by research participants disclose experiences *as* 'lived' (Clandinin and Connelly 2000; Clandinin 2006, 2016). Experiences re-told as stories are a way of understanding them in "a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction" (2000: 20). The re-telling of experiences that make up people's lives is, at the same time, an inquiry into social, cultural and institutional narratives: the discourses that constitute and shape those experiences (2006: 20, 46).

Kenneth Gergen (1994) makes a similar point: "we live by stories — both in the telling and realizing of the self" (1994: 186). Stories are culturally and historically situated as by-products of people's attempts to relate through discourse (ibid.). Narrative conventions lend our lives coherence and direction, acquiring meaning and significance (1994: 193). As well as coherence, life histories also satisfy our need for continuity (Mattingly 1998: 13; also Linde 1993). As such, lived experience told as a life history or life story, focuses on ordinary everyday events (language, rituals, routines) while privileging experience as a way of knowing and interpreting the world (Given 2008: 491). Furthermore, "if selves are realized within social encounters there is good reason to believe there is no one story to tell" (1994: 202).

Narratives are event-centred with respect to both human action and interaction (Mattingly 1998: 8). This means that narratives are necessarily "experience-centred" and "allow us to infer something about what it feels like to be in that story world" (ibid.). They do not merely refer to past events but also "create experiences for their audience" (1998: 8). Fieldwork thus provides a socio-cultural context in which experiences can be gathered and analysed discursively. For the researcher, gathering the stories of individuals is also a way to discern and assemble the wider social narratives or discourses that shape people's experiences, position the subject, or supply points of identification in the construction of a 'self' in relation to others. Further, since narratives have a

temporal dimension, they can also disclose the experience of change itself — both personal and social change.

1.4. Ethnographic Fieldwork

These are therefore the three components of my ‘discursive ethnographic’ method: participant observation, narrative inquiry, and discourse analysis. Next, I shall explain first the fieldwork context and then the types of data gathered during my time in the field.

After gaining approval from the Ethics Committee of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, I conducted fieldwork among a group known as the Southern Marches Area Quaker Meeting (‘SMAQM’). The latter consists of eight local Quaker meetings dotted across the English-Welsh border. Geographically, the area extends from Abergavenny in Monmouthshire northwards to Clun in Shropshire. Local meetings in Hereford and Ross-on-Wye mark the eastern edge of the area, with Brecon and Llandrindod Wells to the west. The list of ‘members’ and ‘attenders’ published in January 2020 numbered 356 people, including children. I selected the largest Meeting, held in Hereford, as the main site for my fieldwork. Over a period of eighteen months between October 2018 and March 2020 I attended the Hereford Quaker Meeting regularly each Sunday, usually accompanied by my wife. I participated in Meeting for Worship (‘MfW’) and occasionally for a ‘business meeting’ that ran monthly afterwards. I also joined a bi-weekly discussion group studying *Quaker Faith & Practice*, an anthology of extracts of Quaker writings and regulations on church governance. In addition, I participated in the formation of a new group that called itself a ‘Climate Change Response Group’.

Quakers refer to one another as ‘Friends’, a term I have adopted for the purposes of this study. While some Friends may have been admitted into formal membership of the Religious Society of Friends, others are conventionally referred to as ‘attenders’. Although the Hereford Meeting lists nearly 80 members or attenders, I observed that between 20-30 Friends gathered on a typical Sunday morning at 10.30 am for MfW. Early on in my fieldwork I spoke at a quarterly ‘Area Meeting’ and introduced my research project. This proved to be a good opportunity to meet a wider circle of Friends and recruit research participants from beyond the Hereford Meeting. With the assistance of Elders, I circulated an

explanation of my research goals and received an encouraging response from Friends across the area who expressed a willingness to share their stories.

1.4.1. Data Collection

During the fieldwork phase, I collected three types of empirical textual material: field notes, publications, and interview transcripts. Observations were recorded in field notes taken during or shortly after Quaker meetings and other events. Many informal conversations with Friends occurred before or after MfW but sometimes at social occasions in Friends' homes. My handwritten scratch notes were subsequently organised into a secure digital notebook. To the latter were added digital images of posters, leaflets, articles and other materials collected in the meetinghouse.

The second set of materials included monthly newsletters and other information circulated, mainly via email, to members and attenders of SMAQM. This material included minutes circulated from business and area meetings, as well as information, news and articles of common interest. In addition, the quarterly *Quaker News* from Britain Yearly Meeting (the national body) and its website were useful sources of data concerning developments on the national Quaker scene. An important further source was a weekly Quaker magazine called *The Friend*. This publication consisted almost entirely of articles and letters contributed by Quakers from across the UK, expressing view-points and opinions on a wide variety of topics. The magazine served as a vehicle for lively debate. I clipped articles of relevance to the research into a digital file, annotated the texts and organised them by theme. Finally, both before and after I commenced my fieldwork, I endeavoured to survey the large corpus of popular Quaker writings. This is a vast and diverse literature on the history, theology, practices and social concerns of Quakers. I focused especially on works concerning the history of Quakerism and recently published works on topical debates concerning its future.

Finally, my main source of ethnographic data were transcriptions made from voice recorded in-depth interviews. These interviews were typically of between 1 to 1.5 hours long in duration. Of the Friends who agreed to talk candidly with me I met

with a total of seventeen individuals. Participants were selected on the basis of their willingness — and sometimes an eagerness — to participate in the research. I also approached Friends whose accounts, judged from prior observations, would offer a useful perspective with the aim of achieving a representative cross-section of interests, backgrounds and religious beliefs. The interviews were open-ended and unstructured. Each interview was recorded using a laptop and microphone using secure digital audio recording and transcribing software.

As far as possible, I have in the presentation of an ethnographic account tried to let the voices of participants be heard in their own words. Each participant agreed to be quoted verbatim and also to be identified by their real name. The interviews were each framed by the same opening question: 'Why did you become a Quaker and what difference has it made to your life?'. Many respondents chose to structure their responses in the form of a narrative stretching back to their childhood. I employed subsequent questions during the interview to explore topics in a little more detail or to fill in gaps, such as whether an interviewee had a religious background prior to coming to Quakers. The open-ended format meant that other or prior commitments, identifications or influences could be explored in relation to their decision to join a Quaker Meeting and their ongoing participation.

1.4.2. Data Analysis

The collected data was analysed in three stages, each at a different level of analysis. The analysis did not proceed in a strictly linear fashion but with some iterative development between them. They were: (i) A preliminary content analysis; (ii) thematic coding of key texts; and (iii) Discourse Theoretical Analysis (DTA). The last of these provided a broad framework for the study at a macro-contextual and macro-textual level that I shall explain more fully in a later section below.

The first, exploratory stage began before the interviews had been conducted. It consisted of a preliminary content analysis of the canonical text, *Quaker Faith & Practice* (QF&P). Key signifiers were identified thematically, together with their frequency of occurrence. Guided by the overall aims of the research, the themes

selected were: identity, difference, religious practices, social action and living. Some sub-themes were identified before being organised into three broad categories: divine names; living and acting; testimonies and values. The purpose of the exercise was to gain an initial appreciation of the important discursive elements, tropes and phrases.[5]

As the data collection proceeded, textual material was organised into spreadsheets and coded by topic and themes. The first comprised transcripts of interviews and the second were extracts from contemporaneously published materials, mainly articles clipped from *The Friend*. Coding was employed as a way of analysing the content and organising extracted material. It was an iterative process guided by the research focus on identity/difference and continuity/change (see example extracts in Appendices A and B). Together with references to interviews or publications, extracted quotes and keywords, this procedure enabled the textual materials to be systematically organised, selected and subsequently arranged into the ethnographic account.

Finally, as the key ethnographic themes emerged from the above analysis, the tools of discourse analysis were employed to provide a further layer of analysis as well as to provide a broader theoretical framework; an interpretative frame in which to problematise and analyse questions of individual or collective identity, the negotiation of differences, and the construction of shared meanings. A brief discussion of the particular method chosen is necessary before we can proceed.

1.4.3. The Discourse Theoretical Approach

Discourse analysis consists of a family of quite different methods (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). The more micro-textual approaches, like conversation analysis, draw on ethnomethodology in a close analysis of the linguistic structure of particular texts (see e.g., Wetherell et al. 2001). Discursive psychology (Edwards and Potter 1992, Potter and Wetherell 1987) and the discourse analysis employed

[5] This analysis revealed that the word ‘God’ occurred much more frequently (n=871) than ‘Light’ (264), ‘Spirit’ (205), and especially ‘Christ’ (56). Whereas variations on ‘life’ or ‘live’ occurred more frequently still (n=1,198) among a large category of terms denoting outwardly-directed activities. Among the key signifiers of social values, ‘peace’ (223) and ‘truth’ occurred more frequently than justice (50) or equality (36).

by sociolinguists (e.g., Gee 2008, 2014a, 2014b) are likewise concerned with textual analysis of language in use. Critical Discourse Analysis refers to a range of methods that take a more macro approach to both text and context (see Wodak and Meyer 2016, also Flowerdrew and Richardson 2018).[6] Inspired by Foucault's theorisation of historically-contingent discourses, CDA is concerned with the work that language does as and its hidden operations of power. A pioneer of this approach, Norman Fairclough, argues that three 'things' are constituted in discourse: social identities or 'subject positions', social relationships; and systems of knowledge and belief (Fairclough 1993; also 2003, 2010).

By viewing discourse primarily as a system of representation (Hall 1997), Discourse Theoretical Analysis (DTA) widens the scope of discourse analysis further by focusing more broadly on meanings and ideologies (Carpentier and De Cleen 2007). It was developed originally by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their book, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* published in 1985. In this work, Laclau and Mouffe develop Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony as a post-Marxist theory inspired by contemporary thinkers such as Foucault, Derrida and Lacan (Laclau and Mouffe 1987). Laclau and Mouffe argued that all objects and actions in a social configuration are meaningful (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 2014). As Stuart Hall insists, "since all social practices entail *meaning*, and meanings shape and influence what we do — our conduct — all practices have a discursive aspect" (Hall 1992: 291). Henceforth, we can inquire "into the way in which social practices construct and contest the discourses that constitute social reality" (Howarth 2000: 8).

Laclau later employed his political ontology in an account of political populism (Laclau 1990, 2005, 2007), while Mouffe theorised an agonistic democratic politics (Mouffe 2005, 2013, 2018). In their wake, scholars of the Essex School have critiqued and elaborated Laclau and Mouffe's original ideas (e.g., Critchley and Marchart 2004; Howarth 2000; Glynos and Howarth 2007; Stavrakakis 1999; Torfing 1999), applying discourse theory to a range of political contexts (Howarth et al. 2000; Howarth and Torfing 2005). Other scholars have taken up DTA in studies of media and communications (Van Brussel et al. 2019) or of institutional change (Jacobs 2018; Panizza and Morielli 2013).

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[6] Sometimes the term *Critical Discourse Studies* is preferred by scholars who employ this approach.

According to this theoretical approach, discourse attempts to arrest the flow of differences on a field of discursivity. Discourse Theory thus employs a small number of key concepts around three core ideas: radical contingency, structural instability, and agentive subjectivity. It balances “a context of instability with practices of stabilisation” (Van Brussel et al. 2019:ch.1). The relative stability of any discursive structure is accomplished through certain privileged signifiers that link substitutable elements of a social formation into a precarious unity, constructing a knot of definite meanings (Howarth 2000: 119; Laclau [1996] 2007; Torfing 1999: 88-89). Its ultimate instability is assured, however, by the presence of unconnected elements that can always *become* connected (2019:ch.1). Consequently, owing to “the inability of a discourse to permanently fix its meaning and keep its elements stable, discourses are vulnerable to re-articulation and/or disintegration” (ibid.).

Viewed as a discourse, a particular ‘religion’ is a construction that establishes “a system of relations between different objects and practices, while providing (subject) positions with which agents can identify” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 3). In a broader sense, a ‘religion’ can therefore be described as a discursive formation: “a result of the articulation of a variety of discourses into a relatively unified whole” (Torfing 1999: 88-90, 300). As a result, religion can also be re-articulated from dislocated floating elements. Discourse theoretical analysis examines the construction of antagonisms, the drawing of boundaries between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’, and the exercise of power (2000: 4). Its utility as a framework for analysing the ‘political’ construction of any particular social formation is explained “in a nutshell” by Torfing (2005) in five arguments:

First, all forms of social practice take place against the background of historically specific discourses as relational systems of signification. Thus, whatever we say, think or do is conditioned by a *sedimented* discourse constantly modified by what we say, think or do. Second, discourse is constructed in and through hegemonic struggles to establish political and moral leadership through the articulation of meaning and identity. Because of the ultimate undecidability of the social world, discourse is therefore a result of political decisions. Third, social antagonism involves the exclusion of a threatening *Otherness* that both stabilises the

discursive system and prevents its ultimate closure. Social antagonism involves the 'othering' of a chain of identities and meanings as incommensurable elements that constitute an 'outside'. Fourth, stable hegemonic discourse becomes *dislocated* by new events it cannot explain, represent or domesticate, thereby disrupting the discursive system. Dislocation shows itself through a structural crisis and the proliferation of floating signifiers which may be re-articulated into new nodal points or empty universals, such as 'nation' or 'community', whose incompleteness or 'lack' is revealed by the dislocation of the social order. Finally, dislocation means that a split subject emerges, traumatised by its lack of fullness, in an attempt to reconstruct a full identity through acts of identification with the promises offered by political projects or religious movements. The construction of a constitutive outside displaces responsibility for the 'lack' to an enemy held responsible for all evil (2005 13-16).

As Torfing's description shows, DTA can supply a useful framework to address questions concerning religious forms, collective identity and individual differences in the 'politics of religion': the discursive ensemble produced by these political practices in liquid times.

1.5. Outline of the Study

The claim that Quakerism is a 'liquid religion' adapted to the fluid conditions of postmodernity concerns its institutional capacity to 'move' with the times (Collins and Dandelion 2014). In terms of discourse theory, this mutability refers to the re-articulation of floating elements in the construction of new limits or political frontiers with respect to an 'outside'. However, the notion of 'postmodern religion' has been the subject of intense scholarly debate. It has addressed, amongst other problems, the reified concept of 'religion' in relation to 'spiritual' practices; the diminished role of institutional religion and its traditions; and the emergence of alternative forms of post-Christian, post-Church or post-secular religiosities.

We shall conclude this chapter by reviewing the *empirical* evidence for practices of a 'fugitive' faith at work in spheres beyond the liturgical setting. That is to say, for a religiosity relatively uncontained by language or geography, or by conventional linguistic distinctions between 'religion' and 'politics', and in which the 'sacred' and the 'secular' have begun to blur. We find postmodern seekers and activists fleeing into the world to decide for themselves 'what matters'. In *Chapters 3 and 4* we shall then hear 'what matters' in the lived experiences of Quakers in the Southern Marches. Before we meet these Friends, however, some additional context will be necessary.

We therefore begin *Chapter 2* with a look at the political conditions facing contemporary Friends. British Quakers are currently engaged in an important conversation about their future as both a 'church' and movement. Their cherished text, *Quaker Faith & Practice*, is in the process of being revised as Friends ask one another, 'what does it mean to be a Quaker in Britain today?'. Like other religious denominations, Quakers are struggling to attract new members. Some worry that Quakerism has become incoherent to outsiders. Many draw comfort and inspiration from the heroic story of the 'early Friends' — a brave band of separatist dissenters with a radically egalitarian vision for a 'true church' and a Godly society. I shall therefore devote close attention to the seventeenth century origins of Quakers as they emerged during the social upheaval that followed the English civil war. We find in this history a tension between the individual and the

collective sewn into Quakerism from its beginnings; a source of potential antagonism that today manifests itself as a dilemma over the limits of inclusion.

Continuing this theme, in the first of the two ethnographic accounts, *Chapter 3* poses the problem of ‘community’ in late modernity and explores other possibilities through the lens of Quaker practice. In the absence of a creed, we investigate what, if anything, binds Friends together. I reflect on my encounter with the Quaker Meeting and hear how Friends experience the distinctive silent practice of ‘waiting worship’. Speech performs a central function in a practice of signification that depends firstly on a preparedness to listen attentively to the Other. Friends’ willingness to be open, to be self-aware, and put their ‘truths’ to question, is also regarded as a self-discipline for everyday life. By doing so, Quakers open ‘the common’ to multiple voices but also make it harder to define their boundaries.

In *Chapter 4*, we shall examine further the question of limits by considering Quaker’s participation in wider political projects. I explore whether Quakers can be properly understood as a ‘movement’. Borrowing Foucault’s concept of ‘political spirituality’, we advance beyond the notion of ‘public religion’ to locate the ‘spiritual’ in political action. If Quakerism can be better understood as an ethico-political movement, rather than as an enclosed group, new meanings and identities may continuously emerge. In their worldly endeavours Quakers find a dissenting common cause with other ‘rebels’ but also with the sufferings of early Friends. Their liminal experiences of political protest cast further doubt upon an essential Quaker identity while rendering themselves visibly identifiable in a broader political coalition.

Drawing the key themes together in conclusion, *Chapter 5* presents the features of a contemporary political spirituality. Engaging with contemporary political theory, the deconstruction of Christianity, and aspects of radical theology, I have characterised political spirituality as a form of *dissent* practiced as a discipline of self *dis-enclosure*. This is a gift bequeathed by ‘Radical Quakerism’ to postmodern seekers: a spirituality that enacts and embodies ‘that of God in every one’ while, at the same time, celebrating the contingency of ‘perhaps’ as the postmodern condition of faith and hope. Sharing concerns for a ‘tumultuous’ world in a radically democratic space, an ethico-political religiosity is structured by dissent: a refusal

to be conformed by powers that govern what can be thought, said and done. Instead, by questing and questioning, asking each other ‘what can you say?’, a spiritual path of *becoming* is laid open by *being-with* others. It is in this politics of the subject that personal and social change is possible. In the signifying exchanges of lived experiences, a gathering of ‘sense’ can articulate a precarious hope for an immanently ‘other’ world. Through political practices that embrace otherness as a friend, an open and plural society may therefore emerge as the promise of a ‘spiritual’ politics.

Before moving on to the Quakers, the final task of this introductory chapter is therefore to review the literature on ‘postmodern religion’. If indeed there is such a ‘thing’ at all.

1.6. Religion for Liquid Times?

Michael Lambek (2008) observes that insofar as ‘religion’ forms the cultural ground or worldview of a society it also articulates its great many concerns (2008: 9). Given such a wide scope, he suggests, we are inevitably led to ask “how subjects are constituted and how agents are motivated?” (ibid.). Anthropologists have emphasised meaning and order, identifying religion with “culture understood in symbolic, semiotic or discursive terms” (2008: 10). Lambek notes that such luminaries as Geertz, Rappaport, Bloch, and Asad have inquired into the conditions of meaning, truth, and certainty that loom large in ‘liquid’ modernity.

The question of postmodern religion (or religion in postmodernity) invites alternative formulations of the relation between ‘culture’ and ‘religion’. Viewed as a product of semiotic processes, religious beliefs and practices are more or less continuous with culture in the Geertzian sense. Thus, new or alternative spiritualities may emerge as transient expressions or contingent products of a particular cultural milieu. On the other hand, established forms of religion may maintain a certain distance from ‘culture’ in order to fulfill their permanent social function: whether as ‘therapeutic’ or ‘critical’ (Žižek 2003: 3). Alternatively, we may construe postmodern religion as a form of practice shaped by peculiarly ‘postmodern’ ideas. According to the theologian John Macquarrie (2001), contemporary theories insist on a break with the past, starting with that between postmodernism and modernity itself. He lists its nine constitutive contrasts: objectivity and subjectivity; fragmentation and totalization; the particular and universal; others and the self; relative and absolute; pluralism and uniformity; passion and the intellect; ambiguity and clarity; opinion and truth. How these themes are articulated may therefore constitute postmodern ‘religion’ and its place in the world.

Faced with these potential discontinuities, David Ray Griffin (1989), in *God & Religion in the Postmodern World*, suggests four reasons for a decline in a traditional belief in God: the problem of evil; the opposition of authority to freedom; a mechanistic view of nature; and the denial of the possibility of an experience of God. He argues that a rejection of the modern worldview and its assumptions is not, however, a sufficient basis for the recovery of belief *after* modernity. The

“problem inherent in the traditional idea of God” was perceived to be in its opposition to social and intellectual freedom (1989: 62). The idea of Divine power must be challenged for any “theistic postmodernity” to be viable (*ibid*.). Griffin proposes that the postmodern critique of modernity has given rise to an emerging postmodern worldview; an ‘option’ he attributes to philosophy that is made possible by a vision that centres on “experiential events” (189: 64). These are “fundamental units of reality” that have an inner reality. Consequently, Griffin’s postmodern God does not have a monopoly on power but “affects creatures...not by determining them from without but by persuading them from within” (1989: 65). God, he suggests, is persuasive not coercive: the possibilities people actualise are finally up to them.

Griffin offers “creative experience” as the hallmark of postmodern spirituality. This, he claims, resolves the modern conflict between a “spirituality of obedience” and a “spirituality of creativity” in favour of the latter (1989: 44, 47). Describing ‘postmodernism’ as a “highly ingenious collage”, Ursula King (1998: 2) claims that the postmodern condition (Lyotard 1984, Harvey 1989) “calls everything into question” (1998: 2,6). She asks, “what can possibly be its meaning for the faith traditions of the world?” (ibid.). In her introduction to *Faith and Praxis in a Postmodern Age*, King (1998) considers the role that faith and praxis play in the context of contemporary pluralistic society. Does it make a difference to politics and economics; to attitudes to the environment? More broadly, does everyone need “a faith to live by” and, if so, what kind of faith: human, religious, critical or a “deeply spiritual faith”? She wonders whether faith still informs our socio-cultural or national identities, makes us “whole”, strengthens our sense of responsibility, and “helps us build a human community of greater peace and justice” (1998: 2).

If the postmodern condition calls everything into question, then ‘postmodern religion’ may be its reply. New religious forms and practices may be viewed as an autochthonous religiosity ‘native’ to postmodernity or else as a refuge from it. The last fifty years has witnessed the rise of eclectic forms of spirituality such as the ‘New Age’ movement (Heelas 1996) that, by the mid 2000s, led scholars to ask whether a *Spiritual Revolution* was underway (Heelas and Woodhead 2005). What was formerly understood as ‘religion’ seemed to be rapidly giving way to a holistic milieu of ‘spirituality’. A new category of spiritual-but-not-religious people were

identified by scholars as products of the postmodern age. An early postmodernist commentator, Don Cupitt, described during the 1980s a turn in the tide of the *Sea of Faith* (1984), insisting that the certainties of traditional religious beliefs were being questioned by a generation whose worldviews and socio-cultural realities were being rapidly reshaped and reconfigured by late modernity.

A raft of scholarly literature on the topic followed in the 1990s. As well as King's (1998) edited volume, Paul Heelas (1998) assembled a collection in the same year on *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*. These books followed a series of review articles in the journal *Religion* (1997) edited by Robert Segal and Thomas Ryba. In the following year, a compilation of papers from one of three conferences on '*Religion and Postmodernism*' hosted at Villanova University was published as *God, The Gift and Postmodernism* (1999), edited by John D. Caputo and Michael Scanlon. Earlier in the decade, Paul Heelas had edited a collection of conference papers presented in 1993 on the topic of *Detraditionalization* (1996) and in the same year published his own work on *The New Age Movement* (1996). Other earlier volumes included Ann Astell's (1994) edited collection of papers presented at a 1992 conference in Wisconsin, *Divine Representations: Postmodernism and Spirituality*; and *Shadow of Spirit: Postmodernism and Religion* (1992) edited by Philippa Berry and Andrew Wernick. Within this corpus, numerous articles and essays ranged widely over topics relating to various construals of the 'postmodern'.

Reflecting on the 1997 conference at Villanova University on 'Religion and Postmodernism', the philosopher Caputo noted that "while everyone we invited to this conference was deferential toward the word 'religion', most of them were abusive toward the word 'postmodernism'" (Caputo and Scanlon 1997: 2). For Caputo, closely following Derrida, the conference occasioned a defence of the deconstruction of religion as the experience of the impossible; a desire for the wholly other, something *tout autre* that shatters the present horizons of possibility, and confounds our expectations. The deconstruction of religion thus heralds Derrida's messianic *religion without religion* (Caputo 1997, 2006). Others, like King, dealt more broadly with the cultural effects of postmodernity, its influence on traditional forms of religious practice, or on the growth in alternative spiritualities. The perspectives offered by participants in this debate inevitably reflect

disciplinary presuppositions but also prior epistemological or theological commitments.

Rosenau (1992) therefore groups postmodernists broadly into two camps: ‘affirmatives’ and ‘skeptics’ (reviewed in Segal 1997). The skeptics view the postmodern age as “one of radical, unsurpassable uncertainty, characterised by all that is grim, cruel, alienating, hopeless, tired and ambiguous” (Rosenau 1992: 15, quoted in Segal 1997: 139). While not necessarily contesting this account, the ‘affirmatives’, on the other hand, offer an alternative to it. In the words of Rosenau, “they are either open to positive political action (struggle and resistance) or content with the recognition of visionary, celebratory personal nondogmatic projects that range from New Age religion to New Wave life-styles and include a whole spectrum of postmodern social movements” (ibid.). While seeking nondogmatic and non-ideological philosophical and ontological practice, these postmoderns also affirm an ethic of normative choices and of issue-specific political coalition-building (ibid.).

1.6.1. Religion and the World

While Rosenau’s typology is helpful, the reasons she offers for the alternative positions are not mutually exclusive. The postmodern condition as characterised by the skeptics has also given rise to both political action and new religious movements of a quite different hue. This suggests that a narrowly cultural view of religion is insufficient to explain the shifting forms it may take. To view religion as the product of semiotic processes alone says little about the operations of power or of the ‘political’ in a system of social relations.

Talal Asad (2003) notes that, while cultures may be conceived as clearly bounded or fragmented, they may also be understood in terms of temporalities of power: practices constituting particular forms of life may be displaced, outlawed or penalised. In a structuralist mode, religion and culture can both be objectified as ‘real’ social phenomena. Religion may be viewed as a social institution; a concrete set of social practices that regulate its internal relations. Religion from this perspective may be taken to be ‘organised’ and visible. Church attendance or

membership of a religious community, for example, are important markers of religiosity. Alternatively, viewed in more Geertzian terms, both religion and culture more broadly are systems of signification; particular constellations of symbolic meanings and values expressed in linguistic, semiotic and material forms. This culturalist understanding can also reify and essentialise 'the' culture, a particular religion, or religion as a universal phenomena. While these essentialisms can be questioned, Asad insists that insofar as they are collective representations of identity they must also be respected.

Thus, both the 'structuralist' or 'culturalist' perspective offer the linguistic and symbolic resources with which to discursively distance 'religion' from culture. Insofar as these conceptual models uphold conventional or naturalised meanings, they may also maintain a clear separation between sacred and secular orders. Religion may be variously depicted as resisting (counter-culture), in dialogue with (acculturation), or else appropriating 'the' culture with positive or negative evaluations made of these entanglements. Talal Asad (1993) took Geertz to task for adopting the standpoint of theology by universalising religion as a system of meanings. This, he argued, had led to a misspecified relation between religious theory and practice as essentially a cognitive quest for order. Raymond Williams (1961), on the other hand, advanced a notion of culture as a 'structure of feeling'. Seen as *social experience in solution*, Williams can be read as emphasising process, discourse and context (e.g., by Matthews 2001). Neglecting these reifies the concept of culture, something Williams expressly wished to avoid by insisting that it is a whole movement and way of life (ibid.).

Asad (1993) also reminds his readers of Williams's analysis of the evolution in the senses of 'culture'. In the past, "culture meant the training that provided the mind and soul with their intellectual and moral accomplishments" (1993: 248). In its distinctively modern sense, it *also* means the common way of life of a whole people in a reaction or response to painful or radical changes in the general conditions of our common life (ibid.emphasis added). Similarly, in his dispute with Geertz's 'problem of belief', Asad (1993) criticises the implication that "religious belief stands independently of the worldly conditions that produce bafflement, pain, and moral paradox", to which belief is viewed as a means of coming to terms (1993: 46). To the contrary, Asad contends that changes in the object of belief

change that belief. As the world changes, so do the objects of belief and the specific forms of bafflement and moral paradox that are part of that world (ibid.).

Social and discursive practices are thus *constitutive* of religion as a way of being. In phenomenological terms a 'lived religion' (McGuire 2008) or, in Wittgenstein's (2010) terms, a 'form of life'. Religion lived and constituted in practices cannot on this account be decontextualised as separable from culture. According to Caputo, "religion is not an isolatable factor or ingredient in a culture" (2019: 123). Furthermore, "every theology is a theology of culture, of its culture, because it represents the depth dimension in a culture, which can be transported to other cultures only with difficulty and accommodation" (ibid.). Further, cultures do not change or develop spontaneously: "people are pushed, seduced, coerced, or persuaded into trying to change themselves into something else, something that allows them to be redeemed" (Asad 2003:ch.4). At the same time, Ursula King suggests "the creative postmodern approach to language opens up new possibilities in interpreting the ambiguities of our relational language about God, and in articulating different styles of spirituality" (1998:7). By posing a challenge to the individualism and dualisms of modernity, she suggests, postmodernism may make space for more holistic and organic understandings of human existence and the sacredness of life itself.

Consequently, if the postmodern world remains haunted by the absence of God, "in some curious way this absence can at the same time become transparent for a new kind of presence" (King 1998:7). Thus, contrary to the modern assumption of the pervasiveness of nihilism, King points instead to studies that illuminate 'the striking affinity between the most innovative aspects of postmodern thought and religious or mystical discourse' (King 1998:7, quoting Astell 1994:14). But if the confluence of creativity, holism and mysticism in the face of bafflement and moral paradox does not lead to individualism, what exactly do postmodern spiritualities 'make' of differences?

1.6.2. Dealing with Differences

King (1998) notes the diversity and pluralism is characteristic of a postmodern spirituality (1998: 96). Difference presumes a “radical alterity” in which the other “cannot be judged, categorised and pigeonholed” (Lash 1996: 252). Scott Lash suggests that difference implies a politics of ‘third space’ that is reducible neither to subject or object, universal or particular. Rather, a space open to the radical alterity of the other. He concludes that without some kind of ‘given’ or plenitude of forms of life to “fill us up as subjects" no understanding or recognition of the other is possible (1996: 272).

With regard to these spaces of otherness, Gavin D’Costa (1998) draws out subtle but important distinctions between pluralism, exclusivism, and inclusivism. The first two approaches, he claims, define the Other in terms of the Self: either as the Same (pluralism) or as a negative Other (exclusivism). Inclusivism, on the other hand, can be ‘open’ or ‘closed’. The latter is expressed in claims, for example made by the Church, to have the truth of God; which means that it can recognise other religions if “others look like us, have our God, teach our doctrines” (D’Costa 1998: 37). It makes the Other Same insofar as they conform to ‘us’. For the alternative, ‘open inclusivism, D’Costa acknowledges Derridean *différance* in the relation of the same to the other.

A religious tradition may lay a claim to truth but “this truth is never our possession but, rather, we are possessed by it” (1998: 38). Consequently, D’Costa argues, we cannot control or limit the truth or claim to have a vantage point somewhere beyond it. Instead, it is in the surplus, the Derridean *différance,* that “genuine Otherness can become a question mark” to our religious self-understandings (1998: 39). He commends an open inclusivism since “the centrifugal force at the centre is not homogenizing the One, the Same”. Rather, in a gesture to deconstructive undecidability, “it is relational and dynamic, revealed and hidden, known and unknown, unpossessable yet possessing” in its relation of the same to other; that offers “the possibility of true communion with the stranger” (1998: 39).

Similarly, King argues that contemporary spirituality is concerned with self-transcendence, the recognition of the other and of interdependence. Together

with the search for meaning and purpose, it is a practice only possible in an open, secular society (King 1998: 96). Meany (1994) goes further by suggesting that human beings are brought into existence as a self *by* the Other. Batchelor (1998) claims meditations on change, uncertainty and emptiness help individuals understand and accept these existential conditions. By releasing the grip of self, he argues, we come to appreciate our own *contingency*, recognise our interrelatedness as “participants in the creation of a shared reality” (1998: 126, emphasis added). We can come to realise we are “nothing more than the stories we keep telling ourselves in our own minds and relating to others” in a complex web of narratives (ibid.).

On a slightly different tack, Bernice Martin (1998) shows how Pentecostalism in Latin America helps participants cope with rapid sociocultural and economic change. In shifting conditions of life, Pentecostalism is “the business of selfhood” (1998: 129). Like Batchelor, she asserts the role of personal narrative, the telling and retelling of stories of individual salvation. She finds that for these practising Pentecostals their faith grants them a degree of self-determination and a measure of control over their lives. Their congregational life offers “a route to new possibilities, to new experiences of selfhood, new patterns of individual *and* co-operative action, to skills and modes of response which have a real survival value in the secular world” (1998: 132 emphasis in original). Furthermore, Martin concludes, they are using their “newly discovered muscle” to challenge postmodern culture not from the margins but from “*within the heartlands of that culture itself”* (1998: 142 emphasis in original).

Conversely, Zygmunt Bauman (1998) reads in fundamentalism a negative reactivity. He claims that it is the “terror of insufficiency” that makes us susceptible to the religious message (1998: 60). The modern idea of human self-sufficiency weakened the grip of institutionalised religion. But in postmodernity, Bauman argues, an uncertainty over identity has created existential insecurities and stimulated a demand for identity experts, peak-experiences and consumption (1998: 68). There is nevertheless, “a specifically postmodern form of religion, born of internal contradictions in postmodern life, in which the insufficiency of man and the vanity of dreams to take human fate under human control are revealed” (1998: 72). Religious fundamentalism offers the full enjoyment of modern attractions

without paying its price: the agony of the individual condemned to self-sufficiency, self-reliance, and “a life of never fully-satisfying and trustworthy choice” (ibid.).

Thus, according to Bauman, religious fundamentalism promises to emancipate the converted from the agonies of choice. It belongs to a wider family of totalitarian solutions offered “to all those who find the burden of individual freedom excessive and unbearable (1998: 74). Choice-making entails uncertainty: fundamentalism puts security and certainty first and condemns everything that undermines it, especially the vagaries of individual freedom. It therefore legislates every aspect of life and thereby relieves the individual of the burden of responsibility. Postmodern religion is therefore described in slightly different ways by Martin and Bauman as a coping strategy in the face of disruptive change. It is the result of a search for stability, the recovery of control, or to alleviate the anxiety of bewildering choices that social, economic or cultural change presents us with. It supplies the means with which we can resist and go ‘against the flow’. Are we then to conclude that tradition supplies the stability and certainty that postmodernity otherwise deprives us of — an antidote to difference and change?

1.6.3. Reinventing Traditions

The claim that in postmodernity our traditions or grand narratives have been jettisoned, Heelas insists, is simply overstated. ‘Detraditionalization’ is nothing new, nor is the notion that it has put religion ‘beyond belief’ (1998: 7). While differentiation at the level of individual identity is widely noted, according to Paul Heelas (1998) postmodern ‘de-differentiation’ is associated only with the creation of *ephemeral* hybrids (1998: 7, emphasis added). At the same time, processes of differentiation proceed in microdiscourses and micronarratives “with no real author” (1998: 7, 9). Tradition does not slip away quietly.

In his earlier study of the *New Age Movement*, Heelas (1996) suggested that detraditionalization was necessary to those who think of tradition as a cultural barrier. He concludes that whereas traditionalized hierarchical religiosity is well-suited for the community, detraditionalized spirituality is suited to the individual. Ninian Smart (1998) observes, however, that detraditionalization is

always *novel* traditionalization; that is, the establishment of a new tradition. As a result, in the New Age type of religion people "make up their 'spiritual' traditions" as a bricolage out of elements of older religions (1998: 83). While tradition is handed down, it is also interpreted and projected back as we reinvent the past. Smart therefore disputes the idea that postmodernity is in a mode of detraditionalization. Rather, that "we are as busy as ever retraditionalizing" by inventing and reinventing traditions (1998: 87).

Ursula King (1998) is wary of the *reproduction* of tradition. Past spiritualities were "too prescriptive, too much embedded in an ascetic and mystical flight from the world, too much centred on self-denial, which could be self-destructive rather than a path to real growth and fuller being" (1998: 101). Inherited spiritualities are too closely tied to particular institutional settings, prescriptive teachings, doctrines, and external authorities. Henceforth, neither an historical or theological approach is "sufficient for the development of the spirituality our society needs today" (1998: 102). Rather, contemporary spirituality is at a crossroads. A return to the past and the revival of ancient spiritual ideals and instructions cannot bring about a genuine transformation of both consciousness and society (1998: 103). Yet the advance of globalisation, media and communications and the exchange of spiritual ideals make us increasingly conscious of the resources offered by our rich religious and spiritual heritage (ibid.). A case can be made therefore that spirituality and religion cannot be separated (e.g., Boyd 1994). Spirituality may be approached not as a "reassuring fortress clearly demarcated by the boundaries of tradition, narrowly defined and unchanging" but, King suggests, through the image of a "journey" (1998: 108). In the end, the spiritualities of the past can awaken and inspire us on the way but need to be "reformulated and reformed" through "the creative and critical rethinking of our traditions" (ibid.).

Heelas stresses the interplay of detraditionalisation and traditionalisation in turn interplaying with dedifferentiation and differentiation (1998: 9). King also regards postmodernism as a *process*: one "which results in a state of affairs or context described as postmodernity, a different condition, world or time from that which existed before now" (1998: 6). Moreover, according to King (1998), postmodernism acknowledges "the urgent need for profound personal and social transformation" (1998: 95). There is thus a process of "spiritualization" at work that

can accomplish this (1998: 108). However, she warns, spirituality cannot be an effective means to these transformations if it is accessible only to an educated elite or privileged class. Concerns about power and privilege in the church feature prominently in Richard Roberts (1998) contribution to the same volume. He points to the "failure of active intergenerational transmission" in a context in which religions and religiosities are otherwise thriving (1998: 209). If it is to avert terminal decline in postmodernity, Roberts urges that the increasingly marginal vested interests represented by the Church must abandon blatant hegemonies, enter into the dialectics of the human community, and re-create whatever it is that it has to offer (ibid.).

The question remains, however, can the Church abandon hegemonies and remain the 'Church'? Further, if it were to do so, would it spell the end of Christianity or just the Church? Even if it were possible to separate form from practice what would become of belief? Especially if the latter is something postmoderns are unwilling to simply accept as 'given'.

1.7. After the Church

Otherwise put, the practice of postmodern religion may no longer be confined or centred in a gathered congregation. Ursula King proposes an “interpenetrative model of spirituality” in which “we are all spiritually engaged” in actions that “construct and transform our world and ourselves” (1998: 3). It is a spiritual attitude interconnected with social action, “with ‘response-ability’ in the sense of being able to respond to all situations in the struggle of life for wholeness” (1998: 109). A culturally engaged spirituality aligned with social action is not necessarily entirely divorced from tradition, however. A similar form and practice can still be found at the margins of contemporary Christianity.

Scholarly inquiry into the religious appropriation of postmodern ideas and culture has recently turned its attention to the so-called ‘emergent church’ movement that took root in the early 2000s (see Jones 2008). The original participants were young seminary-trained leaders in the US debating the future of the church in contemporary culture (ibid.). Through this public conversation postmodern ideas and tropes have found their way into a discourse of ‘emergence’ (for example, Bielo 2011, Gibbs & Bolger 2005, Marti & Ganiel 2014, Mobsby 2007, Moody 2015, Tickle 2008).[7] Katharine Sarah Moody (2015) describes the contemporary ‘emerging church’ as “a loose, transnational association of individuals and collectives” that arose primarily in reaction to dominant modes of Western Christianity (2015: 11). It is a response to “a frustration with the rigidity of mainstream evangelical churches and their reluctance to engage with significant cultural change” (Guest 2007: 45). The movement has actively encouraged experimentation and innovation in practices, as well as a closer engagement with culture. At the same time, postmodernism has supplied the linguistic resources with which many participants have sought to re-articulate their faith.

The emerging church movement occupies a spectrum of alternative practices of Christianity. Its centre ground can be described as “post-evangelical” (Tomlinson 1994) and welcomes a “generous orthodoxy” (McLaren 2004). This emerging church discourse overlaps at many points with that of the ‘missional church’

[7] Leading figures in the emerging church movement prefer to speak of it as a ‘conversation’, signalling an openness towards the forms it may take or the practices that constitute it (see Jones 2008).

inspired by the missiology of Newbigin (1989) and Bosch (1991) amongst outward-looking evangelicals (Guder 1998). These ‘missional’ post-evangelicals have also been dubbed ‘reconstructionists’ (Driscoll 2006). Either side of the mission-oriented core of the emerging church movement, there is either less or more scope for departure from orthodoxy. Holding more closely to their evangelical heritage, ‘relevants’ may simply appropriate the genres and styles of contemporary culture to articulate orthodox Christian doctrines. At the other end of the emergent spectrum are found the more theologically liberal or progressive ‘revisionists’ who may embrace, to a greater or lesser extent, the radical theology inspired by postmodern continental philosophy (ibid.).

The first ethnographic study of the emerging churches in the US defined them as “communities that practice the way of Jesus *within* postmodern cultures” (Gibbs and Bolger 2006: 44, my emphasis. See also Mobsby 2007: 89-90). Recent empirical studies of these emergent groups reveal how participants articulate their developing spiritualities. Emergents are happy to talk in terms of a “deconstructed” personal faith (Moody 2015: 12). A major work describes “emerging Christians” as “misfits” and “outsiders” who “share a religious orientation built on a continual practice of deconstruction” (Marti and Ganiel 2014: 6, 16). Respondents emphasise the example and teachings of Jesus rather than doctrinal beliefs and engage in a discourse of ‘the kingdom’ rather than the Church. Moreover, they are open about their doubts and content with uncertainty. As one innovator put it, “what we discovered at ‘Jesus at a Pub’ was that many of our friends...needed a safe space to ask questions that have no good answers, to deconstruct their past experiences of church, and to voice the fragility of whatever faith they have” (2014: 13).

In his book about the ‘fresh expressions’ movement in the United Kingdom, a *Church for Every Context*, Michael Moynagh (2012) calls for new retraditionalised forms of church. He concludes a chapter on sociological perspectives with a clear manifesto for these ‘new churches’. He argues that they will need to connect with expressive selves who lead immanent lives, have a desire to be good, are increasingly sociable and insofar as they lay claim to a ‘spirituality’ prefer it in the form of a quest. He urges that churches will therefore need to become supportive communities that: engage with practical, everyday concerns, respond to ethical

desires, and connect transcendence to day-to-day realities. Moreover, Moynagh says, they need to offer a welcoming environment in which individuals can tread their own spiritual paths. Gibbs and Bolger (2005) characterise nine distinct practices of emerging churches. They include activities aimed at the transformation of the “secular realm”; living “highly communal lives”; and participation in the life of the community “as producers” (2005: 45).

Thus, emergent churches “promote individualism while at the same time providing a basis for community around shared experiences and relationships” (Marti and Ganiel 2014: 32). Furthermore, their practices are “deliberately open, inclusive, and drawn from a variety of traditions — all in an effort to make people feel comfortable and to allow them multiple paths to choose which religious practices work best for them” (ibid.). Finally, emerging Christians choose lifestyles that are inherently political as they “live out” their Christianity: “For them, Jesus’s mission was a political one on behalf of the poor and marginalised, so they seek to emulate Jesus by identifying with disadvantaged communities, or working for peace and reconciliation, through conventional political engagement...and choosing careers that enable them to work for social justice” (2014: 33).

Rodkey (2014) observes that many of these “emergent” Christian groups use the term “incarnational community”. But, he points out, “their doctrine remains loyal to a fixed, immutable Godhead who might be historically spoken of as a ‘Creator’ but is not creating, moving, or self-giving in any ultimate sense” (2014: 130). Wishing to draw a clearer distinction, Rodkey insists that: “Communal radical Christianity is extraordinary discourse, where one’s solipsistic journey is voiced, shared, compared, diverged, and biblically grafted with the help of others—a lived and living faith, a *chosen* faith, weakened and humbled by its own dynamism” (Rodkey 2014: 135, emphasis in original). Moreover, this radical Christianity, he claims, occupies the spaces of everyday discourse. Its ecclesial forms open communal space for the actualisation of a self-negation, through acts of community, justice, education, and liturgy.

Consequently, a more radical Christianity must equip and teach individuals, “how to engage and change the world in an *extraordinarily* Christ-like manner” (Rodkey 2014: 134, emphasis in original). Rodkey argues that, “radical Christian

communities seek to establish the Kingdom of God in the present, not simply or necessarily through social holiness but by radically reversing Godhead as Holy Spirit" (2014: 131). This radical rethinking means rethinking church and having an extraordinary discourse: "working *in spite of the* Church rather than *for the* Church" (2014: 135 emphasis in original).

1.7.1. Post-Christian Faith

Rodkey's post-ecclesial Christianity is rooted in death of God theology. But, as Santiago Zabala (2004) notes, "contrary to the view of a good deal of contemporary theology, the death of God is something post-Christian rather than anti-Christian" (2004: 2). Moreover, coming after the death of God, the post-Christian era is one in which secularisation has become the norm for all theological discourse (ibid.). Don Cupitt issues his appeal in somewhat bolder terms: "the age of authority, of grand institutions, of legitimating myths, and capital-T truth is over" (Cupitt 1998: 218). Cupitt insists that "in a pluralistic democratic society people are rightly suspicious of ideologies that make totalizing claims, and we should be content to propose Christianity as offering a form of life that...*rings true* to our sense of ourselves, *true to* the way things currently are, and *true to* our life as we now live it" (2001: 2, emphasis in original).

Similarly, for Caputo "religious truth is a truth without knowledge" since "undecidability is the reason that faith is faith and not Knowledge, and the way that faith can be true without Knowledge" (Caputo 2019 [2001]: 115, 128). For Cupitt the task is a reformation of a Christianity both *after* dogma and *after* the Church (Cupitt 2001: 2). Cupitt's assault on Christendom goes further than Kierkegaard who "like Bonhoeffer and the death of God theologians who followed, gave voice to the new anti-institutional, individualised Christian faith that stood in opposition between religion and society" (Robbins 2007: 8). It is from his non-realist epistemological position that Cupitt insists upon a practical, this-worldly faith purged of authoritarianism and triumphalism.

Grace Davie (2015) characterises the "subjective turn" (Heelas and Woodhead 2005) associated with the 'spiritual' as an emphasis on inner, subjective and

ineffable experience that stresses the importance of the individual as the arbiter of spiritual truth. She wonders whether the apparent rise of spirituality might in fact reflect a general decline in religious knowledge (Davie 2015)[8]. This deficit, she claims, has been to the detriment of the public discussion, indicating a role for religious education. She notes that the decline in religious knowledge and institutional participation has coincided with "a shift from a culture of obligation or duty to a culture of consumption or choice" (2015: 7). This leads her to wonder whether a growing market in 'spiritual goods' is simply an extension of the market per se. Like Davie, Turner (2012) also worries about the development of a "spiritual marketplace" for religious lifestyles exposing a "growing division between traditional 'religion' and modern 'spirituality'" (2012: 152). The latter has been captured by commercial interests engaged in a silent take-over of religion (King and Carrette 2004). It has commodified religion as a lifestyle choice which is "low on commitment, individualistic, and highly subjective" (Turner 2012: 138). This has the effect of liquidating the tension between religion and the world by flattening the relationship between the sacred and the secular (2012: 138, 139). For Turner, the consequences may be dire. Once religious practice has been submerged in the circulation of commodities as a lifestyle choice, he argues, it also loses its capacity to change societies. Religion's declining influence in the social domain is precisely because of its evaporation of transcendence (2012: 142).

Davie concludes from Heelas & Woodhead's (2005) findings that "spiritualities which engage with the depths of personal experience are faring better than religions that demand conformity to higher truth" (2015: 168). On this Cupitt and Davie are in agreement. But on that score too, Davie views spirituality as a 'foe' rather than a postmodern ally for a religion adapted to a post-Christian society. Cupitt's project to reform Christianity as a pluralistic, secular religion (2001) is shared by theologically liberal Progressive Christianity Network, many of whose leading figures, like John Spong (e.g., 2001) and Gretta Vosper (e.g., 2008), express non-theistic conceptions of God or roundly reject supernaturalism altogether. Unlike the emergent church in the US, progressive Christianity claims

[8] While Davie famously asserts that falling church attendance and continuing belief in the divine is evidence of 'believing without belonging', Abby Day (2011) finds instead that individuals have a framework of belief that prioritises belonging over *religious* belief. Many of her respondents report beliefs rooted in social relationships rather than the supernatural. They have a 'performative belief' that enables them to maintain important relationships, draw affiliative boundaries of belonging, and claim an identity. Day notes elsewhere with respect to religious beliefs, practices and identities that the more salient question for individuals is: 'what does this mean to me?' (Day 2016 [2008]).

its lineage in liberal Protestantism and appears to co-exist happily under the protective cloak of the mainline denominations. The radical theology of Rodkey and Caputo, on the other hand, occupies an ambiguous place within the wider landscape of contemporary religion and spirituality. According to Caputo (2013), it is parasitic upon, and thereby disrupts from within, the inherited theologies of confessional communities. As a second order reflection, radical theology is the 'messianic' promise that disturbs or 'haunts' religious tradition as the flowering of its possibilities (ibid.).

Jeffrey Robbins insists that a 'radical' theological understanding marks a shift from "transcendence and reformation" to "transformation and creativity". His concern is less with changing from one form of faith to another than with the social process of change itself. It is a vision for radical theology as one that "reads the tradition against itself by introducing new voices and placing the ontological, political, and cultural in the foreground" (2016: 160-161). Rather than existing in fixed and stable forms, 'religion' in contemporary culture may *insist* within fluid discursive networks of 'dis/associative' individuals, groups, or communities postulated by Moody (2015). It is in-between and within these collectives committed to a common cause, that a formless, invisible and silent faith might infiltrate and pervade the public sphere. In short, radical or postmodern religion might simply be the opening of faith in 'postsecular' society.

Religiosity *after* Christianity thus "lives only as a consequence of secularisation" (Robbins 2007: 95, also Vattimo 2002). As Robbins states this position, "the postsecular is not a repudiation or reversal of secularisation but is its historical and cultural consequence, which requires us to take note of the enduring existence of the religious" (Robbins 2016: 147). It is a change of mindset and a changed public perception of religion that heralds a revised politics concerning the role of religion in the public sphere (ibid.). Robbins equates the postsecular with the postmodern: "now that we live in the post-metaphysical age in which there are no absolute truths, only interpretations, the category of belief can again be taken seriously as constitutive of our lived traditions" (2007: 17). Caputo also insists that one of the most important things the word 'postmodern' would have meant, "had it not been ground senseless by overuse", is 'post-secular' (Caputo 2019: 39).

1.7.2. Postsecular Problems

The debate about postmodern religion has thus largely given way to the concept of postsecularity (e.g., Gorski et al. 2012). The latter may offer a better insight into the sharp decline in religious participation. Davie (1994) carefully traced the decline in post-war church attendance and offered an interpretation. Although fewer people were attending church, most retained a belief of some sort in ‘God’: they were ‘believing but not belonging’. For Brown (2001), however, the emerging picture is not merely the decline of the church in Britain but of Christianity itself. Whereas most historical and sociological studies focus on the visible and concrete ‘forms’ of Christianity, Brown appeals instead to a ‘Discursive Christianity’. Christianity is dead, Brown argues, insofar as it no longer enables people to construct their identities and sense of self.[9] The salience of a Christian discourse, he suggests, will be reflected in observable behaviours such as going to church. But they will also be discerned in the ‘voices’ of the people (2001). Secularisation, insofar as it is manifested in a decay in religiosity in its institutional, intellectual, functional and diffusive ‘forms’, will be signalled by a decay in religious discourse (ibid.).

In her updated (2015) study, Davie suggests that it has: “British people are losing the vocabulary, tools, and concepts they require in order to have a constructive conversation about faith” (2015: xiii). An alternative discourse of ‘spirituality’ has emerged instead (2015: 8). Therein lies a paradox: “on the one hand the process of secularisation continues; on the other, religion persists as a topic of discussion, indeed dispute, in the public sphere” (ibid.). Religion is today a very public discourse for which, Davie suggests, people are not linguistically equipped. Moreover, people now believe and belong in vastly different ways, she claims. This paradox consists then in two contemporary trends: a continuing process of secularisation in terms of declining participation in institutionalised forms of

[9] While Day (2011) finds a role for religious affiliation for a sense of belonging, Coleman and Collins (2016 [2004]) caution against a habitual conflation of religion with identity. An individual's motivations for expressing a commitment to a religious group or ideology are manifold; and religious practices may have only partial links to identity. Processes of identity formation are thus both malleable and promiscuous. A separable distinctive ‘religious identity’ is reductionistic. The question of religion’s role in forming a sense of identity and belonging must instead be located in wider socio-cultural movements such as globalisation and secularisation (2016: 3, 22).

religious practice; and, at the same time, the refusal of religion to be confined to the realm of private belief and its readmission to the public sphere.[10]

The flowering of the postsecular is heralded in the words of Hent de Vries (2006): “Religion’s reassigned place and renewed function in the public domain may owe their contours to the very theological traditions and practice, the systems of thought and sensibilities, whose authority they seek to curb or hold in check and whose explicit or subterranean workings—in words, things, gestures and powers—we have hardly begun to comprehend” (2006: 1). Perhaps, but de Vries cautions that if any meaning can be given to the ‘postsecular’ the answers to the questions it poses must be left in suspension (2006: 25). Nonetheless, he suggests there is no more urgent a project than “to inquire in what sense the legacies of ‘religion’ disarticulate and reconstellate themselves as the elementary forms of life in the twenty-first century” (ibid.).

The secularisation thesis has undergone important revisions, notably in the important works of Talal Asad (2003) and Charles Taylor (2007). The scholarly debate in the 1990s about ‘religion and postmodernity’ has converged during the 2000s into the debate over secularism. As Robbins (2007) puts it, “the future as charted by the champions of secularism, death of God theologians, and deconstructive philosophers has given way to a new ‘postsecular’ understanding of the postmodern in which the return of religion is more determinative than the collapse of Christendom" (2007: 11). It remains to be seen whether the ‘postsecular’ endures the revisions already underway to the secularisation thesis. It may mark an actual shift in the social world or it might instead represent an overzealous detection of a turning point in the historical road (Gorski et al. 2012).

Jürgen Habermas (2005, also 2008) has been credited with detecting this broader change in what he calls a religious consciousness. The secular awareness of living in a post-secular society, he argues, articulates a broadly post-metaphysical mindset in contemporary Western society (ibid.). It is “the secular counterpart to a religious consciousness that has become self-reflexive” (2005: 12). The

[10] The paradox to which Davie refers, like the notion of the postsecular, presumes a clear dichotomy between the ‘private’ and ‘public’ realms. The discursive construction of these categories is not challenged critically in sociological literature. Indeed, Bruce (1995) affirms this division in modern societies and claims that, far from claiming a new role, religious participation in the public sphere secularises their discourse. Thus, secularisation confines religious discourse to the private sphere and does not in fact admit religion into the public sphere on its own terms.

postmetaphysical mindset, he suggests, draws a strict line between faith and knowledge. Moreover, it also “rejects a narrow scientistic conception of reason and the exclusion of religious doctrines from the genealogy of reason” (ibid.). As a result, it is prepared to learn from religion while, according to Habermas, it remains strictly agnostic: the certainties of faith are held to be distinct from public claims to validity. At the same time, the postmetaphysical mindset refrains from critiquing religious ideas on strictly rationalist grounds. There is, therefore, in the postsecular age a certain ambivalence to religion which Habermas claims secular citizens must adopt “if they are to be able and willing to learn something from religious contributions to public debates” (2005: 13).

From the perspective of the religious citizens, however, participation in reasoned public discourse imposes a heavy burden. Their entry into Habermas’ public sphere requires that religious individuals translate their religious norms into a secular idiom (Dillon 2012). The communicative rationality demanded by Habermas’ presumes that religious participants “discard the specifically religious vocabulary that penetrates their experiences, worldviews, and everyday language, and they have to be self-reflexive in the process” (2012: 258). Although Habermas seems willing to offer a concession on this point, whether the use of religious language in public debates distorts the postsecular dialogical process depends on how it is received by ‘secular citizens’ (ibid.). He fails to appreciate the contested nature of religious ideas, the centrality of spirituality, its emotional aspects, and the role of tradition. Moreover, his account of the post-secular doesn’t fully recognise its already mutually entangled relation with the secular (2012: 250, also Bender 2012).

Taking Taylor (2007) as his point of departure, Mendieta (2012) inquires instead into the role of religion among “the sources of subjective reflexivity and intersubjective relationality” (2012: 310). He argues that the notion of the ‘post-secular’ offers a more expansive and substantive understanding of subjective reflexivity. Both secularity and post-secularity are linked to postsecular *authenticity*: a kind of agency-subjectivity that has come of age (2012: 311, 327). Mendieta thus offers a Habermasian concept of ‘post-secular authenticity’ to recover an otherwise “inchoate notion” (ibid.). Being oneself, he argues, presupposes that we come to terms with our existential incertitude and corporeal

vulnerability. This is not something we can accomplish alone but in an encounter with others: “to be oneself is precisely to come to oneself by way of others, those who both enable or constrain our possibilities” (2012: 328).

Furthermore, we are ourselves precisely because we express, as *languaged* creatures, our sense of what it means to be ourselves in a given social situation. Every speech act depends on “the possibility of social agents expressing their subjective worlds” (2012: 329). There can therefore be no expressiveness without aesthetic creativity. Post-secular authenticity is a project of “becoming oneself” that intermingles freedom, expressiveness and creativity. The post-secular authentic subject who participates in a Habermasian discourse ethics is therefore a moral agent engaged in “dialogical cosmopolitanism” (ibid.).

1.7.3. Religion Takes Flight

According to these accounts of post-secularity, postmodern religion is in some sense a ‘public religion’ (Casanova 1994). However, its public status in a post-secular society cannot be founded on the “authority and constraint” of the organised religion of a powerful institution and thus must pose no threat to the freedom of the self and of others (Asad 2003: ch. 6). Its contribution to public debate, like any other, relies only on powers of persuasion (ibid). If, however, adherents of a religion enter the public sphere occupied by secular reason, Asad asks, does their entry leave the preexisting discursive structure intact? Put another way, how are the presumed boundaries between the ‘religious’ and the ‘secular’ to be drawn when the former becomes politically active on a wider field?

Talal Asad (2003) suggests that: “far from having to prove to existing authority that it is no threat to dominant values, a religion that enters political debate *on its own terms* may on the contrary have to threaten the authority of existing assumptions” (2003: ch. 6, emphasis in original). To the postsecular argument that religion can enrich public argument in political debates he asks: “what authority do religious spokespersons have in this regard?” (Asad 2003: ch. 6). As Bauman (2000) observes: “To people confident of their power to change things, ‘progress’ is an axiom. To people who feel that things fall out of their hands, the idea of progress

would not occur and would be laughable if heard" (2000: 132). Trust in progress, he suggests, is instead "unsteady and rickety" and we find "the conspicuous absence of an agency able to 'move the world forward'" (2000: 133). The agencies of political life remain where 'liquid modernity' finds them, Bauman observes, tied to their respective localities; while "power flows well beyond their reach" (ibid.). As a result, it is no longer obvious "what *the* agency—any agency—should do to improve the shape of the world in the unlikely case that it is powerful enough to do it" (2000: 134, my emphasis).

According to this view, agency is not inevitable, especially any form of collective agency, due largely to the fragility of social relations in liquid modernity. In her theory of practice, Sherry Ortner (2006) upholds two contrasting versions of agency. One is the agency of unequal power, associated with relations of domination and resistance. The other, an "agency of projects" which concerns culturally-formed intentions, purposes and desires (2006: 144). Although the latter can be disrupted by unequal relations of power, the less-powerful seek to nourish and protect their agency from the margins. Membership in a particular discursive community is thus no guarantor of agency. The resources for agency may be unequally distributed amongst the members, not all of whom therefore necessarily experience a sense of agency. Nevertheless, an 'agency of projects', offers an alternative formulation of religious practice and experience. We may think of religion in terms of a personal or collective project from which a sense of agency arising from one's participation may be ascribed a religious or spiritual valence.

To address these questions of social, ethical or political agency, scholars have examined congregations empirically from the bottom-up. But they have also searched for the 'religious' in different settings. Ethnography has been a method of choice in the examination of public religion engaged in 'secular' activities. We must therefore investigate the possibility that religion, far from going away, has instead become a fugitive hiding in plain sight. Rather than disappearing, 'religion' has escaped into the world; breaking-out or breaking-in to secular spaces, showing up incognito as an uninvited guest. In the final section of this review of liquid forms of faith, we shall look at the *empirical* evidence for a public religiosity redefining its relationship to the 'world' as a more or less visible agency of social change.

1.8. Fugitive Faith

In the foregoing survey of the literature, we have discovered two main themes. First, the declining participation in traditional forms of institutional religion and the turn to eclectic 'postmodern' spiritualities. Second, the emergence of alternative, post-ecclesial or 'deconstructed' forms of public religiosity. The resulting paradox, noted by Davie (2015), concerns a displacement of meaningful practice. No longer cloistered behind church walls, 'religion' is instead practiced outwardly in 'the world'.

Are we therefore witnessing the dissolution of 'religion' as a social form? If so, a version of the secularisation thesis may still hold. The *public* practice of *privately*-held beliefs simply preserves one distinction while dispensing with another: the secular/religious divide. Conversely, the blurring of the secular-religion boundary may be precisely the discursive shift that dissolves altogether the notion that religion is a public *or* a private matter.[11] As we shall later discuss, a space may open up in-between for alternative practices of *being in-common*. The possibility that a 'spirituality' may be at work in the production of an open, inclusive and heterogenous political space will be pursued through a case study of Quakers.

Our more immediate task, however, is to briefly survey the *empirical* and *ethnographic* evidence for a 'fugitive' faith that is neither spatially or discursively contained. Introducing the idea of its 'deprivatization', José Casanova remarked that sometime during the 1980s religion "went public" (1994: ch. 1). By entering the public sphere it thereby gained publicity and various publics began to pay attention to it. Important social and political events such as the Islamic revolution in Iran, the rise of the Solidarity movement in Poland, the Sandinista revolution all revealed the pervasive role of religion in late modernity. As Casanova notes, "simultaneously, religious activists and churches were becoming deeply involved in struggles for liberation, justice and democracy throughout the world" (ibid.). The idea of 'deprivatization' marked the refusal of religious traditions to accept the

[11] The public/private distinction has the additional effect of separating the domains of 'religion' and 'politics' as institutions rather than as alternative ways of describing discursive formations constituted by signifying practices that blur these categories (e.g., May et al. 2014).

marginal and privatized role assigned to them by theories of secularization and modernity (ibid.).

Matthew Engelke's (2013) ethnographic account of the Bible Society and *Theos* think-tank offers a carefully nuanced view of Christianity as a 'public religion'. His central argument is that contemporary formations of the secular cannot be understood simply as 'public religion' without attention to the dynamics of publicity. The Bible Society has, according to Engelke, positioned itself squarely within the commercial realm. But at the same time, it has "never renounced the importance of Christian charity or a sense of Christian community" (2013: 7). It has instead turned the process of secularisation to its advantage. Engelke describes the Bible Society as an 'organisation of Christians'. Its members "came together as private believers in a public body" (2013: 3). This allows them to navigate theological differences and find solidarity in their shared commitment to the "primacy and power of the Bible" (ibid.). Consequently, everything got refracted through concerns with public representation and circulation: it was the public sphere and public culture that mattered. Their publicity efforts were "conditioned by a long-standing institutional effort to keep faith 'private', at least in certain times, ways, and places" (2013: 17).

Thus, Engelke finds a complex relation between private belief and public religion. With respect to the former he discovers considerable differences. But with respect to its public mission, Engelke finds a shared commitment that draws on the legacy of earlier Christian social reformers such as Wilberforce. In the words of one of his participants, "we're called, here and now, to be instruments of God's new creation, the world-put-to-rights" (2013: 19). For these Bible advocates, "scripture should be imbibed, embodied, lived out" (2013: 19). The prevailing "idea of 'Church-Culture' split" nevertheless persists in such a way that "the logic of secularism continues to shape this strand of Christian social action". Bible advocacy thus approaches the task of social transformation "by working with rather than against the discourse of the day" (2013: 231). For these Christians employed by a faith-based organisation straddling the religious-secular boundaries, engaged with contemporary culture, the relation between the church and the world appears to be complex. But, we may then ask, what of the boundaries that continue to define the 'inside' and

‘outside’ of more traditional discursive formations: the congregations that gather to worship each Sunday?

1.8.1. Worship and the World

In his book *Public Worship and Public Work*, Christian Scharen (2004) explores the relation between religious practice and agency ‘in the world’. He asks, “does Christian worship form a people committed to the good of a broader public life?” (2004: 10). To answer this Scharen undertakes an ethnographic study of three quite different church congregations in the United States.

Scharen accepts from the outset the view that the “church’s integrity” depends on it having “a coherent culture distinct from that of its host society” (2004: 11-12). This is the “church-world distinction” (2004: 206). He resists, however, its associated social ethic: that as a ‘counter-society’ churches model an ideal community rather than assume a responsibility for public well-being. Adopting instead a ‘character ethics paradigm’, Scharen embarks on an examination of the effects of corporate worship on the social-ethical commitments of these congregations. As he explains, almost as soon as he began his field work he came to realise that: “the key issue in understanding congregational commitment to public life does not lie in its worship” (2004: 13). Although liturgy is important, he argues, it became immediately clear that for his research participants “it’s the community that makes the church, not the liturgy” (2004: 15). The heart of the matter, he found, “had something to do with the power of a congregation’s communal identity” (ibid.).

Scharen states his conclusions clearly: “that sociologically uninformed dichotomies between the church and the world, because of the simplistic and holistic understanding of culture implied, really harm their own efforts to better lead the church in *being* the church...” (2004: 207, my emphasis). Viewing church congregations through a “crude cultural lens”, he suggests, one cannot see “the ways in which they are bound up with the world in their very ways of being church” (2004: 207). Instead, Scharen identifies multiple sources of communal identity for each congregation: social context; member’s social worlds; denomination or polity;

local culture and history; and the dominant ecclesiology. These components of communal identity lead to considerations of the leadership in the three local churches: “the strength of congregational identity in each directly parallels the relative strength of the leadership” (2004: 219).

Scharen’s ‘interaction model’ for relating worship to ethics describes how social forces become social resources that contribute to each congregation’s identity-based “sense of public” (2004: 220). In this account, ‘worship’ is “less formation as con-formation” of what is important in life (2004: 221). Worship “gives shape to one’s senses, affections, habits of feeling and thinking thinking and believing and behaving” (ibid.). This formation “happens in ways that ‘fit’ the dominant ethos of the congregation, the acquired habitus of the members” (ibid.). Particular churches are thereby led to worship in a certain way, Scharen suggests, “that embodies a vision of who they understand themselves to be” (2004: 222).

However, this interpretation does not challenge the starting assumption that ‘worship’ forms moral character. At the end of his study, Scharen acknowledges that his data does not always support this view. Rather, some members joined the church due to a prior “moral commitment to the congregation’s stand for justice in the world” (2004: 224). That commitment was deepened through their participation in the “public work” of the congregation, while their appreciation for worship grew more slowly (2004: 224). What does this prior commitment mean for the presupposed ‘church-world’ distinction with which Scharen frames his study? More specifically, what are the implications for the construction of a dichotomy in which a particular form of ‘spiritual’ practice—worship—must lie on the side of ‘church’ rather than ‘world’? This forecloses a possible re-articulation of ‘worship’ as a practice in and of the ‘world’ that may deconstruct the church-world distinction altogether.

1.8.2. Faith-Based Action

Once the church-world boundary becomes undecidable, the distinction between social action and religious practice may also become unclear. If so, in a de-privatised, deterritorialized, virtualized, mediatised and digitally interconnected

world (de Vries 2006), faith-based action need not be easily confined to the public works of definable worshipping congregations. A politico-religious *agency* may instead be discovered in a wide range of contexts beyond the liturgical setting. One fruitful context for these empirical inquiries has been in humanitarian aid and relief.

Robert Wuthnow (1991) explores whether and how *Acts of Compassion* outside religious settings are motivated by religious commitments or, in more complex ways, by the self-care needs satisfied by volunteering. What Rebecca Allahyari (2000) calls 'moral selving' involves transforming the experiences of an underlying moral self rather than expressing a situated identity. Through their work among the homeless, the volunteers that Allahyari studied express a desire to change their 'moral self' which she views as a more malleable conception than a positioned 'religious' identity. She describes moral selving as shaping, striving, creating, building and sculpting. Through their work in feeding the urban poor, Allahyari argues that volunteers are also doing self work by drawing on moral rhetoric and biographical experiences. In other words, they construct their sense of being a moral self by appropriating discourses and creating narratives.

Similarly, Erica Bornstein (2012) describes the emergence of "volunteer experience" as something of value in the context of humanitarian work in India (2012: 21). The experience is a goal in itself. It is that of being "in the moment" that de-emphasises the formal 'outcomes' for those in need pursued by the voluntary organisation (ibid.). Consequently, volunteers find that their experience of "giving and being in the moment recasts traditional religious motifs in a new secular form" (2012: 21). Indian humanitarian groups assert an experience of volunteering that is more authentic or 'real' than ordinary experiences. According to Courtney Bender and Ann Taves (2012), experience "is thus both something that happens but also something that people shape, argue over, and strive to find" (2012: 21). As they do so, experience "bridges or complicates" the designations of secular, religious and spiritual (ibid.).

The blurring of these categories is also evident in ethnographies of faith-based organisations such as Christian NGOs who operate in the 'secular' world of international development but within the everyday contexts of local community life.

In her ethnographic account of faith-based development NGOs in Zimbabwe, Bornstein (2005) employs the concept of religion supplied by Geertz (1973) as a model for, and a model of, lived reality. Through the “systematic use” of religious beliefs, Bornstein suggests, “meaning is made in and of the world” (2005: 2). According to Bornstein, these cultural systems of belief link experiences of the material world with “conceptions of the spiritual realm” in processes that enable individuals to “order their world and make sense of experience” (ibid.). Consequently, shared religious beliefs also inform the way socioeconomic development is “planned, conceptualised, motivated and instituted” (2005: 2). This complicates a simple secular-religious distinction.

The Christian NGOs studied by Bornstein employed a “discourse of participation” that sacralised the idea of ‘community’ and “transformed development into a religious act” (2005: 119). Running alongside the appropriated (teleological) grammar of participatory development, Bornstein suggests, is “the Protestant discourse of individualism that speaks to a God-given potential for change” (ibid.). The task for NGO staff is to become “invisible agents of change in the process of changing and transforming communities from within” (2005: 120, 135). The participation of those they are trying to help rests crucially on the latter being “inspired about the possibility of change” through a process of developing a unified “community vision” (2005: 119, 135). The Christian development workers saw themselves as “unlocking” a “God-given” potential for change through discursive practices that silenced other discourses (ibid.). According to Bornstein, the latter included alternative discourses of “governance and responsibility, of entitlement, or the welfare state” in which the state might be cast as the agent responsible for the well-being of its citizens (ibid.).

Bornstein concludes that the faith of Christian development forms sites of struggle over meanings, as well as over financial accountability and met or unmet expectations. The discourse is neither neutral or secular: a proselytizing agenda is always implicitly or explicitly present. However, unlike ‘secular development’, its faith-based counterpart “provides a space in which to negotiate and contest realms...such as good, evil, morality and witchcraft” (2005: 170). Through the language of faith, Christian NGOs therefore “provide a discursive space to negotiate the morality and injustices of poverty” (2005: 172). She is left to wonder

whether the neoliberal consensus in development is not so secular afterall (2005: 170). Her ethnographic account reveals the ambiguities concerning religious and secular categories are produced in the public context.

1.8.3. Into the Grey Zone

In a similar vein, Michael Barnett and Janice Stein (2012) examine the processes of "secularisation" and "sanctification" by which this blurring of distinctions occurs in humanitarian work. The contributions to their volume reveal that secularisation and sanctification are multilayered, multidimensional, and multilinear processes that shape one another. Secularisation "proceeds in distinctive ways in public and private life and in changing forms and scope of authority relations; it creates functional differentiation in society and alters patterns of religious practice, belief and worship" (ibid.). They argue that secularising trends, such as the focus on efficiency and outcomes, can crowd out the sacred principles for religious agencies, reducing space for a sense of vocation. Both religious and secular agencies worry that a *spirit of* voluntarism is being lost under pressure from donors to professionalise their staff and ensure transparency of its processes and finances. Thus, secularisation and sanctification have a rich multiplicity of meanings that are being "constantly debated, fixed and reimagined" (2012: 10).

By avoiding a fixed definition of 'religion', Barnett and Stein (2012) direct their attention instead to 'family resemblances' in order to identify a "set of beliefs, commitments and institutionalised practices that combine to produce an entity that can be defined as more or less religious" (2012: 16). This, they suggest, "permits the identification of shades of grey in a world otherwise defined in black and white" and invites comparison between organised beliefs conventionally defined as religious and those that are not (ibid). Consequently, the sacred cannot be reduced to religion and the sacred can exist within secularism itself. In the context of humanitarian aid, the boundaries between secular and religious organisations are fuzzy "since humanitarian values embody the sacred for both" (2012: 23). However, since the exact meaning of the sacred differs for 'secular' and religious organisations, a space is opened up for contestation, claims of legitimacy and illegitimacy, charges of appropriation and misappropriation (2012: 29). As a result,

the historical tendency of religious organisations "to separate in the name of purity" remains "a risk" for contemporary humanitarianism (ibid.). In general, such fragmentation results in a blurring and re-sharpening of religious-secular boundaries. Thus, as humanitarians act to alleviate suffering in the twenty-first century, "the encounter with the religious and the secular takes on new forms and meanings" (2012: 29).

Researchers have collected examples of apparently successful collaboration with faith-based organisations by international development agencies (Belshaw et al. 2001, Marshall & Keough 2004, Marshall & Van Saanen 2007). The purpose of these collections is to demonstrate to multilateral agencies the benefits of partnership with local religious organisations. Jeremy Carrette (2018) has explored the rationale, legitimacy and influence of religious NGOs working within the United Nations system. Religion, he suggests, emerges within the UN system as a *process* rather than as an object one may observe. Religious actors, therefore, can only be understood through processes in which they are either visible or invisible at different strategic points (ibid.). Carrette shows that, once the shift is made from religion-as-thing to religion-as-discourse, religion can be seen as a living process; a 'fluidity of interactions' in decision-making, that necessarily disrupts the usual essentialised categories.

Furthermore, even if the institution is the result of interventions in a social structure, it is these processes that shape religion as a discourse and practice. It is into the totality of these intervening processes that religion can be found to be embedded (Carrette 2018). Carrette identifies five types of discourse about religion in the UN system and correlates these to an order of power that may be more or less visible. The discourses are: religion as institutional organisation; religion as collective identity; religion as belief / practice; religion as civil action; and finally religion as private ethical motivation. While the last of these is invisible, the first is more clearly visible. Put another way, religion shows up in the UN system as: ideas, a set of values, or a group / identity. Insofar as ideas and values motivate action, an invisible religiosity is present in the UN system without concrete form.

1.8.4. Deciding What Matters

Carrette's study reveals how religious NGOs operate within these wider institutional processes; and that religious language articulates different significance at various levels of the UN system. All actors, however, have to play by the rules established by the dominant discourse. Consequently, some religious meanings are difficult to classify as such as they have evolved towards a more secular form to be effective; others avoid overt religious language altogether. This illustrates that, beyond the recognisably 'religious sphere', the boundary between the religious and non-religious discourse is less clear cut (Bush 2018).

With similar concerns in mind, Bender and Taves (2012) ask: "How do people in our secular (or not so secular) age decide what matters, what goals to pursue, and what things are of most value?" (2012: 1). In their attempt to answer this question, they note first that processes of valuation and the making of meaning take place across a wide spectrum of settings, events, and organizations. Experiences of things of value take shape in tandem with identifying their various projects and pursuits *as* secular, religious, or spiritual. In other words, experience and evaluation occur concurrently and may be framed or expressed in either secular or religious terms. Furthermore, the experience may be valued in these terms regardless of whether these actions successfully effect social change.

The ethnographic accounts of "dispersed projects of valuation" collected by Bender and Taves reveal "the way people in practice complicate a simple 'secular-religious' frame" (2012: 2). Moreover, they test the limits of the secular-religious binary relation by showing how "in many secular spaces, terms and concepts (and experiences) people consider 'spiritual' interact with and inflect either 'religion' or 'secularity'" (2012: 3). They blur the categorical distinctions often employed by scholars that link 'spirits' with a world of enchantments as opposed to the disenchanted space of the secular. Bender and Taves argue from the ethnographic data that 'spirituality' is, in fact, frequently invoked as an aspect of secularity. People use the terms 'spirituality' or 'spirits' to "describe experiences and denote positions and aspirations that are 'more than' or 'move beyond' either secularity or religion" (2012: 6).

Thus, ‘spirituality’ serves a linguistic purpose in both secular or religious contexts to mark something as transcending the secular-religious binary. Accordingly, “it is a discursive practice that, in marking value, participates in its creation and, at the same time, highlights the felt need of many—both scholars and non-scholars—to expand upon the secular-religious binary when seeking to designate what matters” (2012: 8). These expanded resources, “create possibilities for marking, creating and experiencing things of value” (2012: 9). They provide their users with “a sense of possibility and power” as well as limits (ibid.). Valorisation occurs “amidst a web of discourses and authorities that combine to simultaneously identify what matters and authorise that identification” (2012: 28).

Carrette, Barnett and Stein, and Bender and Taves each show that the ‘going public’ of religion ‘blurs’ boundaries by disarticulating sedimented structures of meaning. Thus by appropriating and re-articulating floating elements, new significations of thought, speech and action are possible. These enable new identifications to be made, albeit incompletely (Glynos and Howarth 2008), with subject positions hitherto unavailable. New identifications with ‘what matters’ constitute *new* ways of being which, if deemed especially significant, may also be designated ‘spiritual’ (Taves 2009). What was remarkable in the 1980s for Casanova was the emergence of social movements that were either “religious in nature or are challenging in the name of religion the legitimacy and autonomy of the primary secular spheres, the state and the market economy” (1994: ch. 1).

John Caputo demurs that in fact “God never went away in the general population” and that academics are simply waking up to this fact (Robbins 2007: 153). It is the realisation that “God is an irreducible form of discourse” and “religious discourse is an irreducible way we have of speaking and thinking about our lives, one of the irreducible ways in which we understand ourselves” (2007: 153). In which case, religion has never been a purely private matter. Instead, the course of modern subjectivity has been reversed “by demonstrating how personal and social identity is a product of social construction, how knowledge is intertwined with power, and how the presumably private and interior life of religion is always already public and political (Robbins 2007: 12). This conclusion is supported by the ethnographic inquiries described above. By signifying, valorising, and identifying with ‘what

matters' postmodern 'religion' may find a new liveliness that is neither institutionally cloistered nor linguistically constrained.

At the end of this review of 'postmodern religion', we find a distinction which is increasingly hard to pin down. Religion has dissolved into other categories of thought and action. We are left instead grasping at discursive and semiotic processes; the practices of meaning-making, of articulating values, and agreeing on 'what matters'. The intangibility and invisibility of religion appears to be the hallmark of its postmodern credentials. The 'thinginess' of religion in postmodernity has been found to be unfounded. An uncertain religiosity may, nonetheless, be found alive and well in its post-mortem condition. The spirit of religion silently stalks the public square but does not belong anywhere in particular. In the following chapter we shall resume our journey in the company of those whose fugitive kind of faith begs a question: Is the absent presence of a radicalised religion in these liquid times in fact a gift from the Quakers?

2. The Roots of Radicalism

In this chapter I shall reconsider the legacy left by the early Quakers and how they continue to inform the religious life of spiritual seekers today. We shall examine closely the seventeenth century roots of a ‘radical’ religious commitment to social change through the spiritual practice of politics. As we shall see, their early history features prominently in attempts by Quakers to rearticulate their faith and secure its future. Before we look closely at the emergence of ‘radical religion’ in post-revolutionary England, we shall first consider the contemporary politics of Quaker religion. I will sketch the contours of a vibrant debate among Friends as they try to re-articulate what it means to be a Quaker today. Friends may do so in different ways, agreeing nevertheless that Quakerism has had an important influence on social and religious life in England and elsewhere over nearly four centuries.

2.1. A Gift From the Quakers?

In *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why*, Phyllis Tickle (2008) discusses the advent of ‘networked authority’ to the church as a self-organising system (2008: 152). In a section entitled, ‘A Gift from the Quakers’, Tickle suggests this innovation can be traced back to a seventeenth century sect that: “from the beginning had a distinctly ‘other’ easiness with the paradoxical interplay of revelation, discernment, and Scripture in the life and governance of the body of Christ on earth” (2008: 154). It is in virtue of the insights of early Quakers that Tickle suggests new forms of church have moved beyond a previous ‘bounded set’ way of thinking.[12] Quakerism has bestowed a ‘gift’ to emerging forms of Christianity; a kind of mysticism that is “totally postmodern” (2008: 159).

Repaying the compliment, C. Wess Daniels claims that ‘convergent’ Quakers are likewise concerned with an “indigenous expression of faith” within a “convergence culture” (2010: 241, Jenkins 2006). Consequently, Quakerism can achieve a ‘convergence’ between emergence and the tradition established by early Friends

[12] Instead, Tickle adopts the alternative ‘centred set’ model of a movement *towards*.

(Daniels 2010, 2015). Quakers embody a common desire to “renew their tradition through a growing awareness of the need to interact with culture missionally” (2010: 236). Moreover, they are enabled by postmodern culture to “question what it means to be faithful to their tradition (conservative) while re-imaging it within a new cultural context (emergent)” (2010: 240). Daniels’ articulates ‘Convergent Quaker’ as a kind of hybrid subject position at the intersection of two discourses: traditional Quakerism and the emergent church. He is able to perform a re-articulation in the context of an evangelical branch of Quakerism in the US that shares a discursive field with ‘emergents’.

British Quakers, on the other hand, inhabit a different terrain as inheritors of a modernist Liberal tradition (Dandelion 2007). With its twentieth century pluralisation came a shift away from the assumption that to be a Quaker also meant being a Christian. While a majority of Quakers today still identify as Christian, the precise proportion is uncertain. According to one survey (Dandelion 1996), 51% of British described themselves as Christian. Further studies in 2005 and 2006 found that as many as 81% identified as Christian (Mellor 2008). Furthermore, although 90% of those surveyed in 2006 claimed to believe in God, a growing minority of Quakers describe themselves as non-theistic, agnostic or atheist. However, there is considerable ambiguity amongst Quakers concerning the precise meanings of these terms since Friends may hold to very different conceptions of the Divine (Boulton 2006). Consequently, Friends today offer many definitions of Quaker faith (Plüss 1998) with the result that Quaker identity is no longer expressed in terms of a theology (Pilgrim 2004: 219).

2.1.1. Faith Beyond Belief

As a result, contemporary British Friends may deny that Quakers have beliefs as such or that Quakerism is a belief system at all (Plüss 1998: 234). These Quakers may “object in principle to the formulation of ideas as carrying authority” (ibid.). Others view beliefs as a more or less defined set of ideas, such as those associated with Christianity, or else as the ‘inward light’. While still others prefer to regard beliefs as fluid or the result of a search. However, none of these alternative standpoints invalidate the common claim that Quaker beliefs, as individually held,

are nonetheless grounded in spiritual experience (ibid.). The diverse and contradictory views expressed by Friends are viewed instead as insightful interpretations of the meaning of a shared experience (1998: 236). As a result of the ‘radical turn’ taken by what Dandelion calls ‘liberal-Liberal Quakerism’ “belief is pluralised, privatised, but also marginalised” (Dandelion 2007: 134). Instead of adhering to a fixed and shared set of beliefs, the Liberal tradition of Quakerism that survives in Britain holds to four core tenets: the primacy of experience; a faith relevant to the age; openness to change or what Friends call ‘new Light’; and ‘progressivism’ in the sense that new revelation has greater authority than the old (2007: 129-30). These features, characteristic of modernism, are difficult to regulate owing to the lack of external accountability “beyond the collective interpretation of pure experience” (2007: 133). It marks a Quakerism that, while based in the past, is “potentially forever on the move” (ibid.).

Quakerism exhibits instead a ‘double-culture’ of a strict adherence to ‘form’ given by an unstated ‘behavioural creed’ (Dandelion 2007: 134, 136, also Dandelion 2008). The latter serves to mask theological differences. While ‘God’ may be mentioned in worship, expressions of theology or personal beliefs are avoided, and any God-talk is rare outside the worship event, Dandelion observes (2007: 145). According to Francesca Montemaggi, newcomers to Quakers: “identify with Quaker theological openness [and a] liberal morality with a focus on acceptance of diversity and spiritual seeking” that they don’t find in Christian churches (2018: 2). They feel ‘at home’ because they are accepted as individuals and may suffer marginalisation in other contexts—for example, as LGBT or disabled people (ibid.). Their rejection of the cultural hegemony of Christianity in Britain is however “part of the wider shift away from—what are felt to be—bureaucratic, hierarchical and doctrinal religious forms, towards a more fluid religiosity that emphasises individual self-expression and human relationships” (2018: 2).

In her survey of 225 Quakers in Britain, Montemaggi found that new Quakers often moved away from a church “from which they found themselves theologically or culturally distant” (2018: 5). She found that the most common reason offered for leaving churches was an unease with Christianity, especially doctrinal statements, hymn lyrics and church literature (ibid.). Indeed, some of Montemaggi’s interviewees came to Quakerism “after difficult experiences of Christian churches”

and often due to a perceived lack of questioning and critical thinking. They are looking for an environment in which both their spiritual and intellectual needs could be met (2018: 6).

2.1.2. Syncretism and Inclusion

The newcomers characterised by Montemaggi correspond closely to a grouping within contemporary Quakerism that Pilgrim (2004, 2008) identifies as "syncretists". The latter differ in important respects from those she defines as 'Exclusivists' and 'Inclusivists'. Most Quakers are inclusivists but some express reservations that openness has been misconstrued as 'anything goes' (2004: 220). The exclusivists, on the other hand, are disturbed by the erosion of an explicitly Christian emphasis in worship and, thus, in terms of the collective identity of the Quakers as a Christian group. The syncretists, by contrast, comprise those concerned about their personal spiritual quest, rather than with theological certainty (ibid.). They are more likely to practise an eclectic spirituality that borrows from different traditions. Since there is no clear boundary between inclusivists and syncretists, newcomers are likely to fall into either or both groups. Syncretists are Friends who feel most disconnected or alienated from traditional religion and sceptical towards fixed systems of belief (2004: 221).

Pilgrim argues that people who join Quakers are likely to be attracted to its 'heterotopic' stance as a site of Otherness but also to its 'utopic' vision which early Friends understood as a 'call' to establish the conditions for God's Kingdom on Earth (2004: 217, 221). But by giving an audience to transgressive voices, 'syncretist' Friends can recognise the spiritual explorations of each other as a source of unity (ibid.). She cautions, however, against Quakerism becoming a 'spiritual marketplace', losing its external distinctiveness and Quakers their sense of identity as being Other (ibid.). If, on the other hand, the Otherness of Quakers is about offering a 'utopic space' where alternatives can be explored and practiced, the distinctiveness of contemporary Quakers as a group may remain intact (2004: 222). But she notes that the "utopian vision quest of Quakerism with regard to peace, justice and social equality has become mainstream within the wider society" (2004: 222). Even the "testimony to living simply has become conflated

with environmental and ‘green’ issues” (ibid.). What is distinctly Quaker in its offer of ‘alternative ordering’ to ‘the world’? she asks. The internal energies of Friends are directed instead at presenting “a unified appearance over and against ‘the world’, even as they continue to seek their own unique spiritualities and identities” (2004: 223).

Montemaggi concludes that new Quakers are ‘post-Christian’ theologically but also culturally, reflecting the “profound cultural shift towards a post-Christian Britain, which is religiously diverse, more open to individual spiritual seeking but also more liberal morally and socially” (2011: 11). But her research also indicates that newcomers to Quaker are also attracted by the political activism and humanitarian concerns of Quakerism (2018: 6). Her study doesn’t, however, explore how their spiritual needs and social concerns might be linked: for example, whether Quaker spirituality supplements a prior commitment towards activism; or whether social action is constitutive of Quaker identifications. A working group of Quakers tasked with exploring the future of its tradition certainly urges a move away from binary distinctions towards holistic and dynamic representations that reflect “the interaction between the reflective/mystical and active/social sides of Quakerism” (Rowlands 2017: 61). Indeed, both personal and social transformation are viewed as precisely “the point” of Quakerism (2017: 69).

2.1.3. A Political Inheritance

The suggestion that transformational change is the point of Quakerism indicates a broader inheritance than an organisational form. In his *Fragments of An Anarchist Anthropology*, David Graeber (2004) claims contemporary political movements are indebted to Quakers in their practice of radical democracy. Quaker scholars insist, however, that the institutional structure of the Religious Society of Friends arose out of an early need to contain the potential anarchy of individualised expressions of God’s call to action (Pilgrim 2004: 221). Only by *Taming Anarchy*, could Quakers consolidate their ‘alternative ordering’ and secure their survival as an organised group (ibid.).

Quakers today are said to have inherited from their forebears a post-ecclesial, ‘Kingdom’ type of religion (Cupitt 2001: 61). Pilgrim notes that “sites of Otherness do not emerge out of a vacuum but are stimulated by the very society against which they are reacting” (2004: 210). These ‘heterotopias’ prefigured an alternative ordering of society and marked early Friends out as different (2004: 211). Friends gathered in transgressive and dispersed “places of otherness", waiting in silence for the promptings of truth in speech-acts authorised (if not authored) by God (2004: 212). In this mystical practice, Cupitt asserts that early Quakers deconstructed the traditional God-man distinction (2001: 125). However, Quakerism is only one of many forms in which this attempt has been made, including: anarchism, socialism, communism, liberal democracy and humanitarian ethics (2001: 125). As such, Cupitt insists “Friends have been key figures in the making of the modern world” (2001: 61). Furthermore, “if in the original logic of Western religious thought all religious action is ultimately aimed at bringing in the new world, then the Quakers have been the most thoroughgoing Christians” (2001: 104).

This reading across from the mystically religious to the spiritually political is, however, contested. The story of early Quakers is dearly held by many Friends today who find in the history of their tradition a source of inspiration and a means of identification. For some, as we shall see, it is precisely the original mystical religion of early Friends that provides an anchor in turbulent times. The subsequent history of global Quakerism, however, has been one of both division and proliferation (see for example, Dandelion 2007).

2.1.4. Contestable Identities

The various re-articulations of the Quaker discourse since the seventeenth century have largely reflected *divergent* views on the site of authority. As Ben Dandelion explains, “the variety of primary authority for belief and action lies on an axis between scriptural authority and the authority of inward revelation” (2007: 184). Some Friends insist that diversity is to be welcomed (Rowlands 2017: 55; also Ashworth and Wildwood 2009). Moreover, they are keenly aware of the role that language plays in the construction of religious differences (Rowlands 2017).

Conversations among Friends holding different views find such either / or terms as ‘theist’ and ‘non-theist’ unhelpful; moreover they do not prevent Friends working together for the common good (2017: 55).

British Quakerism has consequently become an “unboundaried space” that may be inhabited or colonised by anyone who, for example, wishes to espouse an alternative ordering of society or wants to develop their ideas for a better world (Pilgrim 2004: 219). It has at the same time rendered notions of unity and shared identity problematic (ibid.). Instead, “theology has become a story” performed when the silence is punctuated by rule-governed spoken contributions, or ‘vocal ministry’, from which themes emerge through patterns of linguistic association (Dandelion 2007: 141-144). Quakers agree that there is ‘that of God in everyone’ even if they disagree on precisely what this means (2007: 151). Thus, in answer to the simple question, ‘what is a Quaker?’, the anthropologist Peter Collins argues for a multi-perspectival understanding of Quaker identity (Collins 2009). There is a tendency to articulate multiple selves in order to create, whether consciously and/or unconsciously, a sense of coherence, unity, and harmony (Collins 2008). Their narratives mark-out a network of discursive practices he labels: canonical, vernacular and individualised (2009: 208).

Collins draws a parallel between his concept of ‘plaining’ in the Quaker tradition and that of purification in Latour’s critique of modernity (Collins 1996, Latour 1993). According to Collins, it is a tradition of aesthetic and ethical practice that critiques contemporary culture (2001). More fundamentally, it is the Quaker practice of symbolisation that forms a group identity formation vis-à-vis another (Collins 1996). The hybrids that subsequently emerge are also scandalous: their resistance to the process of purification occasion a transgression. The narrative practices of the contemporary Quaker habitus appropriate the relatively stable tropes of Quakers over the centuries (Collins 2009: 216). But it also means “there can be no single overarching interpretation by which we can come to understand Quaker identity” (2009: 21). Separately plotted and storied selves are brought under the rubric of a single, overarching narrative, signified, for example, by the expression ‘coming home’ often employed by newcomers (Collins 2008). It is these representations that “comprise” the Quaker Meeting (ibid.). There is a

dynamic of identity formation that may have been prompted by the re-discovery of varied forms of religious faith and practice in late modern societies (ibid.).

2.1.5. A Simple Future

Collins' analysis suggests the tension between the individual and the collective may be resolved by way of a narrative alignment. Quakerism is a strongly textual tradition. The early history of what became the Society of Friends is a rich resource of key texts, tropes and metaphors that make this alignment possible. As such, it is also a resource inherited from the past with which to rearticulate Quakerism for the future. One such articulation is *Our Faith in the Future* (2015): a "word picture" compiled jointly by contemporary Friends who, "facing turbulent times", envision "a future where we let our lives speak". It describes a future in which Quakers are well known and understood, where Meeting for Worship is the 'bedrock', Quaker communities are open and inclusive, and Friends also practise a discipline of 'letting go and letting God'.

With an eye to this future, British Quakers have embarked upon a revision of their 'book of discipline', *Quaker Faith & Practice*, as well as a number of other initiatives aimed at revitalising Quakerism for the 21st century. As Paul Parker, the Recording Clerk of *Britain Yearly Meeting* explains: "There's a real chance to rearticulate who we are as a faith community today and what we'd like to be in the future—redefining Quakerism in Britain with a text that simplifies, clarifies and rejuvenates" (*Quaker News ('QN')*, Autumn 2018). If the Society of Friends is to have thriving Quaker communities working towards a sustainable and peaceful world its strategy states that it must also have simple structures and practices (QN, Summer 2019). Thus, the aim is to be: "a simple church supported by a simple charity to reinvigorate Quakerism" (QN, Autumn 2019). In terms of the organisation, this means having a well integrated and governed local to national structure. But, in addition, the work itself must be "distinctively Quaker". That is to say: "the work and how we do it have a clear Quaker identity and role" (ibid.). Organisation and identity are coupled in an on-going struggle for institutional survival.

The contemporary Religious Society of Friends is seeking to insure its future by rearticulating the central tenets of its faith, streamlining its organisational structure and, as a result, re-establishing the distinctiveness of the Quaker identity. ‘Simplification’, ‘decentralisation’, ‘integration’, ‘distinctiveness’, and ‘sustainability’ are thus prominent elements in the contemporary discourse of a future-oriented Quakerism adapting itself to postsecular or post-Christian Britain. Some Quakers worry about much of this. Especially how decisions are being made by central representative bodies and the implications of being a charity governed by the Charity Commision — such as the non-Quaker role of ‘trustee’.

Rex Ambler, a well-known and respected Friend, author and theologian, sparked a debate in the letters pages of *The Friend* after he asked in an article: “[are] we changing our model of decision-making? Has our old, distinctly Quaker way proved to be too cumbersome or slow? Are we failing to keep up with the modern world? Do we need to streamline our ways of working?” (*The Friend*, 29/08/19). Ambler wonders whether the Yearly Meeting in session is too unwieldy but also observes that: “Friends generally did not follow the discipline of collective discernment. They gave voice to their own personal concerns and did not even respond to what had been said previously. So there was no sense of a process, no sense of being guided to a common understanding” (ibid.).

From the standpoint of the history of Quakerism, these are not new worries—as we shall see. Ambler expresses a fear, apparently shared by many, that Friends have become, like others in society, too focused on themselves as individuals, forgetting the distinctive Quaker method of collective decision-making that ought to be learnt, or taught, within Local Meetings. Quakerism has slipped its moorings and must rediscover its roots. A reading of the story of early Friends, its foundational texts, the acts of its leading figures, canonical phrases and tropes can be carefully woven intertextually into new articulations of what it means to be a Quaker today. These articulations are contestable, as revealed by the vibrancy of public debates and discussions. But for many the story of the early Friends reveals precisely what has been lost along the way.

2.2. Losing My Religion

Before we met in person, one of my research participants, a Quaker named Peter, recommended to me a book: *Journey into Life: Inheriting the story of early Friends* by Gerald Hewitson (2013). It is the text of the annual 'Swarthmore Lecture' given by the author in May 2013. It begins with the words inscribed upon a Quaker meetinghouse:

> Quakers are people of different beliefs, lifestyles and social backgrounds. What we have in common is an acceptance that all people are on a spiritual journey. We hope that we are indeed a real society of Friends, open to the world and welcoming everyone (Hewitson 2013: 3).

Hewitson explains that thirty-years earlier he had found these words appealing. But now they seemed to him bland and anodyne: "in attempting to exclude none, to be inoffensive, to convey no hint of dangerous fervour or undesirable conviction, they said little that was not trite or commonplace" (ibid.). Contemporary Quakers have, it seems, created a belief-free zone for well-meaning friends who spoke of friendship but not of commitment, Hewitson laments. Instead, by following the thread of words describing the lives of early Friends and origins of Quakers he entered deeply into a labyrinth, as he puts it. By exploring the depths, he says, 'Way opened' as he came to realise that only by seeing *their* world as fully as possible can we "begin to hear what they say to us today" (2013: 5).

For Hewitson, foremost in the message of early Quakers to Friends today was their "deep conviction", issuing from the "deep silence of their gathered meetings", that they had 'seen' a "new world order" (2013: 6). Entry into this new world came by an "experience of encounter" in the silence of the gathered meeting; where Presence is so palpable that we can trust our experience of a creative Energy, an intimate Power. Hewitson's nominalisation of the metaphors articulating Quaker experience emphasises the interpretation: the experience is an encounter with an objective or ultimate 'reality' beyond the experience itself. Hewitson explains: "They found they needed a range of metaphors to describe their experience beyond the ordinary and everyday, to describe this power at the heart of the encounter. So they used words like 'Inner Teacher', 'Light', 'Seed', 'Life', 'Anchor'".

As they did so, they “strained the traditional language of Christianity as understood at the time” (2013: 7-9).

Other contemporary Friends also draw upon the ‘story’ of early Friends to critique Quakerism today. In an influential little book on *Quaker Spirituality and Community*, Ursula Jane O’Shea (1993) notes at the beginning of her reflection that ‘modern’ Friends of the unprogrammed (that is, silent) tradition are “often reluctant to generalise about our collective Quaker experience” without the disclaimer, ‘I can’t speak for all Friends’ (1993: 7). The lack of dogmatism that privileges ‘openness’ to the point of reluctance is rooted in the spirituality of early Friends that “came from the inward guide, not from any outward authority, even scripture” (ibid.). Against the tendency to individualise experience, O’Shea wants to affirm instead a *certainty* in the “guidance directing our lives, individually and corporately” (ibid.). She argues that members of the Religious Society of Friends have three fundamental life choices in common: “we have chosen a spirituality, in a faith community, lived according to a Quaker Way”. Furthermore, “we may articulate these choices differently, but they underpin our unity and identity”.

2.2.1. A Crisis of Transition

Hewitson and O’Shea call upon the early Quakers as witnesses to a common experience that can be interpreted and described in common terms and which, in consequence, results in common life choices. O’Shea supports her account of *Living the Way* with an assessment of the Quaker form of organisation that: “is derived from the way the group reconciles the prophetic power of transcendent experiences with its corporate need to survive” (1993: 20). This form has evolved to balance personal spiritual experience with a “counter-thread” of corporate discipline necessary to keep Quakerism “safe” from the vagaries of time and culture (1993: 21).

O’Shea draws upon a sociological model of religious orders to identify the ways in which the Quaker Way has grown and developed in a similar pattern (Fitz and Cada 1975). Like other religious communities, Quakerism has followed a life cycle of four phases: foundation, expansion, stabilisation and breakdown, followed by a

fifth perilous period of *transition* during which the community may die out, minimally survive, or enter a new phase of growth. O'Shea examines what she regards as forces of destabilisation and transition in contemporary Quakerism and the prospects for a renewal of the Quaker Way.

In an evolving public discourse, signifiers such as 'transition' or 'renewal' have been taken-up by popular Quaker writers. Craig Barnett, author of a blog called *Transition Quaker*, for instance has offered a cogent critique of Liberal Quakerism (Barnett 2013). The same author has contributed a series of thoughtful articles in *The Friend*, subsequently published in a single volume on *Quaker Renewal* (Barnett 2017), and also moderates a Facebook group with the same name. His latest book is entitled, *The Guided Life: finding purpose in troubled times* (Barnett 2019). The arc of Barnett's argument is that since Quakers are indeed a kind of religious community in *transition*, the present stage of development calls for a *renewal* of Quakerism as a *guided* way of life since this was the authoritative experience of the early Friends.

Thus, a sense of crisis facing a religious group with ageing and dwindling numbers can be diagnosed with reference to the authentic originary experience. Barnett's critique examines themes such as: a shared language to describe experiences; the relation between the gathered Meeting for Worship, everyday life and the wider culture; the meaning of membership; the role and function of leadership; and the proper meaning of what Quakers call their corporate 'testimonies'. In these discussions of the rejuvenation or renewal of Quakerism the question of 'identity', differences and diversity—whether theological, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, socioeconomic—loom large. Moreover, these questions are sometimes framed by a broader popular critique of Liberal Quakerism and the effects of its 'radical' pluralisation. The decline in the number of Quakers has been attributed to a subsequent lack of coherence.

As a result, it is claimed that Friends have retreated from sharing their *spiritual experience* with each other and wider society (Barnett 2013). Henceforth, the critique of Liberal Quakerism accents a lack or loss at the heart of a discourse in need of repair. What is missing or lost is frequently articulated in terms of the early Friends: the authoritative understandings attributed to the founders of Quakerism

as *foundational*. Barnett writes: “In the foundational insights of the first period of Quakerism, many Friends are rediscovering the passion and authenticity of Quaker spirituality. Far from being embarrassed or put-off by the uncompromising vision and message of 17th Century Friends, many of us are being drawn to find ways of experiencing it for ourselves” (ibid.).

2.2.2. Narrowing the Way

The search for a lost commonality in an authentically Quaker experience reveals a keen interest amongst Friends on both tradition and the function of language. The tension between continuity and change is, at least in part, a question of hermeneutics. In effect, where exactly on the spectrum between ‘the Rabbinic’ (Gadamer) or ‘poetic’ (Derrida) is an interpretation permissible? (Caputo 2017). Subscribing to a Wittgensteinian view on language use and a critical realist epistemology, Harvey Gilman (2007, 2016) describes how the rules of the Quaker language game constitute the community as a particular form of life. A representational, rather than strictly constructivist, view of language has an additional advantage for a ‘mystical’ tradition: the word-object relation can be clarified by making plain a superfluity that otherwise obscures our access to a transcendent real Presence. Since the latter is always ‘beyond’ words, silence or simplicity is judged to be a means of access to a reality beyond.

The quest for a shared language and understanding suggests a narrowing path upon the discursive field as ‘The Quaker Way’ (Ambler 2013). There must therefore be some restriction on the scope of meaning in the name of ‘distinctiveness’. Furthermore, differences can and ought to be ‘resolved’ by rediscovering the distinctiveness of the Quaker Way (Ambler 2016). The latter “reminds us of what unites us a Society of Friends” (2016: 6, emphasis retained). Rex Ambler is less concerned, however, by the need to arrive at a shared understanding than with the authenticity of a shared practice as a spiritual path (cf. Taves 2009). The *distinctive* elements of practice are: the priority of silence; the emphasis on the personal, experimental and practical; speaking truth based on experience; and discerning truth together (2016: 7-15). These practices “tell us a lot about who we Quakers are, what binds us together as a community” (2016:

16). In other words, the practices themselves signify 'Quaker' even without the determinate content of a 'shared understanding'. This however is felt to be unsatisfactory for some Friends who see precisely in the lack of content an incoherence that dissolves unity and denies Quakers their essential identity.

Derek Guiton (2015) advances such a view with some force and offers a prescription. The causes of the existential crisis facing the Religious Society of Friends are threefold: growing secularisation, incompatible belief systems, and the embrace of 'ideology' instead of faith (2015: i). He takes as his point of departure a "brave little book" (ibid.) by Alastair Heron entitled *Our Quaker Identity* that asks whether Friends have formed a Religious Society or a 'friendly society' (Heron 1999). Heron argues that the difficulties facing Quakers are not structural or organisational but 'spiritual'. He foresees a future in which the Society may be described as ethical, humanist or secular but where: "only a minority will affirm personal experience of the living power of the Spirit of God in their daily lives" (1999: 1).

Guiton takes up Heron's call for a renewal of this spiritual experience (1999: 53), possible only if Friends, who *are* the 'grassroots', accept the discipline of allowing God to show them their priorities: to choose to be open to the Light, to be inwardly challenged, enabled to change (1999: 61). Guiton argues that: "The Society of Friends is nothing if not a coming together of people who choose to *interpret* their experience in religious terms" (2015: 251, my emphasis). For Guiton this means being open to the experience of the Divine Presence, "an attitude of the spirit which is essentially theist in orientation" (2015: 253). In other words, a common language implies a common *interpretation* of one's experience both *as* spiritual and *understood* as such in its referentially signified objects.

Quakerism, as Guiton depicts it, is what James Paul Gee calls a 'Big-D' discourse: a way of thinking, speaking and acting as a particular *kind* of person: 'a Quaker' (Gee 2008, 2010). Much of Guiton's book is a polemic against what he sees as the growing influence, if not an entryist 'counter-agenda', of the *Non-theist Friends Network* founded by David Boulton. The latter is a self-confessed 'Religious Humanist' with a long-standing association with the *Sea of Faith Network* inspired by the work of non-realist postmodern theologian, Don Cupitt (Boulton 2005, 2006,

2016). This is where Guiton locates a fundamental “faultline” between two incompatible belief systems. On one side of this antagonistic frontier are ‘seekers’ who may be theists or non-theists but aspire towards the transcendent while being ‘open’ to the possibilities of immanence. Conversely, the ‘humanist’ side is marked by a ‘closed’ reading of immanence and the *denial* of the transcendent as the end-point of the non-theist’s position.

Ultimately, for Guiton, it is this immanence-transcendence distinction that defines the limits of Quakerism (2015: 258). Thus, a personal commitment to the *possibility* of the transcendent Real Presence, Guiton suggests, ought to be formalised as a condition for admission to membership of the Society. Guiton accuses Boulton of losing sight of the ‘essentials’ of the Quaker faith in the claim that Friends may find their unity in a common commitment to social and political action. A reason for joining the *Religious* Society of Friends cannot be: “Because it’s better than the Labour Party” (ibid.). Neither are the ‘active’ and ‘contemplative’ aspects of the religious life equivalent choices. Rather, it is the experience *of* God that *compels* acts of mercy and, in this sense, must remain primary (2015: 88-90).

2.2.3. Reclaiming the Past

Guiton presents his case as a defence of Quakerism as a mystical tradition. God is not the human construct of humanists and materialists. To claim that “our experience of God is beyond words, beyond naming, beyond conceptualisation, is to uphold God’s transcendence” (2015: 236). Guided by theologians and historians, the renewal process must therefore start with “our Christian roots” and locate our present day Quaker language “in the language of Scripture” as it was “understood, adapted and enlarged by the first generation of Quakers” (2017: 84). In the end, his aim is “a better informed, more deeply committed and more spiritually grounded community of Friends no longer believing ‘nothing in particular’, but having something uniquely to offer a generation searching for meaning and the good—a bubbling spring of living water that could change their world and ours” (2017: 84).

In their different ways, Ambler, Guiton, O'Shea, Hewitson, and Barnett each place considerable importance on the story of early Quakers in their arguments for renewal. Popular books about Quaker spirituality make frequent intertextual references to foundational elements located in the past. Key words, metaphors, tropes and figures provide an indissoluble link to these beginnings and function to authorise their statements. To understand why the early Friends are so revered by Quakers today, we will need to look carefully at these early beginnings. In the next section, we shall carefully examine the social historian's meticulous reconstruction of a momentous period in the making of modern democracy. These accounts offer a startling reminder of the imbrications of politics and religion at the dawn of the modern era. It is there that we find a radical commitment to social change expressed with the fervour of popular religious dissent. At the same time, a close study of this history begs other questions. Principally, which story or version of the past can or ought to be appropriated by Friends today as a guide to the future of Quakerism? We shall return to this question at the end of the chapter after examining the story of the early Friends.

2.3. The Birth of Radical Religion

Seventeenth century England was a time of disorientating social change in which ‘religion’ and ‘politics’ were tightly entangled. Barry Reay warns that when we look back at this moment “we should not think of religion in any narrow sense. Our own neat division between religion, politics, and society would have made little sense to the majority of the women and men of the seventeenth century and it is better to think in terms of an overlap and interaction” (Reay 1984: 3). The economic, the cultural, the moral, the theological “all meshed in antipathy towards the regime of Charles I” (ibid.).

After the Civil War, "politically, economically, and religiously, England was a mess” (Friedman 1987: 11). During the 1640s, “well established, if not well-respected, institutions collapsed like the proverbial house of cards” (Reay 1984: 4). “Traditional and legitimate sources of political authority had been destroyed while institutional spiritual authority had lost credibility” (1987: 11). After Cromwell had successfully defeated the Parliamentary conservatives, crushed the radicals of the left and the King to the right, “he remained with little that might help him build a successful government" (ibid). These momentous events were interpreted by many in eschatological terms: "The execution of the king, the 'man of blood', was seen by some people as part of the process of bringing in the Kingdom of God” (Moore 2020: 62). As a result, “religion was politicised” and “much political business was concerned with the conduct of religious affairs” (ibid.). It was commonly held “that Christ would presently come to reign through, with or even within his saints”, the central ‘radical’ idea that “informed most of the sects and movements in the years following the Civil War” (ibid.).

The sense in which ‘radical’ is used today to describe someone seeking extreme change is however of eighteenth-century origin. What people in the seventeenth century wanted to prove “was not the originality or newness of their ideas but the extent to which they were rooted in tradition and committed to its preservation” (Bradstock 2011: xxiv). Andrew Bradstock urges that, “it hardly makes sense to apply it to groups whose understanding of how change occurs allowed no room for political action” (ibid.). Consequently, none of the ‘radical’ groups that emerged in the 1640s-60s were actually engaged in ‘political action’ as conventionally

understood today, with the possible exception of the Levellers. Although the latter represented the left wing of the parliamentary party that won the English Civil War, they were never united as a disciplined entity. Their subsequent defeat at Burford in 1649 brought to an end a nascent political organisation with a powerful cadre of ‘agitators’ in the army (Hill 1973, Manning 1984). Nonetheless, as Reay (1984) convincingly argues, it would be a mistake to underestimate the wider social and political significance of the Quakers’ campaign in the years that followed. Indeed, the persecution they attracted testifies to the threat they were perceived to pose to an already deeply disturbed social order. There is little doubt that in the minds of those who opposed them that the new religious sects were both ‘radical’ and dangerous.

2.3.1. The Rude Multitude

They may have been in a minority movement but the radical sects “both terrified and tormented conservative and moderate during the events of 1640-60” (Reay 1984: 10). The effects of their organised dissent, in Reay’s estimation, “far outweighed its numerical importance” (ibid.). The events of the mid-seventeenth century were thus the continuing outworking of a complex English Reformation that proceeded “from above and below'' in a “great popular movement” (Morton 1970: 10).

The special role played by the lower classes, as demanded by the New Model Army, was “a change of major historical importance” (Friedman 1987: 11). It meant that “[t]he lower and middle sort of people entered the political arena to an extent which no one could possibly have anticipated” (Reay 1984: 5). In this struggle, political battle lines were drawn on what would appear on the surface to be purely theological questions (ibid.). As Friedman puts it, "the result was a curious state of affairs where social and religious radicals could not come to power, but the government and other agencies of authority could not repress publication of radical literature and suppress the freedom of religious speech. Radicals published thousands of treatises expressing opinions which would never have reached an audience a decade or so earlier" (Friedman 1987: 12). The pamphleteers propagated a vision for a restructured society that returned to

Englishmen the rights that had been theirs before the imposition of the 'Norman Yoke' in 1066 (1987: 11). The Puritan minority, on the other hand, saw themselves as the virtuous elect “opposed both to a reprobate feudal aristocracy and to the rude and godless multitude” (Morton 1970: 13, emphasis added).

The religious radicals, on the other hand, argued variously “that all men are God’s children, that God exists in man and therefore to damn man would be to damn himself, that God is reason, and all men, by reason alone, can know God” (Morton 1970: 14). Henceforth, men should distrust the authority of ministers and trust instead their only capacity for reason. While the Puritans were mostly, like the Presbyterians, Calvinists who stressed predestination of the few chosen for salvation, the latter were more rigidly orthodox and prosperous. These Presbyterians in particular therefore found themselves “at a disadvantage as compared with those who were prepared to open the door of salvation more widely” (1970: 13). New sects arose to pose a direct, if disaggregated, challenge to the Presbyterian’s claim to rule as God’s elect.

What emerged was a “rationalist humanism and mysticism, a strange but effective unity of opposites, [that] combined to provide opposition to Calvinist orthodoxy” (ibid.). The latter had formed a “godly bourgeoisie” for whom “existing laws and institutions, as interpreted by themselves, were on the whole satisfactory at preserving a class structure guaranteeing the rights of property” (ibid.). Endowed with an equal capacity of reason and to understand the mysteries of the things of God, the rude multitude could now lay a legitimate claim to political sovereignty (ibid.). Henceforth, “whether it was as militant defence of the community, riot, resistance to tithes, agitation in favour of episcopy, or as political and religious radicalism, the mid-seventeenth century...witnessed ‘the emergence of ‘the People’” (Reay 1984: 7, citing Wrightson 1982: 225).

Conditions were thus ripe for the proliferation of sectarianism: “political anarchy, economic depression, no single religious consensus, no credibility to any of the more orthodox religious institutions, and strong class divisions" (Friedman 1987: 12). This people’s movement “inherited the social hopes, frustrations, dreams and yearnings of those whose only recourse was religious expression" (Friedman 1987: 12-13). It was the vehicle “through which repressed class and political

hopes were expressed” (ibid.). The sects and gathered churches “represented both religious innovation as well as repressed lower class hopes for economic reform" (ibid). The pamphlets published in the name of the ‘Quakers’ were thus “preachments of political revolution” (Sheeran 1983: 9). Moreover, it was a political project for society at large patterned almost entirely on a form of church polity.

2.3.2. The Politics of Dissent

The radicals gained their revolutionary education in the new churches. “In marked contrast to the hierarchical and authoritarian character of the established church, the sects and dissenting congregations [installed] an essentially democratic pattern of government, with ministers being elected by the congregation rather than being appointed over their head, and paid by the voluntary contributions of members rather than the extraction of tithes” (Bradstock 2011: 45). The separatist doctrine—including its opposition to religious persecution, a state church, a professional clergy, and compulsory tithes—bequeathed to them the basis for their broader political demands (McGregor 1984a).

As McGregor explains, the egalitarianism of the Levellers owed a great deal to the theology of the General Baptists. Although this movement shared the radically separatist instincts of the sixteenth century Anabaptists on the continent, the English Baptists differed in their Puritan version (McGregor 1984a: 23-27). Radical in outlook, they held to a doctrine of general redemption in a loose organisational form. In contrast to the “harsh determinism of Calvinism”, the Baptists’ emphasis on human dignity, “accountability and the innate goodness and equality of all mankind" appealed to the lower orders (1984a: 29, 52). It “gave free reign to the individualistic and democratic logic of Protestantism: if all men could be saved, then the priesthood of all believers was an essentially democratic doctrine” (1984a: 52). Furthermore, “the General Baptists’ fluid membership, mass meetings, evangelical campaign tactics, and wider social appeal provided the Levellers with the basis of a popular political organisation” (1984a: 52). For these early radicals, “Baptist membership gave them practical experience of an alternative social model; a voluntary association of equal individuals” (1984a: 62). When a separatist church was set up, each of its members signed a covenant, “an

agreement binding themselves to unity and laying down the rights and duties of all" (Morton 1970: 14). This church covenant was exclusive and dividing, designed to set a group apart. Applied at a national scale, the Levellers proposed instead *An Agreement of the People* that was inclusive and could unite a whole nation (Morton 1970: 15).The latter was intended to be the foundation of a new society, by an act of will and reason, that would mark "the passing of the privilege of the saints to the right of the Englishman" (ibid.).

The end of the Civil War saw the religious-secular wheel turn full circle. The earlier radicals had passed from "claiming the brotherhood of the sons of God to claiming the birthright of freeborn Englishmen" (Morton 1970: 14). In other words, "the lessons learnt in the churches would still help to determine the forms through which the political struggle makes its way" (ibid.). They opened a way for "the transition from Church democracy to civil democracy, from religious toleration to civil liberties, from the demand for a free pulpit to the demand for a free press" (Morton 1970: 16). However, as the post-war years went on "instead of religious ideas developing into openly political ones, we find political ideas reclothed in religious and even mystical forms" (ibid.). For Morton, this reversal marked a diminution of political ambitions, the unfortunate result of the demoralisation and despair produced by defeat: "what had seemed possible to human power and reason now began to seem impossible" (ibid.).

However, reclothing the politically impossible in religious mysticism deferred their 'political' despair only by renewing their 'religious' hopes. As the new religious groupings emerged they began to differentiate themselves from one another. The uninhibited "evangelical and reforming zeal" that characterised the separatist movement in the 1640s gave way in the 1650s to a more "introspective concern for collective solidarity" (McGregor 1984: 62, emphasis added). For historians like Morton, the earlier period could be characterised by a process of secularisation and political action: "For the first time we can see emerging a secular, democratic, political theory, freeing itself from...feudal religion" (Morton 1970: 15). The subsequent reversal was for Morton a lost opportunity.

However, a 'practical' politics was not lost in this reclothing process. As Bradstock observes, "the strong emphasis on individual rights in Leveller thinking was based

not on an isolationist ethics but a strongly communitarian one informed by their practical understanding of Christianity" (Bradstock 2011: 45, emphasis added). Their practical Christianity persisted and "linked to all this was a sense of community, which is to be found in all the radical literature" (Reay 1984: 17). Consequently, Reay disputes the assessment that the years 1647-9 marked a high-water mark for a radicalism crushed into a retreat by mysticism and sectarianism in the 1650s (Reay 1984: 19). According to Reay, "the relationship between religion and politics in radical thought and action was not simply one of movement towards and away from secularism" (Reay 1984: 19-20). Rather, we should think in terms of "parallel and perhaps in some respects conflated ideologies, the one outliving the other" (ibid.). That radical religion survived in a multiplicity of competing religious forms ought not to obscure their continuing concern for social and political matters.

Put differently, we can say that the mystical spiritualism of the various religious groups that followed the Levellers, by re-articulating elements from a wider discursive field, engaged in a hegemonic struggle to fill the political space left by crumbling institutions. The democratic revolution enlisted innovative and heretical theological ideas to meet the political circumstances of the day. What were these ideational resources and how did the various competing groups make use of them?

2.3.3. Inherited Heresies

With both the power and credibility of religious authority severely weakened, seventeenth century radicals roamed freely beyond the margins of Christian orthodoxy. The political implications of the gospel of 'free grace' were preached widely by the radical sectaries (Bradstock 2011: 45). They were inheritors of a longer tradition of heresy and nonconformity that stretched from the anti-clerical Lollards in the fourteenth century via the gnostic perfectionism of the Free Spirit movement to the so-called Family of Love in the sixteenth. A Familist branch had been established in England by the 1570s and their ideas subsequently became popular among the radicals (Reay 1984: 11). These 'lovers of truth' sought a peaceable inclusivity and had little time for rigid dogma, anticipating the unitarian

controversies that later became associated with the early English Antitrinitarians and Socinians. But the deeper roots of seventeenth century religious radicalism can be traced further back to the medieval mystics whose religious ideas fused well with a visionary politics (Friedman 1987: 12-13, also Smith 2014: 11-12).

Among their major ‘mystical’ influences were two important figures: the sixteenth century German philosopher and Lutheran theologian, Jacob Boehme; and the twelfth century mystic, Joachim of Fiore. According to Morton, the Joachite doctrine concerning the new age of the Spirit took two different directions: one stressing its mystical side, the other accenting the practical and secular (Morton 1970: 127-129). Those groups leaning toward the ‘mystical’ included the Fifth Monarchy Men as well as the followers of Lodowicke Muggleton and his cousin John Reeve. The Fifth Monarchists were a millenarian movement anticipating Christ’s reign over a fifth kingdom they believed to be prophesied in the Biblical book of Daniel. The Muggletonians accepted their leader’s claims to have been appointed by God as the *Two Last Witnesses* foretold in the Book of Revelation. Moreton places the Quakers alongside these groups in the ‘mystical’ line of Joachite descent. On the rational side, Gerrard Winstanley led a band of *True Levellers* or ‘Diggers’ in the occupation and cultivation of St George’s Common, Surrey in 1649. For Winstanley, reason dictated that political liberty was inseparable from economic liberty (Bradstock 2011: 51).

While in the Leveller William Walwyn the mystic and sceptic seemed to merge, for the radical groups that followed mysticism and materialism were two sides of the same coin (Morton 1970: 159). By around 1645 the *Everlasting Gospel* was being preached in the writings of Winstanley (Morton 1970: 127); victory in the war a clear sign of the coming new age of liberty. The Levellers proposal for *An Agreement of the People* can be construed as “the Everlasting Gospel translated into the language of practical politics” (1970: 128). The Quaker historian, Rufus Jones, writes approvingly of Boehme’s “powerful interpretation of a vital type of salvation” that appealed powerfully to the Familists as well as to the closely related ‘Seekers’ widely acknowledged as direct progenitors of the Quakers (Jones 1982: 134-5). These separatists left the established church to meet together, some waiting in silence for the true church to come or to be manifest among them.

The religious ideas of all these groups were however in “flux” during the 1640s and 1650s (Capp 1984: 184). Reay suggests some common threads can be found: “An emphasis on immediate contact with the divine, either through the Scriptures or by means of visions or the spirit within; a stress on experienced truth against established, given truths; a rejection of the distinction between priest and layman and of the whole notion of an established church; hostility to tithes; a refusal to recognise orthodox teachings on the Trinity; speculation about the existence of Heaven and Hell; an advocacy of human effort as a means to salvation, or at least an attempt to control if not to reject completely the influential Calvinist doctrine of predestination; a call for liberty of conscience” (Reay 1984: 14-15).

Consequently, “Revolution radicalism took a predominantly religious form; contestation took place within a religious framework” (1984: 15). The communism of Winstanley, as Christopher Hill has shown, “was ‘indissolubly linked’ to his radical theology: ‘Landlords, kingly power and priests will be overthrown together as Christ rises in sons and daughters: there is no distinction between economic freedom, political freedom and spiritual freedom” (ibid., citing Hill 1978: 53). The freedom with which the radical sects could articulate unorthodox religious ideas fuelled their anti-authoritarian and anti-institutional sentiments.

2.3.4. The Problem with Authority

Friedman defines ‘antinomianism’ in political terms as “a rejection of priestly authority and the haughty intellectual authority of the universities" (Friedman 1987: 13). Going beyond the rejection of the moral law of sin, their practical antinomianism was concerned with its radical implications. The sects thus differed in terms of what Friedman calls their “sheer radicalism” (Friedman 1987: 14). The most radical of all were called ‘Ranters’ (1987: 14).

The Ranters exemplified “extreme varieties of antinomian individuality and libertinism, the allegorical interpretation of Scripture predicated upon the saint's communion with God, and apostolic common ownership of wealth by the saint" (Friedman 1987: 13). Amid widespread antipathy towards the established church,

the Ranters thus: “opposed existing religious institutions, were suspicious of government, and believed private property was a source of moral difficulty and class antagonism” (Friedman 1987: 13). The Ranters were not alone. Muggletonians and Seekers shared many of the same ideas but “differed in temperament and political attitude”, particularly with regard to formal religious expression (ibid.). Seekers, Ranters and Quakers all emphasised the workings of a divine indwelling and thus stayed out of the formal churches. Friedman argues that both Quakers and Muggletonians had Seeker and Ranter origins, placing them at the more ‘radical’ end of antinomianism. They were united in their opposition to repressive institutions. However, only those who have been called Ranters refrained from any attempt to create an alternative institution (ibid.).

The contemporary radical thinker, John Saltmarsh, identifies a strongly anti-institutional strand with a position he regarded as “more spiritual” than that held by those he calls ‘Seekers’ (Gwyn 1998: 115). The latter left their churches to wait for the true Church to be revealed, restoring the simple church of the New Testament. This second more radical kind of spiritual seeker held that even the New Testament Church was only a transitional form and anticipated instead a deeper work of the Spirit that would herald a new order of Church in a new age. The latter would not re-institute the outward sacraments. Instead, “sacramental realities were now known in an inward, unmediated way by these new, ‘spiritual Christians’” (Gwyn 1998: 115). The political aspect of antinomianism had a common theological foundation: the idea that Christ had come to reign in the hearts of men. “All spiritualists emphasised the importance of the 'inner light' within the soul as the meeting place between man and God, and hence recognised the spirit of God within themselves” (Friedman 1987: 13).

What emerged was a spiritual ‘enthusiasm’ in which a strong theological antinomianism blended easily with a weaker perfectionism (McGregor 1984a: 60). Both religious orthodoxy and the social and political conventions it upheld came under the subjective judgement of the inspired saint (ibid.). By reducing Scripture to a dead letter, Ranters simply pursued its antinomian implications to a startling conclusion: “inspired by the divine spirit, they could not sin” (1984a: 60). The literary effects of antinomianism were also evident in its unconventional creativity. Thus, as Hill puts it: “one consequence of the stress on continuous revelation and

on experienced truths was the idea of novelty, or originality, that ceased to be shocking and became in a sense desirable" (Hill 2019: 283-4).

2.4. The Spiritual Anarchists

Spiritual enthusiasm gave birth to an early form of anarchism. It offered "a refuge from both the emotional tyranny of Calvinism and the collective tyranny of their congregation" (McGregor 1984b: 138). It supplied a rhetoric with which to resist the more onerous demands of church and sect membership while also reducing complex and subtle doctrines to simpler terms (ibid.). The antecedents of Quakers "met in silent meetings, with fasting and prayer, waiting upon the Lord" (ibid.). Not yet an organised sect, the "alienated individuals" gathering in the late 1640s were characterised as 'Seekers', each "a lost, wandering soul, finding no solace in the discipline of church or sect" (McGregor 1984b: 129).

Since the Holy Spirit superseded any worldly or scriptural authority, the practice of these spiritual seekers was necessarily: "individualistic, anarchic and [thus] generally incompatible with the common discipline of church or sect" (1984b: 121). As a result, "the enthusiast is subject to no external religious authority" (McGregor 1984a: 58). The radical spiritualists inhabited a tension between two sites of authority: the individual and the collective. Their enthusiasm was a reaction to a fundamental contradiction between the saint's liberty and the sect's authority. At the heart of the tension was the radical's notion of 'truth' and the experience of the 'inner Light' as its illuminatory event. Hill discerns two entwined strands of thought.

First, a belief in the continuous revelation of new truths to believers that, in relation to contemporary social and political conditions, heralded the coming of the new age of the everlasting gospel. The sectaries appealed to an experience which the recipient must also have been able to communicate to peers (Hill 2019: 283). Secondly, the latter must also adjudge these truths as acceptable in comparison to the traditional truths handed down by others. This emphasis was common to Winstanley, Ranters and the Quakers (Hill 2019: 283-4). The authority of the received tradition is held open to question: "everything that is traditional is suspect just because it is traditional. In time of revolution men think aggressive thoughts, and these can be recognised by others as valid, as divinely inspired" (ibid.).

Although McGregor suggests that 'enthusiasm' points to an unavoidable individualism, Hill does not find in the sectaries' doctrine of the inner Light an

“absolute individualism” (Hill 2019: 287). Instead, the ideal priesthood of believers: “was a society of all-round non-specialists helping each other to arrive at truth through the community” (ibid.). Congregational interpretations of the Bible provided a check against anarchistic individualism insofar as God was found to be saying similar things to different people (ibid.). Thus, Hill is able to argue that the radical’s doctrine of the inner Light united these new religious communities. Scripture provided a standard by which an individual’s utterances of divine inspiration might be judged acceptable or valid by the group. For Hill, the sectaries’ doctrine of the inner Light, governed by Scripture, formed a bond of unity amongst their individual members.

However, Hill locates another source of unity in the sectaries’ popular opposition to the old regime of church and state as well as to the system of clerical patronage (Hill 2019: 288, Hill 1984: 196). Since they also attached little importance to many of the traditional sacraments, some radicals were vehemently ‘irreligious’ and would have gladly seen the destruction of the national church. They rejected “all forms of eccelesiastical jurisdiction in favour of congregational discipline with no coercive sanction behind it” (Hill 1984: 196). Moreover, “the church would no longer have been able to mould opinion in a single pattern, to punish ‘sin’ or proscribe 'heresy'” (ibid.). This unity-in-dissent was expressed clearly by the Diggers who, Hill claims, were thereby able to transcend “the dichotomy of individualism/collectivism” (Hill 2019: 288). Gerrard Winstanley successfully articulated his ‘New Leveller’ vision for a society “based on communal cultivation and mutual support” (ibid.). The early anarcho-communism of the Diggers' united popular opposition to the enclosure of common land in the symbolic occupation of St George’s Common.

2.4.1. The Libertine Left

In the absence of the Digger’s unity-in-dissent, individuals were free to let their antinomian imaginations wander in their rejection of traditional authority. The terms ‘Seeker’ and ‘Ranter’ represented the threat that antinomian individualism posed to social order. Moreover, it was because of the public reputation of these forebears that Quakers were forced to shift ground politically in order to survive.

The name ‘Ranter’ signified conservative fears of the subversive consequences of religious freedom (McGregor 1984b: 139). As we shall see later, it was therefore appropriated by Quakers as a figure of a disavowed ‘other’.

Whereas the Seeker in the 1640s epitomised the reformist Puritan rejection of church discipline, the Ranter in the 1650s represented “the social and moral anarchy which could result from ignorant minds dabbling in the heady doctrines of enthusiasm and, more generally, from the breakdown of traditional authority during the civil wars” (McGregor 1984b: 139). Not only was “the church order of the Baptists, as well as the Presbyterians threatened by Seeker individualism” but “the Quakers had as much reason as the Baptists to fear that their followers might succumb to the extreme antinomianism which had come to be associated with the name of the Ranters” (ibid.). ‘Ranter’ was thus the name given for a set of unorthodox ideas that, according to Rufus Jones, constituted a ‘left-wing fringe’ at the perilous edge of safety and sanity (Jones 1932: 132).

As early as 1648, the report of a parliamentary committee that led to the Blasphemy Ordinance identified the ‘abominable practices of a sect called Ranters’ (Hill 1990: 177). Along with ideas from ancient and medieval mystical dualism and the legacy of the Brethren of the Free Spirit, Ranters incorporated elements taken from sixteenth-century Libertinism, Familist spiritualism and from the anticlerical popular culture of the day. They used taverns as churches, drank, smoked, cursed and some lived sexually promiscuous lives. They rejected heaven, hell, the devil and the resurrection as a means of keeping the poor and uneducated in line. Most thought King Charles a fool, Cromwell even worse, and had little time for political ideologies. All were violently opposed to the government, sometimes graphically depicted. They rejected private property and organised religion, observing that defenders of the one invariably were defenders of the other (Friedman 1987: 14).

The Ranters thus embodied a “plebian tradition which rejected the fundamental doctrines and institutions of orthodox Christianity” (McGregor 1984b: 137). Among the more unorthodox of Ranterist views can be found a belief in the eternity of matter that equated God to Nature, or Reason, or existing only in human beings or, pantheistically, in all created things (Hill 1990: 175). Ranters could be

characterised as mystical antinomians: “mystical in their claim to have become one with God; antinomian in denying the reality of sin to the believer. The spiritual man’s freedom from the carnal world extended to a moral indifference to his behaviour since all human acts were inspired by God” (McGregor 1984b: 129). They coupled the rejection of the orthodox Christian doctrine of ‘sin’ with the idea that God existed within the created order and nowhere else. Although the 1650 Blasphemy Act did not mention Ranters by name, it cited specifically this belief in an entirely immanent divine power.

In the revolutionary atmosphere of the time, the idea that there is no sin was a dangerous one if the lower classes began to take it literally (Bradstock 2011: 87). As Morton keenly observes of its political implications, the “blunt nonconforming reverance” and “rough materialism” of Ranterism “made a strong appeal to many Englishmen of the lower orders” (Morton 1970: 110). That it held such appeal reveals its emancipative hope contained in this radical idea: that in a world turned upside down the poorest in society might also live as ‘masterless’ men. Hill depicts them as a counter-culture of vagrants, itinerants, cottagers, and urban migrants occupying a space between spiritual enthusiasm and popular irreligion (1990: 175). Women had a special role, “enjoying more equality than in most of the dissenting congregations” (1990: 175). The Ranters never achieved the kind of discipline necessary for, say, a programme of care for the poor and needy in their ranks. They were talkers rather than doers (Hill 2019: 291; Hill 1990: 207). Instead, there was by the end of the decade a “Ranter Milieu” of shared beliefs and attitudes recognised by their contemporaries (Hill 1990: 175). Consequently, as Jones acknowledges, “there were Ranters in almost all the sects” (Jones 1932: 132).

Henceforth, “one reason why Ranters looked so threatening lay in the authority they claimed in their speaking and writing: their explicit rejection of the claims of ecclesiastical and political powers” (Bradstock 2011: 88). They posed a broader danger: “Ranters might appear even more threatening when they argued the social and economic equality of every person” (Bradstock 2011: 88). In this respect, the revolution had yet to deliver and “the Ranters were the chief sectarian expression of radical frustration with the outcome of the civil wars, Cromwell and the suppression of the Levellers” (Friedman 1987: 16). They were the basis of a

radical movement that never was; a ghostly apparition of a Leftist revolutionary figure that, in the end, didn't quite materialise. The lingering spectre of Ranterism nevertheless had an important influence on the subsequent development of Quakerism. Friends shaped their institutional defences in the shadow of this fearful figure.

2.4.2. The Spectre of Anarchy

Although Ranters never existed in any consistently representable way, B.J. Gibbons (1993) disputes claims they are the invention by left-leaning historians. Davis argues that since the term refers to an incoherent set of beliefs of an amorphous group of individuals "it is not sufficient therefore to invoke antinomianism and pantheism and assume that we can thereby identify Ranters" (Davis 1986: 23). These terms could mean a number of different things, he says, and can merge with other groups exploring their implications. Consequently, Ranters "would lose their identity" and cease to be a distinct group, separated from others by any defining characteristics (ibid.).

To this charge Gibbons contends that it can be established that Ranters did in fact share a common ideology that marked them off from, say, Fifth Monarchists, "uniting them as a historically significant movement (Gibbons 1993: 179, emphasis added). Moreover, Gibbons demonstrates that, "the ideology of this group was also substantially that of Gerrard Winstanley, something which is obscured by the word 'Ranter'" (ibid.). What distinguishes them from the other "occult-minded" spiritualist traditions, claims Gibbons is "the extent of their social radicalism and their extreme hostility to the externals of religion" (1993: 181). Thus, "the closer these radicals come to Winstanley, the closer they come to each other in a movement" (ibid.). Gibbons suggests that their shared ideological orientation is "their understanding of God as the 'being of beings', a phrase employed by notable Ranter writers indebted to earlier German spiritualists (1993: 181).

Gibbons thus refers to both Ranters and Diggers as 'radical spiritualists' who were regarded by contemporaries and historians alike to be pantheists and materialists (1993: 182-183). He credits Friedman as the only historian who recognised that

‘Ranter’ theology was characterised by a ‘spirit’ / ‘flesh’ dualism inherited from mainstream Puritanism. They pursued this to logical conclusions in what has been called ‘mystical anarchism’ (Friedman 1987, Gibbons 1993: 184, 189). God is to be found in material objects only insofar as the latter belongs to the realm of spirit. Furthermore, traditional notions of heaven and hell lose their meaning and these notions are, as Winstanley insisted, seen within (ibid.). The indwelling of God led naturally to the rejection of the ordinance of external religion practice; scripture’s meaning was found by inner illumination, and truth is altogether mystical (1993: 188). Further rejecting Davis’s claim that Winstanley was never an anti-authoritarian, Gibbon cites his 1649 works clearly to the contrary. In his later writings, “Winstanley does not ask that the existing regime institute the new communist society—that is a job for the spirit of reason within" (Gibbons 1993: 189). He asks that the state tolerate the growth of the new society until everyone has discovered its benefits for himself.

Consequently, Gibbons agrees that radical spiritualists were not a sect with a group identity. He instead detects a shared ideology of divine immanence constitutive of a mystical anarchism with political implications that point towards pacifism and communism. As a movement, their differences were eclipsed by what they had in common (1993: 194). They had “no formal organisation, no rules of entry, no agreed discipline or ordinances” (1993: 193). They also had no clear leaders, no authoritative texts, or disciplinary tests of membership. Furthermore, “they were all, without exception, religious individualists” (1993: 193). Yet, at the same time, the radical spiritualists “embodied more than the independent, largely divergent or distinctive views of uncoordinated and isolated individuals” (1993: 194). Hill insists Ranters also shared with other sectaries a yearning for unity (Hill 2019: 288). Gibbons proposes that the nearest modern analogy is the anarchist movement, “containing as it does pacifists and insurrectionists, communists and individualists, atheists and Roman Catholics” (ibid.). He notes that there are as many contemporary anarchisms as there are anarchists but they nevertheless form a recognisable movement with a shared ideology (ibid.).

Friedman argues that it was because “the Ranters formed the core from which the other groups drew ideas and membership, once these separated, they often turned against their Ranter sources and perhaps for this reason too, Ranters were

the most visible radical group in public" (Friedman 1987: 16). Consequently, although the radical sectarians never managed to achieve a positive consensus, both the orthodox and most sectarians agreed that Ranters were beyond the limits of acceptability (ibid.). The Quakers eventually swallowed up the Ranters because they were able to combine the social radicalism and extreme antinomianism of the latter with a tight organisational sense and socially acceptably middle-class sexual morality (Friedman 1987: 16).

2.5. Emergent Quakerism

We have dwelt at some length on the radical milieu from which Quakers emerged as an identifiable group in the seventeenth century. Since their ideas overlapped so closely, this pre-history illustrates the bafflement and confusion with which these groupings were met—and the difficulties both contemporaries and historians have in telling them apart. Quaker's survival owes less to the novelty of their ideas than to their organisation. The early Friends began as a network of separatists, wearied by orthodox puritanism, gathered around a charismatic preacher and energised by the writings of a core group of eloquent individuals in a heady milieu of free discussion (Hill 1990: 173-4, 190-91, 2019: 189-94).

George Fox's Journal writings indicate that proto-Quaker groups were meeting as early as 1644 to 1645 in the East Midlands, at least three years before his preaching ministry began (Moore 2020: 5). By 1652 Fox and his fellow itinerant preachers travelled northwards, linking together groups of separatists. Working from lists of local separatists they successfully converted Baptists, Seekers, some Ranters and Fifth Monarchists to their version of religious radicalism (Reay 1984: 143). They established a rural movement of the 'middling sort' of people, yeoman farmers and husbandmen; some already in conflict with their landlords over rents and manorial services or refusing to pay tithes (Reay 1984: 141-142). From its earliest beginnings, "the Quaker movement was a movement of political and social as well as religious protest" (Ibid.). By the end of 1654 Quaker groups had begun to spring up in Wales, Scotland and Ireland (Moore 2020: 27).

The Quaker movement consolidated initially in the North of England, thanks largely to the patronage of Judge Fell and his wife Margaret Fell who offered their home at Swarthmoor Hall in Cumbria as an administrative and coordinating centre. Besides Fox, there was in the early to mid-1650s a core group of leaders that included other influential figures: James Naylor, Richard Farnworth, Richard Humberthorne, Edward Burrough and Francis Howgill. With the assistance of Judge Fell, as many as thirty-six pamphlets were published in 1653 amid the political chaos surrounding the suspension of the Rump parliament (Moore 2020: 27). They consisted of apocalyptic pronouncements, diatribes against the parish ministry and calls instead to obey the Inner Light of Christ (ibid.). The following

year marked the mission southwards by the ‘Valiant Sixty’, supported by a campaign of sixty publications that included careful expositions of early Quaker beliefs and practices (ibid.). Travelling Friends sent full reports to Swarthmoor as a centralised national network developed. Acting as “advisors and organisers”, Fox and Margaret Fell also received expressions of personal devotion that cemented their strategic role. Although travelling ministers were led by the inspiration of their own ‘drawings’, Fox evidently had an important hand in directing their movements (2020: 27-29).

In their early publications, Quaker leaders did not express the brand of political radicalism associated with the Diggers’ occupying commune or Winstanley’s pronouncements on private property. Issues of social justice were not an explicit concern. “The poor always seemed to be ‘them’, and not ‘us’” (Moore 2020: 67). They were not communists and may have had in mind a nation of small producers (Reay 1984: 149-151). Fox and other influential Friends were, nonetheless, mindful of disparities in wealth and how property secured political influence (ibid., Reay 1984: 149-151). The more politically-minded radicals among them may have been prevented from promoting their views by censorship of publications (2020: 67). But records of court proceedings, as well as the corpus of anti-Quaker literature, suggest instead an oral practice of a more radical Quakerism.

2.5.1. The Turn Inward

For leaders such as Naylor, the failure that marked the defeat of the Levellers’ political project in 1649-50 did not extinguish hope. The apparent gap between political ambition and reality simply confirmed instead that “the Kingdom of God was more spiritual than political” (2020: 68). As more Quakers came to this view during the 1650s, their public discourse increasingly reflected an inward turn in their theology. Like the ‘Divine Ranters’ (Friedman 1987), Fox in his earliest writings referred to himself as ‘the son of God’ and was sometimes addressed in similar terms (2020: 79). Both Naylor and Fox wrote about a real union with God, albeit in slightly different ways. Naylor expressed a more mystical understanding, whereas Fox’s experience was dynamic, invasive and prophetic (2020: 82). Claims such as these invited prosecution under the Blasphemy Act. Both were

tried for blasphemy in 1653 and maintained in their defence that God was in them (ibid., 2020: 82).

Facing the prospect of further trials, Moore speculates that it may have been on the advice of those such as Judge Fell that Quakers tempered their language (2020: 80). The more extreme expressions of the individual's union with God invited prosecution but, more importantly, also risked encouraging the kind of Ranterish behaviour incompatible with the more moderate antinomianism of its leaders (2020: 83). Fox, it seems, was mindful of the risks to the fledgling separatist movement of the charge of blasphemy. Alternative formulations, as evidenced in Quakers' earliest writings, were already available in the more orthodox figure of the body of Christ and the Familist idea of divine indwelling. For the latter, the phrase 'the Light within' served as a suitable metaphor that may have already gained currency among the proto-Quakers groups in Yorkshire prior to Fox's arrival (2020: 83).

Moore detects a change especially in the writings of Richard Farnworth who from 1654 came to view the Kingdom as entirely within and unrelated to events in the world. Fox also increasingly urged Friends to turn to the Light of Christ within (2020: 68-69). The more widespread adoption of this discursive figure coincided with a decline in the diversity of theological views expressed in Quaker pamphlets in the second half of the 1650s. Quakers concentrated their message of salvation by the Light, freedom from sin available to all, and even drew upon more orthodox ideas in the notion of a 'covenant of light' (2020: 87-88). As Reay explains, "the notion of the light within...is central to Quaker religious ideology...Christ had come in Quakers and would come in others; social and political change would accompany this inward millennium" (Reay 1984: 146).

Moore notes that, in his writings, "Fox clearly did not equate 'the light' with the Holy Spirit but, more often with the spiritual presence of Christ, or else as something that comes from Christ. There was considerable ambiguity as to what, exactly, 'the light' referred to" (Moore 2020: 79). The signifier nevertheless performed an important unifying function instead[13]. Friends considered each other

[13] In terms of Laclau's discourse theory, 'the Light' may have functioned as an 'empty signifier' by linking substitutable elements in a chain of equivalences. Its emptiness of particular content necessary to its role in uniting different ideas and identities.

equals with respect to one another’s experience of the Light. By linking the metaphor to a notion of perfectibility as a spiritual attainment, the ‘Light’ also enabled Friends to preserve a hierarchy. Friends may be said to have received different ‘measures’ of the Light. Although Fox and other ‘weighty’ Friends were acknowledged as recipients of a greater ‘measure’ than others, it was not different in kind (ibid.) Less experienced Friends, for whom the abilities for spiritual discernment were less advanced, were cautioned not to go beyond their measure, thereby preserving the authority of weightier Friends.

As a discursive innovation, the ‘inward Light’ was something of a two-edged sword. It played an important function in articulating a discursive practice but it also gave their opponents a precise angle of attack. It enabled clear theological battle lines to be drawn between the adherents of the Quaker doctrine and it's more orthodox detractors. The effect was thus to invite a sustained assault on the Quaker doctrine amid accusations of its incoherence (2020: 110-111). As Moore puts it, "Blasphemous claims of union with God, a mysterious 'light', and assertions of sinlessness. It was not surprising that Quakers found themselves attacked from all sides" (Moore 2020: 89).

2.5.2. Practically Political

Despite their inward turn, the early Quakers managed to exert a political influence nonetheless. They may have been drawn into a difficult theological battle, but in practice “the economic and religious aspects of the campaign against tithes could not be separated" (Moore 2020: 67). The religious message of the Quakers was inclusive, egalitarian, and ethical in its social implications. They preached that the Kingdom of God was within, that divine union was available to all, and extended to everyone the possibility of attaining a state of moral perfection in this life (Moore 2020: 21).

Quaker preachers were therefore more than a public nuisance. Their refusal to remove their hats not only denied the authority of civil magistrates but signified their preparedness to disobey the law and refuse to be subject to State authority (2020: 70). Friends’ attitude to the law appeared to Cromwell’s government to

invite public unrest. A proclamation in 1655 forbade disruption to public worship, a key Quaker tactic, while the Lord's Day Act of 1656 extended these provisions to the haranguing of ministers outside of religious services too. A 1657 Vagrancy Act in addition seems to have intended to have the effect of restricting the movements of travelling ministers. Quakers were eventually forced to declare that they posed no threat to civil order and renounced all armed insurrection (Moore 2020: 73). But not before they had caused the authorities some trouble.

Reay (1984) suggests that their political campaign reached a height in 1659 during the turmoil that accompanied Cromwell's death. By that time, the chief demands of their movement were liberty of conscience, the abolition of tithes, the universities that trained the clergy, and the State church itself (Bradstock 2011: 108). The political vacuum presented an opportunity for Friends to advance their campaign to overthrow the clerical establishment. They lacked, however, any real strategy for bringing about the changes they sought (2011: 108). While leading Quakers like Fox made progressive demands for religious liberty, Morton also detects anti-democratic sentiments in his writings of 1659. He accuses Fox of leading the radical religious movement into "apolitical nonconformity" in his pursuit of narrowly sectarian aims (Morton 1970: 19).

Morton laments a lost opportunity for nonconformist radicalism in the seventeenth century as an organised political force (1970: 19). Instead, salvation by the 'Light' merely placed a responsibility on individual Friends to uphold standards of godly conduct in everyday life (Moore 2020: 124). Notwithstanding their seemingly 'nonpolitical' aims, in any consistently organised sense, Quakers were opposed by those who understood the function of the official religion as holding society together (Bradstock 2011: 108). While the hostility directed at Quakers may have been the result of public perception rather than reality (Reay 1984), the political reaction to them indicates that Morton's criticism is too quick. Although the mystical grounds of Quaker public discourse, as disclosed in the writings of its leading figures, give the appearance of an introspective sect, in practice Quakerism had wide-reaching social-symbolic effects.

2.5.3. Speech and Silence

In their social practices Friends embodied the ‘inward Light’, understood as outwardly communicable, in actions that they believed expressed the will of God. The rhetorical structure of the ‘inward Light’, in its dualistic Spirit-Flesh framework of ‘truth’, thus had a powerful centrifugal logic (Bauman 1983: 124-126). Both speech and action, insofar as they gave outward form to an inward Spirit, were ‘prophetic’ performances. Consequently, “Quakers gave every reason to be feared. Their refusal to show proper respect to their betters, for example, could have far-reaching implications in a culture deeply informed by notions of hierarchy and status: since ‘the whole world is governed by superiority and distance in relations’, said one of their critics, ‘when that’s taken away, unavoidably anarchy is ushered in’” (Bradstock 2011: 108).

Richard Bauman explores how early Quaker’s combined both expressive and symbolic means to reestablish authority in the routinization of the ‘prophetic’ (1983: 7-10). He conducts a careful linguistic analysis of early Quaker discourse to trace its development from an “inchoate charismatic movement to an institutionalised and routinized introversionist sect” (1993: 18). His ‘ethnography of speaking’ (Hymes 1962) focuses on how Quaker’s distinctive ‘plain’ language functioned to establish their social identity (1983: 7, 10). Crucially, Bauman links Quaker understandings of speech and silence to the dualism between ‘Spirit’ and ‘Flesh’. On the side of ‘Spirit’, silence was understood as the means for experiencing the indwelling of God’. By attending to the ‘Inward Light’, the Quaker acknowledges God as a speaker. Henceforth, silence is the means by which the voice of God may be heard inwardly, while human speech, being of the ‘flesh’, was invariably prone to error. As a result, in a major doctrinal departure from orthodoxy, scripture served as a guide and standard but was no more valid than the ‘Word of God’ within themselves.

From this basic framework, Quakers expressed divine immanence in a chain of equivalently substitutable signifiers: Inward Light, Voice of God, Word and Truth. All outward forms, including speech, were hostage to untruth unless proceeding from the inner Light, the domain of Spirit. Bauman argues that when Fox said ‘let the truth speak in all things’ and ‘let your lives speak’, he was articulating a folk

theory of symbolic action. Those who are silently attentive to the inner voice of God can, by speaking and acting according to its leadings, live outwardly ‘in truth’ rather than according to the ‘flesh’ (1983: 25-26). Thus, reconciling the natural and earthly life with one’s essentially spiritual existence for early Friends meant inhabiting a tension between the natural and the spiritual faculties (Bauman 1983: 136). Moreover, the Spirit was communicable and could be aroused in those who witnessed their behaviour and were ready to receive the Truth. The ‘convincement’ of others was the result of this rhetorical process in religious discourse with non-Friends (Bauman 1983: 27-28).

2.5.4. Challenging Conventions

Bauman’s analysis of the meaning of speech and silence in early Quaker discourse arrives, by a different route, at a perfectionist antinomianism with its attendant social and political consequences. Despite their inward turn, Reay argues that the early Quakers would not have seen themselves as apolitical nonconformists. They became, rather, “the conscience of the radical republican cause” (Reay 1984: 20).

Bauman contends that Friends accomplished this by flouting social conversions: “the ‘plain style’ of speech and dress adopted by Friends was not deliberately contrived to be a badge of Quaker identity”. Rather, “it came by its radical unconventionality to serve that function in the eyes of the Quakers and non-Quakers alike” (1983: 53-54). The peculiar mode of speech and behaviour that characterised early Quakerism had its social significance as a symbol of resistance to existing structures of social relations. As such, Bauman maintains that it was “a manifestation of radical puritanism at nearly its most radical" (Bauman 1983: 55). When Quakers were accused of rudeness and lack of manners it was because they were viewed as “destructive of the proper order of social relations at the level of social interaction" (1983: 55-56).

Their rhetorical model of a communicable divine Light was inherently destructive of traditional vertical authority. Instead, “early Friends came to recognise a true minister as one not in need of any human authority to authorise their ministry for

their power resides in their capacity to speak from, and witness to, a lived experience, which has the power to persuade others" (1983: 92-93). Thus, "the Light was understood as having a communicative effect insofar as it provokes or solicits a response in the other" (ibid.). In this sense, "that of God is in me and is understood by that of God in you" (ibid.). The essential duty of the Quaker minister was to speak-out God's living word; giving voice to the Word of God speaking directly in them and through them, unmediated by human agency. Bauman argues persuasively that this was, for early Quakers, the essence of legitimate religious authority (1983: 41-42).

Conversely, the outward performance of signs was, in the end, unsuccessful as a means of religious communication. The performative staging of Naylor's entry into Bristol by his enthusiastic followers in 1656 was a pivotal and notorious moment in the Quaker's early history. If its symbolism was intended to be a prophetic sign of Christ's coming, it was widely interpreted by the public as evidence of Quaker's blasphemous immorality (1983: 83). Conversely, Bauman argues that the public trials of Quakers were effective social dramas: "symbolic enactments in which social conflicts are personified, placed on view, and publicly played out" (Bauman 1983: 104-105). In its public staging they shared the features of a theatrical performance inasmuch as they were: framed, public, formalised, agonistic and symbolic. In their formal aspects they involved positional identities while, in the symbolic, the actions of the participants represented larger social issues (1983: 104-105, citing Turner 1974: 33).

For instance, Quakers' refusal to take the Oath of Allegiance, originally enacted after the 1605 gunpowder plot, held acute political symbolism. "Because the Quakers' testimony against swearing was clearly known, this amounted to a direct counterposition of the authority of the state against the authority of religion" (Bauman 1983: 112-113). The Oath "condensed issues of political legitimacy, monarchy, religious separatism, and the establishment of a Royalist ascendency into one symbolic focus" (1983: 116). Even attempts to negotiate an acceptable alternative form of words symbolised a basic conflict "between the power of the state and the conscience of its people" (1983: 116). However, on the stage of the public courtroom, the dispute concentrated its political force only on the movement's leaders. The context for the wider issues raised by the Oath, that of

the legitimate religious authority, would shift to the meeting for religious worship. Quakers' reputation for disrupting church services and 'railing' against the minister, as already noted, provoked Cromwell's government to introduce new legislation.

Bauman's study of Quaker's religious ideas, language and symbolic practice helps us to understand why Quakers were so feared as harbingers of social anarchy. "By threatening the power and influence of the church, Quakers tore at the whole fabric of society" (Bradstock 2011: 114). Edward Butler, an MP, denounced Quaker principles and practices as diametrically opposed to *both* magistracy and ministry (Reay 1984: 163). Together, respect for the law *and* religious authority was presumed to be the basis of all social order. "It was the duty of the church and its priests to instil in ordinary folk respect for their betters and obedience to the law" (2011: 114).

Quakers, on the other hand, "rejected the hegemony of the elite. They questioned the primacy of the Scriptures, rejected the need for an established church or ministry, and challenged the rigid hierarchical structure of society" (Reay 1984: 163). They were nonconformist 'radicals' in their insistence on 'thee' and 'thou' instead of 'you', in their refusal to recognise titles, or to bow or doff the hat to social superiors. Each of these acts were a potent symbol of a religiously-inspired political principle of social equality. Yet so prevalent was the fear of social and religious anarchy by 1659 that Reay argues it led many to look toward the restoration of the monarchy to insure the maintenance of law and order (ibid.). People were alarmed at the increased activity of the Quaker movement and feared the violent spectacle of another Münster.[14] The social radicalism of Quaker's discursive practice of equality thus had huge unintended political repercussions.

[14] The rebellion by Anabaptists who took control of the city in Westphalia in 1534-35.

2.6. The Call to Order

Bauman endeavours to show how the social and discursive practices of Friends, in their ‘plain’ style and language, articulated a ‘prophetic’ antinomianism. In their words and behaviour, early Quakers were highly effective at mobilising dissent in symbolic acts of resistance to structures of authority: the Church and the law. However, concerns arose within the Quaker movement in relation to its ‘internal’ order. As Hill notes in his classic study, "If I am right in supposing that Quakers drew their rank and file largely from Ranter and Seeker groupings, then their problem was to impose discipline on the most individualist of all nonconformists" (Hill 2019: 189-90).

In their very early days, it seems problems of order and discipline seldom arose. Moore notes that up until 1655 internal crises were only minor (2020: 35). Nevertheless, “the Quaker movement attracted many argumentative people” and at the beginning there was no way of regulating ‘the light in the conscience’ insofar as it was liable to indicate different things to different people (Moore 2020: 135). The very public scandal of the Naylor incident in the following year led to a series of more major upheavals (ibid.). One effect of the Naylor affair, Moore suggests, was to advance Quakers’ understanding of themselves as a discrete organisation. Quakers began to see themselves as a sect among others and reconsidered their position in relation to other churches (2020: 35, ch. 17).

Bauman likewise detects a shift of focus during this period towards Quaker’s internal practices. During the 1650s Quaker’s ministry in the world was the primary focus of Friends’ energy and initiative. In relation to their outward-directed focus, meetings for worship served as a spiritual refuge. However, in the face of growing legal repression: “the very practice of turning inward to the Light in each other’s presence was in fact a powerfully unifying one” (Bauman 1983: 120-121). The metaphor of ‘the inward Light’, the illumination of Truth by the Spirit, was embodied in a shared practice centred on silence. But one could never have complete confidence about one’s capacity to give oneself up entirely to the divine will: “if they aroused no such sympathetic response, they might be judged to have been spoken in the speaker's own will, an intrusion of the fleshly impulse" (1983: 124-127, 130).

As a result, Bauman suggests, there was always an element of risk involved in speaking in the presence of one’s “auditors” and thus a tendency to be hesitant to speak at all (ibid.). Some who claimed to speak of the authority of God’s voice within could be seen as going beyond their ‘measure’. Bauman finds evidence that: “an overreadiness to judge the ministry of others emerged as a problem fairly early in the development of the Society of Friends. Because the ultimate authority for each individual lay with the Light within himself or herself, words that did not sit well with someone who was spiritually self-assured might easily be judged as being out of the Truth" (1983: 135). Thus, the pronouncement upon James Naylor was, according to Hill, a tragedy for a Quaker movement already suffering divisions from the secession of the ‘Proud Quakers’. With it came a growing concern for ‘discipline’ in Friends’ conduct.

2.6.1. Disciplining Conduct

By 1657 Edward Burrough was warning of a ‘Ranter spirit’ as he and others made the case for order and discipline (Hill 2019: 188-189). Quaker enthusiasm was damped down from the mid-1650s as the focus shifted to preserving the community (Moore 2020: 216-17). Intensifying persecution and the difficulties of maintaining a national organisation “drove the meetings back on themselves” (2020: 217). An epistle from John Whitehead in August 1662 urged Friends 'to separate themselves from the world', as ‘a peculiar people' not defiled by internal contention but 'holy', 'harmless' and 'separate from sinners'. Quakers saw themselves instead as a faithful remnant (ibid). Becoming more accommodative of other doctrinal positions, the political circumstances of the 1660s sharpened their focus on their own meetings, the recognition of other churches, and, finally, a rethinking of their theology (2020: 224).

If an earthly Kingdom was not imminent, “grouping together was a necessity if they were to maintain solidarity and mutual support under persecution” (Hill 1990: 218). The call for church discipline came both from political pressures—the need to show a united front in the face of hostile attacks from outside—and from internal pressures. From very early on, “there was a conflict between the ideas of some

free spirits and what the leaders thought acceptable” (Moore 2020: 224). A picture emerges of a developing church order of local meetings with leaders, including women, and “whose members were otherwise equal and supported each other” (Moore 2020: 138). These local meetings gathered occasionally for a ‘general meeting’ and sometimes for ‘monthly meetings’ to attend to matters of common concern. They were guided by experienced Friends, usually those who had ‘convinced’ many of their members. Moore suggests this basic organisational pattern was already established in the North by 1653-54 (2020: 138). Further, she finds in early references to Quaker roles in the 1650s: "a hierarchy, with one or more middle ranks of advisors, or 'overseers', between the summit, that is the administration of Fox and Fell, and the local meeting at the base”. Moore adds, “the system had grown up during 1653-54, as the Quaker message spread, but was now becoming formalised" (2020: 138).

Further organisational changes, credited largely to Fox, were patterned on that of the General Baptists (McGregor 1984). General Baptist churches were loosely linked, locally independent, and governed by their covenants (Moore 2020: 143). Baptist ecclesiology, however, gave organisational form to a doctrinal position that was unremittingly hostile to antinomianism, both its perfectionist or more extreme Ranterist variety (McGregor 1984: 60). The mystical spiritualist’s claims that “scriptural representations were merely figurative representations of higher spiritual experiences was totally offensive to Baptist literalism” (1984: 60). Moreover, the Baptist’s model granted “more socially prominent and better educated saints..a disproportionately dominant role in associational proceedings” (1984: 35). The legitimacy of officers in Baptist churches was granted by the congregation through the practice of voting, while other matters were reached through consensus decision-making (1984: 41).

There was, however, no mechanism for principled dissent from the collective will except for defection or expulsion (ibid.). The Baptists successfully *imposed* Christian discipline on their members, “because they rigorously purged from their ranks all but the most committed of saints” and “ejected many an independent-minded enthusiast, common during the heady days of revolution, who would not conform to the collective will of the sect” (1984: 45). From the standpoint of Baptist church polity, spiritual enthusiasm was intrinsically anarchic:

“the authority of the divine light within was supreme, autonomous, and self-sufficient” (McGregor 1984: 58). Consequently, more spiritually enthusiastic individuals found they could express themselves more freely outside the rigid formalism of the Baptist churches (ibid.).

2.6.2. Stirrings of Discontent

To the extent that many of these former Baptists found themselves among Quakers, some resistance to Fox’s reforms was inevitable. Baptist-like formalism began to appear in the latter part of the 1650s. An epistle from a gathering of the ‘Elders at Balby’ in 1656 was one of a number of prescriptive documents issued on church order, discipline, and conduct in Friends’ private lives (Moore 2020: 139). Moore notes, “[t]he amount of prescription that was compatible with direct guidance was always a difficulty, and a subject of comment by anti-Quaker writers. Just as the Balby Epistle was written, the problem was coming to a head in the dispute over James Naylor" (Moore 2020: 140).

Further reforms were introduced by Fox and other leading figures during the 1660s. Fox coined the term, ‘Gospel Order’, to describe the reorganisation of the Quaker network in 1666-68 (Moore 2020: 131). In Michael Sheeran's estimation, Fox was sincere in his efforts: "He did not make the political atmosphere and the inner strife an opportunity for imposing a structure which would institutionalise his own preeminence. Insofar as he did achieve special status, it came from the extent of his devotion to his communities..." (Sheeran 1983: 21). Moore disagrees. Everybody’s ‘measure’ was not equal and Friends recognised those with special callings, not least that of George Fox. She insists that only a minority quarrelled with this assumption. Nevertheless, “Fox was determined that there should be no further challenge to his position”, she says (Moore 2020: 46).

The reforms were a "two-fold institutionalisation of charisma" (Sheeran 1983: 21). First, “there was a subordination of all individual leadings to the control of the community, a belief that the Spirit's voice in the gathered community was more reliable than the Spirit's voice within oneself” (ibid.). It substituted communal charismatic decision for individual charismatic decision. Secondly, “the

establishment of regular quarterly and yearly meetings'' (Ibid.). The system of area or county gatherings were intended, in part, to prevent local disaffection from taking root (Moore 2020: 140). Records were kept, finances were managed at county levels, and larger gatherings held between 1658-60 were, in effect, national synods. Accredited travelling ministers maintained good links between the centre and periphery (ibid.). Towards the end of the century, the Quaker network had been structured into: “a hierarchy of Particular, Monthly, Quarterly, and Yearly Meetings, and other meetings with executive power” (ibid.).

As the new structure developed during the 1660s onwards communication began to flow more regularly from the centre to the periphery. It begs a question: "how could anybody representing the local communities speak authoritatively for them all?” (Sheeran 1983: 15, emphasis in original). Five years after the Balby epistle and in response to the Fifth Monarchist rebellion in 1661, a declaration against political violence was made by twelve leading Quakers. Both documents contravened the principle of local autonomy that granted Quaker communities a non-delegable power of local decision (ibid.). Another document circulated to local Friends in 1666, *The Testimony of the Brethren*, was signed by leaders including Farnworth and Whitehead. It made six points concerning their authority of discernment. The thrust of which was to insist that by failing to acknowledge the final authority of the business meeting, resisting the spirit of truth in the elders and members, the spiritual authority of dissident judgments ought to be rejected. Further, those so disaffected ought not serve abroad until they are reconciled to the church and, while out of unity from the body, desist from writing and publishing. Elders and overseers are thereby encouraged to beware admitting 'such as are weak and of little faith' (Moore 2020: 227).

The Testimony of the Brethren was not universally well received. Indicative of the resentment it attracted, Moore finds that: “It was regularly quoted by dissidents during the internal disputes in later years as a dreaded example of the lengths to which the Quaker establishment would go to maintain its authority" (2020: 228). One hitherto supportive leading Friend, George Bishop, voiced his objection. He wrote in response that if such things to be done as to be determined it ought to be 'by the full consent of those who are in authority in the church'. Undaunted, after his release from Scarborough Castle in September 1666 Fox also threw his weight

behind the new disciplinary measures, leading to the national hierarchical structure of meetings already described (ibid.). These ordinances on church discipline marked the evolution of the Quaker movement as a network of locally sovereign communities to a church with clear central polity. It entailed a substitution of central for local divine guidance (Sheeran 1983: 15). They had the effect of transforming an 'authority from experience' into 'authority from external directives' that Sheeran likens to “transplanting a tree by cutting off its root” (1983: 16).

In the years that followed "the local meetings themselves gradually became subject to the unifying influence of the higher levels of meetings which slowly ate away at local autonomy" (Sheeran 1983: 30). Moore is similarly troubled by the authoritarian turn taken by late seventeenth century Quakerism. She notes that: “The grip of the leaders of the meeting on expressions of the Spirit, which had been implicit in every paper ever written by Quaker leaders on questions of discipline and organisation, was formalised as never before” (2020: 228). Discipline was needed and wanted, she notes, as an outward expression of collective spiritual unity. But it was “the political situation, with the necessity of maintaining unity in the face of persecution, [that] made the imposition of discipline more urgent" (Moore 2020: 228).

In 1672 a powerful Second Day Morning Meeting was established. Comprising leading male Friends and visiting ministers, it functioned as a kind of national executive with principal responsibility for publications. A Meeting for Sufferings, tasked with finding legal remedies for persecuted brethren, followed in 1676 (2020: 229). The establishment of these new bodies marked an important stage in Friends’ attempts to mount a more coordinated and concerted campaign to win toleration, and ultimately survival, by gaining the respect of the political authorities and the wider public.

Sheeran describes the ascendance of a 'central hegemony' between 1676 and 1736 as inevitable (1983: 38): "The growth of the authority of the Meeting for Sufferings was in large measure a natural outgrowth of the need for central coordination if the campaigns to influence legislation were to succeed" (1983: 39). In order to lobby parliament effectively for Friends, it was necessary to coordinate

their activities through central supervision. This created an inevitable tension: “Gradually, bit by bit, the local meetings lost their sovereignty. Quakerism was saved from further persecution by a central institution whose very existence was in conflict with the founding Quaker principle that decisions were based on local experience in common with God's leadings" (Sheeran 1983: 40). Those who pointed to this principle, however, risked being called a ‘Ranter’, a signifier that came to mean ‘not Quaker’. In this way, the boundaries of a Quaker identity were sharpened by way of a constitutive exclusion.

2.7. The Struggle for Hegemony

Sheeran refers to an “inevitable tension” which echoes McGregor’s claim of an inherent contradiction that confounded all the ‘spiritualist’ sects. Moore agrees: "Incompatibility between 'the light' as it appears to an individual Friend and the corporate 'light' of a meeting, which was at the root of the Naylor affair, was and is a potential source of difficulty among Friends” (2020: 195). From 1656 onwards, “this recurring problem generally took the form of a challenge to the authority of George Fox" (ibid).

The Foxian reforms were met by some internal opposition from what Hill identifies as a “Ranter wing” within the movement deeply suspicious of institutionalisation and alarmed by the project to build a national church (Hill 2019: 190-194). The charge of being a ‘Ranter’ and the accusation of a ‘Ranter spirit’ became potent discursive weapons in a struggle for hegemony. As we shall see, a mythic figure of the ‘Ranter’ arose as a symbol of fleshly individualism threatening anarchy to the ‘Gospel Order’. The ‘Ranter’ represented the threatening ‘other’, an enemy within, that imperilled the movement’s campaign for their religious liberty.

Sheeran cites an anonymous 1673 pamphlet as evidence of the simmering resentment towards Fox. In it the author “railed against the 'Foxian-unity' which stigmatised those Friends who dissented from a decision because they were not inwardly moved to favour it as being God's truth. The result was “to deprive us of the law of the Spirit and to bring in a tyrannical government: it would lead us from the rule within to subject us to a rule without" (Sheeran 1983: 30). The pamphlet cited perceived abuses: too much rooting out of error, too much external programming of supposedly spontaneous meetings for worship in order to assure that the recognised ministers monopolised the time with their preaching (ibid).

If Friends in the 1670s were sensitive to what they saw as heavy handedness, Moore finds evidence that Quakers were prepared quite early on to respond decisively to the threat of a public scandal. In 1655 one Christopher Atkinson was required to sign a written confession, in the presence of two representatives from Swarthmoor, before being publicly denied by all leading Friends (2020: 136). She notes that most of the people recorded as causing persistent disruption were

strong-minded women. It may have been, she suggests, that Friends were especially sensitive to irregular behaviour by women for fear of bringing the movement into disrepute (Moore 2020: 137).

The intense persecution and public opprobrium faced by Friends after the restoration placed the movement in an impossible situation. With its survival at stake, internal unity, orderliness and public reputation were inextricably linked. In the absence of much public sympathy, the Naylor affair left the movement vulnerable to harsh repression by a restored monarchy emboldened with a mandate to insure law and order. Hill observes that the threat of Ranterism and atheism perceived by some leading Friends could only be met by an almost Hobbesian exercise of church power (2019: 191). That is to say, by a strong sovereign authority to govern the social body. Quakerism thus faced “the dilemma of a highly individualistic religion which grew up in a millenary atmosphere and was at first organisationally influenced mainly by a desire to hinder hindrances to spiritual freedom" (ibid.). According to Hill, the Naylor case forced a confrontation with Quakers’ radical wing: “Anything not acceptable to the leadership after the Naylor debacle tended to be dismissed as 'the rotten principles of the old Ranters'” (Hill 1990: 191).

2.7.1. The Ranter Myth

Robert Barclay's 1674 *The Anarchy of the Ranters and Other Libertines* offered a cogent intellectual defence of Fox's ecclesiastical polity (Sheeran 1983: 32). Arguing for governmental authority along more traditional lines, Barclay urged that “those who had the higher spiritual gifts, the ministers and elders, were specially blessed with the Spirit's guidance, but not inevitably. For the church's good order, these people of known ability to discern were to be encouraged by other members of the church to ‘instruct, reprove, yea, and command in some cases'” (ibid.). There should be, therefore, a presumption of correctness to the decisions of the community, especially of ministers gathered in the yearly meeting whose advice ought to be accepted by local meetings of Friends (1983: 34). Another weighty Friend, George Keith, went further still by advocating in 1695 that all such decisions should be deemed infallibly determined by the Spirit: a position that

resulted in his expulsion by the yearly meeting (1983: 34-35). Keith, it seems, went too far in his claims concerning authority. For Barclay, authority is vested in those *recognised* for their gift of discernment.

In their drive for discipline in the 1660s, Hill maintains that leading Quakers were right to trace a continuity between the Ranters, Naylor’s supporters, and other figures that rose to prominence in the disputes that followed. The controversy over ‘hat honour’ stirred by John Perrot in 1661-1666 was reminiscent of Naylor’s reputed challenge to Fox’s spiritual authority. Before his ignominious fall, Naylor was the chief spokesman of political radicalism and the Ranter tendency in Quakerism (Hill 2019: 186-7). Other dissenters that followed in his wake, notably John Story and John Wilkinson in 1670-76, caused another sharp separation amongst Friends. These dissidents opposed the subordination of the individual Light within to the sense of the meeting and objected to the hierarchical structure (2019: 192). They saw the new organisation as an infringement on individual liberty that denied the presence of Christ within all believers (2019: 192). They were not easily persuaded that the communal sense of the meeting wasn’t a compulsive discipline that: “meant an end to the absolute individualism in which the spirit of God led each Friend independently” (2019: 192-193).

If a distinction could be drawn between a Quaker and Ranter, it remained however a fine one. Of a ‘rude company of Ranters’ Fox said he encountered in 1668 he wrote: 'though they were Ranters, great opposers of Friends and disturbers of our meetings, some people that did not know them would be apt to say they were Quakers'. Hill muses, “whether they were 'really' Ranters, or whether they were Ranterish Quakers is no easier to determine today than, in all probability, it was in 1668" (Hill 1990: 191). It had been said publicly as early as the mid-1650s that if the Quakers had not come, the Ranters would have over-run the nation. Quakers were evidently more acceptable to the ruling class; but, Hill remarks, had not their doctrines initially been very close, the Quakers could not have absorbed many Ranters into their more gentile ranks. Indeed, Hill finds no shortage of documentary evidence to support the claims that to many contemporaries Ranters and Quakers were indistinguishable in matters of doctrine (2019: 178).

The eminent Liberal Quaker scholar, Rufus Jones, has little sympathy for the Ranter wing. George Fox was rightfully alert to the dangers of the latter's indulgence in "high imaginations" which had no power to discern truth from error. Jones concedes: "But who is to decide what is 'high imagination' stuff and what is 'heavenly vision?'"(1932: 134). In his *Journal* entries Fox was initially attracted to the mystical passion of the Ranters, even as he was revolted by their loose morality and unsympathetic to their pantheism: "The Ranter influence was, in the main, negative and corrective", Jones claims (1932: 138). And yet, "the Ranter shakes us awake" and "makes us realise that if we are going to get anywhere with mysticism we must learn to distinguish between 'will-o-the-wisp' flashes and solid illuminative contributions to the spiritual wealth of the world" (ibid.). By confronting the Ranters a new Society could emerge: "while remaining no less mystical, [it] grew all the time more balanced, and developed group tests and objective standards to try and prove and verify the inward light of the individual" (1932: 139).

Sheeran wonders, however, "what controls could be introduced to test inspiration without denying inspiration altogether?" (Sheeran 1983: 24). Moreover, "harmony of the group could be achieved by excluding those who disagreed—the history of Quaker schisms shows how readily a divided community can split into separate camps each of which manifests *internal* love and unity" (1983: 28, emphasis retained). Sheeran concludes that the Friends' doctrine of discernment during this early period lacked a theological tradition that could have provided a more objective test. The only recourse was exclusion on the grounds of a refusal to be subject to legitimate authority.

2.7.2. Othering the Threat

The quest for unity by way of exclusion played an important role in the development of Quakerism (McGregor 1977). Quaker leaders recognised the need to define the limits of their group. Who the Quakers were and who they were not became of crucial importance in the struggle for legitimacy. In their campaign for religious liberty, recognition of Quakers meant they needed first to be identifiable as a group acceptable to the public. Thus, order and discipline became indispensable elements of a religious identity. Their leaders needed to improve the

group’s public reputation and let it be known who ‘we’ are not: anarchists, revolutionaries, and violent disruptors of social order.

McGregor (1977) carefully traces the role that a mythic Ranterism played in redrawing the ideological lines around the Quaker identity. A narrative of respectability also needed a fantastical element; a plausible conspiracy theory with which to cleanse its ranks of its disreputable elements. The association of the ‘Ranter’ ’image with internal dissent began with the Perrot revolt in 1661. “Fox considered Perrot’s brand of charismatic enthusiasm a dangerous self-indulgence which threatened the unity and safety of the movement” (1977: 360). It was, however, “the association of Perrot with Naylor [that] provided the framework for the Ranter conspiracy theory” (ibid.). Quakers were initially reluctant to concede to their opponents the accusation that Naylor and his followers were nothing other than Ranters.

Only after the Perrot controversy was the Ranterish spirit in Naylor “retrospectively discerned” (1977: 361). If Perrot simply meant to challenge convention, Naylor had openly signalled his doubts about Fox’s spiritual leadings. Refusal to doff the hat was a symbolic act of resistance to authority that threatened unity at a time of intense persecution: “The association of the hatmen with Naylor’s rebellious supporters gave credibility to this theory” (ibid.). Perrot bitterly denied the accusation, notes McGregor, “simply for placing the authority of the inner light above that of Fox” (ibid.). John Wilkinson and John Story “were similarly concerned about the threat to the pure, individualistic spirit of Quakerism posed by the increasingly rapid growth of institutional uniformity” (1977: 362).

There is little evidence of anything remotely resembling an organised Ranter movement after 1650, McGregor insists. ‘Ranter’ became instead, for influential Quaker authors, “a convenient description of the unwelcome by-products of their own missionary activity” (1977: 354). It named both the extreme emotional responses of some of their converts as well as those who were reluctant to submit to Quaker discipline (ibid.). In other words, Quakers deployed a concept of “civil or notional Ranterism” in order to dissociate themselves from disreputable elements in their own ranks (1977: 355). The distinction they wanted to emphasise was between an extreme antinomian belief in freedom from the guilt of sin and

Quaker's perfectionist doctrine of the indwelling Light. If the earlier libertine Ranter writers cast doubt on sin as an operative concept, Quaker leaders urged Friends to resist its temptations and uphold high standards of conduct. At the root of this theological difference, McGregor suggests, was the innate fatalism of Calvinist election. In other words, it was from the uncertainty of one's predestined eternal status that both Quakers and Ranters sought an escape (ibid.). For the former, "insistence that the triumph of the light within should be demonstrably manifest in the moral conduct of the believer led them to judge the religious belief which they encountered according to their opinion of its ethical implications rather than the doctrinal affiliations of its adherents" (1977: 358).

Early Quakers identified Ranters by their behaviour: invariably "rude, swinish, and filthy, as indeed were most of the opposition" (1977: 358). Rudeness and Ranterism were almost synonymous references to a diffuse anti-Christian ungodliness that confronted those who fought what Quakers called the Lamb's War (McGregor 1984b: 137). Apart from their notorious drinking, dancing, singing and swearing, the image of Ranterism was entangled with blasphemy, threats, parody, doctrinal controversy and emotional excesses. But by the end of the interregnum it simply came to represent any anti-social manifestation of the light within (1977: 359). As such, it was a watchword for the threat to internal order with all the connotations of its earlier usage still attached. It referred not to opposition from outside but the threat from within the movement: "In the revolts and schisms which plagued Restoration Quakerism, Ranterism was identified by Fox and his supporters with the internal opposition to the necessary process of consolidation" (1977: 359). More generally, "The Society of Friends first developed its sense of the past, the desire to document its origins, by way of demonstrating that the dissidents' scruples were simply the principles of the old Ranters" (ibid.)

In short, Ranterism was employed successfully as a discursive weapon in the movement's domestic disputes (McGregor 1984b: 136). It contributed, during the Restoration, to "the victory of group discipline over the individualistic spirit of early Quakerism" (McGregor 1977: 363). At the same time, the image of Ranterism as "any irresponsible claim to spiritual liberty" is illustrative of Quakerism's growing pains. Moreover, McGregor concludes, its deployment is no more evidence of actual Ranter activity as it is of any widespread support for mystical

antinomianism after 1651 (ibid.). The figure of the threatening ‘other’ in the form of a Ranter re-drew the boundaries of the Quaker movement. Its re-articulation employed the signifier, ‘Ranter’ to signify the opposition of ‘order and discipline’; the constitutive outside of a governable body of ‘Quakers’ as a Society. It can be seen as an attempt to resolve the dilemma concerning the legitimate site of authority: the individual or the collective. In the end, the identity of the latter in the public imagination was paramount to the Quaker’s survival as a group.

In the face of intensifying persecution, the internal threat to collective and centralised authority was a political risk too great. Internal disorder signalled Quakerism’s threat to the wider social order. If their unity could no longer be forged by their dissent from the religious establishment, they needed to re-articulate what it meant to be a Quaker. The new public enemy, disorder and rebellion, functioned to stabilise a Quaker identity as both peaceable and governable. Radicalism surrendered to quietism.

2.7.3. The Defeat of Radicalism

As we have seen, leading social historians of the seventeenth century carefully trace the development of Quakerism from a loose network of charismatic separatists to a well-organised, disciplined but introspective sect. Fox's great achievement was: "to form a disciplined sect, with a preaching ministry, out of a rabble of ex-Ranters and others new to the idea of thinking for themselves about religion" (Hill 2019: 288). The Quakers emerged as an identifiable 'people' from a more dissolute 'multitude'.

Recent commentators like Rosemary Moore and Richard Bauman follow the classic Quaker historian William Braithwaite (1912, 1919) in depicting two periods of early Quakerism. The first, through the 1650s, and especially before the Naylor controversy in 1656, when at the height of their missionary zeal their public statements were at their most radical. It was during this period that early Friends castigated "the prevailing system of social and economic inequality and the politeness system that supported it as founded on earthly lust, pride and self-will" (Bauman 1983: 57). Quakers appeared as a populist movement engaged in a counter-hegemonic struggle against the hierarchical Church. Friends formed a growing network of separatists whose unity-in-dissent can be figured in its 'up/down' dimension in terms of an antagonism towards a powerful clerical elite (De Cleen and Carpentier 2017: ch. 13).

Early Quaker discourse fused heretical elements circulated widely by a free press with more orthodox Protestant doctrine. The metaphor of the 'inward Light' functioned as a nodal point in a discursive structure, signifying equality in a political community they called the 'true church' and whose constitutive outside was the hierarchical established church. The refusal to attend or to pay tithes and to gather separately signified their dissension from the established social and religious order. Some expressed their opposition to both the minister and magistrate in symbolic acts of public disobedience. Everyday norms and conventions that served to verify social inequality were flouted in a confident enactment of a political theology that disputed sources of traditional authority. The 'otherness' of Quakers was forged by a shared sense of social and economic injustice, disappointed political hopes, and heightened eschatological

expectations. The spiritual equality of the common man was the popular basis for an alternative society yet to rise from the ashes of the democratic revolution.

During this first period of ‘emergent’ Quakerism, early Friends castigated “the prevailing system of social and economic inequality and the politeness system that supported it as founded on earthly lust, pride and self-will” (Bauman 1983: 57). But from the 1660s, their discourse shifted. First, dropping claims to an exclusive legitimacy as the one ‘true church’ they recognised other groups. The logic of difference, however, required that Friends defined clearly who they were by being clear about who they were not. Thus, the question of limits and identity surfaced as leading Friends conceived of a Society of Friends as their form of church. Unity became the principal concern of more conservative new members alarmed by the factionalism aroused by the Perrot affair. Anticipating the demand for sworn loyalty to the Crown in the Quaker Act (1662), William Burrough in 1661 urged 'humility', 'meekness', 'good will', 'clear conscience', 'inoffensiveness', and 'harmless conversations'.

No longer prepared to give offence to the authorities, the message was, in effect, "stay out of public affairs" as they “purchased their religious freedom at the sacrifice of engagement in worldly politics" (Bauman 1983: 117-118). It was a necessary price, albeit at the cost of “the energy and power of the direct inward experience that had energised the first publishers of the Truth" (ibid.). The prophetic ministry against the priests and professors “turned to a sectarian cultivation of a withdrawn, inoffensive posture toward the world" (1983: 151-3). The need arose “to determine who was and who was not ‘a Quaker so-called’” (Hill 1990: 218) since “without internal purity survival as a sect was impossible” (Hill 2019: 292). Membership was pared back to those with strong other-worldly convictions as they “threw off their radical, near-Ranter wing” (Hill 1984: 208, emphasis added). As a result, “what had looked in the Ranter heyday as though it may become a counter-culture became a corner of the bourgeois culture whose occupants asked only to be left alone” (Hill 2019: 286). Bauman argues: "it is difficult to conceive of a more decisive means of bringing a charismatic ministry under control than the power of disownment” (Bauman 1983: 141, 144). Thus the Perrot schism resulted in “decisive and authoritative institutionalisation of corporate control over the ministry” (ibid.).

What at first were subversive symbols of resistance to the social order became a matter of distinctiveness: a conformity of style in speech and conduct that made Friends first identifiable and eventually tolerable. The ‘Gospel Order’ can be viewed, in Foucaultian terms, as the governing regime for an alternative Society: an organised system for acting upon and directing human conduct (Dean 2010). Arguably, the institution of Gospel Order marked a shift from a politics of dissent to a politics of identity. It became necessary to draw a discursive equivalence between internal order *and* equality to demonstrate to a sceptical public Quaker’s opposition to both inequality *and* social disorder. As a signifier of equality the inward Light served as the premise for unity. As a signifier of order it had to serve as a *promise* of unity. Collective agreement signalled a unity-in-order.

Orderliness was thus seen as evidence of the unifying Spirit of Truth. Since unity and order were of the ‘Spirit’, those who persisted in voicing dissent were offering fleshly resistance to the authority of a collective (divine) will. By invoking the mythic spectre of the ungovernable Ranter an unlikely coalition could now be formed with the juridical authorities and a hesitant public. In effect, ‘we’ like ‘you’ are not ‘them’. Consequently, with quietism also came a more othodox religious discourse; Quaker’s theological statements increasingly adopted the language of traditional Christianity (Moore 2020: 216). Rather than signifying moral perfectibility, the inner Light came to re-emphasise sin (Hill 2019: 286). Hill notes that the inner voice of God no longer spoke of the mood of the masses, the pressure for social change, or revolutionary transformations of thought. Rather, the ‘sense of the meeting’ accepted the ‘common sense’ of the dominant classes in society” (2019: 286).

In the last resort, Hill argues, “Quakers didn’t want to overturn the world, any more than constitutional Levellers wanted to overthrow the sanctity of private property” (2019: 289). The Quakers were not alone: “all the sects were anxious to disavow those to the left of themselves, to show how moderate and respectable they were really” (Hill 2019: 292). As we shall see in Chapter 3, one contemporary Friend detects a shift from what he calls the radical ‘content’ of the subject name ‘Quaker’ to a preoccupation with a Quakerly ‘style’.

2.8. A Novel Experiment

The early Quakers' campaign for toleration forced a resolution to perennial tensions, if not contradictions, in their radical theology. The Quakers finally won their religious liberty by shoring up their discursive borders. They had to define *who* they were and *what* they were not. The egalitarian doctrine of the inward Light played a central role. It solidified a movement around a popular idea. More importantly, as we have seen, it expressed a principle that regulated their embodied practices. Foremost among these were those of speech and silence both in their meetings and in everyday interactions. A heresy thus became a way of ordering human coexistence, a system of governance, and a way of life for a priesthood of all believers.

What did Quaker mean in the seventeenth century? A Quaker was a religious enthusiast who believed that their speech and actions expressed a Spirit of truth available to all. The out-working of this simple but radical theological idea almost turned the world upside down. In the end, however, the individualism it provoked had to be tamed. They were a group that discerned together the divine will illuminated by the Spirit in common possession. With their collective survival at stake, Quakers' relations with a fearful public demanded that that relationship be redefined. The emphasis shifted subtly from the individual to the collective. Unity and order became the watchwords of the day. Their leaders made their representations to the newly installed King. They clarified their intentions. They sorted out their internal squabbles by bringing the unruly into line or by simply getting rid of them. They asked, on behalf of all, that they be left in peace. For the purposes of their public relations campaign the Quaker's collective identity took precedence. The Society of Friends survived not by melting into obscurity, making themselves invisible as a shadowy band of insurrectionary revolutionaries. Quite the opposite, 'they' became publicly identifiable as harmless by their common manner of dress, speech and behaviour. A rude multitude finally became a peculiar people.

The Quietist period of Quakerism endured throughout the following century before a return to more politically active, socially reforming Quakerism in the nineteenth. Friends subsequently went on to play an important role in educational and penal

reform, as well in the abolition movement and peace work. If the story of the early Quakers can, as Friends claim, inform the future of Quakerism we must therefore ask: which story and which form? Seventeenth century thinkers were similarly exercised. As Paolo Virno (2004) notes, “the two polarities, people and multitude, have Hobbes and Spinoza as their putative fathers" (2004: 21). The polarity persists in the tension between the One and the Many. Virno suggests that the multitude today redefines the One: the many need a form of unity, of being a One, not as a promise but as a *premise* (2004: 25). Thus, in contemporary political thought the ‘many’ may be seen as the individualisation of the universal or shared experience. Consequently, the One is the base which authorises differentiation (ibid.).

On the other hand, constructing a ‘people’ is the populist promise of a radical politics of social change (Laclau 2005, 2006). The multitudes may, in this sense, be conceived as a process of political subjectivation or the name of the power that invigorates the whole (Rancière 2015: 98). But the quest for a promised unity may also be motivated by fear of disunity or of the dissolution of the social. A Hobbesian dialectic of dread and refuge descends to us today as fear / security (Virno 2004: 25). At the heart of the tension between the people and multitude, like that of the individual and the collective, is the paradox of identity / difference. Faced with the fearful presence of the other we may seek security in the promise of the same. The radical project of Quakerism, unfinished by the end of the seventeenth century, resolved the dilemma by naming the threatening ‘other’ — the figure of the Ranter — as constitutive of the self-sameness of the group. A hegemonic identity prevailed and the Quakers survived.

2.8.1. What’s in a Name?

Who, then, are the Quakers today? And what has become of them as a group or movement? This is the aim of the present study. From the standpoint of the interested participant-observer, my goal is to identify and understand the social and discursive practices that constitute the ‘Quaker’ as such in postmodernity (sec. 1.3). These are also the questions Friends are asking themselves as they reflect and contemplate their future in uncertain and changing times. They are

exercised one again by the need to survive; an imperative that forces them to declare publicly who they are and what they do. A definition or characterisation that can steady the ship in turbulent seas; that can stabilise or fix their identity by negotiating their differences. A definition that can make them identifiable to others. Visible, perhaps. Solid, even. A solidarity that can be achieved through a practice of politics among Friends. Or, as Derrida once put it, a politics of Friendship.

Once again, Friends are asking themselves afresh 'who' or 'what' are 'we'? Are we a People or a Multitude? A One or the Many? Put another way, how much solidity can their religious formation have and still call itself a 'liquid religion'? If the task at hand is a solidarity in 'liquid' times, the Quakers can, as it were, go against the flow. If, on the other hand, they go with the flow of postmodernity then a fluidity of form may be its defining characteristic. Who is to say? This is precisely their conundrum. As they contemplate the future of their movement, Friends have begun a lengthy and inclusive process of reflective discernment from the bottom-up. Reexamining their book of discipline, sifting through their treasured texts, reconsidering their past and imagining a future. What is to be preserved, maintained and continued by 'a simple church supported by a simple charity'? What can be let go, modified, or allowed to silently slip away in order to 'reinvigorate Quakerism'? What are the common or distinctive elements that can define a 'Quaker' way of being in a changing world? A world that has been variously described as: postmodern, postsecular, or post-Christian.

The answer is inevitably tied up with the past and its interpretation. A reinterpretation that is a re-telling, a re-invention, or a novel retraditionalization. The re-interpretation of the past in the present is necessarily a backward projection. At the same time, the present carries the past forward by way of a recontextualisation. The meaning of the past in the present is thus both a production and reproduction. That the Quakers are prepared to engage in such deep soul-searching may be a testament to the fluidity of their form of faith. It is a matter of hermeneutics that may be radically so.[15] Just as Kierkegaard wanted to draw a distinction between recollection and a repetition forward, our openness to change between the 'rabbinic' and 'poetic' (Caputo 2017). What license for change

[15] John Caputo (2013: 74) argues that his Derrida-inspired 'radical theology' cannot be insulated from what he previously called 'Radical Hermeneutics' (1987): an examination of different kinds of differences, especially diverse multiplicity and singular alterity.

can be issued by the continuity of tradition? *Who* is a Quaker (subject) is bound up with objectivity; with the *what* of Quakerism. And perhaps it's *what for*. If Quakerism has a 'point', as suggested earlier, it must have both an object and an objective. Further still, if Quakerism has a 'why?' it is constituted in the discourse of its participants. To enquire what is Quakerism for, we must ask its subjects: 'what does it mean to be a 'Quaker'?

The Quaker subject is constituted in what Foucault termed a politico-historical discourse. This was his great insight. His philosophical project exposed the contingency of historical discourse as a politics of truth. The discourse with which he was concerned forged a link between relations of force and relations of truth. The truth of what can or may be legitimately said is time-bound. But history comes from below and has no boundaries or limits (Foucault 2020 [1976]). To ask 'who' or 'what' are the Quakers is to ask *when* they are. To the extent that any social formation is discursively produced in history, it is necessarily unboundaried. In order to define or characterise a discursive formation, religious or otherwise, we must, as it were, pick our moment. To answer the question we must freeze the frame at a particular point when a constellation can be said to be 'true' of the Quakers. Each re-telling or reformation carries some elements forwards into the present, while leaving others behind. But each re-telling takes place in the present and reconstructs the past for today.

Perhaps more so than the first Friends, Quakers today inhabit a world of diverse and singular experiences; of inter-cultural exchanges and thus of competing interpretations of 'reality'. What is at stake for Friends in liquid modernity is however the same: the basis of a commonality that defines the limits of inclusion or their enclosure in a changeable world. If there are grounds for their Friendship it may be found in whatever binds them together in spite of their differences. The 'liquid' conditions of postmodernity may yield a diversity of solidarities and aggregations. Mitchell Dean observes: "if we are witnessing the 'birth of community' in a new form, it is not as the traditional bonds and hierarchies of small-scale human association such as the village but as the transitory, overlapping, multiple relations of affinity and identification felt by self-responsible subjects" (Dean 2020: 222). Who exactly are the self-responsible subjects that can be named Quakers? Moreover, who does the naming?

2.8.2. Who Then?

The lesson of the early Friends is their emergence in history. They were an original reinvention. As the historian's accounts of 'radical religion' reveal, Quaker discourse *emerged* from pre-existing elements assembled in opposition to a dominant discourse. 'Quaker' was taken-up as a subject name for a counter-hegemonic movement. They articulated in a novel way radical religious-political elements already circulating widely. This rearticulation arrested the flow of inherited heretical ideas and affiliations. They were a contingent product of their time. A moment in which these ideational and linguistic resources were in abundant supply.

The time, as we say, was ripe for change. Spiritual seeking and unrest were widespread after the Civil War. The early Friends were responding to an opportunity for a novel re-stabilisation. An identifiable people eventually emerged from a rude multitude of borrowed ideas and loosely aligned groups. They coalesced around a small set of popular religious ideas. As Barry Reay reminds us, the Quaker position had more or less been reached *before* the arrival of the Quakers (1984b: 143). By the end of the seventeenth century an institutional form of sectarian Quakerism had solidified. But not without its internal fights and external struggles had been settled. The well-organised form of a settled-down or sedimented discourse was purchased at the cost of a more chaotic radicalism.

That's how the story goes, or one version of it. It can therefore be told differently and there is more than one version of the story. How then may we describe or characterise an *authoritative* Quakerism? Some accounts draw heavily on the religious beliefs expressed in motifs and tropes employed in extant documents and memorialised by retelling. History is the archeology of knowledge infused with productive power (Foucault 1972; 1980). The writings of leading Quakers from a time of origins exert an enduring influence. Especially those of George Fox. His personal experiences, preserved in his journal writings, are foundational texts. His accounts of the inward workings of the Spirit, figured as a Light within and the

source of truth, take centre stage in the discursive performance of an authentic Quakerism.

In the historical record can thus be found a compelling metaphor of ‘the Light within’ condensing ideas that redefined the relationship between God and human beings. Crucially, however, it also entailed an undecidability that reconfigured power relations. It functioned to unify a group committed to putting their egalitarian implications into practice. It had real-world effects in the words and actions of its preachers, an influence spread wide by an expanding network of itinerant ministers. People gathered in an act of dissent to hear in their message a moment of emancipation. Margaret Fell’s account of hearing Fox is testimony to the power of his words, the impact they could have on the hearer (see Appendix D). Quaker ministers took aim especially at the established church and a clerical elite. But in so doing they were chipping away at the foundations of society and sniping at its authorities. They practised in the small everyday things what they preached to the crowd. To refuse to say ‘you’ or to doff the hate was a refusal of power, a small act of dissent. The Quakers declared that the dominant social order was not the kingdom God had promised. Some testified boldly to this truth in outdoor gatherings, meetings of friends, in ‘steeple houses’ and courtrooms. They persuaded many. And many of them went to prison.

The mythic and prophetic thus combined in the metaphor of an inner Kingdom, the deposit of the Spirit that illuminated the promise of this world. A new separation of Spirit and Flesh, of subject and object, was a deconstruction of a power which hitherto flowed strictly from above. These images and figures gave expression to an immediacy, an unmediated experience available to all as the Word of God. The inward Light granted divine authority to the Quaker’s speech and actions as ‘truth’. The power of truth flowed in new directions, no longer contained or containable. The prophetic was regularised in their Meeting as an alternative ordering demonstrable in spiritual practices. As Bauman (1983) shows, their understanding of silence and speech informed practices that overcame the problem that Spirit / Flesh dualism posed to the doctrine of Divine indwelling. The result was a radically antinomian democratisation of truth-claims in a particular social form. To their orthodox opponents it was a scandalously irreligious and politically dangerous innovation.

At the risk of putting it too crudely in today's terms, in these events we may discover either a 'religious' or 'political' version of the story of early Friends. Both are true interpretations—as historians such as Moreton, Hill, McGregor and Reay are eager to demonstrate. Their larger point is that each are sides of the same coin; a sleight of hand that constructs a categorical distinction unknown to the subjects they describe. We are today free to emphasise one over the other in a way that the first Friends were not. The liberal Quaker historian and moderniser Rufus Jones emphasised the mystical roots of a practical Quakerism. Barry Reay agrees that the notion of the Light within was (and still is) "central to Quaker religious ideology"(1984: 146). The early Friends were not, however, preoccupied with theology and they lacked any coherent political philosophy as such (1984: 145, 152). They did, however, reject "the hegemony of a learned elite" (1984: 146). They expressed instead the common grievances of ordinary people and had the advantage of being politically well-connected. Reay insists that from its beginning the Quaker movement was "a movement of political and social as well as religious protest" (1984: 141). He thus employs familiar categories to describe the most successful and radical of the "Revolution sects" (1984: 142). If Christ had come in the Quakers then "social and political change would accompany this inward millennium" (1984: 146).

2.8.3. What Now?

How do Quakers describe themselves today? A casual visitor to the *Quakers in Britain* website may be surprised by their apparent diffidence. The words that greet them most prominently on the homepage are few. "Welcome. Quakers are a faith group committed to working for equality and peace". On the same page under 'about us' a pithy further clarification is offered: "We try to live in truth, peace, simplicity and equality, finding God in ourselves and those around us. Our meetings offer a welcoming opportunity for spiritual exploration". If these relatively thin descriptions express the essentials, digging deeper we find fuller accounts of "a radical church born during radical times", of "common ideas" but "different

journeys", a "search for truth, not an arrival", and practices that "grew out of Christianity".[16]

These or any other short descriptions of Quakers in Britain may of course be contested by thicker descriptions. Not all Friends may necessarily agree with the authorised version on the 'official' website. Such is the problem of representation that thin descriptions may have to suffice in the name of inclusivity. As Collins (2009) has argued there is today no straightforward answer to the question, 'what is a Quaker?' Arguably, there never has been. As discussed earlier, Collins suggests a multi-perspectival understanding of Quaker identity is necessary. Since the subject is constituted in a discourse, a range of possible subject positions or identifications may be possible. Indeed, who or what may legitimately be called 'Quaker' is a matter of politics. It redefines a collective self in relation to the other — as Quakerism's history of schism and continuity illustrates well. Any definition or characterisation is thus contestable. Any representation entails an exclusion. The scholarly outsider may thus be wary of making such pronouncements. Some Friends may be equally reluctant to define limits or set boundaries. Others may be less reticent about confidently defining the essentials. This is their prerogative — it is *their* politics.

Quakers may define themselves according to their core, central or common practices. Commonality does not however settle the matter once and for all. New social or discursive practices may be introduced that are not commonly accepted as 'Quaker'. At least not initially. Commonality is both a claim and a contest. It is a matter for negotiation, of collective discernment that begins with an *uncommon* innovation. Alternatively, rather than identifying what is common, Friends and their observers may look instead for the distinguishing features of their discursive practice. For those signifying elements — phrases, behavioural norms, activities etc. — that mark Quakers out as 'other' in relation to something *more* common. That is to say, it marks them out as a 'peculiar people', separate from the world. For those who identify in this way, these are the *distinctive* elements that define *the* Quaker identity. Any elements shared with those who do not identify *as* Quakers are not distinctive *of* Quakers. Overlapping discursive practices and

[16] Quakers in Britain website: https://www.quaker.org.uk/ accessed 18th August 2021.

hybrid identities thus pose a problem for an identity defined by marks of distinction.

Thus, Quakers may therefore be characterised, on the one hand, by practices that are internally shared in common. For example, the practice of silent or unprogrammed worship; the meaning of which may be left open to interpretation. On the other hand, they may be characterised by a distinctiveness that, in relation to an outside, is relatively uncommon. Again, their manner of worship may perform this function in a thin sense. A thicker account of their distinctiveness may, however, lead more readily to an essentialism that obscures its historically-contingent construction. Simply put, external differences define the in-group boundary around the same; while internal differences expose the latter to the contingency of its construction. Internal otherness or multiplicity appears as a troubling reminder that we are not at one with ourselves. It prompts the question: should a multitude be a people? How much difference, disagreement or dissent can be tolerated within a group before its common ground starts to look shaky?

Foucault argues that if marked, visible or great natural differences divide the social space conflict can immediately be settled. The weak surrender to the strong (Foucault 2020: 91). This may be how the early Friends won their toleration from a sovereign power. But Foucault doubts that such natural differences exist, as such. Instead, paradoxically, what Hobbes saw as a state of war is an endless diplomatic rivalry among equals (2020: 92). Thus, when differences are small, unstable, disorderly and undistinguished, no surrender is strictly necessary. In this anarchic state of affairs, the weak is sufficiently similar to the strong to never give up the struggle; the strong remain worried and must remain on their guard (2020: 91). The absence of ‘natural’ differences therefore creates risks, uncertainties and the perpetual threat of conflict. It is an undeclared ‘war’ played out in the presentations of the self and other; an interplay of representations (2020: 92).

For Friends today, a culture of silence may conceal a diversity of religious beliefs as a means of avoiding open conflict (Dandelion 2005, 2008). On the other hand, silent or unprogrammed worship is the common practice of Liberal Quakerism upon which all are broadly in agreement. If Foucault is correct in his analysis the minimisation of differences results nevertheless in a perpetual but productive ‘war’

of competing representations. This interplay may in fact be the distinctly 'Quaker Way' of structuring power relations. A structure that may open-up make multiple positions in a radical pluralistic social form—or else constrains the range of legitimate positions available. Stories of origins are a way that power authorises what can be legitimately said by whom. The authoritative voice most often invoked is that of a long-dead preacher.

As already noted, Dandelion (2007) supplements these core practices with four main tenets: experience, relevance, change, and progressivism. Experience, however, has the "primacy" (2007: 129). If there is any difficulty, therefore, it lies in its contestable interpretation. Popular contemporary Quaker writers overcome this difficulty by drawing a distinction between the various representations of Quaker experience and its common object. Quakers, they say, can legitimately describe the same experience in their own words. For many Friends *the* Quaker experience is a *distinctly* religious experience. Contemporary Quakerism can therefore be characterised as a shared religious experience of 'the Light within'. A common experience that descends in a direct line from Friends in the seventeenth century. This naturalised experience functions to essentialise an objective definition.

Further still, the inward experience of a subject is logically prior to outward action in the world. The claim is made that corporate 'testimonies' of Friends today — those of equality, peace, simplicity and truth — are to be properly understood as the outworking of a collectively discerned inward experience. Collective discernment is thus evidence of a common object coming into presence. However one chooses to describe the experience, it is nevertheless an object in *shared* possession. The object of experience is 'what' is held in common. In this way, a diversity of perspectives at the level of description converge upon a common referent beyond. The object beyond words thereby functions to stipulate a subject position that transcends differences. Thus, the presumption of a common experience lends Quakerism its enduring solidity as a mark of identity.

2.8.4. Truth in Action

It is at this point, however, that a distinctively Quaker discourse on religious experience runs into problems. In its construction of the subject-object relation, we may detect the distinctly modern imprint of secularisation. The priority of inward experience over outward action implies a separation of the realm of private ‘religion’ from a public ‘politics’ that is a hallmark of Western modernity. It is precisely this distinction that historians of ‘radical religion’ insist would have been unintelligible to Quaker radicals at the dawn of the modern era. The claim to truth inscribed by the words and actions by the early Quakers was a matter of *provenance* not primacy. The truth signified in speech-acts and symbolic actions were verifiable only by their effects upon others. Its source was disclosed by its power.

Thus, ‘convincement’ as an intersubjective transformation was not a conversion. It was more like a conversation. It was a truth-effect that evidenced the Spirit at work in the world. God was figured as the spiritual source of a truth-telling measure in every human being. The Spirit animated the human subject as an agent of truth manifesting a Divine promise. Bauman (1983) argues persuasively that, for the early Friends, the truth of one’s words and actions lay in their power to convince. Truth and power were inseparable. Today we may call this a rhetorical power which, once admitted to the public square, is a practice of politics. By prioritising an inward experience as distinctly ‘religious’ have Friends, in a sense, departed from their origins? What we today call ‘political’ and ‘religious’ were tightly intertwined at the dawn of modernity. Modernity subsequently set about disentangling a troublesome knot that reason demanded must be picked apart.

As Foucault describes in detail, the seventeenth century inaugurated a rationality of government and the reason for a State (Foucault 2007 [1978]; 2020 [1976]). The contemporary discourse on ‘religion’ is viewed by some contemporary critical scholars as the construction of a distinctly modern category for which ‘politics’ is its co-dependent ‘other’ (for example, Arnal and McCutcheon 2013). They are separate domains of thought and action that did not exist, as it were, when the Quakers first emerged from radical milieu. We will explore further the relation between the ‘religious’ and ‘political’ in a post-secular religiosity in the final

concluding chapter. There I will attempt to sketch the contours of a ‘political spirituality’ bequeathed by Quakers to postmodern seekers. We shall however arrive there by a longer route. The road less travelled is the one taken from below. It is by way of a close examination of how Quakers today describe the practices and experiences of faith they have made their own. Their narrative self-interpretations of lived experience articulate from below what it means to be *Friends of Truth* in the twenty-first century.[17] By spending time observing, participating and talking with Quakers, I have tried to discover what binds them to one another (*religare*). And in what these ties or affinities presently consist (*religio*).

The given name ‘Quaker’ may be taken up by some *religious* natives of postmodernity. Or it may not. As we shall find, for the contemporary practitioners of everyday Quakerism, ‘Quaker’ may not be their principal identification among the many they may claim. An unboundaried or radical Quakerism is always overlapping, bumping up against the discourses of others. The premise of an identity dangerously exposed to the other is under constant threat. The promise of Quakerism may therefore reside in a paradox. How can the threatening ‘other’ become my friend? The encounter with the other, as *other*, constitutes the relationship. As we shall shortly see, Quakers have a particular way of meeting others and exchanging experiences. Are we talking here about a practice of religion or politics? Quakerism may, in its essential practices, blur these modern categories.

Who then are the Quakers? The problem of representation lies precisely in the problem of boundaries. Who or what to exclude—and with whom does the power of decision lie? Correlatively, if a resistance to power is also its refusal, the shape or form of an open or inclusive social formation must necessarily be ‘liquid’. Form subsists in a particular structure of relations, knowledge and power that make it so. How might we describe such a thing? A society? A community? If it is either of these things, then postmodernity issues a challenge: to welcome others without exercising a power over them. A power to name what a Quaker so-called; to decide in and out is also a power of exclusion. A power that may constitute an essence, a naturalised understanding of what is proper to the name. Georgio

[17] One of the early names historians find that the group that later became known as ‘Quakers’ gave to themselves.

Agamben envisages instead an “inessential commonality” as the solidarity of a *Coming Community* without an essence (1993: 17). It is a commonality that cannot consist in a power to convert the other to the same. Perhaps it can possess—or be possessed by—a power to convince, instead. A power of truth without knowledge for which we give the name ‘faith’. The fugitive faith of a postmodern seeker may thus possess an agency that resists power. The powerless power of faith.

These are but the many possibilities of a past retold in the present. To find out what the past *actually* means for Quakers today we must enter the field. A wide discursive field of contested possibilities marked by broken fences on a landscape dotted with remnants of the past. This is where we meet the elusive Quakers. On the terrain across which subjects are travelling, restlessly on the move, reluctant to be pinned down. How is the Quaker movement today continuing a ‘spiritual’ experiment in equality, discipline and order? A protest. A demonstration. An alternative ordering? Here we may find in a movement that calls itself a *Religious Society of Friends* some important insights for a post-secular, post-Christian society. This will be the principal task of the following two chapters.

3. The Quaker Common

In Chapter 2 we took careful note of British Quakers' continuing efforts to rearticulate who they are as 'a faith community' today and what they would like to be in the future. Some Friends fear their movement is facing a crisis and appeal for a rediscovery of the core principles and insights of the first Quakers. However, the story of Quaker's emergence in post-revolutionary England is a complicated one. Which version of the past can legitimately claim authority over the future? The radical milieu from which Quakerism emerged was inspired by a flux of religious ideas that closed the gap between human beings and God. But the early Friends struggled to resolve the inherent tensions exposed by their radicalism, resorting to 'police' power to secure internal order, discipline and ultimately survival[18]. This chapter propels us back to the 21st century to reconsider familiar difficulties: the form and content of a 'radical' religion fit for the conditions of life in liquid times.

3.1. The Limits of Inclusion

The dilemmas facing the Religious Society today are in some respects those they faced in 1660. In a time of bewildering social and cultural change, their challenges today are also those confronting liberal democratic societies in general. Questions of power, authority, identity and inclusion. But in postmodernity the grounds upon which we once resolved these difficulties have been shaken (Newman 2007). In our contemporary condition, abstract universals and grand narratives are no longer credible and we remain deeply sceptical of traditional sources of authority (Lyotard 1984). If Quakerism is up to the task at hand, what form of society must it take? If the most generous gift of a community is to include everyone, then it may be the work of great imagination (Anderson 1983). In its attempt to draw as widely as possible the circle of the same, Quakerism may be described as an "experience and experiment of the possibility of the impossible" (Caputo 1997: 124, Derrida 1992).

[18] I am here using 'police' in its original early seventeenth century European sense of regulating order and discipline (see, for example, Foucault 2007).

3.1.1. An Impossible Community

Among the contemplatives of liquid modernity, Jacques Derrida worries less about a sense of loss than its object: what exactly are we referring to by words like 'community'[19]. Not only does he dislike the word, he says, "I am not even sure I like the thing" (1995: 355). He acknowledges that there is an irrepressible desire for a community. But, crucially, "its limit must be its *opening*" as a community without limits (ibid., emphasis added). Derrida muses, if 'community' implies "a harmonious group, consensus, and fundamental agreement" then it must pose as much a threat than a promise (ibid.). Derrida reflects instead on an impossible hospitality: "the self-protective closure of 'community' would be the opposite..the preparation for the incoming of the other, 'open' and 'porous' to the other" (Caputo 1997: 108, also Derrida 2002). This radical openness is a hospitality without a host if the latter is one who retains the power to invite, exclude or admit the 'other' on condition that the 'house rules' are respected. Only under a self-limitation that suspends this power, can the stranger be made to feel truly 'at home'.

For Derrida this hospitality is an impossible excess that is never present but always 'to-come' (1997: 109-112). Deconstruction shares with Levinas an "infinitely demanding" ethical commitment to the other (Critchley 2007). Henceforth "deconstruction is hospitality to the other, to the other to oneself, the other than 'its other', to an other who is beyond any 'its other'" (Derrida 2002: 364). A faith community confronts the same undecidability: "If a community is too welcoming, it loses its identity; if it keeps its identity, it becomes unwelcoming" (Caputo 1997: 113). The impossible self-limiting community therefore faces the threat / promise of a community that, while remaining open, denies itself the possibility of collecting itself into a unity (Derrida 1995: 355). The problem of community—of openness *and* unity—confronts Friends today.[20] In order to have a community, must Quakers also have a common identity? (Caputo 1997: 121).

[19] Following Blanchot, the disavowal of 'community' is, for Jean-Luc Nancy, a politics without limit or exclusion (2016: 57). It is not a question of thinking of community as substance, an autonomous entity, or natural given, or totality. A politics that excludes nothing is a move towards a mythical or spiritual foundation (2016: viii-ix).

[20] Derrida poses the question of community in *The Politics of Friendship*: "It will be asked what 'common' can still mean as soon as friendship goes beyond all *living* community?" (1997: 297)

Identity may be defined, on the one hand, as the unity of an object or the 'whatness' of an entity (Carpentier and De Cleen 2007). On the other hand, the concept of identity can refer to the way social agents can be identified (by others) and / or identify themselves with a certain discourse (ibid.). Troubled by the 'thing' or its 'whatness', Derrida ponders a "community without community" whose borders are open and porous; where an excessive hospitality is practised that doesn't result in dissolution but in something else (Derrida 1997: 295). But 'what' exactly? He refers to "another community", an "open quasi-community" that is structurally always to-come. This community is for Derrida marked by an exposure to a "*taut autre* [that] escapes or resists the community" (Derrida 1995: 351, cited in Caputo 1997: 124).

In this Chapter we shall discover how Quakers express the *promise* of a community *to-come* by embodying what Jean-Luc Nancy (1991) calls *being-in-common.*[21] We shall find that, by practising openness to 'the other' as an equally speaking subject, the Quaker Meeting opens a heterogeneous space in which each is an 'other' *for* one another.[22] Before we meet the Friends who, as I have interpreted them, exemplify this disciplined practice I shall first offer a personal recollection. We shall start at the beginning of my fieldwork with my first encounter with Quakers.

[21] Derrida problematises the 'common' not as that which pertains to a community but the end of a 'call' asking: "what is being called the *call*, and what is being called the 'common'?" (1997: 297)
[22] Therefore, a friendship which in Derrida's terms is beyond being-in-common; "neither of the common nor of its opposite, neither apputenance nor non-appurtenance, sharing or non-sharing, proximity or distance, the outside or the inside, etc. Nor therefore, in a word, that of community" (1997: 297-298).

3.2. Sit Where You Like

My ethnographic encounter with a Quaker Meeting began on a bright October morning with an open invitation and a gently-given instruction. Hidden and hemmed-in at the end of a narrow passageway leading off from a street lined with estate agents a short walk from the city centre, Hereford Quakers are not easy to find. The unadorned and unassuming Georgian building that serves as the meetinghouse for Hereford Quakers sits in the shadow of the city's impressive cathedral. Curious to find out about this little-known group, my wife Jane had decided to join me.

Arriving unannounced twenty minutes before the scheduled start, we had allowed time to introduce ourselves. We were greeted by a man and a woman in the small entrance lobby. In their early seventies and sixties respectively, both were busily making preparations. I explained that this was our first time and apologised if our early arrival had inconvenienced them. The lady, who I would later learn was the ‘Clerk’ of the Local Meeting, indicated that we were very welcome to go into the adjacent room where the ‘Meeting for Worship’ would soon take place. Not wishing to extend the onerous prospect of an hour’s silence by a further fifteen minutes, I politely declined. I suggested instead we would peruse the many leaflets and notices on display in the lobby. Our host nodded approvingly and handed me a leaflet from a small table next to where we were standing: “Your First Time at a Quaker Meeting”. When you are ready, she said, just go in and “sit anywhere you like”. The only instruction, gently given, was to be quiet once we entered the room. The meeting starts, she explained, when the first person enters—and there was already somebody in there.

We lingered awkwardly for a few minutes in the lobby, trying not to get in the way. I read a poster about a forthcoming event organised by ‘Quaker Peace and Social Witness’. A couple of photographs caught my eye which accompanied another event: ‘Quaker Activist Gathering 2018’. The wall directly facing the entrance featured a brief history of what looked like a grand Georgian building with artists’ impressions of its grand appearance both before and after becoming repurposed as a Quaker Meeting House. The Clerk returned holding a cardboard box and announced that it had only just arrived from Friends House in London. Reaching

inside she pulled out four more leaflets and offered them to me. I thanked her and looked briefly at them. Each one was coloured differently, featured footprint motifs on the cover and dealt with a different theme: worship, community, faith and living. They were, I surmised, the latest attempt to explain to the uninitiated what it means to be a Quaker today.

3.2.1. Taking My Place

As people started to arrive we made some more introductions and entered the meeting room. I was pleasantly surprised to be greeted by a large bright space, predominantly white with a tall ceiling and patio doors which let the autumn sunshine flood in. Large white bookcases filled with books occupied two opposite corners. The room was instantly inviting. Two rings of chairs and cushioned benches encircled the table that formed the central hub. Upon it stood a vase of orange and purple flowers, a jug of water and glasses, a Bible and the ‘big red book’ I recognised as *Quaker Faith and Practice*. Now in its fifth edition, this volume is more formally “the book of Christian discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain”. It is an anthology of cherished Quaker writings; a memento of three hundred and fifty years of Friends’ reflections on life and faith together with instructions on church governance. It is an imposing tome. I had only read the first chapter, *Advices and Queries*.

Prior to our visit, I had found helpful material on the *Quakers in Britain* website. One helpful article posted earlier in the year was by Alistair Fuller, the Head of Ministry and Outreach. It was entitled, “Telling our stories: exploring the Quaker way” (Fuller 2018). He explained that, “one of the distinctive marks of Quaker faith is that it is rooted in personal experience and not in creeds or set forms of words” (ibid.) Rather, he continued, Quakers are encouraged to listen to and live by their own experience sometimes called our ‘inward light’. Fuller explains that: “for each person this will mean something different and will be shaped by our own stories and journeys, by the traditions and language that shaped us, by our experience of living in the world” (ibid).

Selecting a cushioned seat on the inner ring of cushioned chairs on the opposite side of the room to the doorway in which we entered, I was instantly captivated by the figure already sitting quietly opposite. Relaxed with an arm draped over the arm of one of the white-painted benches he sat with his eyes closed with his cane leaning against him. With long flowing white hair and beard, I guessed he was in his late sixties or early seventies. In the weeks that followed I noted that this gentleman occupied the same spot, usually wearing either a brown patterned poncho or a denim Levi jacket. He made an instantly favourable impression: an image of a modern day Quaker practising a deeply traditioned yet thoroughly contemporary spirituality. Some months later, Tony would teach me a great deal about the unique insights of the Early Friends. Through piercing blue eyes, he could just as easily offer a penetrating commentary on postmodernity, the scandal of post-truth politics, or a critique of Slavoj Žižek. A self-professed story-teller with a first in English Literature from Oxford, Tony embodied for me Fuller's insistence that the Quaker faith is not individualistic but shared: “we are to listen to and learn from the experience of others and the stories that have shaped our faith community over the centuries” (Fuller 2018).

As the room started to fill I recalled Fuller’s words: “This is both a profound freedom and a serious discipline” (ibid.). Most of the people were over fifty years old, many in their sixties or seventies. A mix of male and female but all were white. Plenty of grey hair. I wondered what stories they had to share. Over the months that followed, many of them would do so. But on that first morning, settling into the unfamiliar silence amongst strangers, comfortable on my cushioned perch, an unexpected anxiety swept over me. The thought suddenly occurred: ‘whose place had I taken’? Had I unwittingly occupied the seat of a respected Elder or Overseer? In that fleeting moment I felt suddenly exposed by the freedom granted by the invitation to sit where I liked.

3.2.2. Silence and Stories

Over the course of the next hour, silence was interrupted by four or five spoken contributions. In between times I struggled, as I assume many first-timers do, with what to ‘do’ with the silence. Which thoughts to admit and which, like my fleeting fears, ought to be dismissed? I had previously sought advice from J. Brent Bill (2016), a well-known American Quaker, who wrote of “Holy Silence” as the gift of Quaker spirituality. I didn’t have it, it seemed. Yet, over the following months of regular attendance at Meeting for Worship I found my own way and learnt to greatly appreciate this precious hour in the week when the routines of everyday life were briefly suspended.

On this my first occasion of Meeting, someone stood after a few minutes to read an extract from *Advices and Queries*. The message was eminently practical and simple. It concerned the shared and unavoidable process of ageing. The speaker encouraged us all to face our older years positively and find in them new ways to receive and reflect God’s love. I allowed the words to enter into the private space of my own thoughts, provoking various associations to surface. Some five to ten minutes later another Friend rose to share a recollection of journeys made to far flung places in her younger days; the freedom of a distant youth spent seeing the world. After a few further minutes, another spoke movingly of an encounter on a bus with a Caribbean student who, she said, was “hoping against hope” in circumstances she shared in a brief exchange with a stranger. I pictured the conversation and tried to imagine the young woman and how she was feeling.

Not long after Tony rose to his feet to impress upon the gathered assembly the importance of engaging with young people and learning from them. Picking up an adjacent thread, another older Friend stood a few minutes later to describe his recent experience of travelling to London, a place unfamiliar to him, noting the richness of the cultural and material environment, concrete and crowded. He learnt the importance of planning one's journey in advance, reconnoitring one’s route in the light before attempting it in the dark. I absorbed his words carefully and wondered what to make of them. As I mused inwardly over a range of possibilities, a final speaker interrupted my thoughts to share her experience of visiting *The Globe* theatre. Noting its spatial similarity to a Quaker Meeting, she

recounted how she had enjoyed the carefree good humour of the many school children she encountered there.

Then, suddenly, with the shaking of hands the hour of punctuated silence was over. In the end it seemed to pass surprisingly quickly. I looked at Jane and she smiled a sense of accomplishment. The Clerk immediately stood up to welcome everyone, including “our visitors”. She then proceeded to share various snippets of information on forthcoming events and drew Friends’ attention to some publications I did not recognise. Others were free to interject and contributions by other Friends were welcomed. Accepting the Clerk’s invitation, a lady stood to share news from a recent meeting of the local chapter of Amnesty International. Another updated the group on the activities of Hereford City of Sanctuary, which I took to be a local charity working with Syrian refugees hosted at the meetinghouse. Before these informal proceedings concluded, a Friend stood to advocate on behalf of a charitable cause in an appeal for donations. This I later observed was a regular occurrence. Afterwards the Clerk placed a collection box on the central table along with various other materials — leaflets, magazines, etc.— that she had brought our attention to during the ‘notices’. At the conclusion of the formal proceedings of the Meeting, she invited everyone to stay for coffee and biscuits. Refreshments were served from a kitchen in an adjacent room. Friends were free to approach the table, add to the collection, or peruse the other items placed there. Some people got up and left the room, others moved towards the table. Many simply stayed seated, chatting to their neighbour or crossed the room to speak to another.

A middle-aged lady sitting next to Jane immediately introduced herself. Emboldened by my initiation I wasted little time in sharing my newfound enthusiasm. Employing a rather well-worn phrase to commend Quakers to a life-long member, I explained that it was Friends’ commitment to putting their “faith into action” that had drawn me to Quakers. Expecting an enthusiastic affirmation of my discovery this Friend demurred: “Well, we're only human”, deflating my simple overgeneralization. As if to illustrate her point, she shared that she had recently begun a course at Hereford art college. One or two others came and joined us. Names were exchanged. Alma, was the senior member of the Meeting. Diminutive and attentive, she spoke softly with an American accent. About to enter

her ninetieth year, she had recently been widowed from her husband Philip. We learned later Alma and Philip were deeply loved, respected members of the Hereford Meeting. Another member introduced herself. In our brief conversation we discovered that she was actively involved as a prison visitor where she convened a silent Quaker-style meeting. It was a work to which she was clearly very committed.

Friends asked where we lived but, I noted, did not probe much further. Although I was quite willing to give an explanation, no close inspection was attempted concerning *who* we were or *why* we had come. No reasons seemed necessary. Neither did anyone on that first morning express a hope that we would return for a repeat visit. We certainly felt very welcome to do so. I had no doubt that Quakers are eager to attract and retain newcomers: the clutch of introductory leaflets I had collected in the lobby testified to that. But no one, it seemed, wished to lay upon us the weight of expectation that we *should* return next week. I sensed instead a gentleness born out of a genuine respect for each individual's choices. This was an ethos that would be later confirmed in the many conversations that followed during my eighteen months among Friends.

3.2.3. Sensing the Meeting

I soon settled into the regular pattern of *Meeting for Worship* each Sunday. Each month a 'bring and share' lunch was held as well as a 'Business Meeting' that began after a short interlude at midday. The next two meetings I attended after my first passed in silence for the full hour. This was not uncommon and no one seemed unduly concerned by the absence of vocal ministry. The silences served to heighten, for me, the sense of anticipation. On one Sunday morning an Elder rose to share something, explaining that she had not intended to do so that morning. But, she said, "it is, of course, not I who speaks". Here was a mystery: if not 'I' then who exactly is doing the speaking?

Talking to Friends I later discovered they held, albeit rather loosely, to different conceptions of God, the Spirit or the Divine. Some were rather reluctant to be drawn, wary of over-confident pronouncements on such matters. Whether this

particular Friend's premise was intended to be taken figuratively or literally, the "of course" signalled something that was minimally agreed: the sanctity of each other's words and the experiences they signify. I resolved to give close attention to what was being said and tried to treat the words, opinions, experiences with respect, even if they were far from my own. Sometimes I felt I had failed to grasp them fully: their intended meaning or the precise point they wished to make. But this, I began to realise, may be to miss the point of the practice. Sometimes the thoughts shared seemed fully-formed; their intended meaning clear. At other times during *Meeting for Worship* I found the meaning of what was being said more elusive. There was work to be done. The sense of what had been said was held suspension, open to interpretation. Experiences and events in people's lives were generously given into our common possession. Thoughts and insights shared as a common resource. A fragment of someone else's life offered to 'make of this what you will'. An image, a picture, a brief encounter, an episode, a memory retrieved, recollected feelings. Whatever one can 'make' of these may then be offered back. *Meeting for Worship*, I discovered, was at once deeply private and entirely public. Solitary but together. Inward and outward.

The shared work proceeds in a series of signifying exchanges. On Remembrance Sunday a lady rose to share news of a family member who had recently been involved in a motorcycle accident, asking that we "keep him in your thoughts". The same appeal was made on other occasions with phrases peculiar to Quakers: to "hold" someone " in the Light" or to "uphold" Friends and loved ones suffering illness or hardship. The shared remembrance of the motorcycle accident was followed by words shared from *Advices and Queries* (sec. 1.32). They expressed the importance of reconciliation and forgiveness as a point of departure for *this* Meeting. They were not so much opening words as words to be opened, opened-up and exposed to the unlimited possibilities of the unsaid. These opening words served to cast off a thread for the linguistic needlework to follow. After a few minutes of stillness someone shared her memory of a grandfather who served as chaplain in a Great War meant to end all wars. Another was prompted to affirm the symbol of the white poppy and those known to them who were active in the campaign for peace. Jane, a Friend who had previously spoken of her experience amongst Syrian refugees, felt moved to share a story. A Syrian lady with little English whose nephew had been horribly injured in the conflict translated the

significance of the emblem to her fellows. Jane’s Syrian friends appreciated the opportunity to participate in their own act of remembrance by making their own white poppies.

Alan, a man in his sixties, rose a short while later. In carefully measured tones he observed that it is sometimes necessary to be present in conflict. He proceeded to recount an experience of a Public Inquiry he had once attended. The spatial arrangement of the room in which the Inquiry was conducted, he noted, seemed designed to divide the two sides pitted in strict opposition, foreclosing the possibility of genuine reconciliation. The public witnesses, on the other hand, were appreciated only insofar as they lent support to one party or the other. Quakers may have strange practices but the circle in which we sat in worship signifies and demonstrates peace, he said. A final contribution shortly before the hour came from a teacher in a local school who expressed regret that her school had abandoned the practice of meeting in a circle.

A theme had spontaneously emerged like a tapestry woven from multiple threads of personal experience. Quaker *Meeting for Worship* begins with an expectancy, the horizons of which are drawn as widely as possible by silence: the infinite possibility of the ‘unsaid’. Silence functions as the condition of possibility of whatever *might be* said. Silence precedes, follows and inhabits each speech event. There is no pre-prepared program to a Quaker meeting. No order of service, liturgy or pre-formulated structure of knowledge as in a recited creed. In the silence and stillness of one’s interiority, the other arrives as an intruder; an interruption that re-directs our attention to the *otherness* of another’s lifeworld. In this inter-subjective encounter, the ‘said’ punctuates the unsaid only for the latter to circle around and envelop it again. Whatever is said is taken-up by the other in a lengthening chain of signification. Friends speak *from* their unique position but submit their words to the free-play of association and hence to a destination unknown to the speaker. Discursive elements may be articulated in innumerable configurations, stitched together by a key word or phrase. ‘Forgiveness’. ‘A Poppy’. ‘Refugee’. Thus, the singular speech-act is not self-contained but imported into a discontinuous sequence by linking signifiers. Each contribution is offered and taken not in the strict sequence of a conversational ‘turn’. Their spacing in time is accomplished by the silence between utterances, ensuring the

salience of each contribution but not their finality. Meanings are both itinerant and 'gathered'.

As a result, no one has the final word. Nothing is ever given as finished and complete. On the one hand, a self-interpretation may be offered but immediately exposed to the other; to the scrutiny of others. Each utterance is thus a unique part of an emerging 'whole'. Consequently, there can be no 'right' interpretation, no uncontestable object of discourse. Reflecting on the Meeting on our journey home, my wife and I would often 'take away' different but not altogether dissimilar decodings of the message of the Meeting that day: what it spoke to *me*. On the other hand, a common impression may form even if the latter is not fixed in a text. The collective experience of coming to a sense is a 'gatheredness'. The Christchurch mosque shootings in March 2019 prompted heartfelt outpourings of grief in an emotionally charged meeting. Private thoughts and feelings were woven into a rich and vivid joint expression of sympathy and concern. Afterwards a respected Friend stood to declare that it had been a "gathered meeting". There was a shared 'sense' of the Meeting's central theme or message.

3.2.4. A Discipline of Hope

This sense of 'gatheredness' is irreducible to a simple consensus. It is by this same principle that decisions are made. Unlike *Meeting for Worship*, Business Meetings *are* programmed: there is an agenda. Formally, such gatherings are *Meeting for Worship for Business*. I am grateful to Jane Mace for alerting me to her book, *God and Decision-making: a Quaker approach*. In her comprehensive survey, she shows how these principles may be applied pragmatically to suit the circumstances of different Meetings. As Mace notes in her introduction, it is an approach that "assumes a commitment to divine guidance" (Mace 2012: vii).

Mace's study in part reflects her own experience of being a Clerk and, she says, she approached her research sometimes like an anthropologist, other times as a tourist. Mace describes her approach as 'ethnographic' and I do not intend to repeat her excellent work here. Her book finds a natural companion in Jane Pearn's *The Language of Leadings: a reflection on faith, action and concern*

(2017). Together with Harvey Gillman's careful studies of Quaker language (2007, 2016) and the more recent *God Words and Us: Quakers in conversation about religious difference* (Rowlands 2017), each are thoughtful reflections on the role language plays in Quakerism, as well as the difficulties it presents. Without entering directly into this particular debate, I would make the following observations from my experiences amongst Friends in the Southern Marches.

Firstly, Business Meetings are altogether smaller affairs than Meeting for Worship. Those who attend are representatives of the larger gathering. Many regular participants in Hereford's Meeting for Worship rarely, if ever, attend Business Meetings. Quakers nevertheless place importance upon their method of collective decision-making as distinctive. As noted in Chapter 2, David Graeber credits the practice of consensual bottom-up decision-making among radical political groups to Quakers (Graeber 2004). Among Friends, however, the Quaker Business Method is commonly understood as a procedure for discerning a collective will that, for some, coincides with the Divine will. Quakers understand its non-majoritarian approach as, strictly speaking, non-consensual. Michael Sheeran's seminal work, *Beyond Majority Rule: voteless decisions in the Religious Society of Friends* (1983) is an authoritative study of its development by early Friends and its contemporary practice. The method, he says, works well in a conducive atmosphere in which: "the emphasis is on acceptance of one another, mutual respect, avoidance of manipulative conduct which rhetorical style often hides, a sense of the partiality of one's own insights, and one's dependence on searching together with the group for better conclusions than anyone alone could have attained" (Sheeran 1983: 60).

Maggie, a Friend who serves also as Southern Marches Area representative on the national body, *Meeting for Sufferings*, shared with me her enthusiasm for its 'discipline':

> I go along and see Meeting for Sufferings working, as Quakers, *brilliantly*. I love it...It's so...*carefully*, deliberately, thought-through. And so mindfully practiced. I love it. It's right ordering, you see right ordering working. And that discipline, I love discipline. I love the discipline of Quakers. That they have a way of doing something that has been tried and tested over centuries. And..it's built like that because it makes you behave in a certain way. And to behave in that way is important. We don't shout people down in Meetings for

> Worship. We listen to people. We practice a discipline: we have those sort of rituals..and everybody there is equally responsible for *holding* the Meeting. And making it work."

Secondly, dissenting voices are not suppressed or silenced. An agreement is reached, Sheeran suggests, that is *not* an identity of view. Rather, adopting a musical metaphor, participants do not end up on the same note but remain on different notes (1983: 64). The Clerk conducts the performance in search of the 'sense of the meeting' proposed in a text. The recorded minute, I observed, was never simply a summary opinion, an assembly of viewpoints, and still less the 'totality' of what had been said. Neither is the Clerk a representative or spokesperson who speaks on behalf of all. Rather, there is some artistry in the Clerk's crafting of a minute. Sheeran explains a "folklore of Quaker dissent" in which, if a single person cannot agree with the proposed text, the group is unable to proceed (1983: 66). This being the case, when no such agreement can be reached the dissenting voice may choose not to stand in the way of the group.

Friends are reminded in *Advices and Queries* (see Appendix C) to consider the possibility they may be mistaken and, hence, not to cling too tightly to their 'truths'. This attitude may or may not be justified by a 'religious' reasoning, for example, of preferring the judgment of the group to that of the individual as "divine leading" (1983: 66). As Sheeran puts it, this is how, in practice, dissent is expressed: "the meeting is left aware of the dissenter's opinion, yet the dissenter has indicated a wish not to keep the matter from moving forward" (ibid.). Withdrawing one's opposition but not one's disagreement, therefore, prevents polarisation by exercising graciousness (1983: 67). Put another way, Friends trust that in a collective subject, a 'we' of the decision or opinion, as the singular creation *of* multiple parties. One Friend expressed to me being "disappointed" with a particular decision. But she expressed no objections as such. Dissensual decisions leave no residual. No one is left unwillingly 'outside' of a group consensus since, structurally, a dissensual decision has no 'outside' as such.

Finally, a spatial rearrangement is necessary to Business Meetings that distorts the usual circular configuration of the *Meeting for Worship*. At Hereford Meeting the central table is re-positioned to deploy and occupy it as a desk at which the Clerk and the assistant can sit facing the meeting's participants. With the table moved off-centre, the chairs form a segment of the circle positioned to face the

Clerk's desk square on, usually in two rows. In this more auditorial arrangement, the focus of participants is on the Clerk's table. The agenda items, compiled in consultation by the Clerk, are scribbled on a large sheet of paper taped to the edge of the table, visible to the participants. Unlike *Meeting for Worship* in business meetings a discourse is 'fixed' as a text acceptable to the group. The minute is drafted by the Clerk but offered back to the Meeting. In this verifying gesture, the trace of the unsaid and the contingency of what may be written is thereby acknowledged. Thus, the customary way to voice one's acceptance of the Clerk's proposed text is simply, "I hope so".

The shared practice of articulating a 'hope' described above of course happens in time and space; a practice of timing and spacing necessary to discourse. How does the space 'work' to assist in the gathering of significance?

3.3. Space for Everyone

A popular Quaker author, Geoffrey Durham suggests that the Quaker Meeting *and* a belief in *equality* is the “bedrock” of Quaker faith (Durham 2019: 28; also Durham 2013). Durham’s bold claim points beyond an abstract principle to a practice of equality enacted in their gathering together. For others it is an article of faith that “every life is both equal and holy” (West and Hull 2017: 2).[23] As this Friend remarked: “my own lived experience has taught me how unequal our society can be, but also how we can by our actions redress the iniquities we encounter. For me, the public flows from the personal” (ibid.). As we saw in Chapter 2, the presumption of equality by the first Quakers forged a unity-in-dissent that challenged the social order. How exactly does the Quaker Meeting enact and embody equality today?

Part of the answer, I suggest, is in the spatial practice of the Quaker Meeting itself. The invitation to “sit anywhere you like” provides a clue. It had its intended performative effect: I chose a seat and sat there. It was a free decision insofar as only one of around fifty possible pre-arranged places I could have chosen to sit were already occupied. But in exercising this freedom the possibility of equality is actualised. Had I declined the invitation, my equal status would not have been enacted and would remain a principle yet to be realised. My willing response to her invitation confirmed spatially a social relation which, in the acts of invitation and acceptance, constituted it. The simple words, ‘sit where you like’, thus disclose a more general principle *at work* in the Quaker Meeting.

Quaker Meeting may be integrally understood as both a signifying practice and a spatial practice. The circular arrangement has a spatial significance to which, as Alan testified in his earlier contribution, symbolised equality. At the same time, a certain agency is granted equally to all. Therefore, the invitation to *take* a place, rather than be *given* one—being told where to sit—is consistent with an equality in power relations. In Quaker Meeting words and things are both freely offered and freely taken-up. The contributions to the spoken ministry exemplify a ‘taken-not-given’ principle. Space is made for participants to offer something,

[23] The topic of the 2017 annual Swarthmore lecture given by Catherine West and Andy Hull was titled: ‘Faith in Politics? A Testimony to Equality’.

linguistically, that can be taken-up by others in the group in the signifying practice. This principle isn't confined to sitting and speaking. After Meeting for Worship during the sharing of notices Hereford Friends are usually invited by the Clerk to offer news that may be of interest to others, such as news from a recent meeting of the local Amnesty group or from the refugee project. The items on the central table—*Quaker Faith & Practic*e, the Bible, a jug of water and glasses—may be taken and freely used by anyone during worship. After sharing the notices the Clerk places other items on the table, such as magazines or articles. Friends are free to approach the table and take whatever they find useful or interesting. It is entirely up to you. This apparent unwillingness to give to or to position others, to affirm instead the freedom and agency of the 'other', also extends to collective representations.

3.3.1. Who Speaks For Us?

The four new leaflets offered to me on my first visit to Meeting were gladly accepted. Each differently coloured leaflet represented a different theme: "worship", "faith", "living" or "community", each word prefaced adjectively on the front cover as "Quaker". The front and back covers of each leaflet features motifs of trailing footprints of *different* shapes and sizes. The leaflets each fold open to reveal extended quotations from four named individuals: Jenn, Kevin, Abi and Jon. Printed in white text, each apparently personal account, of between one and three paragraphs in length, is bracketed by outsized quotation marks, emphasising that these are the words of 'real' Quakers sharing their own experiences.

These publicity materials appear to adopt a deliberate style to represent Quakers in the form of personal narratives. An outreach initiative, *Quaker Quest*, pioneered a similar approach in its series of booklets published during the mid-2000s. Quaker Quest aims to provide resources, including introductory sessions, to help people find out about "a spiritual path for our time, a path that is simple, radical and contemporary" (*Quaker Quest* website, accessed 18th Aug 2020). Its "Twelve Quakers on.." series of booklets compiled Friends' different views on a range of topics such as prayer, worship, Jesus, God, pacifism, evil—six of which were subsequently collected into a single volume, *New Light: 12 Quaker Voices*

(Kavanagh 2011). Both the Quaker Quest booklets and the new leaflets acknowledge and recognise differences and present a diversity of perspectives on a particular topic or theme. An anonymous editor has, however, selected the key words and interview extracts.

For our present examination of Quaker identity and ‘community’, the green leaflet is of interest. Each of the extracts describe the Quaker ‘community’ primarily in experiential terms, rather than of an object or entity. The four Friends speak using terms such as: “belonging”, “connection”, “cherished differences”, “acceptance”, “generous openness” and an opportunity to “be myself”. The anonymous editorial ‘voice’ supplies a summary which serves to establish a commensurability between the reflections of Abi, Kev, etc. as an authorised articulation of the multiple viewpoints, rather like the ‘sense of the Meeting’ gathered by the Clerk. For example, the editorial description of “Quaker Community” is given thus:

> In Quaker communities, people of different views and experiences find themselves accepted and valued; difference and diversity are celebrated. Because equality is so central to the Quaker view of the world, the Quaker community is one in which all are encouraged to share tasks and responsibilities. There is no formal hierarchy and each voice has equal value and weight. Being a Quaker is a shared experience. Together, in community with others, Quaker's find support and encouragement, seek guidance and inspiration, and open ourselves to new insights, ideas and possibilities (Quaker Life Outreach 2018).

In their form and content the leaflets illustrate the challenge facing British Quakers in the contemporary socio-cultural context. As noted already, Collins regards Quaker identity not as a unity but as narratively perspectival. Laura Leming (2007) takes a somewhat different approach by connecting a religious identity with a conception of “religious agency” as “a personal and collective claiming and enacting of *dynamic* religious identity” (2007: 74, emphasis added). To realise a religious *agency*, Leming urges, “this identity is claimed and lived as one’s own, with an insistence on active ownership” (2007: 74). This “received or acquired” religious identity is valued and experienced as meaningful and “directed toward chosen or adopted goals” (ibid.). Leming draws a distinction between religious practice as a repetitive enactment that is not agentive, and a conscious *performance* which is. The Catholic women studied by Leming were aware, she

says, of the limits of their positioning in church but also of the possibilities of a shared group identity for their collective efforts at desired change (2007: 75). Their shared knowledge of Catholicism “guides the habitual and innovative actions and patterns of social relations that contribute both to social reproduction and social transformation” (2007: 76). Evidence for religious agency is found, according to Leming, in the emotional, intellectual, and behavioural strategies these women employ to maintain *dual* identities and women and Catholics. Broadly, these strategies fall into three categories: voice; place and space making; and flexible alignment.

According to Leming, the telling and sharing of life stories, as well as a variety of ‘church talk’, are important aspects of voice: the women “proclaim ownership of their stories and insights, *and* of Catholic Christianity, and want to speak in their own words, not just in an approved or scripted formula” (2007: 83, emphasis in original). The women felt that their voices were underutilised and sometimes ignored or silenced in church. But ‘church talk’ can nevertheless produce change, for example, in liturgical language by dropping the word ‘men’ used in creedal formulae. The women also speak ‘poly-vocally’ to negotiate multiple positionalities. Leming found that confrontational talk was employed to challenge elites, usually priests, or as “an instrument of change” in liturgical practice (2007: 84). Leming’s respondents told her they were “constructing paths, places and spaces as a means of claiming their place in Catholicism" (2007: 84). They opened-up spaces for new things to happen: spaces of reversal, dialogue, and interaction with elites. The women drew inspiration from female authors who, rather than exiting from church, modelled instead how to create spaces in which their specific needs could be met. They do so by appropriating symbols and spaces for woman-conscious selves. Flexible patterns of distancing and engagement, including bridge-building, allowed the women to position *themselves* in relation to institutional structures, while negotiating their religious and other identities.

Leming argues that “analysing change in religious tradition as a process wherein individual and collective religious agents exert pressure on institutional structures helps to break down a monolithic perception of static religion” (2007: 74). She shows how multiple identifications are negotiated across Catholicism’s institutional boundaries. The women’s strategies established “narrative linkages" between the

larger church story and their individual stories (ibid.). These linkages, Leming argues, serve to strengthen religious identity—while at other times also providing a needed distance (ibid.). Like Collins' multi-perspectival approach, Leming challenges the notion of religious subjectivity as ideologically fixed and immovable.

3.3.2. Positioning the Subject

The link that Leming makes between religious identity and discursive agency is important to her analysis. However, while Collins suggests that relatively stable tropes of the Quaker tradition cannot secure an overarching identity, Leming takes a received or acquired religious identity as a point of departure for negotiating new positionalities. The women *first* identify as Catholics, accepting and taking up a pre-given subject position, and then employ strategies to reconfigure the discursive structure in the re-articulation of their multiple identities.

There appears to be a logic of difference at work in the strategy of Leming's subjects as they rearticulate the hegemonic discourse in the name of reform. The institutional discourse is both enabling of and resistant to change. The extent to which they are successful depends on the successful disarticulation of its fixed elements. A distinction one might usefully be made, therefore, between this conception of religious agency and that of 'liquid' Quakerism. The first is a limited agency in the context of unequal power relations: one is 'positioned' by a religious discourse and then embarks on a counter-hegemonic struggle from within.[24] The second does not entail first taking-up a given or received subject position that is not freely chosen. Instead, signifying elements can be appropriated, exchanged and re-articulated by *participating* in the discourse that constitutes the active subject. A dialogical production of a multiplicity of 'selves' or subject positions is thus always possible in the unprogrammed practice of Quaker *Meeting for Worship*. As a practice of articulation, its discursive elements are the events, experiences and concerns of individuals shared among Friends. Re/articulation has little to do with an authorised *identity* as a point of departure or as a subject position upon which a multiplicity must converge. To the contrary, the practice

[24] This assertion of agency by otherwise decentred subjects of discourse is similar to Gubrium and Holstein's (1995) argument that everyday interpretive practice reflexively constructs agency by utilising resources drawn from experience: the discursive construction of agents of experience.

opens a wide discursive horizon for a multiplicity of positions that are created by exposing identities to difference, that is *the other*.

Consequently, Quaker subjects are not fixed but unstable inscriptions. Taking-up a position in the dialogical space opened-up by the practices of Quakerism is both a point of arrival and a point of departure. In the rest of this chapter we discover that the decision to become a Quaker is therefore not a matter of acquiring an identity. Quite the opposite: for some at least it was a refusal to be 'othered' or positioned by accepting instead the invitation to 'be myself' as a subject 'on the move' as the following narratives show.

3.4. Arriving as Friends

Now in her ninetieth year, Alma joined the Quakers as a young woman in her twenties. Born in Michigan and raised a Methodist, she came to Britain to attend a course in Cambridge for qualified teachers. It was there she met her husband Philip who introduced her to Quakers. She never returned home nor to the Methodist church. Arriving in rural Herefordshire, Alma and Philip took on a farm and began a way of life unfamiliar to both, learning as they went along. Having spent the best part of her seventy years at Hereford Quakers, I eagerly accepted her invitation to lunch.

Sitting in the cosy lounge of her rustic farmhouse, I asked Alma if Quakers had changed much over the years. She didn’t really think so, although the meetinghouse had undergone a series of improvements. I wondered aloud whether Quakers are, more generally speaking, open to change. She explained:

> Well, I think one of the things that helps not to have difficulties with differences is that we don't have a creed. And if you don't have to make a statement for what you believe then you don't have to spend a long time explaining what..why that means something to you and something to somebody else. If you don't *have* the creed that you've signed-up to, then you come with where you are. And I also think that one of the *really* good things about that is it allows you to *chang*e.

Claiming that the words of the creed might mean different things to different people, Alma suggests that its absence means people come with “*where*” they are. People come to Quakers encumbered with the lifeworld they inhabit, a figurative location on their own journey. Another Friend, John, shared with me his experience of coming to Quakers. His passage, like that of many others I have spoken to, took him through a number of Christian traditions. From high Anglicanism to the Baptists to free church evangelicalism before arriving at Quakers: “And I walked in and, as they say, it felt like coming home. It was just *it*. And I went every week after that and haven’t stopped going thirty years later”. The connotations of “home” are freighted with an immediate experience of familiarity, intimacy, and security. But John goes further, explaining that Quakers has made him “more comfortable with religion” because, “it fits with the way I think”.

Consequently, it was not a matter of fitting-in to Quakers in order to belong, he says. Neither was it a case of moulding it to fit him. Rather, it was already 'where' he had arrived in his project of life. As he put it to me, "Quakers was the keystone fitted into this arch I was building". One of the blocks that John had already inserted was a deepening revulsion towards war. He had spent a part of his career working for an arms company that fitted-out container ships as military vessels during the Falklands conflict. Quakers offered the "keystone" that held together the elements of who he had already become, John continued: "Yes, it didn't *make* me a pacifist, a Quaker, or whatever. It just slotted in nicely at the time". Listening in, John's wife Wendy interjected by suggesting that John's experience is a common one. She tries to recall a quote from a Quaker author, perhaps Gerarld Priestley, but explains it is something like: "I haven't been converted to Quakerism, I already was one. And I think that's probably how it is. That's how it was with me, certainly".

3.4.1. Open to Change

That the absence of a creed also allows for personal change according to Alma is, "so true, I've seen it in the Meeting, I've seen it in myself". Without a creed, she says, "you can change without having to justify it to people or say, 'well I said this but now I want to change this'". In other words, people are free to change their minds or views on things since there is not a shared statement of beliefs commonly held.[25] Having said that, she demurs, by suggesting that a lot of churches have a creed but people don't pay much attention to it: "they say all the words..and do not have to think about it very much".

An educated and well-read woman in her fifties, Libby is an English teacher at the *Royal National College for the Blind* in Hereford. Always thoughtful and thought-provoking, I eagerly anticipated Libby's contributions to *Meeting for*

[25] Ben Dandelion's 2014 Swarthmore lecture was entitled "Open to Transformation". Whereas Alma suggests the absence of creedal belief allows for change, Dandelion's starting point is "the reality of spiritual experience" that is difficult to fathom and name. What matters is faithfulness to this experience; the vibrancy and coherence of Quaker faith therefore requires clarity on what we are and what we are not: "Every community draws its own boundaries and nurtures its life partly through being about what is allowable and what is not" (2014: Prologue).

Worship. Before coming to Quakers and while serving as a Church Warden at her village church, she had found it increasingly difficult to recite the creed. Theologically, “maybe I was also in denial a bit there, really”, she explained, “I *was* saying the creed but not exactly with my fingers crossed behind my back at certain points. But with a kind of..I don’t really believe this literally”. When she joined Quakers, on the other hand, the “attitude to it all seemed far too loose”. Libby offers a slightly different angle on the creed, the absence of which, she wonders, presents Quakers with a different problem:

> Basically, because, you know, you can believe what you like in Quakerism. And, actually, I think that part of the homogeneity is almost..it's a danger of the freedom: if you don't have a creed which says you can become a member if you can say these words, then on what basis *do* you become a member? And although we say we're open to everybody..I'm afraid that the tendency is [to attract] people ‘like us’. Even if you try not to give that message out. How you decide whether somebody belongs in Quakerism if it's not about what they believe? It's about whether they fit in. And whether they fit in is going to be partly about whether they're like us, isn't it?

The homogeneity Libby observes in Quakers she suggests may be an unintended consequence of its “loose” attitude to beliefs. Consequently, Quakers are overwhelmingly white, well-educated, middle-class, and middle-aged, although she doesn’t venture as to why the absence of a creed attracts similar people at a similar stage of life. On the other hand, Alma suggests the absence of a creed enables people to change their beliefs. To illustrate her point, she explains, “we don’t have a creed but we certainly believe in pacifism”. This is a ‘belief’, however, that Libby confesses to have struggled to accept when she first came to Quakers. Describing herself as “politically-engaged” from a young age, Libby attributed her initial difficulty with pacifism to the influence of her father, a Russian dissident. Political events such as the Stalinist tyranny and the Hungarian revolution in 1956 formed an important background to her childhood growing up. As a young adult, Libby became “more and more left wing”. Eventually, with Quakers, she came to believe that “peace and justice and truth and everything are all, it’s not an optional package, really”. However, this is a change she attributes not solely or even primarily to the influence of Quakerism but also to her reading of books.

3.4.2. That of God in Every One

That Libby was free to change her views confirmed Alma's claims. John, on the other hand, had already moved towards a pacifist position when he found a 'home' amongst Quakers. In her discussion of personal change, Alma contrasts propositional beliefs formulated in a creed with a 'belief' in pacifism. Unlike the former, she suggests, the latter is not insisted upon but arrived at. Quakers are not required in any way to "sign-up" to peace as a condition of belonging. Pacifism doesn't function as a creed since it is encapsulated by an idea that is more originary or primary than a 'belief' in peace. Quakers believe in pacifism, Alma says, because: "if you believe in 'God in everyone' you have to believe in honouring God in everyone: that means their life". Alma found little difficulty connecting Quaker tropes with social values that resonated strongly with contemporary social and environmental concerns. I asked her why, then, is Quakers such a small faith group in Britain:

> Well, I still think that: why isn't everybody a Quaker? Well, I'll tell ya, one of the problems is the Quakers, just like you're saying, they've got the right ideas; there's a very sort of smug feeling. And you don't realise it when you're in it. But when I first went to Young Quakers in Cambridge some of the young Quakers talked like that: 'Oh, we're doing this and that' and you'll think: 'who do you think you are!' You know, it almost put me off [..] I've got a lot of people that I know that think, 'well, they ought to be a Quaker' you know? They're out there in the Green Party or doing this and that—why don't they come to the Quakers? But in a way you could say, 'why should they?'

Alma insists Quakers do not have an exclusive claim to values like peace and equality: "No, they certainly don't, they certainly don't". Alma urges again, "these people who think, 'why aren't they Quakers?' Well why *should* they be! They've got their ideas and they're living their ideas and they're promoting their ideas in their different groups. They don't have to come to Quakers to do it". The testimonies of Quakers do not function like a creed. But then Alma goes further still by suggesting that simply sharing certain values or 'ideas' is also no good reason to join the Quakers over another group promoting similar ideas.

Reflecting on the role of the Quaker testimonies, John asks himself: "could I recite them? No, it's just a feeling". They register with him emotionally rather than

cognitively; they connect with him through experience rather than from instruction. Wendy says they are “naturally how we are..because they’re part of us and also part of who the Quakers are”. She suggests the testimonies are what “confirms that to us”. In other words, Friends appropriate these shared testimonies into their own way of being Quaker: a self-narrative or personal testimony. As such, the Quaker testimonies to ‘equality’ and ‘peace’ function like ‘floating signifiers’ that can be articulated in their personal testimony. Therefore, John is able to say he arrived ‘already Quaker’ and yet, as Alma suggests, need not have joined. The signifiers ‘peace’ or ‘equality’ are universals without a determinate content. Alma’s universalism points to an inessential commonality (Agamben 1993). That is to say, shared values and ideas are not the basis of an enclosed identity. Rather, they reflect an ethical imperative with a common ‘spiritual’ source:

> There's somewhere, somewhere I think there's some sort of spiritual unknown that's holding you to that, which isn't just the same as coming to that view from having talked to politicians or something. There's something about acknowledging that there's some sort of ongoing..um..power or light or something in the world...Erm, leading people on and that's where your history is important.

Alma suggests it is the ‘leading’ of a ‘spiritual unknown’, not whether or not people join Quakers, that matters. There is “something drawing people toward the good”. She tells me we have that “universal understanding” even if it is not accepted as such: “And I think that understanding is something that is given. It's given in the nature of things. It doesn't have to be taught in a creed or something". What is distinctive of Quakers, according to Alma, is that it combines a “spiritual base to it and the social thing”. What she says seems obvious is: “If you believe in God in everyone then that has implications”. The ‘belief’ that there is ‘that of God in everyone’ was expressed by all the Friends I interviewed in-depth. Libby explained that she first came across the phrase as a young woman, many years before she became a Quaker, in a book by George Gorman: “That’s it! That’s what I think”, she recalls. She eventually embraced Quakerism after years exploring other traditions, realising that: “it fitted in because ‘that of God in everyone’ also fits with all the Hindu [ideas] about the universal soul”. She also notes that there had also been for her “theologically uncomfortable moments in the Church of England”. In a similar way to John, Libby describes finding Quakerism fitted with what she already thought, with ideas already encountered and values already

embraced. When I asked Alma what ‘that of God means’, she answered, “it’s the Light”, before immediately acknowledging that: “I never think about what it means. It just means the human value of everyone; it's synonymous with pacifism”.

Although all the Friends I spoke to affirmed the phrase, ‘that of God in everyone’, as vital to their understanding of Quakerism, none were very willing to denote its object: for instance, what “that” refers to exactly. Libby sidestepped the question altogether by cracking a joke: “‘*That*’ is often not the nice bit, I’m fond of saying”. She continues, “people say, oh, Quakers believe there’s a little bit of good in everybody. No, I don’t really believe that”. Instead, Libby immediately reframes my question around ‘what matters’:

> Somebody once said about Quaker business, 'God doesn't care whether we have chocolate biscuits after meeting or not'. And I thought, 'no I don't imagine *she* does'. But it *matters* whether those biscuits are Fair Trade biscuits or not. And the question of what God might or might not think about it is kind of like: if it matters, maybe it matters because of God; but maybe it just *matters*! And that's what's important and the question of whether there's a God involved in it or not is completely irrelevant.

Who or what ‘we’ think God is matters less to these Friends than other, more worldly, concerns. A longtime member and grandmother, Jane tells me she joined the Quakers as a young woman while training to be a social worker. Linking the canonical trope with a political value, she explained: “the thing that made me join was that there’s ‘that of God in everybody’ and that whole equality thing”. Her husband David explains: “Friends have this set of principles all of which—well certainly the equality one and the peace one—key right into the whole thing”. For these Friends, ‘that of God in everyone’ therefore expresses a universal principle that may be given content—their particular significance—in the shared experiences of individuals. The subject’s personal testimony supplies the particular meanings of ‘equality’ and ‘peace’ as lived experiences. On the one hand these signifiers have universal significance as matters of ultimate concern (Tillich 1977) that originate from a ‘spiritual unknown’. They are the “social testimonies” of Quakers as a group (Dale et al. 2007). And, on the other, individuals are ‘led’ to articulate, in their *own* words and actions, matters of

particular concern to them. Articulating these signifiers in one's personal testimony therefore entails an agency of decision.

3.4.3. Deciding for Yourself

John's 'coming home' to Quakers is a common experience, almost a cliché, as Montemaggi's (2018) survey suggests. He was able to appropriate elements such as pacifism with little difficulty as he could testify to a concern for peace in his own experiences of life. John and Wendy describe Quakers as commensurate with who they already were; it spoke *their* language, rather than the other way round. Speaking of his earlier experience of evangelical Christianity, John confesses, "it wasn't completely me". In the end, he tells me, "I still came back to this: I'm singing these words but I didn't write them". Furthermore, "do I believe everything that I'm saying?" Similarly, Libby had already rejected elements of Christian orthodoxy when she came to Quakers. Wendy describes feeling alienated in her occasional experience of church services: "The sermon didn't speak to me, particularly; it was vaguely interesting..but it didn't do anything for me". Wendy explains that she didn't really understand what she was doing there: "it was organising me into being something I didn't believe in. So it wasn't right".

Maggie recalls an experience of a church service that prompted a visceral response. She was so "appalled", she tells me, that she remonstrated afterwards with the minister: "I actually took the Vicar to task on the way out about how *excluding* he was of other people: we're alright but anybody who's outside the church they're all damned, type of thing. *We're* alright *in the church*!". Maggie explains that she was "outraged" at "just how arrogant and how off-putting it was, and how unwelcoming". Her outburst, Maggie explains, was characteristic. "I think I have a huge sense of outrage about the way a lot of the world is". Coming from "up North", she jokes, she doesn't mind saying what she thinks: "I was *furious*. And I thought, 'how dare you!' That is just an appalling way of being. So, I have always had a sense of justice and rightness and inclusiveness".

A committed Christian and a life-long Methodist, Sheila describes a growing unease with what she was expected to say and think at church. "I accepted the

whole package", she tells me. "The church is basically right and I didn't question things". Questioning the basic doctrines of the church, Sheila says, was "a bit scary in a way". The theological difficulties she started to experience with structures of belief—such as the Trinity—eventually led her to Quakers:

> The Quakers seemed to be more unified on their ethical views...more secure with them...it seemed a better basis to have these values and not to be too dogmatic about beliefs or anything; a sort of focus on action but with faith behind it. They just seemed to have a coherence about it.

After questioning what she really believed Sheila resolved instead, "not try to believe things I didn't believe in and just try to reduce it to the basics". She "feels stronger that way" and "more secure with this sort of basis and the testimonies". However, although Sheila is a regular attender, and has been for a number of years, her identification with Quakers is not "complete", to borrow John's phrase. Nor is it exclusive. Sheila remains involved in *Churches Together* and is happy to attend local church services and events. I noted in her interview with me she often referred to Quakers as "they". Indeed, Sheila readily admits that sometimes she feels that Quakers is "not quite Christian enough for me". But she is now more inclined to trust what "rings true" to *her*.

John also insists on the importance of people owning their beliefs. I shared a story with him about my experience of being shown around an historic Quaker meetinghouse. I made arrangements in advance over e-mail and my correspondent helpfully offered to meet me there and show me around. My correspondent signed off her message with the customary Quaker salutation, "In Friendship". During my visit, my guide explained with great enthusiasm, admiration and in expert detail the history and practices of early Friends. To my surprise, while chatting after our tour she revealed that she wasn't in fact a Quaker but a committed Baptist. We may have been 'in Friendship' but my host did not identify in a straightforward way with the Religious Society of Friends. She occasionally attended Quaker Meeting but expressed quite forcefully her frustration that when she asked them, Friends declined to explain what Quakers believed. "What kind of religion is it that doesn't know what it believes?", she asked incredulously.

Listening carefully, John sighed and rolled his eyes: “It’s got to be what *she* believes, not what everybody else believes”. Wendy adds, “that’s the point: we don’t all believe exactly the same thing, we’re all individuals”. Wendy expresses little doubt about what this means to her. She recounts words spoken to her by another Friend: “we’re people first and Quakers second..we’re individuals”. Wendy explains: “I am *informed* by what is generally accepted, I suppose, and it helps me in my daily life”. Consequently, “we allow people to be themselves and to take their own view”. More succinctly, “it’s your interpretation of it” that matters. This, she suggests, is why Quakers have an anthology like *Faith and Practice*, a volume she says she “dips into” every now and again. Consequently, Wendy claims “individuality *does* come into it”, although “you’ll find that you do sometimes see things as [other] people see them: you think, ‘that is how I felt too’, or ‘that’s interesting, I might bear that in mind’”. In a similar vein, Maggie tells me about a bumper sticker she proudly displayed on her car which best sums up her ethos. In a Medieval cursive script, it reads, “Thou Shalt”, followed in a contemporary font with, “decide for yourself”.

Wendy’s comments about being a Quaker “second” recall the socio-linguist, James Paul Gee’s, conception “primary” and “secondary” (‘big-D’) discourses (Gee 2008). For Sheila, the Methodism she grew up with may function as her primary way of being, albeit with certain elements now discarded. Quakers enables her to construct her self-identity as a Christian by articulating her ‘own’ beliefs. As a result, Wendy talks of being “informed” by Quaker discourse rather than *conformed* to it. She is “a person first” and an “individual” who is free to appropriate whatever she finds helpful to her life. Admitting that she is “not good” at going along with prescribed group activities, “it’s a question of integrity,” she tells me. By way of an illustration, Wendy recalls arriving as a young woman for a spiritual retreat at the Findhorn community in Moray, Scotland after a long journey: “we were asked to go off and on our own and explore and do whatever and then we fed back. I didn't wanna do that! Because I'd just come on my own to somewhere I didn't know. They *can't* put me on my own, thank you very much! I just burst into tears. I didn't want to do that”. So she didn’t.

3.4.4. The Subject of Power

In their different ways, each of these Friends have demonstrated a refusal to conform, expressing instead an “individuality” of thought and action. In John’s words, it is simply: “the freedom to be different”. He continues, “It's other people's basic freedom. If they want to be different, think different, they can be”. To which Wendy immediately adds, “which is actually quite a good message for everybody in society in a way, isn't it?” Indeed, for Wendy Quakers can offer a “big lesson” for society at large:

> I think one of the things that's distinctive with Quakers is the valuing of everybody else regardless of who they are, their abilities or whatever. And [in] our Meeting for Worship..[at] Hereford Meeting we haven't got a big ethnic mix. But we have, as you know, we're all individuals and there's quite a..a difference in the whole Meeting. And it's very easy for somebody who isn't very confident; it's okay for somebody who's got a disablement; it's alright for somebody who has special needs. We've had adults with autism in our Meeting. They can be there, they can sit there *just* the same as anybody else as everybody's the same. And everybody being equal in that way is a big, a big lesson for society, I think. And if you found that more in the workplace as there tended to be in Quaker businesses in the past: where there was a great value put on the individual worker. That would go a long way.

Once again, these accounts of Friends’ experience of coming to Quakers and feeling immediately at-home do not accord entirely well with Leming’s (2007) notion of religious agency. In particular, with an agency conditioned by a ‘received’ religious identity. As Stuart Hall remarked of Foucault’s early conception of the subject position that reveals “little about why it is that certain individuals occupy some subject positions rather than others” (Hall 2000: 23). Instead, “Hall employs the term ‘identification’ to embrace both discursive and psychoanalytic realms: the subject is not merely ‘hailed’ in a purely passive sense, but reflexively recognises and invests in the position (Benwell & Stokoe 2006: 32). Identification in this sense suggests that subjects play an active role in the construction of the positions they

occupy. They participate in discursive and social practices that enable them to identify anew and act differently (Howarth 2013: 183).

Crucially, the experience of personal change, a new sense of self or subjectivity, is not straightforwardly a matter of identifying with Quakerism as a discursive practice. One's arrival may instead mark a prior moment of *dis-identification* with other discourses and subjectivities that begins with questioning. In this sense, coming to Quakers is an act of dissent in relation to former ways of thinking, speaking and acting. This means resisting certain elements of a previous structure of belief, knowledge or power in which one has been 'positioned'. For some, like Sheila and John, these are expressly 'religious' structures, experienced in other institutional settings. They were no longer "who I am". For others, like David and Jane, coming to Quakers marks a dissension from wider structures of society that reproduce inequalities. Quakerism offers instead a space in which to articulate a new or alternative way of being.

This is not to say that the Quaker Meeting can evade the effects of power in social relationships. Alan described to me how he was made to feel alienated as "very different" at a previous Quaker Meeting. His life outside Quakers had been a struggle, especially in the world of work, owing to a life-long cognitive disability. His story of the various unkindnesses and the unfair treatment he had experienced, especially in the workplace, were both moving, inspiring and profoundly troubling. He described, with remarkable poise and grace, his life-story as a difficult journey towards "self-acceptance". He eventually found he had a gift for creative writing and was able to express himself beautifully in poetry, folk music and in the performance of monologues. He occasionally found work in administrative and secretarial roles that utilised his skills. But mostly he had to struggle against the injustices of the benefits system. When I met with Alan he was keen to share with me a lengthy paper he had written; a detailed historical account of his "lived experience" as a single man, now in his sixties, living on disability-related benefits. He had just begun writing a blog which he hoped would be a useful resource and encouragement for others in similar situations. However, he recounted to me an experience of being 'silenced' at a different Meeting:

> I became increasingly disenchanted and the Elders at that Meeting by about 2008 when I was being treated as an 'overstayer' at the job centre. And because of

> what was reflected in what I said as vocal ministry, Elders said to me: 'if you do attend this Meeting again please don't speak because what you say is always drawing attention to yourself and it's not ministry'. That, I think, because I'd come across stories of other members who kind of were elbowed out, so to speak, seems to me to reflect the situation of those particular Elders and their prejudices.

I noted that Alan had shared a similar story on more than one occasion in Meeting. He explained that during a brief period of academic study he had been warned to "beware the personal anecdote". He shared this story after another Friend had shared a personal reflection and therefore seemed to be seeking clarification. His was not a question of *who* can speak but rather *what* can legitimately be said. As we have seen, similar questions vexed the first Quakers. They concern an uneasy relation between spirituality and power to which we shall now turn.

3.5. What Canst Thou Say?

Tony rose to speak one Sunday morning to remind the gathered Friends of the revolutionary times in which the Quaker faith was born. Referring to those “crazy Quakers”, he recounted that those who later became known as ‘Quakers’ would have been fighting with the parliamentary forces at the battle of Naseby. A few months later, I reminded Tony of his comments concerning these proto-Quakers. Were they motivated by politics? “Oh, absolutely revolutionary, yes”. His companion, Judith, a retired Barrister, agreed and suggested I read Christopher Hill’s seminal historical account of this period, *The World Turned Upside Down,* retrieving for me a well-worn and yellowed original 1973 edition.

Sitting comfortably in their lounge, Judith and Tony treated me to a detailed account of the early history of Quakers impressively recounted without the aid of a text. I wondered aloud whether the early Friends were motivated by religious or political concerns. “Religious”, Judith states without hesitation before equivocating: “Some of them were political. William Penn, for example”. Tony reflects before offering a revision. “Of course there was an influx from the political to the personal all the time”. He continues, “the history is somewhere in between the two, you know, interpenetrating the two”. Finding his stride, and with an oblique reference to contemporary events, Tony offers what can be described as a political theology:

> And when 'The People' [gesturing quotation marks] rose up against God's representative on Earth and they impeached him—that is, they cut his head off—it totally changed the game both politically and religiously. Because, of course, he was the head of the church apart from anything else. God's representative here on Earth has been..killed for political-stroke-legal reasons. People had risen up against this. So then you had the opportunity to seize God for yourself.

Tony enlists the words of Margaret Fell in her response to the provocative words of George Fox (see Appendix D). Fox was steeped in the Bible, Tony explains, and Fell records him saying: “you say Peter says that, you say Paul says that. But what can *you* say?”. Paraphrasing Margaret Fell’s recollection of Fox’s words,

Tony presses home the weight of its importance, laying an emphasis on the word, ‘you’:

> This was a moment in time when this was being said: what have *you*, everyone one of you, got to say? And that was when the idea that you had direct access to God and what *you* had to say was...of, in the first instance, of equal value. Then of *absolute* value because you are in touch with God. And then that gets to the versions of the famous Naylor-Fox thing: the problem as to who has got the most God, so to speak. I mean, Fox would actually speak about 'your measure'; everyone has a different measure. He'd never say who had most. But you kind of knew.

Acknowledging a tension, “the Naylor-Fox thing”, Tony makes a cogent case for the ‘revolutionary’ egalitarian idea attached to ‘that of God in everyone’. First, that it presupposes the “equal value” of speaking subjects. And second, that it insists upon a response from the addressee. It is a question addressed to the ‘other’. From the standpoint of the enunciating subject, it invites another person to speak. Secondly, what “can” be said by the other opens onto an ambiguity. It may be taken to refer to what can legitimately be said, in the context of a dominant discourse or regime of truth. On the other hand, ‘what can’ may express the possibilities of a freedom to speak as one with equally privileged access to truth. According to Tony, Fox “went from place to place—and this is the thing about the religious set-up too—because there actually was always a space for anyone to stand up at a church gathering..and speak their mind. But Fox, in this particular period of his life, people say he moved like a ghost with the wildfire in his tail. He went from church to church speaking-up and up and up and up for God—and against the establishment".

3.5.1. Tearing Down Authority

Tony indicates that Fox’s invitation to speak-out was also a commission to speak-against. I ask Tony and Judith if, in their view, the idea that everyone has an equal voice is a core value of Quakerism. “Absolutely!” Tony responds immediately. Judith is a little more circumspect. “Everyone has *potentially* an equal voice”, she suggests. Tony chuckles as Judith continues, “I think people would

say that sometimes you hear the voice of God more clearly through one person than another." Tony reframes his answer:

> But that was what was revolutionary *at this time*, like the tearing down of the authority, like the not lifting your hat and accepting that that person deserves it [since] only God deserves it [...] And people went to prison for long periods for this thing because they could see it tears down society. And because it's a fabrication, it's something that's made up by the agreement of all its members. And without Quakers being the opposite to that: the opposite to that is probably Ranters, you know like Bob Dylan or William Blake are Ranters. These are people just speaking-out, flaming-out against society. The Quakers were about *making* a society that worked. The first stage is tearing down the authority that's there and then the problem is—and it's good that something was made was the making of something—but they made it organically [...] When, as I said, the king is killed, God is up for grabs and there's this Republic as well: so you can have communism and so on and it's a question of how will these things work out and how much is king-like and represses all this. Then you have a new king. When Charles II is in place—and the Act of Toleration is important because the Quakers are a revolutionary organisation—which of course they were. But they weren't Ranters like Bob Dylan and Hippies and communists, the Levellers and Diggers. They are something else. But because of that they have to keep *defining* themselves within the tension of who they *all* know themselves to be. You know, because of the community, so really *making* it a community.

Tony describes Quakerism as the making of a community which, as a "revolutionary organisation", meant *first* "tearing down authority". The early Friends, emerging from the 'radical milieu' described in Chapter 2, were also, thanks to Fox, able to organise. "One of the reasons that Quakerism survived", Judith remarks, "was because, whatever you think of Fox, he was a bloody good organiser. And he set-up a system of church government which lasted into the twenty-first century". His understanding of these revolutionary beginnings enables Tony to draw a distinction between what he calls "content", on the one hand, and "style" on the other. The former he associates with "Quaker", while the latter, he suggests, is merely "Quakerly". The Early Friends, and their willingness to suffer for their faith, Tony suggests is the properly Quaker "content" of Quakerism:

> Now I'm okay about 'Quakerly' because we all have to live together. But I am *for*

> *Quakers*. So, I just say that—this is *my* impression, of course— that, you know, with all the problems with persons like Fox and whatnot, they were all attempting to articulate something about a complex God...So everyone is allied between being that person that they are and that *force* which they are in touch with. And that has to be part of the Meeting. Everyone has to be able to talk with each other with these understandings.

Tony explains that to speak of 'Quaker' "takes you back to that root". It means one can talk about "Quakers and what they're doing: their doing work around the world, or whatever" but this seems to fall short of his meaning of 'content'. Judith suggests that "Quaker" is an adjective but Tony disagrees: "Well, there you are, that's '*Quakerly*'. We're talking about being *Quaker*—and that does go back to the root". With a note of exasperation, he makes a confession: "Alright, this then is *my* opinion; this is *my* problem with *not* being Quaker because I don't find Quakers so *Quaker* at times". Reminding me that he does not feel 'convinced' enough to apply for membership of the Society of Friends, Tony expresses his frustration at the difference he perceives between style and content. Judith attempts to help by suggesting that perhaps "the 'content', if rightly used, should *determine* the 'style'". She offers by way of example the particular garb that eighteenth century Quakers wore. Tony suggests this is a "good example" of what he is referring to. Margaret Fell, he recalled, suggested that wearing grey was, misquoting her only slightly, a "pretty poor gospel". It was the idea, he suggested, that "wearing grey rather than what Friends went through" was "being Quaker". This was, in Tony's words, "the birth of quietism, of course: we just became this nice group who are looking after each other and we're not part of the world". Referring to the earliest Friends, he continues, "Believe me, they *were* part of the world".

3.5.2. The Content of Quakerism

The content of 'Quaker' for Tony means suffering for one's faith; a content that he worries has been lost. Quakerism's "revolutionary" impulse is the challenge it offered to structures of authority prior to organising as a community. The story Margaret Fell tells of the power of Fox's words indicates a radically egalitarian principle put into practice.

First, ‘that of God in Everyone’, expresses a regulative principle, without determinative content, as the ‘bedrock’ belief or presumption of Quakerism. Second, “what canst thou say?”, is its *practical* principle. It structures the relationship between one and another in the form of a question that insists on an answer. It implies speaking and listening but places a logical priority on the latter. Quakers enquire of one another: what can *you* say? Maggie echoes Tony on this point, indicating that Quakers have given “a way of looking at the world”. What she *really* likes about Quakers, Maggie tells me, “is that they give you the space, you know, ‘what canst thou say?’”. Listening and responding is distilled supremely in the practice of silent worship. Maggie urges that *answering* that of God in everyone entails what she calls “paying attention”. Being attentive to the other.

At its historical roots Tony finds in early Quakerism a revolutionary dissent. Consequently, to be a Quaker is not a style, a garb one puts on as a mark of identity, nor the safety and security of a community that bestows it. Rather, by granting one another an equal capacity to speak the Word of God, Quakers engage in an act of dissent. A dissension from whatever powers authorise who can speak or what can legitimately be said. Tony’s insight into the ‘radical’ content of Quakerism thus concerns one’s relationship with ‘the other’. How, then, is this relation constituted in practice?

3.6. Othering ‘My’ Self

Early on during my fieldwork with Hereford Quakers, a relatively young member stood to speak in Meeting for Worship. Charlotte was a mother in her early fifties and spoke with an American accent. In the course of her spoken ministry she made an impassioned plea: “stop othering me!”. The Meeting had opened with a reading from *Quaker Faith and Practice* concerning love. Another expressed a concern for “the mess the world is in" and the desire to “make a difference”. Our response, a Friend urged, may be in anger or love since our concerns for the world “pierce the heart”. Illustrating the theme, another Friend reflected on a television documentary about racism and inclusion in football.

Charlotte’s contribution to the spoken ministry exposed a difficulty, however. She reminds Friends that she has lived in Britain for decades and has not visited the United States for some time. Her accent, she suggests, says nothing about her identity—*who* she is—at least as far as Charlotte is concerned. And yet, she notes, Friends are encouraged to be ‘open’ to the perspectives of others. She wonders whether there are limits to such openness: how should we appropriately respond as Quakers if others ‘position’ us as we would not wish to be positioned? She tells me later, “I’m not a nationality, for crying out loud! What a judgement. What an assessment!”.

I found Charlotte’s contributions to Meeting always profound as she often probed deeper into complex issues. I was grateful, therefore, when Charlotte contacted me and asked to participate in my research. She explained that she had initially resolved not to accept my invitation but now felt she ought to. It seemed she had things she wanted to get off her chest. When I interviewed Charlotte she was well prepared. She narrated her life story with few interruptions, describing key events in her life leading up to and consequent upon a recent moment of clarifying realisation.[26] Charlotte began by explaining that she came to Quakerism because, “I was always searching. I sensed very loosely that I was seeking and didn't know what that meant. I was young. And I yearned to feel more. I could feel God in my life”. Stretching her hands wide upon her kitchen table, Charlotte drew an

[26] By telling autobiographical narrative marked by episodic turning points, Charlotte highlights a change in her intentional state—a belief, conviction or thought—that Bruner (1991) views as an agent’s attempt to individualise a life.

imaginary time-line and made clear, accompanied by a slicing motion of her hand, that an important event had recently happened in her life. This was a pivotal moment and she wanted me to understand its significance in the context of her life as a whole:

> And I thought I would convey this on a linear line. Of experiences that have happened to my fifty-third year. And therefore try to convey to you where I am - and how on a twenty-four seven level I live my Quaker practices. [...] And so, actually, on May 3rd of this year a moment happened for me and I actually felt that my perspective, what I hold on a twenty-four seven, kind of tweaked. And I had an opportunity to look back and think, 'oh my gosh', I wonder if, God!, I have experienced these things to acquire what I hold now. Right now it feels like I'm in the shoes that I could walk the rest of my journey in, holding practices that I hope I will remember to include but are a product of this journey so far. That has gained in a kind of a crescendo or a momentum which I hold now.

Raised a Catholic and while "questing" in her twenties Charlotte presumed that "religion will kind of be the key in the lock". She "tested" things, "formed groups, journeyed into environmental issues" and got involved in local initiatives. "Was it political?" she asks herself. She concludes: "at fifty-three I can look back and see I've been holding the testimonies of truth and simplicity and equality and peace", striking her hand on the table to add emphasis on each of these four words. Moreover, "so obviously, the hierarchies that I met in the established religions didn't work so I came to Quakerism..again, it feels like I've been led". As she puts it, "it's just a kind of *practice* of upholding the eternals of equality". Quakerism, as fast as Charlotte is concerned, is an everyday practice.

3.6.1. Theory and Practice

Regularly throughout her narrative, Charlotte draws a distinction between "theory" and "practice", the latter she views as an endeavour in her everyday "twenty-four seven". By contrast, she regards 'theory' as a somewhat abstract quest for knowledge which, by her own admission, has exerted a strong motive force in her life. "The whole journey was full of academia", including doctoral research in Women's Studies, since: "I have always felt that *my*—this kind of thing that God

asked me to do in my life—is to understand the puzzle of humanity..my mind is always on it, chucking things into that puzzle that makes up human understanding". Consequently, she has battled with an insufficient interest in what she calls "the content of life". Charlotte describes her change in terms of a renewed commitment to "practice" instead:

> And I tried to quest, I tried to understand. It was about, like, the periphery: where was I placed on the periphery? Trying to..*practice* inclusiveness. Being in it. Belonging. Senses. What does that mean for people, for me, the way I relate? How do I *honour* people on twenty-four seven? So that's basically the Quakerism that has very much moulded me. I've responded to what I feel I've been led to practice in my life.

The event of May 3rd relates to Charlotte's newfound commitment to practice, asking "how does this effect me on a daily basis?"

> I try to keep ever-vigilant to honouring that of God in other people. I hope they can see it in my eyes. They must do because I'm forever confided-in. Because people must know I'm going to preserve that because I honour their uniqueness. I've no expectations on where you come from. I'm not gonna do that because it's that of God within you. Which is a unique entity. You're shot through with a billion aspects of which I can—*will not*—reduce and categorise and reduce that God within you—as well as myself. And if people make assumptions on me I must—well at times, maybe not—let it go. Other times it is required for me to speak *my* truth to the power of social conformity. And all these sorts of things. So, *literally*, everything is political for me.

Charlotte is a qualified counsellor. Its person-centred approach "paralleled the ethical framework of my Quakerism", together with "those central Quaker practices" of autonomy in non-hierarchical relations. But Charlotte insists she is also a parent and a wife. She links her commitment to 'practice' to all these spheres of life in her 'twenty-four seven' and to a startling realisation about herself revealed through her professional appraisal feedback received recently at work. She is not relational, she claims, too entrapped by theories and the search for certain knowledge. She shared her self-critique with a remarkable openness and honesty. In this discovery about herself she perceived a wider problem. How many Quakers, she wonders, as "ethical moral people" are "only holding the

theories" while their behaviour is "hurtful, blindsided by their passions"? As a counsellor *and* a Quaker, Charlotte says she is supposed to help people, "open them up and enable". However, "it's not my call on how people *are*":

> But I notice through that practice people *yearn* to be heard and they need to be because we're establishing that of God within them. Of which we're all unique. And that's the way forward: that duality of honouring and requiring I'm heard is the answer to *every* situation in life. And that's from which I walk on a twenty-four seven. I *just* view life as operativities of that while holding all the theories I possibly can. [...] And for me it's just trying to let that person *be* and make mistakes 'cos life and these kind of practices, these models I'm holding, are one's that life *is*.

Charlotte resolves to reverse her binary and put theory into practice in all aspects of her everyday life, "because it's God and God is everything". That means "questing the unknown" and being "less keen on the established", she tells me. One should pay attention instead to what we don't know and "to what unfolds, you know, the magic of what's in people". She suggests we are: "so comfortable talking about answers and evidence and the verifiable". Conversely, she asks, "what is it that the human, the inner world?..there's no evidence around it. It will never be quantifiable". The clarity reached on May 3rd was a significant moment of self-realisation that she had "sat with an ego" and "stopped listening". Or, rather, she suggests, "I listened with a theory" whereas, "my actual Quaker theories demand that I *practice* equality".

Consequently Charlotte says she has arrived at juncture, a cross-roads. She accepts she is "a big-picture person", less inclined to "microanalyse this one thing". So she has now stopped doing that: "it's not where I'm at", she tells me. Consequently, Charlotte feels she is now: "free-wheeling and I can invest my twenty-four seven in what's percolating". Describing it as a step into the unknown, she acknowledges, "I don't know where this is leading me":

> So that's why I signed up to do this [interview]; to start talking. What *is* coming from me? What *have* I got ? What *should* I do? Because without a role we don't know where to go in this world. I don't want to write a book. I want to see somebody's eyes. And also I don't need to talk about myself. I know what I feel, I

> want to..*create* a kind of collective in this world. We have a pretty frightening horizon ahead of us and I want to do what I can to make in-roads into how we get along *collectively*. This is win-win business. It's not in our own heads with our own answers. We have to communicate.

Charlotte feels this has implications for Quaker Meeting. She wants to hear people, she says. “Let's just talk..we're not only entitled to minister when it's something about climate change or how beautiful the children are. What have you *got* going on in there? Our *mind*...what's going on? You're entitled to *share* it. Tell us. Nobody's going to come down like a sledgehammer on you”, she pleads. Although, unfortunately, she laughs, sometimes they do.

3.6.2. Not a Category

Despite the importance of everyday practices that chime with Quakerism, the living-out of the testimonies, Charlotte nevertheless expresses an ambivalence: “I’m only in Quakers because it's the best of the lot. I don't need a category and I don't really want all that peripheral stuff either”. She wonders instead, is all this journey giving me something to *give* to people?” But therein lies her dilemma: to honour God within everyone, to be listened to, yet “I don’t wanna *tell* anybody anything”. In Quaker worship, Charlotte claims she is “so alive to the notion of getting God in-between humans that I want ministry”. She adds, pointedly: “So speak and honour and trust yourself to launch into that which is *your* ministry. I want to hear that and I am doing my end of it to go vulnerable”.

Picking up her theme of openness and vulnerability, I suggest that the previous Sunday’s meeting had been highly charged, one might say ‘gathered’. Charlotte, who had not been at the meeting on this occasion, asks what it was about. She rolls her eyes as I explained the theme was the climate crisis. This had become a regular topic of ministry and a concern that Charlotte clearly shared too. However, she expresses her frustration with a performative flourish. “For me, this is everything”, she says, grabbing a handful of raisins from a small bowl that had been sitting between us. Throwing them onto the table top, Charlotte declares, “and this is the people”. Then, pinching some of the randomly scattered raisins into a little cluster, she adds: “And here’s people who will be naturally governed

toward spirituality”. Pinching another cluster: “Environmental stuff”. And again, “drinking and drugs”. And others: “sport...education”. She explains, “honouring God in everyone isn’t bringing everyone to spirituality”, the first of the clusters she formed. “It’s going where *they* are. And it will keep me holding diversity, you know?” Charlotte makes a plea for the *diversity* of concerns Friends hold in-common but which don’t all fit under a singular category. They are what matters to people. These concerns must all be shared and gathered: “You are unique. You are like some people and you are like no one”, Charlotte implores.

Another thoughtful Hereford Friend echoed Charlotte’s sentiments regarding the Quaker Meeting as a balance of similarities and differences. A life-long environmentalist, Green Party member, and activist now in his fifties, Richard is a regular attender at Quaker Meeting. He tells me, “It's really good to deeply listen to someone whose own prism through which they're looking at the world is different". This isn’t always the case in other religious traditions, he says. Richard explains, “I don't really see much of a difference between political parties and churches". He continues, “I mean, to me they're both about formulating a *weltanschauung*, a world-view, a kind of package, a way to interpret, a prism through which we look at the world”. Moreover, “people feel very comfortable being within that kind of community which are all looking through the same prism". He suggests that one can use the term “faith group” to describe them since, Richard suggests, both are capable of “submerging the individual in the collectivity”. Alluding to the darker implications of ideology, Richard notes that “the Nazis did this very powerfully”. People believed fervently in a message, he explains, that transcended politics and religion: “a kind of mania takes over” before many woke-up and realised they were misled:

> And I think that politics or religious belief can become like that. It’s about the bounds between submerging yourself in a community of belief where you, in a sense, forfeit your own individual agency as an actor. You take on the ideas and also the behaviour of the group.

Richard has no such difficulties with Quakers. “For me, ‘faith’ is faith in humanity in that we can act together and do things and be kind people given the opportunities”. He continues, “It seems to me that the community of people *in* Quakers are at an individual *and* political level following their own path towards

that better future". Given his working definition of ‘faith’, I ask what Quaker *practice* means to him:

> I think practice has to be really rooted in the real world. Accepting the world as it is and seeing the possibilities for making it better. Either on an individual level or a community level or a family level, globally, nationally—whatever level we choose to engage with it, just trying to make it more peaceful, more sustainable, more...friendly

As a faith engaged in the ‘real’ world, Richard views the practices of the Quaker community, like Charlotte’s raisins, as both individualistic and politically-engaged. Employing a familiar trope, Friends follow their own *paths* in the pursuit of a better world, he says. I ventured that Quakers might be legitimately viewed either as a religious group *or* as a social movement. Richard tells me, “there is a third-strand” which he simply calls “community”. He shares passionately about the experience of community in his life: among a close group of male friends, in his neighbourhood, with other activists, and in the Quaker Meeting. But these communities are, for Richard, not made of people looking through the same prism.

3.7. Becoming Friends

We may conclude from these accounts that the experience or ‘sense’ of community for these Friends is found in a particular relation of human coexistence or a ‘politics’.[27] Charlotte’s account of her Quakerism is one that grapples with its difficulties with respect to: theory and practice; speaking and listening; the self and the other. “Stop othering me” was not simply a plea for recognition or a demand for self-determination. It posed a question that opened onto an ongoing struggle against self-enclosure in a forlorn quest for knowledge. She warns that if we lock ourselves up in models, theories, categories of thought, we become closed to the everyday “content of life”. But she uncovers a dilemma too. When to speak and when to listen? To speak ‘my’ truth as a unique individual with something to offer. While, at the same time, ‘honouring’ the same God in every other as the practice of equality.

Charlotte claims therefore that, for her, “everything is political”. Her quest wasn’t, she had discovered, a puzzle that can ever be completed. But it is in relationships with others, exposed and vulnerable, that the ‘puzzling’ must nevertheless continue. Charlotte attests not to an identity, such as “Quaker”, but to a practice of radical openness to the other. Her onward journey, she suspects, is as a singular individual gathered with others in a collectivity. Becoming a ‘self’, as Charlotte had come to realise, is an everyday practice that resists closure by ‘othering’ one’s self-certainties. Like Charlotte, Tony also locates the *practice* of equality at the heart of Quakerism. Honouring ‘that of God in everyone’ means asking the other, ‘what can *you* say?’, listening carefully and being prepared to respond. This is, for Tony, the radical ‘content’ of what it means to be ‘Quaker’ which, he insists, is not the garb of a religious identity. Charlotte likewise resists the “category” of a pre-given subject position. Rather than being ‘othered’, Friends practice an openness we might call ‘othering myself’. This means meeting others in the depths of their otherness and offering something of yourself in return. For Charlotte, it is an unsettling journey into the unfolding, unknown, and unverifiable.

[27] The term ‘sense of community’ has been described in terms of four constitutive elements: membership (a feeling of belonging), influence (making a difference to the group), needs fulfilment (resources received through the group), and shared emotional connection (shared history, place and similar experiences): “somehow we must a way to build communities that are based on faith, hope and tolerance, rather than on fear, hatred and rigidity” (McMillan and Chavis 1986: 20).

In their thoughtful accounts of the practical content of Quakerism, Tony and Charlotte indicate that a sense of self as an active subject is impossible without the other. Kenneth Gergen (1994) has argued that subjects can only become actors in reciprocal relations in which others play a part. Positions are mutually offered and taken in exchanges that ensure the performance of one's self-identity and sense of agency is contingent upon social conditions. According to Haggard and Tsakiris (2009), "the *experience* of agency refers to the experience of being in control of one's actions and, through them, of events in the external world" (2009: 242, emphasis added)[28]. As Alan's story of being silenced testifies, membership in a particular discursive community is no guarantor of agency. The necessary resources may be unequally distributed amongst its members (Ortner 2006). While Erving Goffman refers to a performative agency in the dramaturgical positioning of the subject, Bauman (2000) finds 'cloakroom' communities in late modernity: entire audiences who yearn to take to the stage passively positioned by the skilled performers of a spectacle.

The act of speaking is, therefore, not in itself an indicator of agency, strictly understood. A speaker may be a mere 'animator' of the words of others. As Goffman (1981) argues, the fact of speaking does not mean the speaker is the 'author' of the words spoken. The Author is "someone who has selected the sentiments that are being expressed and the words in which they are encoded" (1981, cited in Wetherell 2001: 105). Thus, a speaker cannot straightforwardly be assumed to be an agent 'authoring the self' (Holland et al. 1998). In Goffman's terms, a 'principal' is a person active in some particular social identity or role, acting in a capacity as a member of a group occupying an office and proffering the 'official' view. As such, the speaker speaks not as an 'I' but as a 'we' authorised to speak on behalf of a collective. But, as Wendy quipped, there is no such thing as a 'Head Quaker' who can perform this role. Instead, an "existential agency" requires the transfer of authority to a multiplicity of 'authors' who each participate in a discourse that *constitutes* the subject (Duranti 2004, also 1997). The latter entails making an investment in a subject position as an act of identification by an *active* subject. This complicates the idea of an individual as an entity separable from a

[28] Psychologists refer to a 'sense of agency' in addition to a *fact* of agency: a *feeling* of control over our actions and their consequences (see Beck et al. 2017, Haggard and Baruch 2015, Moore 2007).

collective. It leaves space instead for individuals to act as producers of their self-identity as “the imaginings of self in worlds of action” (1998:5).[29]

Friends arrive at Quakers ‘with where they are’, situated in unfolding self-understandings but made to feel ‘at home’ among others. Holland argues that our sense of self is lived. Experiences and events supply the resources with which to co-construct our sense of who we are. Identities are thus psychohistorical formations that develop over a person’s lifetime (1998:5). They can be conceived as: “means through which people care about and care for what is going on around them. They are important bases from which people create new activities, new worlds, and new ways of being” (1998:5). Consequently, as Leming (2007) also showed, “specific, often socially powerful, cultural discourses and practices both position people *and* provide them with the resources to respond to the problematic situations in which they find themselves” (1998: 32, emphasis added). We ‘author’ the world in the making of meaning but the ‘I’ is not an entirely “freewheeling agent” (1998: 170). Rather the ‘I’ “draws upon the languages, dialects, the words of others to which she has been exposed” (ibid.). Thus, drawing on the dialogism of Mikhail Bakhtin (Bakhtin 1981, Holquist 1990), Holland argues that the vantage point rests within the ‘I’ and authoring comes from the ‘I’ but the words come from collectively shared experiences. We make words our own, appropriate them, by investing them with our intentions and lending them our own ‘accent’.

This means that we also “represent ourselves to ourselves from the vantage point (the words) of others, and that those representations are significant to our experience of ourselves” (1998: 172). This dialogical account of self-formation accords with the Quaker practice of Meeting already described. As Holland explains, the self occupies a position from which meaning is made; a position that is addressed by others and the ‘world’. Each position is, Tony insists, addressed by a question: ‘what canst thou say?’. By answering, the self ‘authors’ the world—both itself and others.[30] The self thereby authors itself, and is made knowable, in the words of others. Self-authoring is therefore, at the same time, the orchestration of the voices of others. For Foucault, the ethical care of the self

[29] Similarly, Jerome Bruner (1990) views autobiographical narrative as the interpersonally distributed construction of selves; acts of meaning in transactions between self and other in a social context—self-making and world-making together.
[30] Bruner (1991) claims that, like knowledge, self-formation is intersubjective. Self-making is affected both by one's own interpretations of oneself and that of others: the problem to which Charlotte alludes to in her reluctance to be ‘othered’ by others.

concerns how self-other relations are governed in a regime of truth. His notion of ‘political spirituality’ will be taken up in the next chapter. Presently, Holland suggests speakers depend upon the words of others as resources with which to author their ‘own’ experiences. In the answers we give, we nevertheless find our own voice as an author and “escape from being ventriloquated by first one and then another authoritative voice” (1998: 185).

This is Tony’s point. Quakerism is first of all an escape from authority before it is a form of community. The injunction ‘what canst thou say?’ is a transfer of both authority and agency. The latter may give rise to profound experience of being ‘myself’ as one ‘at home’ with others. Being open to others and listening to what they have to say solicits a series of agentive responses that may be ascribed a spiritual valence.[31] The repeated cycles of interaction, the discipline of Quaker Meeting, keeps open the possibilities of a shift in view-point or subjectivity. That is to say, the discursive construction of our own subjectivity through participation—by listening and speaking—in a community of differences. The self is always mutually constituted with others in the micro-interactions of discourse that open ‘being’ to ‘becoming’. Thus, only in our *being-with* others, by sharing and exposing our fragile ‘self’ to the other’s disturbing presence, can we discover new ways of being, other forms of life together.

We may therefore conclude that ‘openness’ is a spiritual practice that constitutes the Quaker ‘common’ as a site of otherness. We may also say that these spatial and signifying practices are an *event* of the other. The effect (significance) of which is also *affective* (a sense or feeling): an experience to which a specialness may be ascribed as ‘spiritual’ (Taves 2009). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri suggest “the power of love is the constitution of the common and ultimately the formation of society” (2009: 195). A particular experience of the self-other relation—that of ‘love’—produces ‘the common’ insofar as its actions “mark a rupture with existing being and creates new being” (2009: 181). Indeed, such a power may fail when the multiplicity of the common is reduced to identity and

[31] According to Ermarth (2001), a “complex, multi-laminated subjectivity” is “a description of lived experience in our time” that also alters the idea of agency. In the discursive condition it is impossible not to make a difference since “we *are* difference” not ‘selves’ or ‘subjects' independent of discourse. Rather, postmodern subjectivity is a moving intersection or nexus of empowerment: “the agent first of a unique and unrepeatable sequence that is constantly being specified from the potentials available in the discursive condition” (Ermarth 2001: 47-48). Postmodernity provides for a personal uniqueness that is not given but co-constructed day to day (ibid.)

unity; when hierarchies are imposed upon common relations (2009: 195). In this case, love must take the form of “indignation, disobedience, and antagonism” just as it did for the radical milieu of the seventeenth century. We may say the early Quakers successfully developed an organised project “aimed at creating institutions of the common” (2009: 195). It is a task taken-up by contemporary Friends. But what of the agency of a project that gathered early Friends into a commonality? If the Quaker common is constituted by the practice of a ‘loving’ openness in the project of becoming, what has become of the unity-in-dissent that bound the first Friends together in a political project? These questions will be taken-up in the following chapter when we examine the relation between the ‘common’ and political dissent.

4. Political Religion

In the previous chapter, we explored how Friends experience a sense of agency and community through a spiritual practice of 'openness' to the other. The Quaker common is a site of otherness. Not a space defined or marked-out by an *uncommon* otherness but one in which the other is encountered by a self 'on the move'. It is a way of being together which, for these Friends, is not a collective identity or a singular subject position they have taken-up. Rather, a place of arrival and departure, of questing and questioning. Their identification as Quakers is neither with a 'category' nor is it strictly necessary ('why should they?'). They are 'individuals first' who are 'informed by' rather than conformed to Quakerism. As such, they each arrive with 'where' they are in their life's journey; as subjects who do not need to 'fit-in' and can therefore feel 'at home'.

4.1. The Quaker Movement

In Chapter 3 we explored the 'political' dimension in contemporary religion, Specifically, the politics of the discursive formation of a religious group confronting the 'impossible' challenge of an inclusiveness that threatens to dissolve its form. In this chapter we shall return to a theme introduced in Chapter 1 as religion's increasingly public role which, in the absence of visibly concrete form, may be described as a 'fugitive' faith. As discussed earlier, religious language or spiritual ascriptions may be deployed to describe instead the experience of moral selves engaged in an 'agency of projects' (Ortner 2006). In this grey zone, the public-private distinction may appear to dissolve into an open common of individuals gathered by such a project. Consequently, the distinction between politics and religion blurs too. We may therefore prefer the phrase 'political religion'. The difficulty, however, is that such a 'religion' may remain exclusive. The metonymic extension of 'religious' practices can move a discursively constructed boundary to encompass hitherto 'secular' activities in the public square. The church-world distinction is thereby preserved by de-secularisation. Insofar as 'political religion' is the form of a hegemonic politics, it is not the inheritance of

Quakerism. As we saw in Chapter 2, for the first Quakers religion was a private, public and political matter.

This chapter therefore takes ‘the common’ as its point of departure by inquiring whether Quakerism may be understood as a *political movement*. To consider Quakerism as a movement, however, confronts a slightly different question. It concerns the location of the ‘spiritual’ in the innumerable contexts of political action. If an answer can be found, it may also address the conundrum posed by Derrida’s paradoxical community without community. We shall therefore consider the radical “content” of Quakerism which, as Tony insists, is rooted in its revolutionary origins. That is to say, in a form of dissent from inegalitarian structures of power-knowledge. In order to do so, I shall enlist Michel Foucault’s concept of ‘political spirituality’ as an alternative lens through which to examine Quakerism as a distinctive regime of practices governing self-other relations by way of an ethico-political discipline.

4.1.1. The Essence of Quakerism

At the centre of this inquiry is therefore the relationship between Quaker spirituality and political activism. Before considering what Foucault meant by ‘political spirituality’ let us first consider what one thoughtful Friend suggests is the political ‘essence’ of Quakerism. In his narrative we may detect a ‘spiritual’ openness in one’s relations with others that issues a political challenge to structures of inequality. This confluence of the spiritual and the political he calls ‘befriending’.

Amid the regular flow of messages, newsletters, agendas and meeting papers circulated amongst Friends in the Southern Marches area, a document caught my eye. Written by Peter Hussey, a Friend from the Llandrindod Wells local meeting, it was titled *Looking for the Essence of Quakerism*. The note begins with a reminder of George Fox’s vision on Pendle Hill of “a great people waiting to be raised”, which Peter links to the understanding of the early Christian communities (Hussey 2019a). He goes on to argue that just as the Christian message became “corrupted” over time, the “Quaker concept” has also lost its essence: “it went flat,

in greyness and sombreness, a ‘silly poor gospel’” (ibid.). Echoing Tony’s earlier comments concerning the ‘content’ of Quakerism, Peter suggests a lost vitality. Fox’s “peculiar people”, rather than being distinctive, have simply become “eccentric” (ibid.).

Part of the problem of this encircling peculiarity, Peter suggests, lies with traditional Quaker language: “we cling to words that we understand but which need to be explained to anyone else”. He asks “how do we transform ourselves, discarding those aspects of our culture that are off-putting to the uninitiated?”. Instead Friends must inform newcomers “from *their* viewpoint”, expressed clearly and “couched in the language of today” (ibid.). There is something in the human mind, Peter says, that delights in love and truth. These promptings should re-energise and re-direct us and, ”because we know that this ability is available to all we are obliged by that knowledge to treat all with respect, love and friendship”. In conclusion, Peter makes a plea:

> We all need to work at being friends, opening ourselves, exploring, nurturing. Maybe that is the essence: we are friends of each other, ready to go out from our meetings to meet others and befriend them, ready to stand by those friends who are being oppressed, enslaved, bombed, gassed, starved, drowned, mutilated. Whatever prevents that has to be ditched. Our government, our economics, our privilege, our comfort, our busyness. That is the essence of what Fox began (Hussey 2019).

Sitting together in his home among the hills of mid-Wales, Peter tells me how he arrived at his *Essence of Quakerism*. As a young man, he decided “God isn’t in churches”. Sitting on a cliff-top while his Catholic wife-to-be attended Mass, he realised: “I’ve got God here”. He resolved immediately never to practise any form of religion: “I would just have *my* religion”, he said. Peter’s passage into Quakerism happened many years later. He found Quakers while recovering from a mental breakdown. At this stage in his life in 1979 he had “gone through a lot of questioning”. He tells me he had been a vegetarian, practiced Yoga, got involved in Green Politics, and stood as a candidate for election. Following his illness he was “thinking about spirituality again but not with any particular direction”. He started to “appreciate that Quakerism was *a* form of spirituality which had the

same outcome” as his political commitments. Indeed, it was through connections he made in Green politics that he first met Quakers.

This was a familiar tale. Alan, Richard, and another Hereford Friend, Jan, had all come across Quakers during a period of political campaigning. Indeed, most of the Friends I interviewed in-depth had arrived at Quakers already engaged in some form of activism. Maggie’s philosophy for life was to cultivate an “awareness”. She would later explore in her book, *Gathering Our Senses*, a practice of “paying attention”, especially to the natural world. An attentiveness that is available to all. Now in his eighties, Peter links his “political base” with ‘that of God in everyone’:

> It is *the* most radical idea, isn't it? And people refer to communism as being Christianity because of that equality element. And that is incredibly radical. That's where Jesus was coming from. That's why he was crucified. So we are still trying to get to that radicalism. But because we're Quakers, we're doing it in a very middle class gentlemanly sort of way. So Quakerism isn't working.

4.1.2. Reforming Friendships

Peter suggests a radical rethink is required. He contends that there are, “numerous people outside that we see as Quakers but who don’t see themselves as Quakers”. These people don’t come and sit with Friends in Meetings, he says. Consequently, “we don’t get to know them and we’re not relating to them”. Moreover, people sit on the boundary, observe all the internal busyness and don’t want to get involved. You might have “a heart to heart” but mostly exchanges are, “a surface chat about who you are and where you're from and how many children you've got and that sort of thing”. It rarely goes beyond that, he says.

Peter notes that, in the past, a *Becoming Friends* introductory course had proven to be a good way of “finding things out”. Peter’s Local Meeting is about to try an experiment he calls *Open Minds*. It is a discussion group he hopes will introduce some distinctly Quaker elements—such as silent reflection—while also enabling people on the periphery to engage with one another on deeper and weightier issues. What is important is that newcomers “understand that they are part of something else”. Peter explains that he feels he must take a personal lead to

address the “crisis” Quakerism is facing. Otherwise, “we’re not going to go anywhere; we’re just going to get smaller and smaller and disappear”. Tasked by the area meeting of Elders, his *Looking for the Essence of Quakerism* contains ideas that he says are, “pretty radical but I think that is where I am at”.

Noting the peculiarities of certain Quaker words and phrases, Peter reflects that: “well yes, the peculiarities are there for historic reasons and the history is interesting. But it doesn't matter. What matters is the Spirit and is the Spirit moving you at this moment”. Like other activist Friends I met, Peter is impressed by young people whose concerned political action gives him hope:

> I think the young people of today are showing us how to do it and we're not listening. So, they're doing it on social media. They're doing it by coming together for *specific* purposes. Like a demo or something of that nature. Or a...gathering. That sort of thing is okay. Going to *any* sort of meeting once a week is just not on at all. So I think we've got to start finding how we work with that.

While Peter is clearly committed to the insights of early Friends, he proposes nevertheless that a conception of ‘Friendship’ must be produced anew in the contemporary context. To ‘make’ new Friends, he says, entails a *befriending* that requires both openness and a willingness to “stand by” others, particularly those oppressed by injustice. He insists that this entails going to ‘where’ others are and seeing the world from their standpoint. Peter therefore associated ‘befriending’ with an attitude of openness towards, and identification with, others as constitutive of a social relation. The ‘radical’ meaning of friendship.

It is a relation upon which another Hereford Quaker also offered a thoughtful reflection. Robert, a man in his seventies struggling with Parkinson’s disease. Stooped and aided by two sticks, his journey to Quakers each week is a difficult one. A well-informed environmentalist, member of the Green Party, and one-time author of a book on organic vegetable gardening, Quakerism expresses an ethical position to which he remains committed. As someone who may not otherwise enjoy much human contact during the week, he tells me that friendship is for him the most important part of being a Quaker. He pinpoints, as its principal influence, “a *concept* of Friends that is a very good one” whether a capital ‘F’ or a small ‘f’, he says, since they are much the same, really:

> There’s no great difference in the notion of friendship among Quakers or outside, except that there is no hierarchy: there are some quite wealthy people and there are some poor people. Within the Meeting, I don't see there is any distinction, we treat each other equally, I think.

Robert proceeds to illustrate his point about friendship outside the Meeting. Since his Parkinsons has affected his speech somewhat, Robert says he has lost his confidence to minister in Hereford Meeting. He notes, however, that “most Quaker ministry seems to be about personal experience”. Robert adds: "I've heard people disapprove of that theme developing in a meeting. I don't know why, I think it's quite nice to do that”. He explains that he wanted to share something on the previous Sunday about a recent experience but lacked the courage to do so. He recounts the story for me instead. He tells me he had been resting on a low wall as he made his slow progress home from the dentist. A female sixth-form student, a stranger, stopped to ask if she could be of any help. As she walked with Robert back to his house they had “a lovely conversation”. Reflecting later on the brief encounter, Robert observes:

> I was reminded of the saying in the Bible that it is more blessed to give than to receive. But I'm not sure about that because for someone to give, someone has to receive. Nobody can give unless somebody receives. The two actions are equal. So we should all be always willing to accept a gift or help for our own benefit but also to allow that person to give. And it just leads to a mutual experience which is umm, what's the word? Inspiring.

What Robert calls “the gift of friendship” is, like that of Derrida’s impossible hospitality, ensnared by an undecidability. The *befriending* self is one willingly and vulnerably exposed to the other who may offer help or a gift. But in a mutually constituted relation, each needs the other. In a similar vein, Todd May (2014) detects a subtle dispute between Derrida and Jaques Rancière concerning the former’s problematizing of friendship. May argues that: “the possibilities of friendship..are not properly the subject of a deconstruction but, if anything, part of the other that is to have a space opened for it by a deconstruction” (May 2014: 136). He suggests that, “in the name of opening a space for the other”, Derrida relinquishes a social tool by which that space can be opened (ibid.). Rancière, on

the other hand, addresses the excluded: the part of a social order who have no part and therefore do not ‘count’ (Rancière 1999).

May argues that Derrida errs by viewing friendship from the standpoint of those who *do* have a part in the social order. Consequently, solidarity may be realised more as a threat than a promise (May 1999: 136). Instead, one must take-up the standpoint of the oppressed or marginalised other. This is precisely what Peter also seems to have in mind as the ‘essence’ of Quakerism. May advocates a type of relationship that “can provide the basis for, or intersect with, movements of resistance” to the neoliberal order (ibid.). Moreover, the practice of such deep friendships, he suggests, “might be called training for movements of solidarity” (ibid.).

The discipline of Quaker worship corresponds closely to May’s “training” ground in *deep* friendships that have a distinctly ‘radical’ content. May recognises that such friendships can be self-enclosed and thus inimical to political solidarity. But not necessarily so. By virtue of its presumption of equality, Quaker Friendship cultivates “a willingness to challenge social norms [that] opens out onto a flourishing participation in political movements" (May 2014: 140). It also supplies the motivation to do so. Thus, the promise of Quakerism is its social practice of ‘befriending’ that may forge solidarities and alliances with innumerable ‘others’. In this mobile sense, Quakerism may correspond closely to what Foucault called a ‘political spirituality’. But what exactly did he mean by this?

4.1.3. Politically Spiritual

Peter and Robert’s reflections on the nature of friendship provide a useful point of departure from the notion of ‘public religion’ towards a ‘political spirituality’. As we saw in Chapter 1, the former features prominently in literature on contemporary religion and in its critiques of the secularisation thesis. Empirical work amongst religious activists has however exposed the shortcomings of a formulation that rests on the presupposition of a private-public distinction. The ‘fugitive’ faith of those gathered in a ‘common’ political project evades this and other dichotomies. The friendship relation described by Peter opens a space in which inequalities

may be refuted or resisted. Radical friendship is thus a practice of dissent that is neither confined to a congregational setting nor simply proceeds outwardly from it.

Foucault attempted to theorise the relation between the technologies of disciplinary power to which subjects are 'subjected' and an ethical 'care of the self' by which a self-constituting agency may nevertheless be exercised. He went on to propose an interrelationship between, on the one hand, the historically contingent discourses that articulate power-knowledge as a 'regime of truth'. And, on the other, the practices that govern the relations between 'self' and the 'other'. Summing up his life's work in an interview in 1978, Foucault concluded with a question that Ladelle McWhorter (2003) carefully translates:

> How to read the relation between ways of distinguishing true and false, and ways of governing oneself and others? The will to found each of [these practices] entirely anew, each by the other (to discover an altogether different division [of true and false] by another manner of governing oneself and governing oneself otherwise by taking another division as point of departure), this is 'political spirituality' (McWhorter 2003, Rabinow and Rose 2003: 254).

Foucault employed the term 'political spirituality' again later that year in response to the popular uprising that led to the Iranian Revolution. McWhorter argues, however, that he meant something other than simply political action grounded in religious faith. As she reads him, 'political spirituality' simultaneously puts to question both one's self-disciplining mode of existence *and* the epistemological regime in which one's self-awareness is fashioned, *in order that* new possibilities may be cultivated in each. The ethico-political technologies that govern self-other relations, 'governmentality', thus has a 'spiritual' aspect insofar as the subject attains a transformed mode of being: a self-transformation that is bound up with a politics of discerning true and false (McWhorter 2003). Thus, "one cannot deliberately influence others and transform oneself in the absence of knowledge—knowledge of self, of others, of management techniques or ascetic regimes" (2003: 42). As one makes new discoveries of understanding, so new ways of governing oneself and others can also be found. Likewise, new techniques of self-transformation give rise to new possibilities of truth (ibid.).

Jeremy Carrette gives a somewhat different account of Foucault's notion of 'political spirituality' within the arc of the latter's overall project as a critique of religious 'utterances' through the technology of the self (Carrette 2000: 43). In his work on religion, Foucault "questions the hegemony of religious discourse and reveals its excluded Other; he identifies the hidden currents of confessional practice and uncovers the silenced body" (2000: 129). The values and ideals of religious belief exert control on human experience through social, cultural and political exclusions: these include the unsaid as well as powers that silence. Foucault thus contested the 'spiritual' in terms of the politics of experience and of a corporality that challenges theological dualism (ibid.). His critique took aim both at the body silenced by religion and the technology of pastoral power as part of a broader project to place religion within a framework of 'governmentality' (2000: 129, 136, also Dean 2010). According to Carrette, the Iranian Revolution "revealed to Foucault the full force of religious phenomena in holding the 'collective will', 'spirituality' forming the key factor in the people's challenge to institutional power" (2000: 137). Regarded as a highly prized additional level of meaning, the 'spiritual' was thereby capable of mobilising a political will. The notion of 'governmentality' is henceforth the nexus of ethics, politics, and spirituality in which 'political spirituality' emerges to challenge the dualistic categories of religious discourse. Consequently, "the spiritual can be suspended in the 'political' and the 'material', where the 'spiritual' is 'political' and the 'political' is 'spiritual' (2000: 140).

It is precisely this entanglement of the spiritual and the political to which Peter's conception of Friendship seems to point. Thus, in order to go beyond 'public religion' and find out whether Foucault's alternative conception might be found in practice rather than theory, we shall return once again to the lived experiences of contemporary Quakers. Having noted how my research participants had been led to Quakers by their political commitments, I was keen to learn how Friends continued these projects 'as Quakers'. I did not need to wait long for the opportunity.

4.2. Quaker Response-ability

Shortly after I began my fieldwork, Hereford Quakers formed a group to discuss together their individual and collective response to the looming climate emergency. Originally advertised as a topic for an occasional Tuesday evening ‘education meeting’, it immediately became a regular monthly gathering. David, who with his wife Jane convened the group, also circulated research, information and related news on the subject via email to its ten to fifteen participants. In one of these early exchanges, David proposed a name: the “Climate Change Response Group” (‘CCRG’).

During its first meeting, participants in the CCRG expressed frustration at the apparent failure of political institutions to adequately address climate change. The crisis needs a “new story”, it was suggested, rather like the proposed “Green New Deal” in the United States. Someone observed that the climate emergency was a question of equality, a core Quaker value or ‘testimony’. As a group, Friends asked one another, ‘what can we do?’ Richard has been giving talks on the subject of climate change since the early 1970s. The technological solutions are well understood, he explains, but the political will is lacking. His hopes had recently been renewed, however. A young Swedish girl, Greta Thunberg, had recently begun a ‘School Strike for the Climate’ that had inspired the first similar action in the UK. This and another new movement called ‘Extinction Rebellion’, he suggests, are a cause for optimism. The new climate movement seems to have attracted the support of young people. He wonders how young people are being mobilised. David suggests that the group watch a video presentation by one of the organisers of Extinction Rebellion, often referred to simply as ‘XR’. He explains that he and his wife, Jane, had also felt invigorated by the demands made by the new movement. Its call on the government to “tell the truth” sounded a distinctly Quaker note.

Over the following weeks of the spring of 2019 as the global climate movement rapidly gathered pace it became a regular theme for the Meeting. Jane rose on a Sunday morning to describe how profoundly challenged she felt by the protesters. For the first time in her life she said she was considering whether to break the law and risk being arrested. Both Jane and David had begun attending local ‘XR’

meetings and were going to attend training sessions on nonviolent civil disobedience. Against this backdrop, David asked whether Friends in the CCRG might consider joining him in supporting a Christian Aid campaign to encourage HSBC bank to divest from fossil fuel energy projects. A few weeks later a small group of us stood with a clutch of Christian Aid flyers and a large petition board outside the Hereford branch of the bank.

4.2.1. Presenting Our Concerns

At a subsequent meeting of the CCRG the group embarked on a slightly different project. The Meeting was to participate in a 'Night of the Churches' open evening, organised by *Churches Together in Herefordshire*. It was suggested that the CCRG might coordinate an exhibit for visitors to the meetinghouse that demonstrated Quaker's concern for climate change.

A Friend wondered whether we might draw our visitors' attention to the latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Another with particular responsibility for Hereford Quaker's relations with other local churches explained that she already had some materials from CAFOD, the Catholic development agency, on the topic and she had also contacted Greenpeace to ask about literature they could make available. The CCRG members expressed no apparent difficulty in using the publicity materials of other organisations to get the message across. Indeed, David felt that a key message should be precisely that: Quakers work in solidarity with others. Friends felt, however, that the display ought nevertheless to include some quotes from *Quaker Faith & Practice*. In addition, the display might illustrate how Hereford Quakers were responding to the climate challenge. In the end, a large display of diverse materials included all of these elements. Among them was a note on "A Quaker Approach to Change". It explained that this entails:" letting the Light show us our darkness, answering that of God in every one, and striving towards unity". Another display board was headed: "How do Quakers Respond?" Underneath was a well-loved quote attributed to the Quaker abolitionist John Woolman in 1772, accompanied by a 1988 statement on climate change by London Yearly Meeting. This was accompanied by the very recent words of a declaration made from a Quaker

Meeting held at the Extinction Rebellion camp at Marble Arch on Easter Sunday 2019.

In their different ways, both the HSBC protest and the climate change display were an opportunity to represent ‘Quakers’ to a wider world. The Quaker ‘response’ to the climate crisis played a central role in this task. Whether Quakers must, at the same time, always speak-out on such matters in a distinctly ‘Quaker’ way was less clear. During the HSBC demonstration we presented our petition to the HSBC branch manager in the name of Christian Aid. The latter had organised the campaign, the materials and formulated a demand that Hereford Quakers were happy to mobilise around. On the other hand, it was felt that visitors to the Meeting House on the *Night of the Churches* should understand that social and political engagement is an indispensable part of ‘who’ Quakers are. But whether and how distinctly a ‘Quaker’ identity should be stamped on these activities was less clear. For David, the presentation was primarily intended to draw attention to climate change rather than to Quakers, as such. He saw Friends as part of a wider coalition with which he identified strongly. This in no way prejudiced David’s personal commitment to Quakers, however. He had only recently been accepted into formal membership, a decision he had made after many years of attendance. But this was not an exclusive identification. I noted after the first CCRG meeting that I never again saw David without a bright blue or green Extinction Rebellion ‘hourglass’ badge pinned to his jersey.

The emphasis placed by these Friends on ‘inclusion’, ‘openness’ and ‘befriending’ makes the representation of Quaker identity problematic. Any such attempt necessarily implies a constitutive exclusion (Thomassen 2017). If what matters to Friends is ‘our’ collective response, the boundaries of shared concern must be widely drawn. Who is ‘our’? The website advertising the *Night of the Churches* event said of the opportunity to visit the Quaker meetinghouse: “Engage with Quakers’ concern for our planet—contribute ideas to our exhibition!”. By employing the possessive pronoun in relation to both ‘planet’ and an ‘exhibition’, guests were invited to participate in a common endeavour. As Alma said, since the “right ideas” promoted by various groups have a common origin in a “spiritual unknown”, people do not need to come to Quakers to do so. In their desire to welcome participation, Quakers must, however, be generous in their language. As

Peter insisted above, inviting a dialogue of ‘open minds’ requires innovation in discursive practices. As we shall shortly see, for some Quakers the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘political’ have already blurred into a more broadly shared sense of “response-ability” to deeply felt concerns (King 1998: 109).

4.2.2. Blurring the Boundaries

A few months after its first meeting, David reflects with me on the formation of the CCRG. He says, “I keep coming back to the ‘response’ bit because that’s what it’s all about”. There was nothing particularly remarkable about his suggestion of forming the group. Jane explains that “it is just us being *us*”. She adds that “being Quaker and being activists are so mixed-up”. The “activism bit”, she tells me, comes from having been brought up in a “pretty political household”. Jane’s ‘political’ upbringing taught her that “if you believe something, you *do* something about it”. The “equality thing” was, Jane insists, the reason she joined.

Prior to coming to Quakers Jane and David had been founding members of an intentional community with a strong environmental ethos. During this period, David relinquished his role as a social worker to pursue a livelihood as an organic market gardener. Later, they founded a community-based Carbon Rationing Action Group (CRAG) in a village south-east of the city. They felt this would have a greater impact than a similar group amongst Hereford Quakers since the latter, Jane suggested, were likely to be already behaving “more in-line” with its aims. The purpose of the group was to motivate each other to “improve our behaviour”. David is eager to explain that it is very hard to separate “how much our behaviour is motivated by being Quakers and how much we’re Quakers *because* of the way we’re motivated”.

While David and Jane both express with clarity a sense of personal commitment, they also stress the need for solidarity. On more than one occasion Jane spoke in Meeting to express the view that “we are stronger together”. Reminding Jane of these remarks, she expands:

> I think I feel that even [among] people who are not religious there's quite a lot of respect for Quakers. And I think that at a time of political crisis, which I think this is, that it's important for us to be saying fairly clearly and publicly that, collectively, we are concerned about this.

Referring to a decision recently taken in the Hereford Business Meeting not to participate in a locally coordinated effort to implement an environmental audit scheme designed for churches Jane admits: “I'm still a little bit disappointed that we decided that we don't want to join that”. David adds: “I think the whole thing of *cooperation* has interested us always”. Neither Jane nor David had particularly religious upbringings. Jane views herself as a practical person whose background did not particularly promote ‘spirituality’. Jane recalled that although it was a term she disliked, it did not prevent her mother from becoming a Quaker before she later resigned over pacifism. Conversely, although his mother insisted he was confirmed in the Anglican church, David’s father “strongly disapproved of religion as “a kind of a feudal idea”.

Yet despite her ‘practical’ approach, Jane has little difficulty today in locating religion and politics in the same conceptual domain. She overcame her lingering reservations to ‘spirituality’ as opposed to “being in the world” through her belief that: “we have a responsibility to keep—I don’t always use the language—but it *is* God’s creation”. While serving as an overseer and clerk she came to view the practical as having a spiritual content. Or, more precisely: “At a time when there was significant, sort of, crises which were expressed sometimes in terms of practical discontent. But there was an awful lot of spiritual discontent in it”. Quaker Meeting has, according to Jane, “grown on us”. It is“that sort of quiet space and the feeling of community” that makes it for her “undoubtedly a spiritual community. I *feel* it in the Meeting”.

Consequently, for David and Jane the language of ‘spirituality’ and political ‘activism’ have become more tightly coupled. David says, “for us anyway the separation between religion and political activism just looks much more...blurred". David suspects, however, that amongst many activists religion has “a bad name”. Speaking of XR activists, he says, “their motivation isn’t coming from people who are going to be talking at any rate in religious terms”. Jane suggests that, for many, the principles and values they share are not reserved by ‘religion’.

Conversely, Quakers offer a “space” and “calm” that can help people “move to seeing where a lot of [those] values *come from*”. I wonder whether, therefore, their participation in the Quaker Meeting offers something that might be missing for Extinction Rebellion activists. Jane feels that may be true for *some* people:

> Well, I was thinking of it in practical terms about the experience of not being afraid of non-violence, not being afraid of confronting people's ideas without getting into a conflict with them necessarily. I think of this whole 'speaking truth to power' without necessarily battering down the ramparts of power.

David picks up the theme with reference to their forthcoming direct action training with XR. He explains that the “respect basis” of their approach is intended to “avoid setting-up antagonism with the other person and creating hostility and resistance to change”. Concerning his proposal that Hereford Quakers meet to consider their responses, David says it is a way of coping with growing knowledge of an imminent global crisis. With “something in the air” surrounding the school's strike and XR protests, he had reached a point at which he said he “felt keenly the need to be involved with fellow Quakers from the Meeting”. Moreover, the ‘Quaker response’ he had in view is consistent with the longer tradition of the Religious Society of Friends which Jane reminds him was exemplified by John Woolman. As David sums it up:

> My quite emotional expression of concern and, you know, what on earth we..how we were going to respond as a support group, again not unlike the CRAG group idea. You know, given that Friends have all these..this set of principles, all of which—well certainly the equality one and the peace one—key right into the whole thing.

David and Jane articulate an equivalence between equality, peace, and climate change. Thus, climate justice becomes synonymous with the practice of Quakerism, since the ‘whole thing’ hangs together, as it were, around the nodal point of ‘equality’. The ‘spiritual’ aspect for Jane, like Alma, consists in a belief or feeling that these values come from somewhere. Quaker practices provide a ‘space’ to discover the ‘spiritual’ source of their felt concern. What matters, says David, is therefore our response.

4.2.3. How the Light Gets In

The keystone at the centre of Quakerism is equality in action. Equality is presupposed and enacted in the individual and collective lives of Quakers. Consequently, the climate emergency insists on a response. David poses two versions of the same question: first, how am ‘I’ to cope and then how are ‘we’ to cope with what Charlotte called the “frightening horizon ahead of us”. In their spoken contributions to the *Meeting for Worship* over the summer of 2019 I noted that Friends began to express a struggle between a growing sense of despair and the need to find ‘hope’.

One Friend in her fifties, a counsellor by profession, remarked on the emotional impact of the prevailing mood of impending crisis. After a few minutes, Libby stood to make an illuminating suggestion. It was precisely during such difficult times that hopeful “cracks” may appear. Referring to the words of Leonard Cohen’s *Anthem*, she remarked that this is “how the Light gets in”. The imagery of the poem provided a literary and, presumably cleverly intended, intertextual reference to the familiar Quaker trope. It expressed a view that social change is consequent upon fractures that must first appear in our dominant modes of understanding. Libby suggests that only when cracks appear in formerly fixed structures of thought, speech and action is change possible. The despairing sense of crisis, she seems to suggest, is the condition of hope.

Against the backdrop of a looming crisis, Tony detects a welcome change in the Meeting. It is somewhat overdue: “Let’s keep to what Quakers mean by reaching ‘that of God’”, he urges. There is too much emphasis on “being nice” in Meeting, Tony demurs. But God is not ‘nice’. Tony fully accepts the importance of “holding the community together”. We are after all a ‘priesthood of believers’, Judith adds. Of course, Tony agrees, Quaker Meeting “is not an individual thing, it’s a communal thing”. But, he insists, we can “pitch that at the level of Quaker theology”. He continues, it should not be the reason *why* Friends meet together: “are you here for picnic lunches or are you not?”. Tony worries that Quakers have become unduly preoccupied with creating a safe social space. Friends worry too much about hurting one another’s feelings. For example, by the use of “God-language”. He asks, “what is there to be hurt by?”. Language *can* be hurtful,

of course, “like when the authorities impose this language on you and that language means that you can only have sex in a certain way that we proscribe, or whatever”. Power insinuates itself into human relations “in any number of ways”. Thus, the central message of Quakerism for Tony is precisely that: “you have exactly the same right and authority to speak as the other person”. This ought to embolden Quakers to speak-out, Tony says. Yet, he says with candour, “there’s a growing tendency to care more about the person who is hurt more than anything else, frankly”.

The early Friends, on the other hand, were willing to suffer and die for what they believed. Referring to the “revolution with Cromwell and with Friends and with Levellers and Diggers”, Tony claims: “this intense ferment comes out when you take the lid off”. He accepts there must be “give and take” in community but ‘niceness’ as a “supposition” of congeniality misses the point. He tells me: “Frankly, the Meeting isn’t for dealing with people’s personal issues. They’re there and we’ve all got them”, he concedes, “but the Meeting moves on and the person is part of that and is healed—or is not”. Tony’s frustration that Quakers have lost their original radical edge has left him ‘unconvinced’. Despite his many years of attendance this has prevented him from applying for membership. He tells me he is “prepared to *be* convinced if people *can* be convinced by what is going on”. Happily, he observes, “the Meeting is becoming more energetic, more outspoken”. He agrees with Judith that it seems to have become more outward-looking. The Meeting’s renewed attention on climate change has produced a change:

> Because it’s taking place in the world: Greta Thunberg talking to Congress and talking to the United Nations. And there being a young people's movement and older Friends going along and being part of that young people's [action] at the sixth form college here in Hereford. So this world movement but that's something: they are acting like Quakers, these young people.

The youthful global movement has had an ‘energising’ effect on the Hereford Quaker Meeting, Tony suggests. Friends should “bring it to the Meeting and share what they want to see happen”. He illustrates his point by offering a reflection on a poster hanging in the Meeting House which also featured in the *Night of the Churches* exhibit (see Appendix E). He describes the image on it of a river meandering through a landscape annotated with words from the Quaker lexicon.

The bottom half of the poster depicts the river tumbling over a cliff as a waterfall accompanied by the words: “in a tumultuous world, be a Quaker”. Ever the story-teller, Tony wonders what we are supposed to make of its message: -

> So, there's this plateau where everything is settled and there's this little winding stream going through it and it comes to this edge and then it plunges down and then there's this tumult. And what is intriguing is..it's like is that tumult going up into there, as it were, or the plunging *from* that plateau that we're all on *into* that tumult? Because without it we don't have the life that is radically so. It’s not simply about politics, it's about whatever you call Spirit. And that again comes back to the interest of the interplay of politic and spiritual change in, say, with George Fox and the original Friends.

The analogy Tony wishes to draw is that, just as a waterfall can only flow in one direction, so Friends find themselves inevitably plunged into a tumultuous world. Staying on the safe and peaceful plateau is not an option, he insists. “Well, there's the gathering together and being nice to each other. You know, you have communion, you share, we have shared food, and we love each other and all that”. All of this is good. But, he adds, with an escalating shrillness, “there's no reason why that should replace large global or connection with large global change: they are not opposed to each other!”. The poster represents “an intriguing image that we've got this stillness and peace and integrity and, yeah, that's Quakerly”. Yet, Tony asks, “there's this tumultuous world and how do the two connect?

A still and peaceful Meeting above. A tumultuous and turbulent world below. For Tony, the message of the poster is that “the two *have* to connect". Echoing Libby’s sentiments, he adds: “when that tumultuous world actually draws the energy out of you which is all there in potential, that's a good thing for everyone”. Consequently, “to be engaged with that is good in itself” since “you're a part of this problem and solution". The scale of change required is a change in every single human being on the planet, according to Tony, “including the people controlling things”. It is that, Tony, claims with little apparent hyperbole that Quakers actually have to offer: that is ‘Quaker’. The entire world being Quaker would not be a “takeover”, he cautions. Rather, “it would be the only way the planet could survive for human beings. It’s the *only* way to *be*”.

For an unconvinced Friend, Tony seems unreservedly convinced of the potentially world-changing implications of Quakerism's 'radical' content. He describes a principled practice or form of life—of being 'Quaker'—that is not articulated in strictly identitarian terms. But neither does he abrogate the practice of gathering. "If there weren't Quaker Meetings", he asks, "what would *be* Quaker?" He continues:

> Yes, the values are going outwards and they're coming back. The Meeting, to me, which is why I find it irritating when we're talking about the minutiae...you're just stopping the potential for that going out and coming back, going out and coming back: essentially being recharged [..] Activity can be going on out there and you can be discovering it here in the Meeting. The Meeting should be a seedbed of stuff spiritually going on so that you can move out into the world and bring it *back*. And so this should not be a safe place where you have to not hurt me. There's a whole world out there where people are being hurt *radically*. And that should be being brought back into the Meeting. And it should be being contained within the care of the Meeting.

Despite her strong commitment to activism, Jane is equally eager to affirm the important role that the Meeting has. She tells me: "I don't know why but I know that if you took away Hereford Meeting from my life there'd be quite a big gap which would make it more difficult to be and do the rest of the things that I'm trying to be and do". Tony concludes that the message of the poster must plainly be that: "the connection between a torn world and a peaceful Meeting should be something that is vibrant, that we are involved in". Being 'Quaker' consists, for Tony, in a presupposition of equality that insists upon our mutual answerability. Addressed *by* the tumultuous 'world', *through* exchanges with one another, we are invited to *respond* to the insistent question: what canst *thou* say? As far as Tony is concerned, being Quaker entails a *response-ability* that ought to be invigorated by the practice of Meeting. That means that the tumultuous world experienced by Friends 'out there' must be let into the meeting and into the care of Friends in it together. It is neither safe nor comfortable. It is 'how the Light gets in'.

4.2.4. Faithfully Political

Many of the Friends I interviewed were, like Tony, similarly unabashed about their political commitments. As previously noted, almost all of the Quakers I interviewed had been actively engaged in organised political action before coming to Quakers. Their prior involvements were many: The Green Party, Friends of the Earth, Christian Ecology Link, the Peace Council, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Amnesty International, and Transition.

Some Friends remain involved with these and other local initiatives. Having eventually relinquished his membership of the Labour Party for the Greens, David tells me however he has less faith in the political process than he used to. The approach of successive governments is “blinkered” to the level of change required to address the environmental crisis. Discovering Quakers through his campaigning with the Green Party, Peter also found in ‘the Light’ a spirituality that converged with his politics. It was, he explains, a path he was already on: it was “where I was getting to..it fitted in”. Today, Peter takes an avid interest in Welsh politics and advocates for its distinctive culture. Through his involvement in the *Meeting of Friends in Wales*, he is able to combine his spirituality with his commitment to what he sees as a progressive politics in Wales. He describes himself as a “radical green socialist”.

Peter is not alone. Jan laughs as she recalls that, many years earlier, when she was on the executive committee of CND, *The Guardian* newspaper once described her as “an extreme green feminist”. Maggie identifies as a “seriously left wing” socialist but shares her frustration that “politics is driving me crazy”. Quakerism, she insists, is “incredibly radical” and entirely compatible with her socialist ideals. Libby tells me, “I probably have more in common with atheists in the green movement than I have with somebody who’s going to church and has right-wing political views”. She explains that often if she is asked, ‘are you religious’ she says, ‘no’, “because I don’t see myself as being a religious person”. She describes herself on her Twitter account as: “Quaker: Bad Example”. Instead, Libby describes religious ‘belief’ as like standing beside a stream. Whereas, “faith is just being in the stream and not holding on to those ideas. But here I am in the stream”. She is not sure what difference becoming a Quaker has made: “I don’t

know that it would have been any different because it’s always been about what to do—what’s the right thing; what we should be doing to make the world a better place”.

In a similar way, Maggie describes her concern for the future of the planet as “bigger than Quakerism”. Ultimately, what matters is our being “awake”, practising an “awareness” and “paying attention” as a way of being-in-the-world, she tells me. This is her life philosophy and her spirituality. Consequently, “people outside Quakers” also “get it”. In Sheila’s experience, this has not always been the case in the church. When it came to environmental concerns she found her fellow Methodists open but somewhat apathetic. Rather than affecting every area of church life, “it always seemed to be a minority interest”. Although “you could do it there”, Sheila felt “their heart wasn't really in it”. Libby, on the other hand, is reluctant to separate her religious belief from her commitment to a better world, adding “I’m not sure how different religious belief makes that—it’s a kind of integrated sort of thing”. Indeed, she suspects “there’s nothing I would have done differently if I was an atheist”.

For Charlotte too, “everything is political”, but as we have already noted she also resists the “category” of ‘Quaker’ as necessary to her self-identity. Robert acknowledges that he is a *representative* of Quakerism: “By your fruits shall you be known”, he says, citing words attributed to Jesus in Matthew’s gospel (7:15). This means he is “very conscious of trying to uphold my own standards all the time”. Robert explains, it’s “not that I go around saying, ‘I’m a Quaker’. I don’t. But I know I’m supposed to *be* a Quaker”, he laughs, “and therefore I try to be a Quaker everyday”. Likewise, Libby also describes her reluctance to identify as a Quaker: “I think it sets-up all kinds of weird expectations and people then interpret what you say in a very strange way”. She recounts an experience as a teacher when her reputation as a Quaker attracted unwanted suspicion from an Ofsted inspector. Richard, the long-time speaker and writer on environmental issues, says he has used a range of categories to describe himself: atheist, non-theist, agnostic, humanist and Quaker. Although he has called himself a non-theistic Quaker, he is not terribly interested in any such labels.

Richard's indifference to labels extends to a wariness towards collective identities. He tells me he has been involved in both political and ecological communities in the past. Quakers, in his view, "spans both really". The Green Party is a different kind of faith community: "it's about re-imaging humanity's relationship with the natural world". He reflects: "we're all made up of our lived experiences, we lay down layers. The best we can hope for is to learn from them and move forward into something better, more constructive, more useful for humanity". What links faith, community, spirituality and politics for Richard are "meaningfulness and purpose". In which case, I ask him, is Extinction Rebellion also a kind of 'faith' movement? "Absolutely in as much as the Quakers or the Conservative Party are". Richard explains that people who are drawn to XR share "a real anxiety about what humanity is doing to the planet". Since they don't know what to do with that anxiety, XR seems to offer hope since "we've tried everything else". Therefore, Extinction Rebellion is a faith community since it shares "a belief that we can and must turn the human future around". We are entering into a time, he insists, when the political choices are not what they were in the 1970s:

> Now it seems you can choose to be with Greta Thunberg and Extinction Rebellion and the School Strikes movement and the politicians that embody them: Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Cortez, and Caroline Lucas — and Molly Scott Cato, who is a strong Quaker. They seem to me to be really good on individual ethics and their policies and it's all coming from a position of love and kindness

Richard links politics and spirituality through signifiers like: 'faith', 'hope', 'love', 'meaning', 'purpose' and 'lived experience'. Religious beliefs, on the other hand, can be used to justify all sorts of political standpoints, he says. He credits the Green MEP, Molly Scott Cato as an influence on his joining the Quakers. Writing in *The Friend* magazine in November 2018, Molly Scott Cato suggests "a strong grounding in personal morality or spiritual belief" prevents her from being buffeted by the attacks of political opponents in a conflictual political realm. She connects Fox's question, 'what canst thou say?', with the bewilderment experienced when conflicting political positions are justified by claims to religious authority. As a Quaker, Scott Cato says she tries to be guided instead by a practice of discernment which for her means reflecting on the motivations behind her actions. She observes, "I'm astonished by how often people are deeply moved when I manage to agree with an opponent, or acknowledge a mistake". Drawing

inspiration from early Friends, she claims, “George Fox made explicit our personal responsibility to study our own spiritual path and follow the guidance we receive from a power greater than ourselves, what we call the Inward Light”.

While Scott Cato draws a distinction between religious authority and personal discernment, David suspects that part of the broad appeal of Extinction Rebellion is the absence of “off-putting language about what you are supposed to believe”. He suggests that in its central emphasis on non-violence, XR nevertheless overlaps with Quakerism and other traditions. Most would perhaps “run a mile from established or conventional religion”. But neither are they coming to Quaker Meetings, he observes. Jane wonders whether “some of them perhaps go to Buddhist groups” and practice meditation instead. Although he has become increasingly comfortable with the fact that XR activists do not express their motivation in religious terms, David suggests a “spiritual motivation” may nevertheless be at work:

> I think when I first became interested in Quakers I felt that really civilisation was, you know, about Christianity and what I liked about Quakers was their more simple approach which had shed a lot of the requirements to have specific beliefs beyond principles of governing behaviour. But I've realised that I'm just...I'm not really interested in whether people want to become Christians or not. What I am interested in is whether they seem to have something that looks like a kind of, I suppose even if I'm reluctant to admit it, a spiritual motivation. But it's not linked to religion.

David recounts a radio programme he had heard recently in which someone referred to “the religion of atheism”. It revealed to him the notion that those that adhere to such a world-view are nevertheless “coming from a kind of belief position”. More precisely, “they are not just indifferent to what’s going on about them”. David describes this as an interesting insight and also expresses a sense of relief that he no longer feels people *ought* to be Christians. He attributes his changed views to the ‘blurring’ he has experienced between spirituality and activism. This change in perception has been accompanied by new opportunities for associations with ‘others’ and the possibility for unexpected solidarities. Like Libby, without feeling attached to a pre-constituted religious identity, David feels he is now able to identify with others in unexpected ways.

By way of an illustration, David shared with the Meeting his experience of an encounter with a young activist that challenged his political prejudices. Participating in a demonstration by local students outside Hereford's council chambers, he struck up a conversation with a young male protester. To his surprise, the young man revealed that he was a supporter of the Conservative party. David explained that he had never considered the possibility that the climate protesters would draw support from people on the opposite side of the political spectrum. It was an important lesson. David told me: "we were terribly impressed by the fact that he was from the other side, the other camp". It illustrated that "there was mileage in having dialogue with apparently opposite views from our own". David adds, "I say 'apparently opposite' because, you know, the more you talk with other people, the more you find out what you have in common".

4.3. Rebellious Friends

The conversations with Friends described above reveal the multiple and different ways they identify with others through a shared ‘faith’ in a political project. Consequently, ‘Quaker’ is only one context-dependent identification and may not be the most important. Some of my research participants were uncomfortable with being labelled or categorised as such. We may say, these Friends are neither gripped (Glynos and Howarth 2007) by a Quaker identity nor do they cling tightly to it.

What matters more for these Friends is their being ‘at home’ in an inclusive ‘space’ in which they can pursue with others the political and ethical commitments they regard both as their own and shared. These concerns and experiences are brought *to* the care of the Meeting where Friends can uphold each other in mutually supportive relations. They identify with others within and beyond the Quaker Meeting who share their concerns and are somewhat reluctant to frame the latter in conventionally religious terms. Indeed, religious language may be seen as an obstacle to building solidarity with others in their common commitments. Instead, Friends suspect a universal spirituality is nevertheless present in political activism. They describe the latter in terms of feeling ‘led’ to ‘respond’. Returning from their participation in the Extinction Rebellion protests in October 2019, David and Jane shared their experiences with the Hereford Meeting. Writing in the monthly newsletter, Jane explained:

> I went to London feeling apprehensive but found myself at home amongst the XR community in Trafalgar Square. I have never felt more at home in a large group of people most of whom I did not know. In many ways it was like a large Quaker gathering. There was a great sense of community and love. (*Hereford Quakers Newsletter November 2019*)

Other Quakers expressed similar sentiments in their accounts of the London XR protests.[32] In a contribution to *The Friend* (03/05/19) another XR activist, Sue

[32] Jane employs the phrase ‘sense of community’— a term formalised by McMillan and Chavis (1986). In a later reflection, David McMillan (1996) renames its constituent elements: Spirit (membership), Trust (influence), Trade (needs fulfilment) and Art (emotional connection). Thus, ‘membership’ as a sense of belonging together is now ‘Spirit’ and shared history, place and similarity of experience is preserved as ‘Art’. While ‘membership’ emphasises boundaries that create

Hampton, recalls being asked by a Sky News reporter whether she saw herself as a criminal. “No”, she told him, “I am a Quaker, and a grandma, and an author who writes mainly for children. I am a conscientious protector. I have been a follower of Jesus all my life”. She is ready to be arrested again, she writes, to protect her grandchildren and those of her readers. With others she sang “we love you” to the police and told them, “we’re doing this for your children too”. She describes an emotionally-charged atmosphere:

> The gathering in sunshine was remarkable for its emotion (most of us cried at least once or twice), the quality of the speeches but also for the peaceful spirituality. “Love” was at the core of the message. When we moved into the road in front of the Houses of Parliament, we did so quietly, with purpose and solidarity, singing. (*The Friend* 03/05/19)

Sue explains that she has been involved in protests in the past and felt uncomfortable with some of the things being said around her. However, with Extinction Rebellion “my soul has found deep peace in the nonviolence that holds and unites, regardless of diversity”. She continues, “there has been nowhere I would rather be, spiritually and physically”. She says of her week on Waterloo Bridge, that “it took me closer to paradise than any other experience I’ve lived”. In spite of the heat and overcrowding, “the spirit was warm and strong, with songs and chants, and dancing on the pink boat” (ibid.).

This particular Friend describes her experience of collective action with clearly spiritual and religious language. Employing familiar tropes, she adds: “As a Quaker” she did “what love required of me..knowing we were serving the truth”. Friends who supported XR frequently point out that Quakers share with the climate movement the principle of nonviolence. Maggie goes further still. She tells me that Extinction Rebellion “absolutely needs Quakers”. The movement is, she says, set-up to be non-violent, thoughtful and principled “and Quakers have a way of doing that ready-made”. Consequently, Quakerism and XR are “perfectly symbiotic in some ways”. But, Maggie warns, the climate movement will need to hang on very tightly to this principle if it is not held securely by the ‘spiritual’:

emotional safety, McMillan here prefers “the spark of friendship” in a setting where we have an audience with whom we may express unique aspects of our personality.

> Extinction Rebellion *might* have a spiritual basis to it; it doesn't need to have. But Quakerism I think *has* in a sense. But we know *how* to be non-violent. We know how to do what we do because we *have* to do it. Because we can *do* no other. And I think Extinction Rebellion has that about it. It's very carefully thought through, as Quakerism is. But they know why they're doing things; they just *have* to hang on to the non-violent bit of it and the respect for difference. For people in the movement, they respect people very much. There's no naming and shaming. They try to do it—and when I say, 'they', these are the people who are the sort of the *main* movers and shakers who set it up. They have got *real* principles underneath it and they have to hang on to them *really* tightly because they will be blown about in all sorts of ways, pretty much as Quakers were in the beginning. But they have to hang on to it *really* tightly.

As something to be tightly adhered to, Maggie is aware that nonviolent protest can easily slide into violence without practices to resist this tendency[33]. Judith Butler (2020), argues that nonviolence is an assertion in speech, gesture and action of a claim to life worthy of value through networks, encampments and assemblies (2020: 24). Henceforth, “when nonviolent movements work within the ideals of radical egalitarianism, it is the equal claim to a liveable and grievable life that serves as a social ideal, one that is fundamental to an ethics and politics of nonviolence that moves beyond beyond the legacy of individualism” (2020: 24). For this task an “egalitarian imaginary” is required that reckons with the potential destruction in every living bond (ibid.).

For Quakers, ‘That of God in Every One’ seems to function as such an imaginary. It is also a regulative principle that, Maggie suggests, XR ‘needs’ from Quakers: a principled practice which is ‘spiritual’ rather than merely pragmatic. Maggie is well-positioned to make this assertion. She has had a lot to do with Extinction Rebellion, she explains. Having been in the publishing industry, she helped Roger Hallam, one of the founding figures in XR, to publish his book, *Common Sense for the 21st Century* (2019). She commends Hallam’s research into social movements adding, “he knows that nonviolence works. I suppose he’s being

[33] Judith Butler (2020) notes that a state violence is at work when it uses its power to represent the dissenting power of some group as violent (2020: 4). Thus, to make an argument in favour of non-violence one must evaluate how violence is figured within a field of discursive, social and state power and the fantastical character of these attributions. The task of nonviolence is to find ways of living and acting that checks or redirects violence without resorting to a self-defensiveness that ushers in an inequality and exclusion: an imperilled self-certainty that rests on a social ontology or social imaginary. Butler suggests an openness to alterity casts equality as social interdependence and thus to conditions of livability as determinative of equality.

pragmatic about it. Quakers do it because it's part of their spiritual belief. But he does it because he knows it works—and because it's the only way to treat people". While Maggie regards the practice of nonviolence as having a spiritual rather than merely pragmatic basis, Friends ascribe in similar terms a 'spiritual' valence to the experience of political protest, as we shall now see.

4.3.1. The Spirit of Protest

From its inception in 2018, many Quakers expressed a close affinity with the radical 'protestants' of Extinction Rebellion. By April 2019 contributors to *The Friend* were encouraging others to get involved. Mark Smalley notes that people are attracted by the values promoted by XR and "Quakers need to be part of it" (*The Friend* 11/04/19). He notes that many Quaker Meetings are offering space for local XR groups to meet, an arrangement he suggests ought to be formalised "as an expression of Quaker faith and practice" (ibid.).

Similarly, Chris Herring suggests a synergy of practices. He reports on a public vigil held by local Friends: "it is using Quaker methods to support climate action to give people the opportunity to share grief or anger, whatever they want to share" (*The Friend* 09/05/19). He adds, "I feel very strongly that this is something Quakers can give to the world; we have an almost 400-year tradition that can help people and support the crisis, which is essentially spiritual" (ibid.). Noting "the links between social responsibility, social justice, faith, action, state authority, and our Peace Testimony", Mark explains, "it feels to me that there is considerable shared ground between Quaker values and those of XR" (*The Friend* 11/04/19).

Clare Scott Booth, describes her experience among protesters at Marble Arch at Easter. She writes, it was "moving, still and gathered" and a "good exercise of my Quaker responsibility for the planet", adding "it's very important for us to be here" (*The Friend* 25/04/19). In the same edition of the magazine, Ruth Leonard-Williams describes her "spiritually profound" experience in terms of the "connection" she *felt* by employing key Quaker signifiers.

> There's a really beautiful intention to be deeply peaceful and non-confrontational..[there] were no bad feelings with the police. People are trying to retain that peaceful way of being. Some of it is quite spiritually profound. When I knew I was going to be arrested, I was trembling. I felt a great connection with whatever you want to call it: Spirit, the light, love. I felt really liberated – being able to put my body on the line for something I have put my life into. (*The Friend* 25/04/19)

While Clare's "spiritually profound" experience of non-confrontational protest 'connects' with Quaker signifiers, one is not obliged to ascribe significance in these terms. It is a connection between experience and language that is by no means given but "whatever you want to call it". These signifiers are, however, useful linguistic resources with which to interpret their experiences. The Clerk of the *Meeting for Worship* held at Marble Arch noted in the minuted statement that they were: "*called* here in a spirit of Peace, Love and Truth to bear witness to the pain of our planet" (21/04/19, emphasis added).

Sarah Freeman says she felt "strongly led to compare those compelling gathered moments" to the "fervour of the early Quaker days" (*The Friend* 19/07/19). She links the "resounding XR message" to 'tell the truth' about the climate crisis with the popular phrase "speak truth to power" that she attributes to George Fox.[34] She laments, "our testimonies are apparently so quiet". Alastair Cameron makes a similar point, about Quakers who "feel driven to act" and in so doing "continue to do what they have always done" (*The Friend* 17/10/19). He quotes approvingly Friends' appeal to Charles II in 1660: "our principle is..to seek peace..and doing that which tends to the peace of all" (ibid.). He observes, "in a world turned upside down, the clearest messages are now coming from those who have done least to create this emergency and who have the greatest stake in seeing it resolved". He continues, "we are amazed and heartened as we hear them speak truth to the powerful" (ibid.).

Friends also make a direct connection between the XR strategy of mass arrests to the 'sufferings' of early Quakers. Maggie is the Southern Marches Area representative on the standing body, *Meeting for Sufferings*. She explains that

[34] The phrase 'speak truth to power' is popular among Quakers and often incorrectly attributed to George Fox.

they continue to record the names of those “arrested for their faith” in a Court and Prison Register. This is “because they are standing-up for their faith and it’s..the sacrifices they make for it”. The purpose of *Meeting for Sufferings*, she tells me, is “to talk about and support those Friends”. Maggie admits that ‘faith’ is, for her, a difficult word since: “it implies believing in something that isn’t possible”. She prefers to view human beings as part of a universe becoming conscious of itself, she says. This is the basis of our responsibility: “we are conscious and we have got a responsible place in the world”. As “insignificant and magnificent as that is”, she adds, “I have got ‘faith’ in my place in the world”.

Alastair Cameron notes, although Quakers are no longer persecuted, “some of us feel driven to do things that lead to arrest” (*The Friend* 17/10/19). Another Southern Marches Friend, Jamie Wrench, in an article penned for *The Friend* feels that getting arrested is the only act left available to him: “Everything I have done over the last decade or so has been Reasonable and Proper. I’ve joined a climate action group, written articles for *The Friend*, had polite meetings with my MP, written letters and signed petitions. All to no avail. So, I fear, perhaps it’s not time to stay polite, but get arrested. And dare to dream of a hopeful future” (*The Friend* 19/10/19). The magazine’s editor reported that “Friends are upholding a ninety-one year old Quaker who was arrested and charged during the Extinction Rebellion blockade at Dover Docks”. The man expected to be arrested and told Channel 4 News, “it’s great the young people are protesting but it’s my generation that has caused all the trouble, so here I am” (*The Friend* 17/10/19).

Since suffering arrest is a response to an “essentially spiritual” crisis, these Friends view it as a ‘spiritual’ responsibility. Abigail Maxwell suggests that reframing political action as ‘spiritual’ can also subvert the threat of confrontation. She recounts a police officer asking her about the Quakers and whether they approved of the actions she was taking. She “told him about 1652 and about Quaker worship”. The officer assured her in reply that the police were there to ensure people had a good time (*The Friend* 24/10/19). Similarly, the editor of *The Friend* reported a post on the ‘XR Quakers’ Facebook page that described negotiations with police over permission for *Meeting for Worship*. The officer was concerned that the gathering would become a locked-on protest or grow in size. Josephine Snell explained that “the purpose was simply to provide a peaceful

space in the midst of the complexities" (*The Friend* 24/10/19). Steve Hale, another Friend from the Clun Meeting in the Southern Marches Area, attended the final *Meeting for Worship* the following day. He told *The Friend*, “It was a satisfied silence – satisfied that Quakers had continued to meet under difficult circumstances and under threat of arrest” (*The Friend* 24/10/19).

Abigail found no shortage of other performative acts of ‘political’ liturgy on the streets of London. She describes the haunting appearance of the ‘red rebels’ in their flowing robes and with white-painted faces: they “processed slowly and silently to face the police; the similarity to contemplative prayer is clear”. She also observed Buddhists making a meditation walk around the protest site and teaching meditation techniques at a tented encampment of faith groups. The XR demonstrations are, she suggests, “a good place to find spiritual seekers”:

> Those involved care about a cause greater than themselves, and put their bodies on the line. With my XR-Quaker banner hanging from my neck to my thighs, I had several conversations about spiritual matters. One man could not believe in a creator God but saw the value of an attitude of reverence. When asked: ‘What are Quakers, then?’ I explained, and often handed out copies of *Advices & Queries*. (*The Friend* 24/10/19).

Following her experience of protest on the streets of London, Abigail argues that “if Meetings are ageing and shrinking, it is not for a lack of spirituality in the wider community”. There was a festival atmosphere at Trafalgar Square, she reports, with “free food” in a place where she “shared many hugs”. Citing William Penn, that ‘Force may subdue, but Love gains’, Josephine Snell tweeted of her experience amongst other Quakers participating in XR protests: “It’s been a very precious experience to be part of such a great group of fellow spiritual travellers, and it’s a testament to the way we’ve all worked together, that even when our base was taken away twice, we managed to keep on holding our Meeting till the end” (*The Friend* 24/10/19). Abigail describes her experience in similar terms: “Seeing the hope and determination, the community and love, I knew this was where God had called me. I could be there because of the love and support of Friends”.

We can find in these various accounts plentiful examples of intertextual or inter-discursive links between the discourse of political protest and that of the

Quaker tradition. Consequently, a ‘blurring’ can occur signifying elements are exchanged and re-articulated on discursive “shared ground”. Another contributor argues that Quaker’s non-materialist Quaker spirituality must draw upon the “poetry, prayer and praise” of other traditions if it is to foment an effective response to the crisis (*The Friend* 09/05/19). Priscilla Alderson argues ecological awareness requires change at four levels: thinking, deciding, acting and being. However, Quaker faith may be insufficient at “prompting change” at each (ibid.). Subconsciously held Quaker values must therefore be re-thought since they tend to set “mind over matter”. Priscilla urges instead a deeper reverence for nature in an encounter with the sacred which “can feel intensely physical and natural as well as spiritual” (ibid).

4.3.2. Disruptive Influences

As these accounts reveal, Friends have found a commonality and fellow-feeling among those who may or may not share beliefs in conventionally religious terms. But rather, they can articulate a sense of both commonality and compulsion: a call to collective action without violence which has both a ‘spiritual’ source, valance and a sense of agency. This ‘spiritual’ discourse of protest opens up a wider linguistic terrain for new constellations of meaning and identity—new forms of life. However, the hybrid formations produced by the ‘mixing’ of floating elements also invites accusations of transgression. These signifying exchanges may be viewed, not as an intensification, but a dilution or contamination of what is distinctively ‘Quaker’.

We have seen that Friends readily attach a ‘spiritual’ significance to their experiences of political protest in two different ways. First, following Taves (2009), we may say that they ascribe a *specialness* to the concrete events, experiences, and ‘things’ they describe. The special significance may correspond to their uniqueness or rarity as well as the affective dimension of experience. In their recollection and re-telling of these events they thereby constitute the experience as ‘spiritual’. Secondly, Quakers also employ a distinctive way of ascribing ‘spiritual’ significance to the experience of agency. Friends frequently speak of feeling ‘led’ or ‘prompted’ to act or speak: of feeling compelled to do what is

required of them. As we have seen, some who joined in the XR protests and risked arrest expressed their participation in these terms by appropriating resources—words and phrases—from the texts of the Quaker tradition. They do so to describe, valorise and authorise a sense of agency *prior* to the action itself. This may be figured as a universal spiritual *source* of political action—Alma's "spiritual unknown" (see Chapter 3). Consequently, Quakers locate the spiritual not only in the things themselves—that is, in *actual* things so constituted. But also in a constitutive power ascribed to their possibility. This power is figured as a source or force anterior to action and the actual. As we noted in Chapter 3, the contingent possibility of whatever may be said is practiced as silence in Quaker's unprogrammed worship. But Friends are encouraged to bring the whole of life under the ordering of the 'spirit of Christ'. Thus, the 'promptings' and 'leadings' of a spiritual practice may also provoke and authorise a political act.[35] It is a felt experience of a force or agency 'possibilising' a more equitable and peaceful world that legitimise the Quaker's response. As Maggie says, Quakers know how to do what they do "because we can do no other".

We shall have more to say about the 'event' of possibility in the next chapter. What concerns us here are the syncretistic exchanges themselves; the re-articulations of meaning and identity that may occur on the wider discursive terrain upon which activist Quakers tread. In an extended interview published by *The Friend* (19/12/19), Ian Bray, a leading figure within the Extinction Rebellion movement, attributes his activism to Quakerism. He came to the latter via the peace movement and *Peace News* was "my pathway". This literature "started me realising that there's this quite political aspect to Quakers". At a *Peace News* summer camp Ian recalls attending an *Earth First!* workshop on "how to build a mass movement for radical change", necessary to tackle a huge systemic problem. His thinking was shaped, he says, by reading "interesting people" such as John Michael Greer, a Druid, and Thich Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist monk and activist. The latter taught him that: "we can't just go and do more inner work", putting our faith in a compartment, "you have to be engaged". Ian explains, "what

[35] *Advices and Queries* begins (1.02): "Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life". The second advice continues: "Bring the whole of your life under the ordering of the spirit of Christ...Let your worship and your daily life enrich each other" (Britain Yearly Meeting 2013).

I've learnt from Buddhism is that all things are interlinked". Like Priscilla Alderson, Ian feels that a "really strong appreciation for the materiality of nature" may sometimes be missing from Quakerism. Like many others, he experienced a dawning awareness of a tragedy unfolding which was "a kind of epiphany for me" (ibid.).

According to Ian, Quakerism is "complementary" to activism and when he has been involved in direct action people have remarked upon his "very solid, grounding, calming presence" (ibid.). Speaking of the need for inclusiveness, Ian says of the XR movement, "we have to make that space because of love and justice and the strategic imperative". Moreover, "radical change doesn't come from people who are comfortable", Ian insists. Therefore, people at the centre of XR are eager to bring "marginalised voices" to the fore (ibid.). But XR isn't trying to be a political party but is instead "a campaign to raise awareness of the issues and establish a proper democratic process" to make informed decisions based on science. Their demand for a citizens assembly, Ian suggests, is an "act of faith in the people". It is this that gives the movement its political form: -

> XR is a decentralised network of autonomous groups – an amalgam of anarchic principles. It's not seeking to be vanguardist. It's definitely left-ish and attracts those people, but the idea is that XR is a broad movement, which obviously means having lots of people within it who you disagree with. (Ian Bray, *The Friend* 19/12/19)

Ian confirms that his Quaker faith strengthens him in his activism. Moreover, "my Quakerism beholds me to act in service to a greater good", he says (*The Friend* 19/12/19). He has also greatly appreciated the support of his local Quaker Meeting and of feeling "upheld" as a valued member of a community. Indeed, Ian claims that his "biggest spiritual insight since I joined has been that I don't consider myself, as an individual, as very important" (ibid.). Having "profoundly accepted the scheme of all things being interlinked", he paraphrases Thich Nhat Hahn: "What is a wave but water? When the wave has gone, the water still exists". He adds, "everyone needs to look hard at 'what love requires' of them" in order to find purpose and overcome a "great chasm of despair and nihilism" (ibid.).

The interview with Ian Bray in *The Friend* was not met with a universally affirmative response. In a letter to the magazine, Catherine Dawson expressed her dismay. She was "disturbed by the adulatory and uncritical interview and decided Quakerism as espoused by Quakers UK no longer speaks to me" (*The Friend* 17/10/19). She took issue with "the influence of paganism and druidism on his thinking". Describing it as "pseudo-mystical nonsense", she adds parenthetically, "I question what they are doing in a Quaker Meeting" (ibid.). Moreover, Catherine notes that Extinction Rebellion has developed from anti-capitalist organisations. Consequently, while XR may have had some success in forcing an acknowledgment from the government on its promises to address the climate emergency, she argues that the movement is "not interested in advising ministers on how to achieve zero emissions within our system of parliamentary democracy" (ibid.). Behind XR's "campaigning facade" their agenda, she suspects, is to overthrow the current economic system: "it seems to prefer to encourage the belief that only the destruction of the free-market economy and the return to a pre-industrial utopia will achieve that goal" (ibid.).

This cautionary intervention from a deeply concerned Friend provoked a flurry of responses, mostly in defence of XR. Helen Meads applauds XR members for listening to their critics and responding to the need for greater diversity. Yes, it is true, she observes, that XR believes capitalism has failed: "We need to live a different way but I have never seen or heard of XR promoting utopia" (*The Friend* 31/01/20). They have instead urged for a systemic solution to a systemic problem, she insists. Another correspondent, Kit Welchman, expresses his regret that Catherine is considering leaving Quakers as a result of the latter's apparently strong ties to XR. He offers a reassurance:

> I have found the 'rebels' among the most open, friendly and honest groups of people I have met. I see them as explorers of our time, willing to go beyond accepted boundaries, facing the risks and dangers, finding new paths in their searches – and among them Quakers 'walking cheerfully'. (*The Friend* 07/02/20).

Kit alludes to a family resemblance between XR and Quakerism. As evidenced by their handbook, *This is Not a Drill,* XR does not form a "fixed system" (ibid.). Instead, the latter "contains a wide variety of personal stories and comment". He draws attention to the words of Archbishop Rowan Williams in the preface: "[XR]

might allow a new space and a new imagination to flower in the face of incipient tragedy, a new hope and dignity".

Yet despite these attempts to articulate the 'symbiotic' relationship that Maggie suggests 'needs' to happen, Catherine is not alone in her concerns. Michael Lanigan expresses his admiration for the founders of XR but worries that "the movement may be taking us down the wrong path" (*The Friend* 14/02/20). Furthermore, doing so may "result in the extinction of Quaker membership" (ibid.). Quakers, he says, are *identified* with the values of 'silence' and 'peace' and "the principles of peaceful protest are fundamental to our witness to the Quaker way". Michael continues, "silence gives space for the Spirit to effect fundamental change" (ibid.). Michael, it seems, wishes to draw a distinction between peaceful silent protest and the scenes of disruption on the streets of London. Confusing the repertoire of direct actions performed by XR with distinctly Quaker practices will, Michael fears, lead to the latter's demise. He may speak for many Friends who are discomfited by XR's methods and concerned by the warm embrace the movement has received from Quakers.

4.3.3. Radical Religiosity

At the heart of this debate is the question of whether XR is an inheritor of a 'radical' tradition shared by Quakers. Peter Hussey, the "radical green socialist" who penned *Looking for the Essence of Quakerism* (2019b), has no difficulty in locating the new climate movement within a broad stream of radical religion.

In a short reflection written in September 2019 Peter argues that movements like XR and Transition ought to be viewed as a sort of religion. Noting that for many in British society religion has become an irrelevance, he argues that: "the trouble with religion is that it keeps on getting fossilised in ways of thinking that are no longer appropriate and are adapted to the needs of the powerful and rich" (Hussey 2019a). Employing a definition of 'religion' offered by a Wikipedia entry, Peter makes a displacement. Since religion is "a social-cultural system of designated behaviours and practices" it extends to behavioural and lifestyle adjustments necessary to address the ecological crisis. Further, "a sense of connection to

something bigger than ourselves" is, says Peter, a universal human experience. Consequently, political movements and "green thinking" may be designated religious or spiritual. Furthermore, these are ways in which "we are coming together, we are acting together, educating each other, feeling for each other, supporting each other" (ibid.).

Once again, our being *for* 'each other' is, according to Peter, inextricably bound up with the 'essence' of Quakerism (2019b). Peter argues: "if every human has the same rights, the same value as any other, then the logic of that understanding is that we have to work for equality of opportunity, we have to respect others, we have to be honest to others, we have to equate our wellbeing with theirs" (2019a). As a result, Peter conceives of religion as a collectivity of *individuals* with talents, strengths and weaknesses (2019a, emphasis added). But more than that, he says, "we are part of community. For me, that is religion" (ibid.). He concludes, with a clear statement of what this '*we*-ness' consists in: "we are prepared to give and receive, we are open to others, their benefits and their needs. We are practising loving our neighbour" (ibid.).

Another learned Friend sees in Quaker's involvement in XR a reminder of the Friends' formative past as part of a radical mileu. In an article contributed to *The Friend* (27/06/19), Judith Roads explores the similarities between the contemporary political movement and that of the early Friends. As both an academic linguist and a scholar of Quakerism, Roads reflects carefully on her personal experience of the London demonstrations: "I was struck by the similarities between Extinction Rebellion and the early Quaker movement in Britain" (Roads 2019). The speakers at Marble Arch did not, of course, see themselves as preachers of an 'end-times' religion: "Except, perhaps it is", she quips (ibid.). In her short article, Roads playfully makes connections between elements of a religious discourse familiar to early Quakers and those of contemporary political action. With a sense of irony, she writes "modern-day climate rebels don't suggest that people should repent their sins, unless rampant consumerism and corporate greed can be seen as modern-day sins" (ibid.). Pointing to some of the seemingly bizarre embodied enactments in the XR repertoire, Judith recontextualises the meaning of 'Ranterist' symbolic performances of the seventeenth century's radical milieu. She explains, "some

[today] have gone 'naked for a sign' publicly in parliament, as Isaiah and other prophets in history exhorted. Nakedness today is an unexpected symbol of change, of upset to the status quo" (ibid.)

Roads remarks on the youthful appeal of the movement, observing that "it's prepared to misbehave to cause nonviolent civil disruption as it seeks urgent change" (Roads 2019). Extinction Rebellion has the attractive energy of a new group not yet bound by tradition, she says: "no older people bemoaning how things were better years ago and how the group has forgotten its roots" (ibid.). She gently chides Friends by reminding them that Quakerism was once young too. But the Religious Society of Friends, in its corporate life together, nevertheless has some "insightful things to say about the alternations between closed and open groups" (ibid.). Warning against the closure of tradition, Roads identifies a "key aspect of the history of the Quaker movement" (ibid.). Namely, that it has "repeatedly reinvented itself and enabled new growth and insights to develop". Experience teaches us, however, that vibrant groups can however "lose their way, become stultified and eventually forget why they existed in the first place, snuffing out the flame" (ibid.).

The events at Marble Arch and Waterloo Bridge exposed the radical roots of the Quaker movement. Roads asks "is this what the beginnings of Quakerism also felt like in 1650?" (Roads 2019). If so, then the history of Quakerism may offer an important lesson for the fledgling climate rebellion. Comparing the latter to the young and enthusiastic movement of Friends in the seventeenth century, she asks: "how durable is the inspiration and energy that a founding group experiences?" (ibid.). Roads pinpoints a conundrum which, as we saw in Chapter 2, also vexed the early Quakers. Roads asks: "will it create structures and tradition or will it retain a *healthy balance* between competing elements of anarchy, regulation, community, democracy and power?" (ibid., emphasis added). These are precisely the questions that theorists of contemporary political movements have sought to address. The insights of political scientists may therefore offer a way forward for scholars of religion.

4.3.4. Spiritual Politics

As we saw in Chapter 1, the debate amongst scholars of religion over the contemporary role of religion ran aground on a sedimented private-public distinction. Some critiques of the secularisation thesis depict a religiosity that has escaped the liturgical settings of organised religion. In so doing, however, they have preserved one of secularisation theory's basic assumptions. Namely, that religion can be meaningfully discussed in terms of its 'private' and/or 'public' aspects. Ethnographies of lived-out religion have further destabilised this structure of discourse. As Bender and Taves (2012) have argued, 'spiritual' may designate a meaning or value beyond the frame of 'religious' versus 'secular'. Consequently, a postsecularity figured as the admission of private religious beliefs into the deliberations of a secular public sphere may not offer a suitable way forward.

Political theories of the 'commons', on the other hand, start in a different place and lead in a different direction (e.g., Hardt and Negri 2004, 2009). Not only may religious movements transcend the private/public dichotomy but the 'spiritual' may be found instead within the 'political'. The ethnographic evidence from contemporary Quakers presented above points this way. We shall therefore conclude this chapter by examining whether contemporary *political* theories of collective movements can help us theorise a 'spiritual' dimension in politics. Our purpose is, first, to discover whether an unbounded 'fugitive' faith can be found in contemporary practices of political protest. And, secondly, to see whether these practices can put some more flesh on the conceptual bones of a 'political spirituality'. We shall begin the next section with the attempts made by some scholars to track down a fugitive 'religion' to sites of political protest.

4.4. Movements of Faith

As noted at the end of the previous section, Judith Roads poses important questions for both Extinction Rebellion and today's Quaker movement. The success with which XR has mobilised a youthful energy issues a timely challenge to the Society of Friends. If the ‘healthy balance’ of the latter’s ‘competing elements’ is measured in terms of the misbehaviour, energy and vibrancy of a movement relatively unbound by tradition then XR reminds Quakers of their own disruptive origins. Furthermore, through Friends’ participation in a wider coalition, meanings and identities may be re-configured on a wider discursive terrain. Since what it means to be Quaker can be obscured or modified by these re-articulations, these new constellations may be seen as a promise or a threat. The questions Judith raises therefore open on to a larger one concerning the function, identity and visibility of religious groups participating in collective political movements.

4.4.1. Transcendent Possibilities

In broad terms, social movements can be said to arise in an effort to control the direction of social change by controlling a society’s symbols and self-understandings (Goodwin and Jasper 2015). Craig Calhoun and his colleagues (2011) note, however, that “the rise of politically active religious movements complicates our ideas about modern life—in particular, what many of us had regarded as its essentially secular character” (2011: Introduction).

Furthermore, it may be argued that all the major world religions began as movements of social change (Kniss and Burns 2004: 695). Henceforth, religion continues to influence contemporary social movements at different levels. It does so firstly at the cultural level by constructing identities, defining social problems, and providing symbolic resources to justify meaningful social action (2004: 696). Consequently, Ortner (2006) notes that, as a rich repository of cultural beliefs and values, religion therefore has “close affinities with resistance movements” (2006: 50). The internal organisation of religion also influences its “mobilizability” in relation to wider social issues, while the macropolitical environment will partly determine what kind of religious movements are possible (2004: 696). The

post-secular therefore challenges us to understand anew how religion is present in social movements and how social movements are present in religion (Kniss and Burns 2004: 711). Calhoun offers a way of understanding this relation by appealing to a notion of 'secular transcendence' oriented towards the future (Calhoun 2012).

For Habermas (2010), the change in secular attitudes towards religion reflects a growing awareness of what is missing in secular reason. As Calhoun reads him, Habermas nevertheless sets limits on religious participation in public life since a direct appeal to a transcendent notion of ultimate truth is beyond the bounds of reasoned public discourse (Calhoun 2012: 354). The question of how 'secular' the public sphere can and should be therefore remains contested (ibid). At the root of the difficulty, he suggests, is the idea of the secular expressed by the relationship between the 'eternal' and 'temporal'. Calhoun appeals instead to a "secular transcendence" that he defines as "the capacity to imagine the future and orient oneself towards it" (ibid.). In other words, what is missing is a transcendent sense of the 'real' that reaches beyond the 'actual'. Without such a move, Calhoun suggests, we can fail to appreciate how some "values" give order to human life and action. Even if these higher-order values, or 'hypergoods', are not equated with the 'sacred', they nonetheless "reach beyond the immediate and the immanent" (2012: 356). It is the way in which we are "oriented beyond not only what we have now but also what we are now or what we can achieve" (Calhoun 2012: 356).

These hypergoods therefore establish our transcendent relationship to the world. A connection to history and to "projects of making the future" are potential sources of secular transcendence (2012: 359). An awareness of the past and an anticipation of the future enable people to recognise the *contingency* of present institutional arrangements. This in turn "invites an awareness of larger (or at least other) possibilities" (ibid.). Our closer connection with the culture, ideas, and experiences of *other people* helps us to transcend the immediately given. As we do so, we may "work actively to transcend the limits of existing social conditions or culture" (ibid.). Further, Calhoun notes that the collective efforts in social movements are reinforced by experiences of solidarity: "participating in a movement brings to many both a heightened sense of the possibility of

transforming conditions others take as unalterable and a heightened sense of connection to others in the movement" (ibid.). The connections formed by those joining in shared actions, Calhoun argues, are not of "sameness" but "connection despite difference and of being in something together" (ibid.). By linking secular transcendence with a sense of the possibility for transformation, Calhoun's analysis of a *movement* points towards new and looser forms of postsecular religiosity. The latter complicates the polarised view of relatively closed faith communities, on the one hand, and open, informal actor networks, on the other.

4.4.2. Furiously Hopeful

Craig Calhoun's analysis of the sense of solidarity enjoyed by participants in future-making projects accord well with the accounts offered by Quakers who participated in climate protests. His observations about the sense of community experienced among different people "in something together" (2012: 359) are particularly salient. Our Hereford Friend, Jane, reported her experience in similar terms. Maggie was equally enthusiastic, telling me that XR "absolutely needs Quakers''. In another narrative segment, she tells me how "furious" and enraged she was with the minister's "exclusionary" message about the Church. On the one hand, her worldly concerns are expressible as a spirituality of 'awareness' that is "bigger than Quakerism". But, on the other hand, it is the "ready-made" discipline of Quaker practice she 'loves' and is indispensable to movements of nonviolent political action. A disciplined respect for others is, for these Quakers, not merely pragmatic but the 'spiritual' accompaniment to protest.

This begs a question: what is the difference between a social movement and a religious movement? The former can be defined as: "collectivities acting with some degree of organisation and continuity outside of institutional or organisational channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant authority, whether it is institutionally or culturally based, in the group, organisation, society, culture or world order of which they are a part" (Snow et al. 2004: 11). In their symbolic and semiotic ('cultural') dimensions a solidarity in a networked form can be accomplished through the social, symbolic and discursive practices that frame collective action. In a novel line of inquiry, one religious scholar has

approached his examination of collective action from the standpoint of theological discourse. Jordan E. Miller (2019) explains that: “rather than looking for clues about religious or theological positions in movements that set out to change the world, I started to recognise a kind of radical theology that develops out of those movements” (2019: 9). He does not claim that theological truths reside in social movements. Rather that social movements may generate new theological insights. In the “world-construction” actors were engaged in he finds “the work of religion being performed” (ibid.). Referring to the occupation that began in Wall Street, New York in 2011, Miller claims that “Occupy created something unique to its time and place that only theological language could fully explain” (2019: 9).

Social or political movements are also networks which may include formal organisations such as churches (della Porta and Diani 2006: ch. 1). Moody (2015) suggests that churches, as locally organised groups, can form part of a wider ir/religious association of the Faith/less in wider networks of symbolic or discursive practices. In his theological account of a *Furious Hope*, Miller connects the cultural dimension of collective action to theology through the prism of ‘desire’ (Winquist 1995) and ‘ultimate concern’ (Tillich 1957). He contrasts Tillich’s theology of culture with “a theology of propositional statements about a being called ‘God’” (2019: 48). In the former, Miller urges, one may recognise the unconditional element that constitutes religion for Tillich. It may be found in traditional mythological symbols but it may also appear in “prophetic-political demands for social justice as the ultimate concerns of religious and secular movements" (ibid., Tillich 1959: 20).

Both Miller and Calhoun thus make a case for secular transcendence in the networked form of social movements. It is one that recognises not only that the world exists without us but that it is also made in part by human action (Calhoun 2012: 358). As Miller reminds his readers, for Žižek the *Occupy Wall Street* movement *is* the Holy Spirit[36]. Occupy exemplified “resistance against the totality

[36] Žižek draws a direct lineage from St Paul to Marxism (2000). As the Holy Ghost itself, he regards the community of believers as outcasts from the social order, ideally with psychoanalytic and revolutionary political collectives as its main forms (2000: 150). Thus, as a radical Jew and an outsider to Jesus’ inner circle, “Paul goes on to his true Leninist business, that of organising the new party called the Christian community” (2003: 9). The Holy Spirit stands for the symbolic order that cancels or suspends the entire domain of lived experience: to locate ourselves within it is to enter a life beyond the biological; Paul’s radical break from the Jewish tradition seen as a Kierkegaardian ‘Christianity-in-becoming’ (2003: 10).

of an imposed consent through speech and silence” (2019: 187). It refused to engage in a dialogue with the totality and chose instead to carefully control its own language (ibid.). Consensus based on similarity is in any case a sham, suggests Miller. Consequently, reaching consensus is hard, frustrating and slow. Instead, by refusing to issue political demands *Occupy* chose to remain silent instead. It was an ironic movement that “refused to posit its own, new metanarrative” (2019: 184). The silence of *Occupy* in terms of political demands was, for Miller, both its power and potential (2019: 181). It did not reminisce but was, instead, a repetition which, in Deleuzian terms, is always *difference*. Its ritual practice was self-referential: it talked about itself, debated its own worth. In its discursive and democratic practices it thereby modelled a new collectivism. By focusing on its internal processes, rather than reform of the System, “Occupy was communion” (2019: 188). Miller argues therefore that a religious interpretation of *Occupy* after the death of God is warranted “in the spirit of changing the world” (2019: 190). Thus, what Miller (2019) calls a ‘furious hope’ is the discourse of a postsecular kind of ‘faith’. A move away from the certainty in shared beliefs about a present reality to an uncertain ‘faith’ in what *may come*.[37]

As Critchley (2012) defines it, ‘faith’ is the lived subjective commitment to an infinite demand expressed in a declarative act, an enactment of the self (2012: 13). Faith is thus performative: it proclaims itself into existence in a situation of crisis that, according to Critchley, calls for a political intervention (ibid.). While for Tillich ‘faith’ is the state of being ultimately concerned, Critchley sees faith as an activity that proclaims itself into being without guarantees or security, enacting the self in relation to the infinite demand of love (2012: 18). The faith of the ‘faithless’ thereby opens up the discursive field of ‘religion’ to its political possibilities. It is not confined to, or defined by, a belief in the existence of a metaphysical reality or a being called ‘God’. Critchley argues that ‘faith’ is not necessarily theistic. It can be articulated on an expansively undecidable terrain by active subjects whose identities and identifications may or may not be conventionally ‘religious’. As we saw above, David made almost exactly the same point about the ‘spiritual’ motivations of activists who would run a mile from institutional religion.

[37] For Tillich (1959), faith is concerned with existential conditions of uncertainty and contingency and the certainty of the Unconditional that may be called ‘God’. Faith therefore is about the ‘courage to be’ (Tillich 2000) in conditions of unknowing rather than with the certainty of propositional beliefs.

For Calhoun the postsecular consists in a transcendence that engages in transformations that may “overcome capitalist exploitation, or environmental deprivation, or war” in specific situations (Calhoun 2012: 359). It is oriented towards a desired future; the promise of a ‘better’ world. In a similar thrust, the neo-pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty in conversation with Gianni Vattimo, suggests that ‘holiness’ resides not in the past but in an ideal future. He writes, “my sense of the holy, insofar as I have one, is bound up with the hope that someday, any millennium now, my remote descendants will live in a global civilisation in which love is pretty much the only law” (Zabala 2005: 39). Claiming to be non-religious, Rorty says this sense consists simply in the hope for a better future. Similarly, the sense of the holy is for Miller (2019) a “theopoetics of resistance politics” that expresses a furious hope (2019: 10). Religion is “an inspiration, a mode, or a method, and politics is about content and material (would-be) reality—the future” (Miller 2019: 23).

In a similar way, Miyazaki argues that hope is a methodological problem (2004: 7). Interpreting the gift-giving exchanges he observed during his field work in Fiji, Miyazaki presumed that “the production of hope of God’s blessing is a product of a carefully orchestrated discursive play of human agency” (2007: 8). However, he realised that as such this description of a semiotic process of *knowledge* production foreclosed the possibility of a “prospective momentum inherent in hope” (ibid.). Instead, Miyazaki came to see that “hope in the past is extrapolated and replicated as hope in the present” and that this replication occurs in a field of discourse beyond rituals (2004: 110). In Fijian Christian discourse, the production of hope temporarily places God’s agency into the background; extending the source of hope to social and political action while foregrounding human agency (2007: 120).

John Caputo makes a similar point about a ‘weak’ force soliciting human agency when he writes, “the messianic is concerned not only with redeeming the dead, the *revenants*, but with redeeming the future, the children, the *arrivants*; the ones to come, which is the more usual meaning of hope” (Caputo 2006: 96, emphasis in original). According to this deconstructive gesture, there is always something futural, something coming, something promised, something getting itself promised in words and things (Moody 2015: 94). For Moody these include the form and

content—or structure and discourse—of ir/religious associations inhabiting Habermas's public sphere. There is something hyper-real coming in what is real "that keeps present realities open to new possibilities" (ibid.). Miller (2019) enlists the concept of 'subjunctivity' to refer to the grammatical mood of a verb to express "uncertainty, hypothesis, contingency, possibility, desire, potentiality, necessity, or hope" (2019: 351). As Libby said, hope shines through in the cracks that appear in contingent structures of thought, speech and action. Through political resistance and religion "reality itself drives towards its own difference" (2019: 373).

These accounts of an uncertain faith lived in hope for a better world, like that of Richard, breaks down the religious-secular categories. There is, however, a constructive aspect to these deconstructive moves. As Robbins (2016) points out, as the hermeneutics of the kingdom of God, deconstruction is fundamentally affirmative. The weak "subversive, insurrectionary power" of God is a messianic politics "attentive to the concrete political demands for justice" (2016: 90). If that is the case, the discourse of a radical religion—as a political theology—must animate a response to pressing contemporary global challenges. He urges that "where radical theology once bore the signature of theological apocalypticism, may we now understand that our world is too fragile to engage in such death-ridden fantasies" (2016: 127). The radical theology of the future, Robbins writes, must be a catalyst for the alteration of habits, dispositions, and modes of thought necessary to sustain the world we risk losing (ibid.).

4.4.3. An Agonistic Common

In their different ways, these scholars have attempted to identify a religiosity or spirituality in movements for social change. I began this chapter, however, with Foucault's concept of 'political spirituality' as a particular way of linking the two main threads of his larger philosophical project. Foucault envisaged an ethical-political subject as a site of resistance to subjection by structures of power-knowledge. Unlike the spirituality detected by the scholars of social movements reviewed above, Foucault's genealogical or historical-discursive method alerts us to "the ways our understanding of ourselves is linked to the ways in which we are governed, the ways in which we try to govern ourselves and

others, and the ways in which this occurs under forms of knowledge postulated as truth by various authorities" (Dean 2010: 14). To the technologies of power in the production of truth, Foucault thus adds a critical ethos concerning who we are and have become in our relations with others.

Like the accounts of religious movements given above, Foucault's notion of governmentality looks beyond the publicity afforded to private belief in postsecular terms. It advances instead a much closer examination of *practices*. As Mitchell Dean (2010) notes, it became clearer at the start of the twenty-first century that "political struggles and spirituality are far more intimately connected than the narrative of a liberal art of government built on the tolerance of a privatised religious belief can allow" (2010: 10). Contemporary forms of religion may therefore be analysed as: "practices of training that constitute forms of asceticism or self-government, and how this self-government is linked to political government, to relations with others and to members of one's own community, and to the obligations that all this imposes" (ibid.). Furthermore, "the forms of identity promoted and presupposed by various practices and programmes of government should not be confused with a *real* subject, subjectivity or subject position" (2010: 43, italics retained). Regimes of government do not *determine* forms of subjectivity. Rather, "they elicit, promote, facilitate, foster and attribute various capacities, qualities and statuses to particular agents" (ibid.). Put otherwise, the problem of self-government is not one of identity but of *identification* (ibid).

In these moments of identification the subject is constituted in an act of decision in which affects and passions may come to the fore (Howarth 2013: 182). Social agents are shaped by immersion in systems of meaningful practices but neither their structure, and thus the subject, are ontologically complete (ibid.). It is precisely in the gaps made visible in moments of dislocation that a radical subject can emerge (Howarth 2013: 182). These fissures, like Libby's 'cracks' of hope, make it possible for a radical political subjectivity to emerge as social actors identify anew and act differently (2013: 184). Thus, "in revolutionary situations and organic crises, collective political subjects take decisions about the creation and formation of new social structures" (Howarth 2013: 185; also Howarth 2000: 122). The decision by some Quakers to participate in political action may therefore be seen as a decisive act of identification in new discursive structures. Moreover, as

we have seen, this *experience* has also invited comparison and reconnection with Quakerism's 'radical' roots. This leads Judith Roads to ask whether Extinction Rebellion will create "structures and tradition" *or* "retain a healthy balance between anarchy, regulation, community, democracy and power. In other words, will the movement remain sufficiently structurally open to foster new configurations of meaning, identities, and ways of being?

As we noted at the end of Chapter 2, the tensions to which Roads alludes may be characterised in terms of competing theorisations of a 'people' or a 'multitude' (e.g., Hardt and Negri 2004, Rancière 2015, Virno 2004). While the former is seen as a response to a Derridean excess or Lacanian 'lack', the latter is figured as a Deleuzian / Spinozan 'abundance' (Tønder and Thomassen 2005). According to poststructuralist theory, both share an unstable ontology (Marchart 2005). That is to say, there is a radical contingency at the heart of *any* discursive structure that may be concealed in hegemonic or sedimented discourses (Glynos and Howarth 2007: 133). Any structure of belief or knowledge is contingent, partially fixed, and thus provisional and revisable. From this assumption, recent studies of collective movements have challenged the dichotomous view of social formation (e.g., Dhaliwal 2012, Kioupkiolis and Katsambekis 2014, Prentoulis and Thomassen 2012). In response to empirical evidence supplied by new political protest movements, especially *Occupy* and the 'squares movements', theorists have reconsidered the hegemony of 'the People' or the biopolitics of the 'multitude' as strictly alternative formulations. Instead, political theorists find space in-between.

A religious formation institutionally self-aware of its own mutability can, in this poststructuralist sense, properly be described as a 'liquid religion' (Collins and Dandelion 2014). By extending the same argument we may make the analogous claim concerning a potential breadth of religious forms. We are not restricted to the view that religion is *either* visible in concrete form as a 'faith community' (a 'people') *or*, alternatively, as an invisibly anonymous religiosity inhabiting social movements (a 'multitude'). Viewed instead in terms of their countervailing political *logics*, both are the result of interaction *between* a logic of hegemony or identity (that is, of equivalence), on the one hand, and autonomy or difference on the other (Glynos and Howarth 2007). A discursive 'space' can therefore open up in-between these two poles, each a condition of the other. These spaces have

been called “agonistic commons” in a post-hegemonic theory of collective movements (Kioupkiolis 2019: 177, 182). Proposed initially as a challenge to Laclau and Mouffe’s theory of hegemony (Arditi 2007, Beasley-Murray 2010, Day 2005, Johnson 2007, Kioupkiolis 2018, Lash 2007), ‘post-hegemony’ has subsequently been advanced by Alexandros Kioupkiolis as a modified version of Laclau and Mouffe’s original theory (Kioupkiolis 2019). He does so by addressing what he sees as the biases that have overlayed the development of their thought: a vertical distribution of power, individual leadership, populist homogenisation, sovereign representation and antagonistic formation of the collective (2019: 164). Instead, by weaving the two logics together in what Judith Roads calls a ‘healthy balance’, Kioupkiolis defines an open, diverse and self-managed commons (2019: 34). The latter occupies a common horizon of principles, values, practices and aspirations that acknowledges dissent, internal division, and plurality as a common good (2019: 177).

A community of the common is like Derrida’s community-without-community. It relies therefore on a figure of community “rooted not in a thick identity of ideas and positions but in common political practice, the participation in lasting debates and negotiations over the common, through which we acquire our common identities and our sense of co-belonging to a political alliance or a democratic association of the common” (ibid.). Post-hegemony dispenses with an essentialist hegemonic logic of antagonism, exclusion and power relations that preclude consensus, maximum inclusion, and equal distribution of power. Seeking a synergy between ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ elements, socio-political activity seeks instead to balance a politics of hegemony with that of an open and plural commons. In this resulting form, “the fixing of antagonistic frontiers, the formation of collective identities, the rallying together of forces, the exclusion of particular policies and social forms, the struggle to overpower the opponent should be undertaken primarily *outwards*—against the advocates and beneficiaries of unjust, oppressive, exclusionary, homogenising and unequal relations” (ibid., emphasis added). By concentrating political force outwards, a political subjectivity is unified *against* a common ‘enemy’ but without ‘vertical’ structures of leadership, inequalities of power or essentialist notions of identity. Concomitantly, the “drive to enact an inclusionary, free, egalitarian and diverse commons should energise mostly the ties and interactions *within* the multiple movements that converge against common

adversaries: the political forces that defend old or new enclosures, hierarchies and injustices" (2019: 177, emphasis added).

The 'agonistic commons' of contemporary political movements bears a strong family resemblance both to early Quakerism and to its contemporary counterpart. The latter may therefore be characterised, in terms of its structure, as a post-hegemonic commons. The latter does not, at least in Kioupkiolis's formulation, disclose what, if anything, constitutes the 'spiritual' dimension of political action. In the final section of this chapter we shall consider what else may be necessary to the practice of a political spirituality. It is with respect to this supplement that the ethnographic data supplied by contemporary Quakers may shed further light on Foucault's concept by investing it with a particular content.

4.5. The Spirit of Anarchism

The foregoing account of a post-hegemonic collective movement balancing opposing logics addresses well the questions posed by Judith Roads. It does not, however, describe a critical ethos or ethical practice that may earn the epithet ‘spirituality’ that Foucault ascribed to an ascetic care of the self. Another lens with which one may inspect a political spirituality is ‘new’ or ‘post-’ anarchism. Referring to the alt-globalisation movement that emerged in the 1990s, David Graeber (2002) suggests that its new forms of organisation are *constitutive* of an ideology: “It is about creating and enacting horizontal networks instead of top-down structures like states, parties or corporations; networks based on principles of decentralised, non-hierarchical consensus democracy” (2002: 70).

The Quaker activist, Ian Bray, described Extinction Rebellion as anarchic. Like Occupy, its egalitarian, anti-authoritarian network *form* resembles what Tickle (2008) calls Quakerism’s ‘gift’ to contemporary ‘emerging’ Christianity: that of networked authority. For Graeber (2004), the new anarchists that practice radical and participatory forms of democratic political action are also indebted to the Quakers. Other theorists have explored nineteenth century anarchist political philosophy through post-structuralist theory (May 1994, Newman 2010, Sheehan 2003). Saul Newman has developed a theoretical perspective he calls ‘postanarchism’. According to Newman, it is “a political logic that seeks to combine *both* the egalitarian and emancipative aspects of classical anarchism, with an acknowledgment that radical political struggles today are contingent, pluralistic, open to different identities and perspectives, and are over different issues—not just economic ones” (Newman 2004 cited in Rousselle and Evren 2011: 5, emphasis added).

Like the post-hegemonic ‘agonistic commons’, Newman argues that a *practice* of postanarchism can open-up a heterogeneous space of different individuals who, like Charlotte’s raisins, may cluster around shared outwardly-directed concerns. Classical anarchism tended to deny any hierarchy between theory and practice—Graeber’s observation about ideology *as* form—and thus closes the gap between ‘form’ and ‘content’ without reducing one to the other (2011: 11). As Tony insists, the ‘content’ of ‘Quaker’ is not to be confused with mere Quakerly ‘style’

but should instead be inspired by the anti-authoritarian community of early Friends. Similarly, Charlotte dethrones theory as a forlorn search for epistemological certainty: a distraction from the 'content of life'. Theory misses the point of Quakerism which for her is the everyday practice of 'honouring' that of God in everyone. As another Hereford Friend, Richard, explained above, faith groups such as Quakers *can* resemble political parties in their form but not in their content. To do so risks 'submerging' the individual in a structure governed by an ideological system of *authorised* beliefs. While Alma views the absence of a creed as the condition of possibility for change, David suspects that one of the attractions of XR for many is precisely the absence of "what you are supposed to believe". What Quakers, political parties, and movements like XR share instead, Richard suggests, is the shared purposeful *hope* for a better world.

The hopes are, as already noted, expressed by religious-political movements as a matter of faith rather than certainty.[38] From a postanarchist perspective, there can likewise be no ultimate ground, foundation or *telos*. Rather, as Newman insists, postanarchism conceives of the autonomy of 'the political' in autonomous spaces that define themselves in opposition to the state. By 'the state' he refers to the structure of power that polices and regulates politics so that its insurgent dimension is repressed (Newman 2010: 9). Postanarchism therefore shares with Rancière a notion of dissent. The latter conceives of dissent from an unjust social order (that Rancière calls 'police') that assigns people to unequal roles and identities. But Newman emphasises the power relations that secure inequalities by positioning subjects. He employs the figure of insurrection as a *refusal* of power by a dissenting community that, in so doing, prefigures an *alternative* social order. Postanarchism does not form a vanguard to assault what Jane calls the ramparts of power. Its goal is not the revolutionary seizure or destruction of external systems of power. Rather, postanarchism operates at a micro-political transformation of the self and its relations to others and the creation of alternative and more autonomous relations (Newman 2016: 53-56).

[38] The *an-archic* absence of foundations, origins or *telos* recalls Tillich's (1959) definition: "Faith contains a contingent element and demands a risk. It combines ontological certainty of the Unconditioned with the uncertainty about everything conditioned and concrete...The risk of faith is based on the fact that the unconditional element can become a matter of ultimate concern only if it appears in a concrete embodiment" (1959: 27-28). The latter may include symbols like 'God', rituals, mysticism and: "It can appear in prophetic-political demands for social justice, if they are the ultimate concerns of religious and secular movements" (ibid.).

In his formulation of a post-anarchism, Newman therefore steers much closer to Foucault's 'spirituality' than the otherwise similar conception of a post-hegemonic commons. He contemplates an "*internalised* insurrection, an insurrection that goes to the roots of our subjectivity, even our psyche, before it is turned outwards" (Ibid). According to Newman, prefiguration refers to the idea that political action should already embody the ethical form and principles of the type of society that one hopes to build. Secondly, he suggests, prefigurative practices should be what Foucault termed 'practices of freedom': ethical practices and a constant work on oneself "in order to invent subjectivities and relationships which are self-governing and no longer enthralled to power" (Newman 2016: 63-64). As a prefigurative politics, postanarchism offers an account of political subjectification that recalls the radical roots of Quakerism presented in Chapter 2.

In their fervent anticlericalism, the Ranters, Seekers and Early Friends railed *against* the injustices of the tithe tax, the hierarchical authority of the established church, and *for* the freedom to practice their alternative egalitarian form of religion. Central to their project was the presupposition of a 'spiritual' equality -'that of God in every one'—with all its social implications. Charlotte locates the everyday practice of Quakerism in this presupposition. As Peter says, this is Quakerism's "most radical idea". But like Tony, Newman views freedom from authority as a condition of equality. Therefore, by focusing on an equal power to speak and act Newman links prefiguration to a Foucauldian dissent: "the refusal of any kind of representable identity" by way of a "gesture of *dis-identification*" (Newman 2016: 28).

Like post-hegemony, postanarchism offers a critique of hegemony for its 'vertical', homogenising or totalising aspects that attempt to fix exclusionary boundaries. In addition, Newman's postanarchist conception of the political posits a constitutive 'ontological gap' between politics and ethics (2010: 10). Ethics exerts a restraint on politics, resisting the purification of the political space. In this respect, Newman departs from Kioupkiolis in two important ways. Firstly, Newman to a greater extent than Kioupkiolis accents freedom and autonomy by way of an *ontological* presupposition. Secondly, drawing on the individualistic anarchist tradition of Max Stirner, he upholds the singularity and uniqueness of individuals in a voluntary association. Thus, Newman's postanarchist perspective proposes that we must

instead, “think the collective with and through the individual" (2016: 136). That is to say, “to think of forms of association and community which at the same time do not eclipse singular projects of *ownness* and ethical self-transformation but which, on the contrary, are intensified *by* those differences" (2016: 136, emphasis added).

By ‘ownness’, Newman refers to each individual’s capacity for freedom since each is *already free* in an ontological sense. Individuals need to be reminded of their freedom to speak (‘what canst thou say?’) and act (‘sit anywhere you like’). Equality is thus inhabited by an ontological freedom—a freedom *in* equality—constituted in practices. We may also detect here the Levinasian strains in Charlotte’s plea concerning the uniqueness and depths of each individual whose voice she longs to hear in a ‘collectivity’. As Newman explains, “ownness or autonomy is not confined to a strictly individualistic endeavour and is something that can be practised associatively, in collaboration with others” (2016: 63). The insurrectionary forms of solidarity, co-operation and mutual aid that emerge are therefore grounded in the innermost desires of singularities.

Rather than out of a sense of self-sacrifice or obligation, Newman emphasises instead the intensification of emotion and the affective aspects of political participation. As we have noted, Friends attribute a ‘spiritual’ valence to this experience. Likewise, Newman argues that the insurrection, as a politics of ownness, is “a movement of joy, conviviality and the happiness experienced in being together with others” (Newman 2016: 60, 62-63).

4.5.1. The Political Practice of Spirituality

In this anti-essentialist and non-foundational ways of being-in-common we may detect what Christopher Hill discerned among Winstanley’s Diggers in their occupation of St George’s Common. Recall from Chapter 2, that Hill locates an alternative source of unity for these commoners in their shared opposition to the church and state (Hill 2019: 288). Through their unity-in-dissent they were able to transcend “the dichotomy of individualism/collectivism” (ibid.). Exactly what practices may constitute a ‘post-anarchistic’ form of political spirituality?

Kioupkiolis urges that the politics of an agonistic commons must nourish a political *ethos* of a respect for differences that is capable of subverting conflict (Kioupkiolis 2019: 178). In consequence, an equality of voices must, *in practice*, resist enclosure and exclusion. History suggests this is a formidable challenge for religious formations grounded by shared religious beliefs secured by contestable creedal statements. But without a creed Quaker's also have a history littered by schismatic division over religious differences. In the face of differences, Kioupkiolis appeals for attitudes "such as a responsiveness to the other part — *audi alteram partem* — a willingness to learn from others, solidarity and care beyond differences, even a qualified disposition for consensus" (2019: 178). Peter and Charlotte make a similar plea for Quaker Meetings that 'discipline' Friends to resist self-enclosure and be open to personal and social change. *Meeting for Worship* is a political-ethical practice, a spiritual 'training' ground, and a space of mutual support.

That Extinction Rebellion "absolutely needs Quakers", as Maggie insists, is therefore not simply because they share a principle of non-violence and a respect for differences. But because Quakers *have*, as Maggie claims, "a way of doing that ready-made". It is *how* collective action can be forged by an uneasy alliance between consensus and dissent: the consensual freedom of differences within a collectivity (Kioupkiolis 2019: 178). It is by way of this 'gift' that Quakers, as a group, can also affirm their particularity as part of a coalition or alliance of differences. They are "nested in the same web of communication and they can act in common" (2019: 206). In these movements "connections expand horizontally, lacking any single commanding centre and fixed boundaries" (ibid.). Friends who participate in these wider movements and networks can thus resolutely do so 'as Quakers'. Their distinctive practice renders them visible and identifiable as such. As *singular* participants, however, they "need not subordinate their distinct identities to an overarching or 'thick' collective identity" (2019: 177).

They are instead, as radical subjects 'on the move', the contingent products of a *dis/identification*. David and Jane committed themselves, *as Quakers*, to a sub-group called "XR-Peace" which, linguistically, joins the XR name with a key Quaker signifier. Similarly, the Lambeth 'faith bridge' action in October 2019

mobilised those identifying themselves as 'XR Quakers' and 'XR Muslims'. A popular emblem of Quaker's participation in, and solidarity with, the climate movement was created visually by superimposing the Quaker 'Q' logo on the encircled hour-glass symbol of XR (see Appendix F). In these hybrid and possibly ephemeral constellations, identities are not lost or submerged but re-inscribed. Through their participation, Quakers may be visible and identifiable *in* their practice of openness. The 'satisfied silence' of a 'peaceful space in the midst of the complexities' opens-up a liminal zone in which silence functions as an invocation to contingency; to the possibility of whatever may be said by anyone who wishes to participate. It is a space in which claims to truth fall silent as political actors form a circle as Friends. Not in order to issue political demands, as such, but rather, to listen to each other, share ideas and experiences, and jointly formulate a response. *Meeting for Worship* is thus a political practice of openness in non-hierarchical interactions that supplies the ground of cohesion without closure (Kioupkiolis 2019: 187, 188).

We have, in this and the previous chapter, covered a lot of ethnographic and theoretical ground. I have endeavoured to put the data and theory in a productive dialogue; the latter serving as an interpretive lens on the former. We have proceeded closer to a definition of a political spirituality bequeathed by the Quakers to postmodernity. We have gained some traction on the way in some key ideas: dissent, dis/identification, and an inclusive commonality that resists closure in the name of equality. In the final chapter, I shall attempt to draw together the threads of a discursive practice, descending from Quakerism, that we may finally describe more concretely as a 'political spirituality'.

5. Conclusion

The scope of the present study into what I began by calling the ‘politics of religion’ has necessarily been wide. The aims set out in Chapter 1 were twofold. First, to examine the political practices that constitute Quakers both as a faith group and a collective movement. Second, to discover what its social and discursive practices reveal about the role of religion or spirituality in our ‘postmodern’ society.

Our inquiry has therefore proceeded from a conception of politics that, following Mouffe (2005), attempts to order human relations in conditions which are always potentially conflictual. Thus, ‘political’ practices are those of a hegemonic struggle for which a sedimented religious discourse or ‘tradition’ is evidence of a partial stabilisation. However, any such totality remains vulnerable to re-articulation in the wake of disruptive events that expose the contingency at the heart of an always-already dislocated structure. The latter can be figured as a threatening otherness that constitutes its outside: the promise / threat of community marked by a discursive boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

The claim that Quakerism is a ‘liquid religion’ (Collins and Dandelion 2014) can therefore be understood in terms of Discourse Theory. That is, as a discursive formation amenable to re-articulation by virtue of practices that are ‘political’ insofar as they are responsive to an unconcealed contingency. Otherwise put, we may say that the ‘tradition’ of ‘liquid’ Quakerism is one of reform and renewal precisely because of a self-awareness of its own possibilities: a *revelation* that fosters a capacity to think, speak and act ‘otherwise’. However, this claim to institutional flexibility relies on political practices. The *re-articulation* of the Quaker faith is a contest of interpretation; a negotiation over its ‘true’ meaning and identity. There are therefore inevitable disagreements and differences concerning its future. We embarked on our inquiry in Chapter 2 with the debate among Friends over its representation. In the tension between continuity and change, we found that many Friends look to the stories of the very first Quakers as authoritative: recollecting the past as a guide to the future. However, history is also a contestable interpretation. If the past does indeed serve as a guide, we discovered in Chapter 2 an intense political struggle to define ‘us’.

The early Friends were egalitarian separatists who indulged in symbolic displays of wilful civil disobedience. Performed in public view in churches and courtrooms, their acts of resistance foreswore an allegiance to traditional sources of power and authority (Bauman 1983). At the same time, their mystical practices embodied the shared idea that the 'inward Light' was communicable in interpersonal encounters ('speaking to thy condition') with transformative rhetorical effects for individual subjectivity ('convincement'). The 'Light' thereby served as a compelling figure of a constitutive power to which each was *exposed* in communicative exchanges that bound one to another. However, despite the political implications of their spiritual equality, the early Friends never quite managed to resolve the tension between the individual and the collective without resorting, for a time, to a power of exclusion. A sovereign power of sorts to decide the exception to the acceptable rules of conduct.

Therefore, in Chapter 3 we looked at the difficult questions concerning identity and community for a group that today wishes to be welcoming and inclusive. I suggested that *Meeting for Worship* (MfW) signifies equality and justice without supplying its content. Quaker worship is not a liturgical ritual that articulates a rigidly 'given' structure of belief. Rather, equality is taken as a presumptive principle awaiting a signification in words and actions that *testify to* it. First, Quaker Meeting is a *spatial practice* that signifies equality by gathering individuals in a space that grants equal authority to each subject, as such. Second, as a *signifying practice*, MfW articulates concerns *for* equality in chains of signification. Governed by an "absolute perhaps" (Dandelion 2007: 152, 2008: 33), a 'sense of the meeting' may be discerned and provisionally fixed in a text. Friends' tentative, dissensual agreement is customarily offered with 'I hope so'. We also found striking examples of Quaker's commitment to friendship. The latter may be characterised by a dialectical relation between the self and the other in which the former strives to remain 'open' and responsive to the latter. A reluctance to be 'othered' or to do the same *to* others appears to be resolved by wilfully othering 'my' self.

Thus, the core 'spiritual' practice of Quakerism endeavours to figure the 'other' not as a threat but as a promise. Otherness is appropriated as a productive resource.

This complicates the discursive construction of group boundaries that necessarily become fuzzy or porous. As a result, inclusivity for some has its limits when ‘anything goes’ and *the* Quaker identity goes missing. For other ‘radical’ Friends, the blurring of boundaries appears to be an opportunity. For these Friends, Quakerism provides a supportive social space in which to pursue their ‘own’ political projects. Viewed through the conceptual lens of Foucault’s ‘political spirituality’, in Chapter 4 we explored the transformative potential of Quakerism as a practice that constitutes the active subject when people, alert to the creativity of their project, "seek a new way to establish a regime of truth and a regime of self-governance" (McWhorter 2003: 40). It is a practice that "puts in question both one's style of existence and one's epistemological regime, one's self-discipline and one's mode of self-awareness, in order to cultivate possibilities in both fields simultaneously" (ibid). When practiced as part of a wider network or coalition, such as Extinction Rebellion (XR), these critical and reflective practices inscribe Quakers as an identifiable element within a wider order of discourse; one in which individual Friends can identify with others in a shared political project.

In conclusion, an ethnographic case study of Quakers has disclosed a regime of practices constitutive of a political spirituality. What we may call ‘Radical Quakerism’ is a *particular* form of political dissent practiced as an ethical discipline of openness. In other words, it is the practice of a spirituality in relation to the ‘political’ that resists closure and subverts the threat of conflict. The encounter with the ‘other’ is an *event* that reveals the ‘perhaps’ in whatever can be said or done. It is a practice of signification conditioned by contingency: the movement *towards* meaning that does not have the finality of a ‘truth’. Rather, as a gathered ‘sense’ of what *can* be said and of what *may* be. The spiritual practice of political action is therefore the articulation of hope with the uncertainty of faith. It is the otherness exposed in the event that opens the horizon to social and personal transformation.

These spiritual practices are therefore central to a definition of political spirituality I shall elaborate in this final chapter. Taking Foucault’s conceptualisation, as described in Chapter 4, as our point of departure, my task is to identify the key elements of its practice. The final part of this chapter will then speculate further on the practices of ‘spiritual politics’ more broadly. We will consider the possibility of a

fugitive political spirituality that escapes and evades any particular form and, instead, haunts the social as the *spirit of change*.

Before we arrive at a fuller definition of political spirituality, however, we must return once again to the problem of the ‘politics of religion’. That is, to the unresolvable tension between the individual and the collective and the paradox of identity / difference. It is in relation to this perennial conundrum that a postmodern religiosity may finally supply an answer. I shall argue that political spirituality emerges in response to this mystery as an ethical practice of openness: a coming to terms with difference as a conditional of possibility for change rather than as the trauma of loss.

5.1. Politics of Friendship

The dissenting separatists of seventeenth England laid the groundwork for a form of political religion by constructing an antagonistic political frontier with the established Church. Their politics of religion was an earnest attempt to order and organise an *alternative* system of human relations as the ‘true church’. Aided by a free press, the severe social dislocations that followed the English Civil War provided the conditions in which the first Friends could re-articulate their inherited religious tradition in a radically egalitarian form.

The early Friends inhabited disruptive and uncertain times that gave rise to competing political projects—of which Quakerism was a notable survivor. As we noted in Chapter 2, some Friends today sense a crisis in the Society of Friends that also reflects wider instabilities. Some have argued that Quakers need to recover a distinctive mystical practice and a common spiritual experience. Yet, as we discovered in Chapter 4, others find hope in political protest that recalls the vibrancy of the early Quaker movement. These conditions have thus yielded competing visions of the future of Quakerism. One discerns a ‘lack’ that emphasises the need to build a hegemonic constellation to restore a lost distinctiveness. While another sees an ‘abundance’ of possibilities in a multitudinous process of pluralisation (Tønder and Thomassen 2005: 2-3). However, we concluded Chapter 4 with the theoretical possibility that these positions are neither mutually exclusive nor do they exhaust the range of possibilities. Before we investigate a way of navigating between them, let us first reexamine the roots of political spirituality in early Quakerism by asking: what exactly was ‘radical’ about it?

5.1.1. New Horizons

One answer to this question is the particular way in which early Friends insisted upon the equality of speaking subjects. In Chapter 2, we saw how, according to Bauman's (1983) ethnography of speaking, the early Friends' cultivated a practice of silent worship according to a strict spirit/flesh dualism. Since spoken words were of the flesh, the Word of God arrived in the silence as the truth revealed by the Light of the Spirit. The democratisation of religious life could therefore be accomplished by the figure of an indivisible inner Light possessed by all according to one's 'measure'.

Although the demands of discipline and good order attenuated a strict equality, it was nevertheless a remarkable achievement in its time. Their political forebears, the Ranters and Diggers, opened the way by *Demanding the Impossible*, as Peter Marshall titles his monumental history of political anarchism (Marshall 1992). Marshall notes that, although earlier medieval rebellions had both egalitarian and libertarian aspirations, the dominant world-view prior to the English Revolution placed little importance on the individual[39] (1992: 96). Everyone had their place in a hierarchical society ordered in a *Great Chain of Being* descending from God with the king as his divine representative on earth (ibid.). Foucault attributes to Thomas Aquinas the three analogies that authorised the sovereign to govern: an analogy with God, with nature, and with the pastor or father of a family (2007: 234). The theological-cosmological continuum from God to man established the 'political' order that translated sovereignty to government (ibid.). Foucault notes that at the end of the sixteenth century God was not thought to govern directly, in the pastoral sense, but reigned over the world through principles (2007: 235). The idea of God's pastoral government disappeared between 1580-1650 just as radical groups appeared during the English civil war. A new rationality of government was being figured: neither that of the pastoral power of God nor the sovereign power of the king. Following in the wake of these revolutionary political activists, the Quakers took up the project of democracy in a politically religious form.

[39] It may be more accurate to say that medieval Christianity affirmed the individual's place in the social order as a governable subject of disciplinary powers that secured a hierarchical order.

Against this backdrop, the idea of divine indwelling and the metaphor of an inward 'Light' was a significant early modern linguistic innovation. As we saw in Chapter 2, it expressed a theological idea with radical political implications. To view the metaphor simply in terms of mystical experience and religious practice overlooks the wider sociocultural context. Its radical theology issued a political claim. Further, Moore (2020) notes how it performed an important function by unifying differences. It wasn't new but it enabled early Quakers to articulate an identity that, at the same time, drew a sharp political frontier with their orthodox opponents. In terms of discourse theory, 'the Light' functioned as an empty signifier which, retaining a residue of particular content, embraced an assortment of separatists formerly identifiable as Familists, Seekers and Ranters. Indeed, their opponents could detect no appreciable difference. The constitutive differences of the newly identified 'Quakers', a pejorative term adopted by the Friends of Truth, remained only partially obscured. The metaphor thereby performed an important symbolic function that enabled early Friends to weave pre-existing elements into a politico-religious subject under a new name. On this account, the metaphor 'Light' had a lot of work to do.

In sociolinguistics, metaphors are understood to play a pervasive function in the structuring of thought and expression (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). The cognitive linguistic view of metaphor regards the latter not as a property of words but of concepts employed in everyday processes of thought and reasoning (Kovecses 2010: x). Accordingly, the Great Chain of Being is a large system of *conceptual* metaphors that correspond to the linguistic expressions of language in use that shaped human understanding of their social world (2010: 4, 151). It accounts for how its *objects* are conceptualised metaphorically. An idealised human society, a literal earthly Kingdom of God, can therefore be conceived of metaphorically in terms of a 'lower' organism such as the human being or Christ's earthly body. Another system, *Event Structure*, describes how *events* (and changes in states) are understood metaphorically (2010: 151). While the former captures the metaphorical conceptualisation of *things*, the latter conceives of their *relations*—in a fashion analogous to the universal grammatical distinction between nouns and verbs (ibid.). The discursive innovations of the seventeenth century emerged to challenge the hegemonic world-view that structured society as a strict hierarchy. The metaphor of a divine 'Light' marked a break with the social order of the Middle

Ages according to the theological-cosmological scheme. It heralded a radical shift in thinking.

More precisely, it marked a shift from the vertical ordering of objects to the events that subsist in horizontal relations. In Chapter 2, we saw how the discursive practices of the religious radicals extended the spirit/flesh binary in a chain of metonymic substitutions: silence/speech, truth/untruth, light/dark. Motivated partly by their religio-cultural inheritance (including earlier heresies) and partly by their embodied perceptions, these signifiers supplied the elements with which to articulate a new discourse. Consequently, the radical spiritualists of the seventeenth century spoke of events and experiences—states of change and their causes—metaphorically in terms such as location, force and motion (Kovecses 2010: 165). Their 'mystical' lexicon, clearly evident in early Quaker writings, included linguistic metaphors such as 'leadings', 'motions', 'guidance', and 'openings' that embed image schemas (such as up/down, in/out) in *basic* conceptual metaphors. Foremost of which were those of a bodily 'container' and of a 'force' of cause and effect (Kovecses 2010). On the one hand, the human body is a container of divine presence which acts upon the individual. But, on the other hand, the inspired words and actions of individuals can act upon and elicit a response *from* others.

As Bauman (1983) shows, the presumed communicability of the indivisible 'Light' in the experience of 'convincement', introduced a horizontal relation expressed as an event structure. Thus, the rhetorical power of the Quaker evangelist's words exposed individuals to an immanent divine power in interpersonal relations. There stirred a sense of a spiritual 'self' exposed to the 'other' as a source of divine truth. The practice of speaking outwardly a truth born inwardly in silence disclosed an immanent power in the world. It also made a deconstructive gesture of an undecidability with respect to human and divine agency in a speech-act. Since the agency of a communicable Spirit was thought to operate in interactions between human beings, each was exposed to its subjective effects. The Light figured an experience of a divine power thought to be at work in an *inter-subjective* encounter in which one or both parties experienced a self-transformation. The power of human words was thus attributable to God. A divine power was no longer mediated to the individual through scripture or the priest but through one another.

The Ranters had already made a similarly deconstructive move. They had pressed religious language further still in the service of freedom by severing completely a vertical divine transcendence from their conceptual scheme. Their mortalism and materialism remained committed nevertheless to the spirit/flesh dualism (Friedman 1987). The Spirit inhabited a very this-worldly world and the soul flowed back into a mythical sea upon death (ibid.). The Ranter's blasphemy was to declare that God existed in his creatures and nowhere else. Their politics pursued the practical antinomian implications of this radical theology. Nigel Smith examines how the Ranter's mystical understanding of divine immanence informed their use and understanding of language as a bearer of divine truths (Smith 2014: 24). That some Ranters employed language in highly unconventional ways indicated that the indwelling Spirit determined the utterance of the speaking subject. A creative use of language therefore disclosed a mysterious divine source. The speaking subject had no control over what is said nor how it will be understood by others (ibid.).

Thus, "Ranter language is rooted in a divine signifying act in the individual which has a totally free interpretive value" (Smith 2014: 25). Further, by parodying orthodox forms of discourse, such as preaching, Ranters were resisting the social constraints imposed by these forms (2014: 25). Puritanism not only disapproved of the frivolous but distrusted the use of imagination in one's devotional life, emphasising instead the Word as pure logos (2014: 26-27). The Ranters, on the other hand, engaged in a play between literalism and free interpretation in which: "analogous meanings rebound off one another as the sense of spiritual death in the outer body grows paradoxically into rebirth and essence with the inner arrival of God" (2014: 27). The consequent change in the individual's perception and behaviour serves to enhance the authority of the speaking subject" (ibid).

The implications of this hermeneutics of Ranter discourse are clear. *Free* interpretation of words enhanced the authority of the speaker. Conversely, a pre-given interpretive scheme (a dominant discourse) diminishes the authority of the speaker. Rather than silence, it was for Ranters the novelty, creativity and freedom of expression that authorised the words of the speaker as 'spiritual' rather than of the flesh. Their interpretation was therefore a matter for the hearer or

listener, rather than the speaker. Henceforth, the sense-making activity provoked by the Spirit's leadings is always a *political* practice in a social context.

5.1.2. An Insurrection of Conduct

The politics of religion for the Ranters and early Quakers can therefore be characterised both as a 'horizontalisation' and an opening of the self to the other. They resisted the vertical, hierarchical order of society patterned on a medieval Christian cosmology by conceiving things otherwise. Notably, by conceiving in inter-subjective encounters the presence of an immanent divine power.

After the English Revolution had dispensed with the sovereign power of the King, the religious radicals dispensed with the pastoral power of the priest. Foucault's notion of pastoral power concerns the needs of living individuals, their relation to the collective, obedience and duty, knowledge and salvation (Dean 2010: 99; Foucault 1982). As the "conduct of conduct" (Foucault 2007: 193; 2002 [1994]: 341), Foucault argues that pastoral power descended into modern forms of government that started to emerge in the sixteenth and seventeenth century (Foucault 2007, also Newman 2019: 114). The Quakers appeared at a time of transition in which movements of counter-conduct were experimenting with new forms of government in separatist religious communities. In these new forms, pastoral power was not abolished but radically and 'spiritually' intensified. The institutional, ecclesiastical form of pastoral power inherited by the seventeenth century radicals *individualised* people in a relation of subordination with respect to salvation, obedience and truth.

Foucault described three components to this general pastoral power relation: analytical identification of merits and faults; a network of servitude in which the ego was excluded; and the production of hidden truth in spiritual guidance and direction (2007: 184). As a guide or spiritual director responsible for a care of souls, the pastor demanded submission by an individual; a complete servitude in a field of obedience in which he observes daily life: "in order to form a never-ending knowledge of the behaviour and conduct of the members of the flock [through] the exhaustive observation of the life of the sheep to direct the conscience" (2007:

181). As Saul Newman explains, “the pastor who governs his flock is not a sovereign, nor does he exercise juridical power, but he nevertheless insists on obedience from its members'' (2019: 115). Originally through confessional practice and later by the apparatus of government by the state, pastoral power demands obedience to guidance and direction. It is the exercise of power, not necessarily coercively, over one’s conduct (ibid.). The examination of conscience was therefore not voluntary and did not assure the individual's mastery of himself (Foucault 2007: 182). The pastor *teaches* the truth if he forces men to accept a certain truth: a structure, a technique of power, investigation, self-examination, and the examination of others. A secret inner truth of the hidden soul becomes the element through which the power is exercised, obedience is assured, and through which the economy of merits and faults passes (2007: 183).

The movements of counter-conducts that sprung up throughout the Middle Ages, including the Protestant Reformation itself, challenged the institutions of pastoral power. As Foucault puts it, it was “counter-conduct in the sense of struggle against the processes implemented for conducting others” (Foucault 2007: 201). These movements had five common forms, “all of which tend to redistribute, reverse, nullify, partially or totally discredit pastoral power in the systems of salvation, obedience, and truth” (2007: 204). These are: an ascetic discipline of the self; a form of community; a focus on scripture; mysticism with respect to religious experience and truth; and eschatological beliefs (2007: 204-216). These elements were present among the religious communities that proliferated after the English Revolution. The latter were therefore continuous with a series of pastoral revolts in the previous two centuries that Foucault calls “insurrections of conduct” (2007: 228).

Seventeenth century England was a moment of insurrection insofar as: “the explosion of different forms of religious community and religious organisation was one of the major axes and one of the great stakes of the struggles” (2007: 228). Religious dissent was thus coextensive with an insurrection of conduct. As we saw in the accounts offered by social historians in Chapter 2, Quakers formed an egalitarian community forged by what Foucault calls a “principle of absolute equality between all members of the community” (2007: 211). In a priesthood of believers each is a pastor to the other. The latter occurred precisely at the time

when a pastoral model of God's reign was being called into question by the scientific discovery of natural laws (Foucault 2007: 235-236). Yet the modern practices of *government* exercising 'political' power of the *state* had yet to be fully figured-out. As historians have noted (see Chapter 2), during the development of early Quakerism hopes for Cromwell's commonwealth were fading fast. While these insurrectionary regimes took aim at 'vertical' forms of pastoral power, the sense of disorder it provoked after the removal of the monarchy presaged the return of a juridical form of sovereignty. To avoid the inevitability of social conflict, Hobbes therefore proposed principles of government derived from a theory of sovereignty based on a contract (Dean 2020: 129). Friends were, at this time, still working out their alternative ordering. In the end they instituted a system of governance that remained deeply entangled with a prevailing *regulatory* concern for order and discipline inherited from the previous century.[40]

The Meeting of Friends was therefore not merely an act of resistance (to the tithe) or a refusal (to attend church). It was also an experimental *demonstration* of a different kind of community. It subverted pastoral power by dispersing it among the people in an alternative regime of practices that, in consequence, informed how people thought, acted and identified (Dean 2010:ch.1). Pastoral power was no longer strictly a relation of subordination. Rather than taught by obedience, truth was revealed instead by an immanent divine power—as an *inward* guide or teacher—evidenced in transformative inter-subjective encounters ('convincement'). As described in Chapter 2, concerns for order and discipline eventually prevailed, however, in the sovereignty of the collective secured by the residual exercise of a disciplinary pastoral power to regulate behaviour.

5.1.3. Politics of Subjectivity

The early Quakers' political religion was marked-out principally by their antagonism towards the clerical order. And by extension towards the magistracy, a juridical 'police' power that enforced an ordained social hierarchy. As a counter-conduct movement, their political religion was structured by their separatist dissent in the name of radical equality. What was radical about the early

[40] Which, as Foucault (2007) explains was the original European meaning of 'police' at the start of the seventeenth century.

Friends', then, was first their refusal to be subjected both to an inegalitarian social structure and to a regime of truth secured by unequal power relations. Thus, their 'insurrection of conduct' was driven by a struggle against a power that positioned the subject in a structure of power-knowledge. Divine truth was discoverable and verifiable inter-subjectively. Second, this intensification of a 'spiritual' pastoral power demonstrated another way of governing oneself and others: supplying the theological legitimacy for a radical democracy. The early Quakers and other radicals resisted their assignment to social positions in a hierarchical social structure. Their dissent was a self-determining act of subjectivation on condition of a freedom they had yet to fully secure.

The free subject "is situated in organic networks of affect, identification and care" as well as lifestyles, professions, voluntary associations, institutions and organisations (Dean 2010: 193). Consequently, subjection and subjectivation are each a condition of the other. Institutional Christianity gave rise to a hermeneutics of the self—a self with an internal life that may be examined and interpreted by another (Newman 2019: 119). The confession thus became a technique of producing the subject, positioning her as a particular kind of individual (2019: 120). The contemporary confessional subject is similarly conformed "to certain norms and discourses, to a certain 'truth' and identity, that have been produced for him and render him governable" (2019: 117). Therefore, rather than accept her 'individualisation', Foucault claims instead that the subject's proper task is "not to discover *what* we are but to *refuse* what we are" (Foucault 2002: 336, emphasis added). The political, ethical, social and philosophical problem of our time, says Foucault, is not to try to liberate the individual from individualisation. Rather, "we have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality that has been imposed on us for several centuries" (ibid.).

For Newman this means "refusing to be identified in a particular, prescribed way, and reinventing ourselves in ways that allow a greater degree of autonomy", thereby evading the fixed ideas and essential identities that 'pastoral power' obliged the subject to embody and conform to (Newman 2019: 121). Consequently, the features of a contemporary political spirituality may exhibit some or all of the elements Foucault described at the birth of modern governmentality. In light of the ethnographic data presented in Chapters 3 and 4,

we may translate Foucault's five forms of counter-conduct into their contemporary expressions: a self-discipline of 'other' awareness (the ascetic); inclusive forms of inessential commonality (community); free interpretation from a multiplicity of view-points (scripture); uncertain and contingent claims to knowledge (mysticism); and the articulation of a shared hope for a better world (eschatology). Thus, contemporary Quaker practices of political spirituality may be seen as an articulation of an 'insurrection of conduct' that descends from the early Friends. On this reading, what continues in this tradition of insurrectionary counter-conduct is an experiment in a radically egalitarian kind of community that refuses 'positioning' power.

5.2. The Lack of Fullness

The reexamination of the ‘radical’ elements in seventeenth century religious dissent undertaken in the previous section has enabled us to identify a direct line of descent from emergent Quakerism in the seventeenth century to its ‘postmodern’ expression today. This account is of course contestable. Indeed, as already noted, some Friends today find in the story of early Friends evidence of what has gone missing from contemporary Liberal Quakerism. In urgent need of reform, the latter has succumbed to the incoherence of an ‘anything goes’ syncretism in the name of a chimeral inclusiveness. According to this view, Quakers have lost their identity to a rupture that has exposed an absence of fullness; the incompleteness of a community riven by major differences. There is no longer a basis of common beliefs, understanding, language or experience to unify Friends as a group.

William Connolly observes that, at the moment when faith is opened-up, some are “moved to deny or repress such a moment in the interests of asserting political hegemony over other faiths” (Connolly 2006: 294). As a consequence, “the response of participants to this internal rupture is fateful for the possibility of pluralism” (2006: 295). Where Connolly sees the rupture of faith as a productive opening, Friends may experience instead the trauma of loss. In this ‘politics of Friendship’ we find a strand of discourse expressed in terms of ‘crisis’, ‘incoherence’, and ‘transition’ that issue a cry for ‘renewal’. Guiton (2015) describes a ‘faultline’ exposed by a growing constituency of nontheist Friends. Recall from Chapter 2 that his proposed remedy is to make a declared openness to the possibility of transcendence a criterion of membership. Guiton advances a particular interpretive framework (a discourse) in the apophatic tradition of Christian mysticism.

Similar arguments were made in a debate that erupted on the letters pages of *The Friend* magazine over the summer of 2019. A narrative of ‘diversity is our strength’ was met with ‘but we are a Christian church’. One Friend wrote, “I despair of Friends who seek to airbrush our Christian heritage out of the current expression of our spiritual experience as, by doing so, they are seeking to airbrush me out of the Society. I wish to be recognised as a Christian Quaker…” (*The Friend*

28/06/19). We find here a heartfelt plea for the recognition of an established, stable identity.

5.2.1. Quakers and the World

This is a familiar conversation among Friends today. There were in these recent exchanges many conciliatory tones and attempts to find common ground. Forums have been formed and books written that seek either to resolve, reconcile or accommodate religious differences (e.g., Ambler 2016, Ashworth and Wildwood 2009, Grant 2018, Rowlands 2017). It ought to be noted too that none of my research participants spoke of sharp theological divisions in their experience of the Quaker Meeting.

Tangential to these ongoing debates is the question of Quakers' relation to the 'world'. Those who, like Guiton, have argued persuasively for a distinctly 'Quaker' spiritual experience view the latter as logically prior to social action. Guiton insists "the encounter with God is primary and leads to action in caring for others and the world" (Guiton 2015: 87). The link between experience and action is the practice of collective discernment in Meeting. Consequently, Guiton disputes the idea that a *religious* society "can find its unity in a common commitment to social and political action" (Guiton 2015: 85). If that were the case, he suggests, "should we not in all honesty present ourselves to the world as a social and political organisation" (2015: 85). Consequently, the religious and the political must also inhabit separate domains of human experience, with primacy given to the former.

But this is not quite how the Friends we met in Chapter 4 see things. The political and the spiritual have for David become increasingly blurred. We may detect in their narratives the very thing that Guiton discounts: the possibility that the Society of Friends is a social, political *and* religious 'organisation'. Political parties are, for Richard, much like faith communities. His faith lies, he says, in humanity's capacity to come together and address the world's pressing problems. Both describe their relation to the world, as Quakers, in terms of their political commitments. They arrived 'with where they are', as John claims, 'already Quakers' insofar as they had already articulated the values of equality and peace

in their self-narrative: a world-view or subjectivity with which they had arrived at Quakers. As a result, everything is political, as Charlotte insists (see Chapter 3). Jennifer Kavanagh (2017) employs the trope, ‘practical mystics’, to describe the relation between Quaker worship and their everyday lives as a circular process. Similarly, Tony describes a two-way flow inwards and outwards. He worries however that Meeting may become a safe refuge from the tumult of the world. As Richard put it, we are made up of layers of lived experience accumulated from myriad encounters with this world. These are gathered into the Meeting in order that Friends may together discern its ‘sense’.

The difficulties we encounter in the ‘renewal’ discourse as a response to the experience of a ‘lack’ or rupture of faith are thus twofold. First, that an attempt to fill the gap with a particular content of spiritual experience imposes upon it a particular interpretation. Alternative experiences and subjectivities necessary to an ethos of pluralisation are thereby foreclosed. Second, it demands the separation of the ‘religious’ from the ‘political’ as distinct realms of experience and action. Ernesto Laclau makes a useful analogy when he argues that any political articulation shares the same general structure of a “mystical fullness” organised around what he calls a “double impossibility” (2006: 143). This ‘fullness’ cannot be named or represented directly, nor indirectly through equivalent terms without an irreducible remainder. The ‘beyond’ cannot be represented without giving it positive content that deprives it of its ‘mystical’ beyondness (2006: 142-145).

Laclau examines the “mystical fullness” through Meister Eckhart’s insistence upon a God who is nameless and excludes from itself all differentiation or representational image (2006: 137). However, lengthening the chain of things that God is ‘beyond’ also empties them of their particularity. As a result, “his very transcendence is contingent upon an increased immanence” (2006: 140). If God is nowhere in particular, he is everywhere. This leads Eckhart to conclude, as some Ranters did, that God is present in all things (an infinite no-thing inhabits everything). As Laclau observes, Eckhart’s mystical way of life is a detachment that: “cannot be that of an anchorite, who lives a segregated existence, for the mystic is not refusing involvement in daily life. The mystic should be fully engaged and, at the same time, strictly detached from the world...essential detachment and actual involvement are two sides of the same coin” (2006: 141).

From this analysis Laclau draws his two conclusions. First, since God is ineffable, any name, such as ‘Light’ or ‘Presence’, may be used to refer to the Divine as long as we attribute no determinate content to that name. To do so, however, is also irreverent: “while the mystical experience underlies an ineffable fullness that we call ‘God’, that name..is part of a discursive network that cannot be reduced to this experience” (2006: 142). Second, if instead God is named through the evacuation of particular contents of an equivalential chain, we may collapse the equivalences into an undifferentiated identity. An absolute universal, however, erases the transcendent dimension unless some equivalence remains and therefore a residue of particularity. Laclau thus reveals the subject's attempts to incarnate an absent fullness. A deadlock is reached, however, and “mystical experience, left to itself, is incapable of providing the differential remainders that are, nonetheless, its conditions of possibility” (2006: 145).

To escape this double bind, there is a temptation instead to give it a content determined not by the mystical experience itself but by the “positive religion to which the mystic belongs” (Laclau 2006: 144). This is precisely what Guiton (2015) seems to do in his insistence upon a particular interpretation of spiritual experience. By shortening the chain of legitimate differences, a particularity is promoted instead as a universal and a boundary constructed to mark the discursive limits. In this move, the meaning of ‘Quaker’ is restored as an identity with a determinable content. An inclusive ‘anything goes’ liberal Quakerism, tendentially emptied of meaning, is rearticulated by privileging a particular point of view. A spiritual experience that is not one ‘cluster’ of heterogeneous concerns—as Charlotte illustrated with raisins (‘the spiritual ones’)—but functions hegemonically. The discourse of a real Presence is advanced as a nodal point by which commensurate experiences, beliefs, or narratives can be held together. Quaker identity is purchased by redefining its constitutive exclusion. Indeed, in the exchange of letters in *The Friend* during the ‘God’ debate, some contributors said that, since their experience did not accord with this particular discourse, they were being made to feel they no longer belonged.

5.2.2. The Illusions of Otherness

Guiton's project of renewing Quakerism as a version of Christian mysticism, were it to succeed, may nevertheless achieve a partial fixation of identity. Once consolidated, a "branded" or "entrenched" identity can then become resistant to modification (Connolly 2002: xvi). A sense of stability and completeness may thus be achieved. However, since no internal difference can fully represent the system as a whole, no signifier can achieve a final closure (Howarth 2005: 261). The illusion of a complete closure of a totality can instead be accomplished with the support of a fantastical element. The latter functions to suppress the political dimension and absorb dislocations by covering over the lack (Glynos & Howarth 2007: 146). A fantasy of an original wholeness and harmony fills the void in the subject and the structure of social relations (ibid.). By way of a logic or a narrative, this fantasy promises to recapture a lost/impossible enjoyment by *concealing* the contingency of the discursive formation (2007: 147, emphasis added). Thus, when the logic of hegemony or equivalence (substitution) predominates, a 'fantastic' narrative about some internal obstacle or an 'enemy within' blocking identity can lend vital support (2007: 150).

For the early Friends, the figure of the Ranter and a narrative of a 'Ranterist spirit' performed this function, leading to a purification of the social through the power of expulsion (Chapter 2). In the contemporary 'politics of Friendship', nontheist Quakers have been accused by Guiton (2015) of entryism in their refusal to obey the 'rules' of an established tradition. The possibility of a more institutionalist or reformist politics may occur, however, when the logic of difference or autonomy (combination) comes to the fore (Glynos and Howarth 2007: 150). Even so, differential demands or concerns may once again be articulated by a fantastic narrative. For instance, one that imagines instead an *external* obstacle or enemy that threatens the harmony (ibid.). This is the tendency not only to construct an enemy as an essentialised identity but also to vilify or demonise this Other. Precisely where these political boundaries are drawn is, by virtue of their discursive construction, contestable. But a fantastic narrative can make these boundaries appear natural or inevitable. At least, until events conspire to reveal the contingency concealed by this imaginary.

An article penned for *The Friend* magazine (12/12/2019) by Tania Mathias, a former Conservative MP, prompted a flurry of responses. In the piece, Tania explains how her Quaker faith informs her political views and influenced her decisions in parliament. Her claim that, “freedom is not a Quaker value *per se* but it is the core of my Conservatism” sparked a sharp debate. One Friend commented, “I am surprised to be reading a Party political article in *The Friend*. Especially from a representative of a Party whose policies have resulted in dramatic increases in poverty and inequality”. Another remarked: “You write ‘As a Quaker, I…’ but I genuinely struggle to see anything of Quakerism in the values you articulate...Your article seems to propose that Quaker values are ambivalent, counting for little beyond giving one the freedom to follow one’s political inclinations”. Freedom for whom? Freedom from what? another asked. But Friends nevertheless balked at the suggestion that Tania ought to choose between being a Quaker and being a member of the Conservative Party. One reminded readers of George Fox’s graciousness towards William Penn over the wearing of a sword, expressing the hope that Tania “will continue to bring Quaker values to the Conservative Party with the blessing of all of us” (*The Friend* 31/12/2020).

David’s encounter with the young Conservative Party-supporting climate change protester exposed the contingency in identity construction. It enabled David to re-articulate their relationship, identifying with someone ‘from the other side’ in their common endeavour. This was accomplished by redirecting antagonistic forces towards an outward foe: a common enemy defined not by ‘who we are not’ but by *what* we stand against in their political project. The social relation is constituted not through the signifiers ‘equality’ and ‘peace’ but by their negation. Quakers unite with others in an articulation of shared concerns about the world. Consequently, there can be no political form of spirituality without both an ethical openness to each ‘other’ and to wrongs inflicted on one another. This is precisely the ethico-political practice that Peter called ‘befriending’. It is to these practices that we must turn before we can define political spirituality not as a philosophical concept but as a practical matter.

5.3. An Ethics of Openness

The ethical and the political do not stand straightforwardly in opposition to one another. The fantastical element that may accompany the political on a path to ideological closure is a way of coping, in Lacanian terms, with a 'lack' that splits the subject from the source of enjoyment. However, these fantasies can also be "the driving force that motivates different groups to take action for a better society and for a better world" (Akdogan 2017: ch. 12). It is, however, an impossible search for an enjoyment that the drive to action alone cannot accomplish. The imagination is thereby enlisted that utilises "fantasy's capacity to produce deeply affective relationships with particular social horizons" (ibid.).

Consequently, an 'ethical' counterweight to political attempts to incarnate the absent fullness, may be described as an "enjoyment of openness" (Glynos and Howarth 2007: 151). According to Stavrakakis (1999: 29), the lack in the subject is impossible to fill, rendering the fullness of identity also impossible. *Identification*, on the other hand, remains a possibility as individuals embody and enact a subject position available in a discourse (Akdogan 2017: ch. 12; also Glynos and Howarth 2008). Contingency intervenes, however, and identifications are never complete and fully coincident with the subject position (ibid.). The resultant restiveness—the desire produced by the lost object—is the effect of an ontological contingency to which the subject must come to terms. It requires a subject learning to live with paradox as a 'spiritual' practice.

5.3.1. Living with Paradox

An identity is needed to act and to be ethical but must not, at the same time, conceal the differences upon which it ultimately depends (Connolly 2002: xv). Identity is thus always incomplete: the 'lack' or absence of fullness described by Laclau above. There is a paradox of identity / difference (and thus of their interpenetrating logics): "an identity is established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognised" as essential to its being (Connolly 1991: 64). What is to be resisted, therefore, is the tendency to congeal

established identities into “fixed forms, thought and lived as if their structure expressed the true order of things” (ibid.).

When these congealing pressures prevail, “the maintenance of one identity involves the conversion of some differences into otherness, into evil, or one of its numerous surrogates" in order to secure its own self-certainty (ibid.). Conversely, the fact that social spaces are riven with tensions and fissures has to be acknowledged and negotiated by subjects. Indeed, “the task of democratic subjectivity is to foster and encourage, rather than deny or conceal, such contingency in the name of making possible the emergence of new identities, which can be respected and mediated in the democratic public sphere” (Howarth 2008: 198; see also Glynos & Howarth 2007: 125-126). But how, exactly, is the absent fullness kept unconcealed?

First, these dislocatory events may be experienced as a rupture that, in the context of institutional religion, may complicate or confound the experience of faith (Connolly 2006: 294). A positive response to moments when fixed identities are disrupted by difference therefore calls for “a *secondary* set of practices that prepare it to participate with forbearance and presumptive generosity in a larger ethos of multidimensional pluralism” (Connolly 2006: 295). The motivation for doing so may be found in a concern for “the late-modern condition that multiplies minorities on the same territory” (2006: 296). It may also reflect an interest in preserving democratic forms of governance (ibid.). Together with the specific injunctions of faith-practices, such as love or hospitality, or else to subvert modes of violence “fomented by the clarion call of national unity”, Connolly hopes that a mixture of these motives can birth what he calls an ethos of pluralisation (ibid.).

The secondary practices of agnostic respect called for by Connolly must, like those of post-hegemony (see Chapter 4), nourish a respect for differences that is capable of subverting conflict (Kioupkiolis 2019: 178). Connolly notes that any pre-existing pluralism provides new movements with “funds of differences" from which they may proceed to a “critical responsiveness” (Connolly 1995: xiv-xv). This response must “translate an appreciation of diversity into the active cultivation of generosity to contemporary movements of pluralisation” (ibid.). The challenge of a pluralistic culture is then to “negotiate modified relations of

co-existence as new identities cross the magic threshold of enactment" (1995: xvi). Connolly argues that it is precisely the possibility of a new way of being that must disrupt the stability of established identities. To *become* something new entails a movement in self-recognition endorsed by others to whom we are connected (ibid.). Hegemonic identities depend on existing definitions of difference. If instead we are to alter our recognition of difference, we must also revise our own terms of self-recognition (ibid.).

5.3.2. Opening the World

In short, to be ethical, according to Connolly, is to be willing to put one's identity at risk and to call its comforts into question (Connolly 2002: xix). As we saw in Chapter 3, Charlotte resolved similar challenges ('stop othering me') by rededicating herself to a practice of openness in her relationship with others: to 'honour that of God' in them means, for her, their diversity. Henceforth, a disciplined spiritual practice of ethical openness is necessary to a generous plurality. It entails the recognition of multiple sources of morality and to treat one's own faith as contestable—not only in the eyes of others but also in one's own (2002: xxiii). To put oneself to question is an ethical commitment to pluralism. The latter is also a commitment to equality, since each is the condition of possibility for the other (2002: xxiv). Viewed as a self-discipline, the enjoyment of openness corresponds closely to Foucault's ethics of concern for the self as a practice of freedom (Rabinow and Rose 2003: 25). As Foucault claimed, "for what is ethics, if not the practice of freedom [as] the ontological condition of ethics" and thus the form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection (2003: 28).

In a similar way, Connolly insists that a *generous* response to mystery, rupture, abyss, openness, and difference leads to pluralisation (Connolly 2006). He employs terms such as 'gap', 'rupture' and 'mystery' to name an *unstable ontology* (Marchart 2005). That the latter can be figured either as an absence ('lack') or an opening ('abundance') is, according to Jean-Luc Nancy, inscribed at the heart of Christianity. He refers to 'dis-enclosure' as the self-deconstruction of both metaphysics and Christianity as a "life in the world outside of the world" (Nancy 2012: 2). The spirit of the West is thus: "a mode of being in the world in such a

way that the sense of the world opens up as a distancing within the world itself and in relation to it" (2012: 3). Put otherwise, this world implies another world, another order, or another way of life rather than an "other" beyond it. A beyond that is instead within or an outside that opens *within* the world (2012: 6, 10).

Nancy describes, as a mode of being, an openness to the world's opening. Like Connolly's abyssal rupture, this openness in being as such corresponds closely to Newman's ontological anarchy. Each insists on a contingency, a *perhaps-ness*, in whatever 'is' and what may-be that introduces a 'spiritual' aspect to the political. The an-*archē* in Newman is the absence that "reveals the historicity and discursivity of our accepted structures of thought and experience" (Newman 2016: 10). At the same time, "the ontologically anarchic condition..presents us with an open horizon for creative political thought and action" (2016: 137-8). The presupposition of 'ontological anarchy' thus gives rise to a different kind of mystical spirituality at the heart of politics. The task of radical politics is "to cultivate and affirm the forms of life and the practices of freedom which already render it visible" (ibid.). These are spaces for what Peter called 'Open Minds' asking each other 'what should we do?' or 'how should we think?' They are questions that "take on a new and singular urgency as we are confronted with the uncertainty of the ground beneath our feet" (ibid.).

5.3.3. Ranterish Spirituality

Newman enlists Nancy's notion of a community of exposed singularities to describe these political spaces.[41] Since meaning is always shared, meaning is itself the sharing of Being (Nancy 2000: 2). It is put into play among us: 'Being' has no other meaning than the dis-position of 'between' (2000: 27). Consequently, "Being cannot *be* anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the *with* and as the *with* of this singularly plural co-existence" (2000: 3, emphasis retained). Existence is always 'with' without which nothing exists; 'we' and 'we others' are irreducible: a paradoxical first personal plural that makes sense of the world. Thus, argues Nancy, 'We' says (and 'we say') "the unique event whose

[41] In his work on the problem of community, Nancy (2000) develops the ontology of being-with (that 'I' is not prior to 'we') into a 'being-singular-plural': a co-essence or essential sharing such that power is neither internal or external to its members but consists in the collectivity as such (2000: 30).

uniqueness and unity consist in multiplicity" (2000: 5). Thus, singularities are ontologically and irreducibly open: "without essence, identity, borders or a predetermined project" that might otherwise swallow-up uniqueness and plurality into a totality (Newman 2019: 38). Our *being-with* one another is instead our co-appearance in "an ontologically anarchic community which is always 'unworking' itself and opening itself up to that which is beyond it" (ibid.). This mode of coexistence means "the moment of ontological anarchy is an experience of freedom and intense ethical reflection" (2016:10).

Following Foucault, the form of association Newman has in view is constituted in ethical practices that opens itself up.[42] A discipline necessarily concerned not only with oneself but how one relates to others (Newman 2016: 11). Contemporary examples may be found of what Agamben (1996) called an inessential commonality. One that does not 'submerge' the individual, as Richard fears, into a totality over which they have no power. By overcoming a dichotomy, it accomplishes what Hill (2019) argues the Diggers alone achieved. A union of singularities is a way of figuring individual difference and collectivity together (Newman 2016: 44-45). Moreover, "something like this might be found today in various radical affinity groups, gatherings such as *Occupy* or networks like *Anonymous* which are not permanent political organisations based on stable identities but, rather, contingent associations of shared intensities'' (ibid.). By refusing "fixed or governable identities", Newman notes these groups are concerned neither with a revolutionary seizure of power or the construction of democratic hegemonies (Newman 2016: 47). Neither are their political demands expressed through existing representational structures. They are anti-institutional insofar as they seek to assert the collective power of singular individuals over institutions and are engaged instead in an insurrectionary "struggle for autonomous life" (Newman 2016: 48, also 53-56).

To Newman's list of examples we may add contemporary Quakers. Viewed through the lens of governing powers that conform people to a particular way of thinking and acting, the relationship between religion and politics is already a complex one: "religion can at times be on the side of political power and, at other

[42] The search for alternative terms is an acknowledgment that 'community' is the work of political construction in contemporary discourse: "it is an attempt to stabilise and normalise particular sets of relations and practices and to establish continuous regimes of authority. It works on the much more open and fluid identifications that characterise contemporary forms of sociality" (Dean 2010: 199).

times, radically opposed to it" (Newman 2019: 127). Yet, Newman concedes that the contemporary context reveals the "prominence of religious spirituality in some progressive social movements" as well as "a kind of secular spiritualisation in the form of declarations of moral outrage, of the discourses of many protest movements" (ibid.). As we found in Chapter 4, individuals may identify with the discourses of political dissent and civil disobedience in movements such as Extinction Rebellion. Thus, political subjectivities can be realised in a contemporary form of counter-conduct that "open up possibilities for an 'other life' and 'an other world'" (Newman 2019: 130).

Newman's 'common' subsists in an ontological *an-archy* of singular-plural being-with. In doing so he brings a familiar figure into view. A postanarchist kind of 'Ranter' who bears only a passing resemblance to a libertine individualist. A contemporary Ranterist perspective is, like Tony's radical content of 'Quaker', wearied by the institutional power, of rules of conduct vested in centralised authorities or vertical leadership. Like that of the Diggers, the Ranterish common is not a safe space or a peaceful refuge from a turbulent world. It upholds instead the uniqueness, nonconformity, and the freedom to 'decide for myself' within an ethically *self-disciplined* collective. Henceforth, if a strand of 'Ranterist' individuality has indeed survived or resurfaced in contemporary Quakerism, it shares a post-hegemonic or postanarchist commitment to the common in the practice of openness.

In sum, as a practice of political spirituality, "freedom—or ownness—as a release from our voluntary servitude is a discipline, an art—something that is learnt, that one learns from others and teaches oneself, something that is fashioned, worked on, patiently elaborated, practised at the level of the self and its relations with others" (Newman 2016: 111-112). It is the ethical self-discipline of a 'spiritual' kind of anarchist whose mode of *being-with* others is the opening of the world.

5.4. Defining Political Spirituality

The foregoing examination of closure and openness in the politics of religion has laid the final groundwork for a definition of political spirituality. It has been informed by an ethnographic encounter with contemporary Quakers. Theirs is a practice of a political spirituality that David Boulton (2002) once called 'Radical Quakerism'. The Friends we have met practice a 'fugitive' faith that is contained neither by fixed identities nor spatial or discursive boundaries. The general form of their political spirituality can therefore be stated concisely in two parts: -

First, political spirituality is a form of dissent that proceeds on the presumption of equality among subjects. To speak or act in the name of equality is to testify to it in a political act that enacts and embodies dissent. Equality functions discursively as a floating signifier articulable in the words and actions of individuals that voice disagreement with the wrongs of inequality, injustice and violence.

Secondly, political spirituality is a practice of radical openness, or self dis-enclosure, that proceeds from the presupposition of ontological freedom. The practice therefore figures in silence an opening or void as the condition of possibility of whatever may be said or done. It poses an *insistent* question to which critical responses are offered in signifying practices that articulate as hope a 'sense' of a world to-come.

In the following section we shall look more closely at the constitutive elements of a political spirituality defined in this way. It is an elaboration of Foucault's original conceptualisation. Radical Quakerism is a *particular* form of political spirituality commensurate with this general formulation. I shall argue that Quakerism's distinctiveness as a political spirituality is to be found especially in its secondary practices: the disciplined way in which self-enclosure is resisted. As Charlotte explained, rather than being 'othered' by others, 'honouring that of God' *in* others is a transformative everyday practice of *becoming*. However, these distinctive practices cannot be isolated from an overall structure of dissent that plays a constitutive role. The practice of openness in an alternative form of community is the means of refusal in the pursuit of the autonomous life of a becoming-self. Radical Quakerism is a generalisable discourse of refusal or resistance to the

technologies of power-knowledge and regimes of government by which people are otherwise subjected, interpellated or positioned. To refuse who we are, as Foucault suggests, is to shake ourselves free of powers that direct how we ought to think and act. This is no easy task: the technologies of the self and technologies of power are deeply entangled. Political spirituality is therefore an ethico-political regime of practices that involves both dissent and dis-enclosure.

I shall examine more closely the *spiritual* disciplines of dis-enclosure a little later. As we noted above, these practices ensure that a critical responsiveness accommodates differences in a non-essentialist unity. It is in their relation to dissent that these 'secondary practices' supply the ethical counterweight that resists a hegemonic politics of identity. It enables a unity to be found *in* dissent—what I have referred to in Chapter 2 as the unity-in-dissent of a radical religion. I have identified three core elements to this ethico-spiritual practice: *space*, *silence* and *sense*. As we fill-out Foucault's original idea, I shall call as expert witnesses those who, like Charlotte, are *practitioners* of a political spirituality native to the liquid times in which we find ourselves. First, however, let us look more closely at the components of dissent as the structural frame in which 'spiritual' practices are made operative. I shall propose three key elements: *questioning*, *disidentification* and *speaking* and examine each of these in turn.

5.4.1. Called to Question

The corporate testimony to equality figures prominently in Friends' narrative accounts of coming to Quakers. All of my research participants referred to the canonical trope, 'that of God in every one', as central to their understanding of Quakerism and why they joined. The phrase is abstracted from its original context in Fox's epistle preserved in *Quaker Faith & Practice* (see Appendix C.). When I asked Libby to explain what the phrase *meant* she indicated that it is not a matter of semantics but of the practice of social ethics. All of my research participants used the phrase to signify equality. The corporate testimonies to equality and peace are not, however, necessarily recitable like a creed but are instead a 'feeling' (John). As Maggie illustrated in her 'enraged' response to a sermon, many Friends view inclusion as an indispensable practice of equality. Acts of dissent

directed at structures of inequality presume equality as a principle realisable in practice.

Dissent begins with 'questioning' the order of things. As we have seen, some Friends arrive at Quakers as a result of questioning religious 'truths' they had previously accepted. In church, John began to wonder why he was singing words he didn't write. Sheila became uncomfortable with some traditional hymns and ended-up, like Libby, questioning doctrines she had grown up with. Consequently, coming to Quakers may be seen as an emancipatory moment ('to decide for myself') that recalls the early Friends' separation from the established church. Although these particular cases are indicative of a nonconformist dissent, it is structure, not its object, that concerns us. It is not necessary to leave the Church of England in order to be a Quaker. Dissension nevertheless involves taking-leave of something.[43]

The early Friends opposed the hierarchical structure and authority of the clerical order. They did so by refusing to attend church or pay the tithe *and* by meeting together instead. Their point of departure was the possibility of a 'spiritual' equality. Through the doctrine of an indivisible 'inward Light' they perceived the existing social order to be unjust. Jacques Rancière termed this perception the 'partition of the sensible' (Rancière 1999). It is a "partitioning not solely of social space but also of our perception of things that reinforces social hierarchies" (May 2010: 9). Together with its justificatory scheme, Rancière calls these social hierarchies a 'police order'. The claims of the separatist churches to be the 'true church' is therefore what Rancière means by 'politics'. The latter is "an extremely determined activity antagonistic to policing" (Rancière 1999: 29). Henceforth, political activity is: "a mode of expression that undoes the perceptible divisions of the police order by implementing a basically heterogeneous assumption, that of the part who have no part, an *assumption* that..demonstrates the *contingency* of the order, the equality of any speaking subject being with any other speaking being" (1999: 29-30, my emphasis). Henceforth, "politics is the assertion of equality among those who presuppose it among themselves" (May 2010: 10; see also May 2008).

[43] A structural analogy may be drawn here with the dynamic regional process that political anthropologists postulate between the centralised power of states and the resistance of 'stateless' groups seeking to preserve the autonomy of their communities. Also in the distinction between the state and the opposition or resistance offered by 'civil society' (see Gledhill 2000).

The seventeenth century radical separatists were, on this account, engaged in a populist politics of dissent. Their collective act of disobedience united them in their respective groups in opposition to the established church. In Rancière's terms, the emergence of the 'sects' were moments of political subjectivation that were "not given in the police constitution of the community" (1999: 36). This is a mode of subjectivation that creates subjects "by transforming identities defined in the natural order of the allocation of functions and places into instances of experience of a dispute" (ibid.). Consequently, their subjectivation is a *disidentification*; the removal from the naturalness of one's place in the police order and the "opening up of a subject space where anyone can be counted" (1999: 36). It is the occupation of space in which "speaking out is not awareness and expression of a self asserting what belongs to it" (1999: 37). Rather, it is the product of multiple fracture lines opened up by individuals and networks; a political *disorder* inscribed in the police order that expresses the difference between subjectivation and identification (ibid.).

Thus, the disorder wrought upon a social order is the inscription of a subject name as "being different from any identified part of the community". Being a part of no-part, the dissenting subject is constituted in the act of nonconforming separation. The 'Quaker' emerged originally as a subject name for a *disidentification*. A capacity of enunciation not previously identifiable in the given field of experience, the subject name 'Quaker' was produced by a reconfiguration of the field. It was accomplished by turning an egalitarian logic into a political logic (Rancière 1999: 35). The Quaker's 'common' is thus what Rancière calls a "community of dispute" that resists the consensual system that preserves inequalities (Rancière 1999: 17-18, 30, 35, 124). By way of this disidentifying move, equality can be testified to in practice rather than in 'theory' (Charlotte). Social theory may only serve as a "verification of inequality" (Genel and Deranty 2017: 66, 133). The political subjectivities forged by a community of dissent must oppose structures that hold social inequalities secure in a consensual order.

5.4.2. Dis/identification

Questioning therefore leads to disidentification. This has implications for the notion of a stable Quaker identity. In general terms, identity may be defined either as the unity of an object, its 'whatness', or as the way actors are identified (by others) and / or identify themselves with a certain discourse (Carpentier and De Cleen 2007). In response to the question, 'why did you become a Quaker?' I found during my fieldwork and interviews that Friends rarely spoke of an objective identity (i.e. as a particular kind of person). Instead they *identified* with and as Quakers in particular situations.

Rather than asserting a 'Quaker' identity as such, my research participants appealed instead to Quaker testimonies to 'equality' and 'peace' as discursive elements in their *own* self-identity ('my-self'). As we noted in Chapter 3, Friends author their *own* sense of who they are 'as Quakers' by appropriating these signifiers into their self-narrative. It is in respect of this sense of ownership that the principle of equality is operative. As an empty signifier, 'that of God in every one' functions as a nodal point in a discursive structure. It is a point of attachment through which Friends can articulate, in their *own* words and actions, what it means 'for me' to be a Quaker. By supplying its content, the subject thereby constructs the discursive position they occupy. Participation in the discourse is thus an investment in one's subjectivity; a self-authorised identification.

As a result, Friends commonly describe being 'at home' in the Quaker Meeting as an inclusive space where they can 'be myself'. Quaker is one of a number of identifications Friends *may* make but it is not a 'category' with which they necessarily wish to be identified ('I am not a category'). Friends hold rather loosely to the notion of a Quaker identity; identifying as such in settings where a correspondence between 'Quaker' and being 'myself' can be preserved. They arrive *where they are* on their path of life (Alma), perhaps already a Quaker (John), while others don't realise they are Quakers and never arrive (Peter). But then again, why should they? (Alma). Instead, *being* a Quaker is an everyday practice of honouring that of God in every one (Charlotte) and behaving ethically (Robert). The Quaker Meeting can thus be figured as singular individuals thrown together into clusters of shared concerns about the world (Charlotte).

In Chapter 3, we explored how Charlotte problematised the assertion of her *own* sense of identity ('stop othering me') while remaining 'open' to those others doing the 'othering'. Similarly, when Wendy asserted herself at Findhorn ('I don't want to do that') it was for her a matter of personal integrity. Neither Charlotte nor Wendy should be understood as asserting individualism. Indeed, when Wendy declares that "we are individuals first, Quakers second" she acknowledges only that Friends' singular uniqueness is logically prior to an identification that unites Quakers *in their dissent*. This is the inverse of how Leming (2007) describes 'religious agency' in relation to Catholic identity (see Chapter 3). As previously noted, her account of agency begins with a collective identity that is first received before it can be rearticulated and appropriated as one's own. But as Wendy puts it, she is *informed* by what is generally accepted amongst Friends but she is not *conformed* to Quakerism. This is precisely because, she says, the latter allows people 'to take their *own* view'.

This multi-perspectival view of Quakers makes a unitary notion of Quaker identity difficult to uphold (Collins 2009). Friends, like everyone else, make multiple identifications in the construction of a dispersed identity; a composite of available subject positions ('grandmother', 'green', 'socialist' etc.). As already noted in Chapter 3, an imagined 'community' and any other universal idea reflect a struggle to construct and stabilise an identity. However, to characterise instead the decision to come to a Quaker Meeting as an act of dissent is to refer to a *disidentification*. It requires actors to leave behind former ways of thinking, speaking and acting in order to do so *otherwise*. It is to effect a departure from a discursive structure (with its sedimented claims to truth and knowledge and associated power relations) in order to 'arrive' at another. The question remains, however, how a subjectivation is accomplished and what role the subject plays in this change.

As we have just noted, Jacques Rancière (1999) describes a politics of dissent as an act of disagreement with the roles and identities imposed upon people in a consensual social order. Saul Newman (2016) also refers to disidentification in his postanarchist account of alternative voluntary associations of singular individuals refusing to be subjects of governing powers. Our capacity to resist dominant

regimes, such as the neoliberal order, according to Todd May (2014) must involve the cultivation of deep friendships as a sort of training ground for mobilising a social movement that *speaks-out* against inequality and violence.

5.4.3. Speaking Without Fear

In Chapter 4, we met a thoughtful Friend who described the act of befriending as the ‘essence’ of Quakerism. As Peter put it is “to stand by those friends who are being oppressed, enslaved, bombed, gassed, starved, drowned, mutilated”. Following Rancière, we may say Friends act on the presumption of the equality of each speaking subject *when* they inquire of the other. By listening they *verify* the other’s subjectivity. The Friend is one who “speaks in the name of its equality and in so speaking becomes recognised as a particular collective subject” (May 2010: 12).

In this respect, the political spirituality of Quaker’s is not revolutionary. As Jane points out, Friends have no desire to form a vanguard that can assault the ‘ramparts of power’. It stands within the insurrectionary counter-conduct tradition that Critchley (2009) calls “Mystical Anarchism”. Newman’s *postanarchism* refuses power by practising an indifference to it (Newman 2016: 137). Its forms of community are also singular projects of *ownness* and ethical self-transformation (2016: 137). As already noted, Foucault’s genealogical explorations trace an ethico-political concern in the classical Greek ‘care for the self’ that entailed an ethical concern for one’s relations with others. But as Newman points out, Foucault’s other example of subjectivation may be found in their concern for free and fearless speech (*parrēsia*). Unlike Christian confession, this imposed upon oneself an obligation to speak the truth, especially when counselling others (Newman 2019: 123, Foucault 2010). To do so, sometimes at a great personal cost, is always to issue a combative and confrontational challenge to power (ibid.). Although democratic forms of governance grant an equal right to speak, it does not guarantee that dissenting voices will necessarily be tolerated (2019: 124). For this secondary ethical-spiritual disciplines are necessary.

A political spirituality must therefore ‘speak truth to power’ *and* tolerate internal dissent and disagreement. The alternative community formed by early Quakers sought to “radically reorganise life autonomously and beyond the control of the church and the state” (Newman 2019: 127). As we saw in Chapter 2, the first Friends were not afraid to speak-out but eventually struggled to accommodate internal dissent and disagreement. Subsequent generations of Friends have, however, bequeathed to Quakers today a method of non-majoritarian decision-making that does not suppress dissent (Sheeran 1983). For many, this is a hallmark of the Quaker Way (see Chapter 2) as well as its gift to radical politics (Graeber 2004). But as we discovered in Chapter 4, activist Quakers also identify with their forebears in public performance of symbolic actions that ‘speak truth to power’. They may do so at personal cost, such as the ‘suffering’ of arrest, and frequently ascribe ‘spiritual’ valences to these experiences of communal protest.

In slightly different ways, Rancière, May, and Newman describe a structure of dissent, commensurate with Quakerism, that *questions*, *dis-identifies* and *speaks out* against perceived injustices. Our task remains, however, to elaborate the distinctive ‘secondary’ practices that inscribe the ‘spiritual’ into these political acts. I have already referred to these as ‘openness’ or dis-enclosure, the interlocking elements of which are: space, silence and sense. Together, they correspond closely to what Foucault called ‘technologies of the self’. Let us now examine what these crucial practices entail.

5.5. Resisting Self-Enclosure

As Tony explained in Chapter 3, equality *in practice* authorises the other to speak *and* to be heard. Further, the other speaking subject is *valued* as a source of truth. The equality of speaking subjects is signalled in the canonical phrase: 'what canst thou say?' These are the words attributed by Margaret Fell to George Fox as he, like Maggie, remonstrated with the minister. Fox's argument concerned the site of authority and the source of divine truth (see Appendix D). Addressed to the other, the question grants a certain *freedom* that transfers agency. In Quaker Meeting, words and things are thus not so much 'given' as freely taken. In their indifference to it, power is dispersed by giving it away. Silence occupies the empty place of power to produce an opening to the possibilities of free and fearless speech.

5.5.1. The Sense in Silence

As noted in Chapter 3, Quaker Meeting is a spatial and signifying practice. Friends gather in an 'unprogrammed' silent space. Ben Dandelion (2007, 2008) suggests it is a practice governed by the presumption of epistemological uncertainty. This 'absolute perhaps' is "the defining characteristic" of Liberal Quakerism (2007: 152). In the Quaker Meeting silence exposes each participant to contingency, to the *perhaps-ness*. It opens-up the language community to the possibilities of whatever *may* be said. Silence therefore bridges epistemology and ontology as the *contingency* of what *has* been 'said' and the 'excessive' possibility of what is left 'unsaid'. It ensures *Meeting for Worship* is a relatively unbounded space of signification. In these intersubjective exchanges words are not given in reply, as in a conversational turn. Rather, their significance is discernible in associations offered in *response*. Silence is a present absence (and absent presence) that invites further responses to the question suspended in it: 'what can you say?'. Over the course of the time-limited meeting the provoked responses are woven into a more or less shared 'sense'.

For Derrida religion is "always a response and responsibility that is prescribed, not chosen freely in an act of pure and abstractly autonomous will" (Derrida 1998: 34). It is "to give oneself back, and up, to the other. To every other and to the utterly

other" (ibid.). As de Vries reads him, Derrida's claim of responsibility does not start with Kantian autonomy or duty. Rather, responsibility is "excessive and extends itself, in principle, to everything and everyone—including oneself—as the totally other" (de Vries 1999: 10). For Quakers this excessive response / responsibility to the other is customarily expressed as an *answerability* to 'that of God in everyone'. However, the 'absolute perhaps' endlessly defers the final word on any matter ('I hope so'). There can therefore be no creed. Whatever can be said or written is provisional. The 'sense' of the meeting cannot be the fixed or final end of meaning. It is rather a movement towards meaning in the way that Jean-luc Nancy employs 'sense': not as an abandonment of truth but as a shift of register. While truth is being-*such*, 'sense' is the "movement of being-*toward* or being as *coming* into presence or again as transitivity, as passage to presence—and therewith as passage of presence" (1997: 12).

For Nancy this *being-toward* of sense makes the separation of worlds, or 'kingdoms', decisive. Not because they stand in opposition but "as the vertical is to the horizontal: heterogeneous, heterotopic dimensions, which cross at one point" (Nancy 2012: 18 in Alexandrova et al. 2012). Thus 'sense' is an opening: "the opening of the world is the opening of sense in the world" (2012: 18). Through this opening, 'making sense' corresponds to a 'sense' that both penetrates and escapes at the same time (ibid.). An opening is the "dis-enclosure of the self-prescribed limits of rational thinking" (Alexandrova et al. 2012: 24). But it is also the opening of the closure of a metaphysics that: "stabilises beings, enclosing them in their own being-ness" (Nancy 2008: 6). Furthermore, "this opening points not to a transcendence of God but to the void, the absence of God as a giver of sense" (2012: 25). In the absence of a giver and thus of a pre-givenness of meaning, Christianity "no longer founds and forms our horizon of thinking and acting in the world" (2012: 26). But neither is this simply modernity's rationalistic taking leave of Christianity. It concerns a mode of existence. Being opened toward the world is "living in this world as outside of it" (Nancy 2008: 10). Crucially, this "outside" does not exist as an entity, an 'other world' or kingdom behind the scenes. Rather, this "outside" mode of existence is "the opening of the world to inaccessible alterity (and consequently a paradoxical access to it)" (ibid.).

That Christianity is at the heart of both the dis-enclosure and enclosure is the possibility of its self-deconstruction: it is a religion of the *departure from* religion (2008: 142). This is the inheritance of Christianity itself. The Quaker Meeting may thus be seen as a place of departure and arrival. It is a dissensual community of singular beings who, in their openness to one another in a space where nothing is 'given', can make sense of a world 'beyond' as a world *to-come*. Quakers articulate—with the uncertainty of faith—their hopes for a more just and peaceful 'other' world. They also prefigure it by patterning an alternative order of society. As we have already seen, for Connolly this alternative order is pluralistic. When pluralisation occurs *within* an institutional faith it *amplifies* "a moment of mystery, abyss, rupture, openness, or difference within the faith that complicates or confounds the experience of faith" (Connolly 2006: 294). The rupture is experienced by the faithful as "a stutter in their own creed" and a sense of "creedal insufficiency" that may inspire a generosity towards other creeds (ibid.). In consequence, "the gap opens up an element of mystery, rupture, or difference that evades or resists definitive interpretation" (ibid.). In this way, Connolly links democratic and agonistic plurality with a kind of mystical experience. It is this experience that produces multiplicity insofar as a "presumptive generosity" is sustained by 'secondary' ethical-spiritual practices (2006: 294-295).

Connolly has in mind something akin to Alain Badiou's 'event of truth'; a moment of rupture, an in-breaking, of a subjectivity for which St Paul's Damascene conversion is an archetype (Badiou 2003). We may also think of Lacan's unsymbolisable *Real* that exposes the gap or 'lack' in the socio-symbolic order. A Real that cannot be grasped but can be respected by our "encircling" of it (Stavrakakis 1999: 83). With respect to the practice of political spirituality, these point to an 'opening-up' that corresponds closely to what I have been calling, following Nancy, *dis-enclosure*. I have suggested that the latter proceeds, for Quakers, on an ontological presupposition *figured* by silence. As the possibility of the said, the unsaid serves as an "ontological imaginary" (Tønder 2006: 327). Not an imaginary of reason but of its limits at the horizon of expectation; of possibilities that arrive from beyond the possible. As Caputo (2005) reminds us, 'God' is a Biblical name for the impossible.

Silence is thus an imaginary of a structural void or gap or *an-archē* that opens onto an expansive discursive field of im/possibility. It is the an-archic condition of all that may be said and done by those who encircle it. Silence can therefore function as the mysterious absence of a given meaning and the coming into presence of a 'sense'. Thus, sense-making is a constitutive of a political spirituality accomplished by silence or else by some surrogate that functions likewise to subvert pre-programmed outcomes through the radical freedom of speech. These are participative spaces that enlist contingency into the project of social change. It is 'how the Light gets in'.

5.5.2. Opening Space

Quakers insist that we must make space for silence in our lives (e.g., Bill 2016). The silent Meeting is an indispensable element of the political spirituality of Liberal Quakers. It is a space in which anyone is welcome to 'sit anywhere you like'. I arrived at my first meeting with, as Alma put it, 'where I am'. By accepting the invitation, I took 'my' place among Friends. I did so by simply entering the room, choosing an empty seat, and sitting down in silence.

In Chapter 3, I shared my first experience of a Quaker Meeting at the start of my fieldwork. Recall that on this first occasion a brief moment of anxiety that I may have taken a seat usually occupied by another. Someone perhaps with a superior claim to it. I had briefly entertained the notion that the arrangement of the social space concealed a power relation. I had experienced church services previously in which the front row was customarily reserved for the elders or leaders. It is of course not uncommon in our wider culture to organise space according to status, privilege or pecuniary means. But by superimposing a hierarchical structure on the space of Meeting, I had mis-interpreted it. As we shall shortly see, the meeting space is an important element of the Quaker discourse of equality. The practice of meeting together enacts or performs equality by *spatialising* the relation of equality between speaking subjects. Furthermore, in its refusal to impose a 'positioning' power, the spatial practice is also a spatialisation of 'silence'—the ontological 'void' or 'absence' that is the opening-up of what *may* be said in a space emptied of power.

Several months after my first visit to Hereford Quakers I shared my initiatory experience with two seasoned Friends. Wendy smiled: “People do sit—*I* often sit—in the same place. If someone else is there, that’s fine I go somewhere else. So that’s generally the way people view it”. I had noted that people do tend to occupy their favoured seats at the Hereford Quaker Meeting. Consequently, the ‘transgression’ of a newcomer does indeed often result in the displacement of somebody. For John this is a good thing—and not simply a matter of hospitality. He interjects: “when I have to move I think it’s good because I *have* to move and get a different perspective”. John’s use of a spatial metaphor, a “perspective”, suggests that one’s position and movement in the space of meeting has a symbolic significance. He indicates that the spatial practice of Meeting signifies one’s preparedness to adopt an alternative view point and to accommodate others. In ‘positioning theory’, a subject *metaphorically* takes up a position in the discursive production of a ‘self’ (Davies and Harré 1990). Having taken-up a position as one’s own, a person sees the world from that vantage point “in terms of the particular images, metaphors, story lines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are *positioned*” (1990: 46, my italics). Correspondingly, “sit where you like” may be understood as a metaphor for freely taking-up a particular subject position in a restricted field of positions marked out in advance.

Exploring the relation between discursive and spatial practices, David Howarth (2006), draws attention to Margaret Kohn’s *Radical Space* (2003) noting that: “for her, political groups created distinctive places to develop new identities and practices, while using such public spaces to democratize ever-widening sets of social relations” (2006: 107). Consequently, various theorisations of space have flourished in recent contemporary political theory. A notable influence upon this ‘spatial turn’ is Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) account of space as a social production. He theorises the spaces of society as a triad: spatial practice; representations of space; and representational spaces (1991: 38). Social space is produced through processes in which it is materially *perceived*, discursively *conceived* and thereby *lived* in everyday experience, a synthesis that Edward Soja called ‘third space’ (Soja 1996). Lefebvre notes that, as more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols or signs, ‘religious’ lived spaces such as village churches are often

interpretations of *cosmological* representations (1991: 39). No such interpretation appears to be warranted for the plain style of the Quaker meetinghouse or its regular circular (or square) seating arrangement. Instead, the space of meeting may be described as a *political* representation. Howarth's notion of *spatialisation* shows why.

First, Howarth proposes a category of 'space' as a regulative rather than a constitutive idea that refers to: "any law or order of relations that yields a structural regularity between objects, whether it take the form of succession or co-existence, and the key element in this conception is the fixation and representation of objects—the rendering visible of objects—whether they are literally or empirically present or absent" (2006: 112). He argues that space is never actualised in a pure form since every repetition is contaminated by alteration—in Derrida's terms an iterability. Thus, linking space to discourse theory, Howarth regards dislocation—the "specter of temporality and contingency, both as a generalized condition of 'disjointedness' and as an event"—as features of *space* (ibid.). *Spatialisation*, on the other hand, refers to the attempt to represent or symbolise an event by reducing its essential contingency to a repetitive structural form. However, since the intervals that separate whatever appears from their non-appearance help to constitute its presence, "each appearance is internally divided between its identity and its difference" (2006: 113). Thus, a signifying moment occurs that, according to a logic of spacing in spatial practices, cannot fully represent its objects (ibid.).

According to this account, the dislocated space spatialised by the meetinghouse is a symbolic representation of space perceived by lived experience. By participating in the spatial practice of meeting together in a circle, Friends experience that which it represents spatially. Namely, the equality of speaking subjects in a commonality constituted in the act itself. As a spatialisation, the Quaker Meeting therefore represents multiple and equal enunciative positions. The circular arrangement of chairs orders contingent space in its two aspects: as an identity (the circle) and differences (the chairs). Because of the contingency of 'dislocated' or unordered space, the representation of space spatialises the productive tension between the logics of identity and difference: the circle (identity) is formed by the equal spacing of chairs (differences). Thus, in its spatial aspect, the Quaker

Meeting inscribes an ‘agonistic common’ that holds the two logics in tension (Kioupkiolis 2019).

At the intersection of the multiple positional view-points, the centre is occupied by a table and the symbols of religious tradition that serve as a focal point. Thus, in the practice of *Meeting for Worship* each speech-act is made from a unique spatial position in relation to both the emblems of religious tradition and to one another. The texts are a rich resource that may be taken, used and shared by anyone speaking from their *own* position. As noted in Chapter 2, the table is a mediating space, upon which objects are offered and subsequently accepted as useful. The table may be said to symbolise the empty place of power in which words and things are not pre-given but offered up and freely taken (Lefort 2006). Power is dispersed instead equally to each speaking subject.

According to this theory of spatial practice, “if we view social practices as the particular articulation of differential elements, and one of these elements is physical space, then social practice weaves physical space into concrete discourses or social worlds” (Howarth 2006: 116). Since the significance of the space is relative to the projects and practices of subjects (ibid.), space can signify equality in a political community. Meeting in a space is thus a political act that presupposes the equality of each speaking subject *in the act of gathering* together. It is the spatialisation of a plural-democratic social form in the “precarious space in-between” identity and difference (Mouffe 2006: 320). A discourse of plural democracy thus has a vital spatial element as political representation of equality.

Space is therefore the third of the three elements, alongside silence and sense, in the practice of political spirituality. They may be articulated in different forms, each element descending from a common ancestor in seventeenth century ‘radical religion’. That is to say, space, silence and sense are constitutive elements in a ‘spirituality’ of political dissent gifted by the Quakers. The question that now remains is whether these elements can inform the practice of politics more generally. Our final concluding explorations therefore concerns not a politics of religion as a discursive formation but the ‘spiritual’ practice of politics more generally. Otherwise put, it asks whether we speak meaningfully about a spiritual-ethical practice in the reordering of human relations?

5.6. Towards a Spiritual Politics

In the previous section we outlined the triad of ethical-spiritual practices of political spirituality as: *space*, *sense*, and *silence*. These interlocking elements expose what 'is' to what *may* be: to other possibilities exposed by *contingency*. These spiritual practices are 'how the Light gets in' through cracks appearing in any dislocated structure. A spirituality of 'perhaps' may therefore be operative in practices that order human coexistence. Foucault locates an ethical self-discipline in the government of oneself and of others. As we have seen, it is through these relations that self-certainties are put to question and new ways of being and knowing may emerge. To speak of the spiritual in these terms may, at the same time, be called a 'political theology'. If there is such a thing. Some Quakers, at least, are not so sure.

5.6.1. The Spiritual in the Political

One Sunday morning I bumped into Tony as I was leaving the meetinghouse. As we chatted briefly, it became apparent that Tony was under a misapprehension. He had assumed that my research had something to do with 'theology'. This, he warned me, would present me with a problem: “Quakers don't have a theology”. Tony had double-checked with a life-long, 'birthright' Quaker and he agreed there is no such thing. I reassured him, this was not my intention, explaining once again that the theme of my study lay at the intersection of 'religion' and 'politics'. This may have been slightly disingenuous only insofar as some eminent thinkers have located the 'theological' precisely in this mutual relationship.

In *Political Theologies: public religions in a post-secular world*, Hent de Vries asks how we are to understand the relation between the 'political' and the 'theological'. In the imbrications of these categories of thought, he suspects a tension between an elusive “absolute” and the plural forms in which this “empty” notion becomes dogmatically reified, fixed and fetishised (de Vries 2006: 46). Carl Schmitt has advanced a particular conception of the 'political' (constituted by the friend/enemy antagonism) informed by his 'political theology'. His defence of the figure of the sovereign in the state of exception preserves a fragile distinction: the modern

State as a secularisation of theological concepts (Schmitt 2005 [1922]). But, as de Vries points out, Schmitt's position ambiguates between a theological origin of the political and a merely structural analogy between the two (2006: 47).

Conversely, a political spirituality of dissent and dis-enclosure points in a very different direction.[44] For Schmitt, political theology concerns the theological basis of sovereign power as its defining problem (see also Newman 2019). Insofar as political spirituality has an implicit theology, it cannot be described in these terms. Since it is a refusal of power by exceptional individuals, political spirituality may be viewed instead as the political *practice* of a 'radical' theology.[45] [46] The latter defies a simple definition (see Caputo 2020, Crocket and Robbins 2018, Robbins and Crockett 2015). Nevertheless, Robbins (2016) claims that radical theology is a discernible body of thought that can be traced back to the Death of God movement in the late 1950s (e.g., Altizer and Hamilton 1968). Radical theology's postmodern renaissance in the late seventies began with an engagement with Derrida (for example, Altizer et al. 1982; Raschke 2000, 2005; Taylor 1982, 1984). For Mark C. Taylor, deconstruction is the hermeneutics of the death of God (Taylor 1984). It is not a theology of presence but of absence. An absenting of God who, Nancy suggests, appears fleetingly as a 'wink' or as passer-by (Nancy 2008). As such, radical theology is "more critical—or even deconstructive—than it is confessional" (Robbins 2016: 6). Caputo agrees that radical theology asks important questions of confessional theology. Radical theology haunts and disrupts confessional theology from within: it is the *becoming* radical of confessional theology (Caputo 2013).

As we saw with the first Quakers, the deconstructive questioning of confessional religion by a radical theology has political implications. It must "take tradition to task for the ways it tends to domesticate the full, radical implications of faith" (Robbins 2016: 6). More broadly, it may entail "un-inheriting" postcolonial

[44] Though not quite the direction which for Agamben (1998) may be defined in terms of biopolitical control over 'bare life'; a process in which the exception becomes the rule within a political order that both organises state power and offers an emancipation from it. The bare life of a subject and its subjection is a life that cannot be sacrificed but may be killed (1998: 8-11).
[45] Edward I. Bailey (1997) offers three alternative definitions of implicit religion: an spirituality of interiority he called 'commitment' for which politics is its variety of expression; an 'integrating foci' for oppositional meanings; and 'intensive concerns with extensive effects' (1997: 8-9).
[46] For Schmitt, the sovereign is the one who decides on the exception and may therefore stand outside the law. Dissenting individuals make sovereign exceptions of themselves by refusing to be governed by powers that conform them to a particular way of thinking and acting.

conceptions of heritage, history, and identity, while reflecting on the deferred promises of democracy (Abeysekara 2007: ch. 1). A postsecular theology thinks an 'im-possibility' that crosses borders, blurs lines, and thereby un-inherits pervasive binaries such as: identity/difference; self/other; democracy/foreigner; citizen/alien (ibid.). Some worry, however, that radical theology has entered a quietist phase; losing its radical edge by becoming de-politicized (Rodkey and Miller 2018). Robbins insists with Clayton Crockett (2011) that radical theology *is* a political theology (Robbins 2011, 2014). Crockett maintains that "today we can see a deconstruction or breakdown of any strict opposition between the religious and the secular" that is "coincident with a resurgence of religion in cultural, political, academic, and sociological terms" (Crockett 2011: 160). This points to the possibility of a radical democracy beyond liberalism: "a form of freedom that requires plastic forms to bring it into being" (2011: 164). By affirming the death of God, a radical theology "freed from transcendence" is not reduced to nihilism but is "an affirmation of thinking and living under the conditions of reality and materiality" (ibid.).

In its denial of other-worldly concerns, a radical political theology seeks instead to transform the world. It reveals democracy as "the political instantiation of the death of God" (Robbins 2011: 6). By taking flight from sovereignty and dominion, an 'exodus' from transcendence "is shown to be the only means for a meaningful form of resistance and rebellion" (ibid.). Like Taylor (2007) who locates God in emergent change, Robbins describes an "inside-out force" which is not concerned with an imagined other world beyond but with "an unveiling and affirmation of our own present possibilities" (ibid.).[47] In a similar vein, we have seen in Chapter 4 how Miller (2019) detects a 'radical' theological discourse in political movements like *Occupy*. He claims that a radical political theology *is* a resisting theology: "a thinking that brings all established orders into question" (2019: 104). Not only is its discourse theologically iconoclastic and apophatic, it is politically subversive. Radical theological discourse is both a "religious atheism and a political

[47] In his later work, Mark C. Taylor argues that the uncertainties and instabilities that arise from the complex systems and networks that constitute today's world have a tremendous capacity for change. The divine is "the emergent creativity that figures, disfigures, and refigures the infinite fabric of life" (2007: Introduction). Thus, God is not the ground of Being but "a figure constructed to hide the originary abyss from which everything emerges and to which all returns" (2007: ch.7). In the light of new realities, "religion is an emergent, complex, adaptive network of symbols, myths and rituals that, on the one hand, figure schemata of feeling, thinking, and acting in ways that lend life meaning and purpose and, on the other, disrupt, dislocate, and disfigure every stabilising structure" (2007: ch. 1).

anarchism" (ibid.). By dethroning sovereign power, death of God theology claims that religious community is only possible in God's absence. What one finds are practices of resistance through social actions that build solidarity. In its self-referential aspect (Rappaport 1999), it is a ritual of resistance from below without a strategic perspective. It works through its uncertainty: "another world is possible but no perfect world will ever come" (2019: 110). A ritual that works best, says Miller, in the absence of God.

Thus, viewed as a practice of radical theology, political spirituality resists powers that otherwise govern and position subjects. It produces an *open* space for equal speaking subjects. It is the acknowledgment of *contingency* in these spaces, however, that grants politics a *spiritual* dimension. Without which there is neither faith nor hope *in politics*.

5.6.2. Friends of Perhaps

John Caputo (2013) has described his radical theology as "a theology of perhaps". Locating its roots well before the 'death of God' movement and in the medieval mystics, Caputo traces a progression of thought from Eckhart via Hegel, Kierkegaard and Heidegger to Derrida's religion-without-religion (Caputo 1997, 2006). Caputo prefers not to speak of the death of God but of the *birth* of God; not of the 'lack' revealed by contingency but of its Derridean *excess* (Caputo 2016, also in Robbins 2007).[48] As a result, the experience of an *event* demands a creative theo-poetic response.[49] That is to say, a "constellation of metaphors and metonyms, of parables and prose, of myths and mysteries, of paradoxes and paradigms, in short a discursive form that makes use of every resource possible in order to give words and deeds to an event, to give the insistence of this event

[48] More specifically, "the death of a high and mighty God is the birth of God in the world, whose democratic sense of freedom and equality incarnate the divine life today" (Caputo 2016: 55). Caputo traces Vattimo's (2002) 'weak thought' via Hegel back to Joachim of Fiore (1135-1202) and locates God: "in the depths of the world, in the arts and sciences, in ethical and political life, where the world is busy making the kingdom of God come true, making the name (of) 'God' come true in the sacrament of the world" (ibid.)
[49] In Caputo's radical hermeneutics, interpretation 'goes all the way down'. Religious discourse is always a theo-poetics as opposed to onto-theology. More broadly, it emphasises aesthetics, imagination, dialogue in community, embodiment and transformative effects (Huggins and Keefe-Perry 2018).

existence in the world, allowing it to become a mundane word and deed" (Caputo 2020: 177).

Henceforth, 'God' is the name of an *event* with a phenomenology that motivates the expansion of metaphorical chains of expression. The event is a solicitation or provocation to speak or act. The way that Quakers customarily describe their spiritual experience is how Caputo describes the event harboured in and under 'God' as a name for a postmodern experience of the possibility of the impossible (Caputo 2005). Thus, for Caputo, 'call', 'leading', and 'prompting' are likewise those of radical theology's language game. He enlists the word 'perhaps' to name the event that is going on in the name (of) 'God':

> 'Perhaps' sounds like it has renounced all truth and has consigned itself to a regime of opinion. But in truth the society of the friends of the 'perhaps' is also the society of the true friends of truth, not because they are *in* the truth, which means inside the secure confines of certainty and dogma, but in the sense of befriending it, seeking it, loving it, exposing themselves to its unforeseeable and dangerous coming, to the risk of the 'perhaps'. These friends of truth are 'anchorites', solitaries, outside the commonly received opinions of the community, which means they are dreaming of a community without community. (Caputo 2013: 7, emphasis retained)

Derrida writes, "the thought of the 'perhaps' perhaps engages the only possible thought of the event—of friendship to come and friendship for the future..and there is no more just category for the future than that of the 'perhaps'" (1997: 29). The Derridean 'perhaps' is the passage from Caputo's weak theology of the event to the responsibility of (human) being. Thus, "if God is neither a highest being, nor being itself, nor a mystical being, and if we are not trying to prove God's outright non-being, if none of this will do, what is there left for weak theology to do?" (Caputo 2016: 77). The answer, he argues, lies in the unconditional event going on in and under whatever exists—the *may-being* beyond being. By offering a 'theology of perhaps', Caputo proposes that: "'Perhaps' is not a refusal to engage with reality but a response to the solicitation of the real beyond the real" (Caputo 2013: 7). Moreover, "it is not a refusal to answer but the depths of responsibility, a recognition of the extent to which the question exceeds us and puts us in question" (2013: 7).

In his *Insistence of God* (2013), Caputo appeals for a ‘society of friends of the perhaps’ constituted by a responsiveness to what stirs, provokes and solicits in the event of ‘perhaps’. Caputo’s vision of a ‘society of friends’ sounds a lot like the *actual* Religious Society of Friends. A society constituted by a response to an event that may be named a ‘call’ and that we may also call ‘God’ (Caputo 2020: 12, 67). ‘God’ is the name of a call, “to which the only testimony is the response, the only evidence is the answer, the only proof is the action” (2020: 67). The call and response, like a question and answer, is a ‘weak theology’ of an event that insists (Caputo 2006). God insists but ‘we’ (human beings) *exist.* We may say, God happens in *our* response to a call or provocation that gives ‘God’ his existence in the world. We do not know the ‘caller’ or from where the call comes, Caputo argues. The ‘call’ supplies the phenomenological content of the figure of Spirit: “the call is the radicalisation of the Spirit” that haunts and disturbs whatever may be said and done (2020: 12).[50] The spectral call, like an insistent question (‘what can you say?’), puts us in the accusative and demands our individual responses.[51]

In a similar way, Nancy argues that ‘revelation’ is a disconfiguration. It does not reveal anything hidden, as such. It reveals “only insofar as it addresses, and this address constitutes what is revealed” (2012: 20). Like Caputo, he says “the call calls for a response, which is another call” (ibid.). The responsibility to respond has the structure “of all to all, everyone to everyone, as if only to salute one another: nothing more nothing less, but in this way clearing endless paths and voices between contingent existences'' (ibid.). Accordingly, for Nancy truth revealed is truth that contains no doctrine or preaching but “the opening of the voices of the ‘with’ [and] the innumerable voices of our sharing” (ibid.). In their fidelity to the event of the other, politically-minded friends can therefore find unity in their mutually shared *response-ability*. Rather than supply a contestable interpretation of the ‘caller’, a political friendship shares diverse experiences of the ‘call’. A call that questions, calls friends *to* question and address one another *with* the insistent question: what can *you* say (and do)?

[50] Caputo insists that the world is both sacramental and mundane; Spirit is neither substance nor separate from the world but like Heidegger’s being-in-the-world. It is the breath of the body and of the world that inspires by calling for the coming Kingdom (Caputo 2020: 35-36).
[51] The motif of a spirit as a spectre is from Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* (2011). For an extended reflection on Caputo’s appropriation of Derrida’s ‘hauntology’ see Schendzielos (2015): *It Spooks: living in response to an unheard call.*

Caputo (2013) claims that ‘radical theology’ is a second order reflection on the beliefs and practices of a confessional community. It is the undertaking of those who detect within it a disturbing *perhaps-ness*. Their response-ability to the call is to what *may be*, haunted by the promise / threat of what is to-come. In their disruptiveness, the religious radicals of the seventeenth century were arguably doing the same. Today’s radical politics may be described as an ethical reflection on the beliefs, practices and disciplinary powers of any kind of ‘confession’.[52] A reflection that puts to question the regimes of knowledge, truth and power to which subjects are subjected. To ‘refuse who we are’ is therefore to participate in socio-political critique of its mystical grounds. In his essay on the *Force of Law* and its ‘mystical foundations’ (2002), Derrida is able to draw the distinction between the law and a justice to-come through a deconstructive questioning: “for there is an authority—and so, a legitimate force of the questioning form of which one might ask oneself whence it derives such great force in our tradition” (2002: 236). Since the founding of authority rests on itself, it is a violence (2002: 242). But to give myself to the other, Derrida says, mixes force with justice. The latter, moreover, is “an experience of the impossible: a will, a desire, a demand for justice” (2002: 244). Justice does not *exist* as a law or rule but rather inhabits it as its call, as a *spirit* of justice (2002: 245).

5.6.3. Against the Enclosures

Contingency or Derridean *différance* is henceforth the unconditional ‘spirit of’ what may come.[53] If there is a postanarchist ‘spirituality’ it is, as we have already noted, to be found in this presupposition of an ontological freedom, a radical contingency, that a Quaker scholar, a French philosopher of deconstruction, and a radical theologian have each called ‘perhaps’. In Caputo’s terms, it is the possibility of an

[52] As Caputo (2020: 8) notes, since radical theology is found wherever matters of ultimate concern are raised, its currents circulate through culture at large. Consequently, we can talk about radical theology without mentioning either confessional theology or religion.
[53] Caputo links Tillich’s (1959) ‘Unconditional’ to the undeconstructible as opposed to whatever is conditional and therefore deconstructible: “the conditional is what is constructed under the concrete conditions of language, history and the socio-political order” (Caputo 2016: 29). According to Tillich, “Man is aware of something unconditional which is the prius of the separation and interaction of subject and object, theoretically as well as practically” as an element, power or demand (1959: 23).

event that disturbs whatever may be said and done.[54] Openness to the event is openness to the promise / threat of what *may* happen (Caputo 2020: 11).

For the seventeenth century radical spiritualists, silence and speech were figured as two sides of a Spirit-Flesh dualism (Bauman 1983). For contemporary radicals, the 'Spirit of God' may refer instead to the sense of possibility: a spirit of change that inhabits the social and prompts those who seek to reform it. The spiritual practices of politics may therefore include those already described: critical questioning, dissent, dis/identification that senses in the present its immanent 'other' possibilities. A society (with a small 's') of friends (with a small 'f') of the 'perhaps' is therefore one forged by a sense of possibility in the absent presence of what *may be*. For Quakers, the silence of unprogrammed worship is the practice of 'perhaps'. Similarly, the spiritual practice of politics is the practice of *contingency*: an ethico-political discipline that 'enjoys' openness and resists closure.[55] Furthermore, since contingency is revealed to us as 'otherness', it is also an event of the other. The spiritual practice of politics must therefore intensify this encounter. Actively listening to the other is a reflexive practice that exposes the contingency in our *sense* of self. In the presence of the other, our self-certainties may be destabilised.

The practice of contingency in a spiritual politics is therefore not self-assertive. It is the self-discipline of a *response-able* listener. A self willingly exposed to the other as *other*. While closed societies always have a determinable object, an uncertain faith is an opening that has no object upon which to contemplate (Marratti 2006). There is instead the call of an 'other' world structurally to-come: a justice to-come, a peace to-come, a democracy to-come that prompts a response. Having no object, the call is an experience of a beyond open to 'free' interpretation. An open society cannot therefore be accomplished by constructing an essential identity or by appealing to an imagined or mythic community. Rather by practicing a generous commonality in our *being-with* others: the spiritual discipline of listening

[54] In the past or future: "Events are not what is present but what is being recalled and what is being called for in the present. They are not what is happening but what is being called for in what is happening" (Caputo 2020: 9).
[55] Todd May (1997) notes that foundationalism can be tied to exclusionary practices. He refers instead to an anti-foundationalist framework of "contingent holism" (1997: 16). He looks to a philosophy committed to both contingency *and* holism: one that views humans as members of communities of discursive practices that includes a commitment to the principle of respect for differences as action-guiding (1997: 16-19)

and speaking to one another in ethical reflection. Consequently, the ‘spirit of’ politics is concerned with the way in which differences are articulated as ‘sense’ without concealing contingency and thereby effacing ‘hope’ with certainty. Introduced as an element of political discourse, the practice of ethical self-government may therefore have important implications. It may enable us to live productively with our differences. And in so doing *become* ourselves.

5.7. Becoming Ourselves

As the constitutive practical aspect of a fluid social formation, an openness to sense and contingency is the discipline of people ‘on the move’. The shared response-ability of those answering an unconditional call is, like the spirit of justice, disclosed in an encounter with the other. This ‘spirit’ animates a political response as the spiritual content in politics.

A career in politics or one’s participation in a street protest may be *felt* as a sacred calling with all the affective load this implies. As discussed above, this sense of call is the spiritual force that propels us ‘on the move’. Faced with a rupture of faith’s certainties, a critical responsiveness is a politics of *becoming* (Connolly 2002: xxviii). A political spirituality native to postmodern or post-secular society is also a politics of becoming friends: a befriending that enters into an ethical relation with others who, in their mutual becoming, embody an uncertain hope of a world to-come. In practice, this means living in the present with our differences—not as a problem to be overcome or resolved but as a productive encounter.

Thus, a postmodern discourse of ‘faith’ insists not on a stable or fixed identity but with the ‘becoming’ of a subjectivity correlative with ‘sense’ rather than with the finality of a meaning. A self on the move has only an unfolding ‘sense’ of who she is; a singular individual who refuses to be categorised (‘othered’). According to Badiou, ‘faith’ is a kind of subjectivation or a reactivation of the subject (Crockett 2014: 149). The latter is a Nietzschean ‘becoming’ through a repetition that is always a distinct reiteration, rather than a repeat of the same identity. In more Deleuzian terms, it is the repetition of difference: “Becoming is becoming differently, becoming in and as difference” (2014: 152). For advocates of a ‘radical theology’ persuaded by a dialectical interpretation of the Christian narrative, this is the resurrection presaged by the death of God (Hass 2014). However, once the Becoming of the Subject is stabilised into a unity, according to Nietzsche, it loses its power of movement (ibid.). The will to power is the reiteration of identity repeatedly held open to difference and thus to continual change as the experience of ‘movement’ in the subjective sense of self. Kierkegaard, for all his passionate piety, insisted he was not a Christian but was only *becoming* one. His apparent humility reads like an account of contemporary creative spirituality figured as a

journey. Becoming is an “ongoing creative origination, [that] would allow us to see beyond the immanent/transcendent polarity...the *beyond inherent within* becoming and its potentiality” (Hass 2014: 167, emphasis in original).

Bauman (2000) warns that in our postmodern condition: “the volatility of identities stares the residents of liquid modernity in the face. And so does the choice that logically follows: to learn the difficult art of living with difference or to bring about, by hook or by crook, such conditions as would make that learning no longer necessary” (2000: 178). In the latter self-defensive move, “this imagined community is purified of all that may convey a feeling of difference” (ibid). Consequently, when we are all together we have almost nothing in common and “when we do share beliefs and a history, we reject those who are different from us” (Touraine 2000: 3). This means, “we can live together only if we lose our identity. Conversely, the return of communities brings with it a call for homogeneity, purity and unity” (ibid). Therein lies the bind I have been calling the politics of Friendship (among Quakers) here problematised as a politics of friendship more generally.

5.7.1. To Each a Voice

Touraine’s proposed solution is an openness towards our mutual becoming. In a world of uncontrollable change, “the individual attempts to transform lived experiences into the construction of the self as an actor” and as a stable point of reference (2000: 13). It is the ‘Subject’ *becoming* an actor. The subject, he says, is an assertion of freedom and responsibility that has no content but its own production. The subject therefore “resists all ideologies that might force it to conform to the order of the world or the order of the community” (2000: 14). On this criterion, he suggests, it is also a *social movement.*

In a similar fashion, Jarrett Zigon suggests that by sharing their stories individuals are *enabled* to “*be with”* one another. Our narratives reveal “the ethical process by which individuals intersubjectively work to reattune their embodied ways of being-with-oneself *and* those others living in their shared social world” (Zigon 2015: 205, emphasis added). It is therefore not a matter of coming to a mutual

understanding but of moving *towards* an agreement (ibid.). *Being-with* one another "charitably" is about learning to "live with others despite the uncertainty of any such sharedness" (ibid., emphasis added). The important point Touraine wants to make is that "the individual can be transformed into the subject only if others are recognised as subjects striving, each in their own way, to reconcile a cultural memory and an instrumental project" (2000: 14). It calls for intercultural communication, avoiding the trap of a politics of identity, and the practice instead of a "politics of the subject". More precisely, to echo Foucault, it is the politics of becoming a subject of a subjectivation rather than subjection. This, according to Touraine, may supply the basis for a solution to a dilemma: to reconcile the unity of society with a diversity of personalities and cultures. What such a solution must reject, he argues, is "the dream of making all individuals obey the same universal law of reason, religion or history" (ibid.). This, he urges, always turns into a nightmare of domination.

Thus, to be the author of one's own sense of self is to be the narrator of lived experience always offered in an exchange. The politics of the becoming-subject, in the manner of friends, is an exchange of significances: the collective discernment of 'what matters' revealed in experiences that are shared. It is not to look for significance in the similarities but in the differences. Furthermore, authorship and authority are closely entangled. To speak fearlessly as friends is to do so free from positioning powers. But since language is social, there can be no purity of authorship. Rather, to be an author in this attenuated sense means a nonconforming creativity that invites free interpretation. To be an author means not parroting the Party line as a Principal, in Goffman's terms. It is an attempt to speak as one not ventriloquised or programmed to speak and act in a certain way.

Likewise, to feel 'at home' is to be granted or to have my own voice in a familiar place: where I can be 'my' self rather than someone else's (i.e. 'othered'). Consequently, a spiritual politics must draw on the ownness of personal experience—of what we take to be 'my' lived experience as each individual has 'freely' interpreted it. To silence as self-indulgent the 'personal anecdote' of lived experience deprives the collective of a vital resource. A more radical spirituality may thus be offered as an answer to Alan's question: the sharing and exchange of experiences as the basis for an inessential commonality in the gathering of

senses. Response-ability lies in paying attention to the ownness of each other's singular experience and its power to modify my 'own' interpretations. Quakers emphasise a mutual willingness to be mistaken and not to cling to 'my' truths. The different experiences of others builds our social reality dialogically as 'otherness' enters into 'my' world-picture. The sharedness of that reality is fragile in its articulation—a 'hope-so' whose condition is otherness.

The spiritual practice of politics therefore occurs as senses of multiple becoming selves weave into a sense of a collective self. In the collective discernment of friends, no-one is trying to win the argument in a debate; to assert the rightness of my position over that of others. As Alan observed, a space need not be configured to divide us, *a priori*, into internally opposing factions that assumes no 'common' endeavour or project: a space with no centre, only a faultline. Rather, in a spatialisation of equality role-switching entails a constant shift of footing in the discernment of a collective sense. Finding a way forward together in the method of friendship is a peculiar practice of dissensual politics. There are no winners and losers insofar as position-taking is successfully subverted by wilfully resisting the self-assertion of 'my' entrenched position. One is required to switch positions and take-up the perspective of the other: to other 'my' self, to relinquish self-possessiveness in order to author myself as one *becoming*.

5.7.2. Wide Open Spaces

Consequently, ethical resistance to ideological closure of a subject position is the *sine qua non* of a plural and open society. Making space for otherness in such a society, however, entails creating spaces *of* otherness in which response-able ethico-political practices can take place. Can these political spaces be created?

The kinds of spaces of ethical self-government for the spiritual practice of politics may be found beyond Friends' meetinghouses. Citizens assemblies, social forums, and sociocratic circles each share a similar ethos. Their spatial and signifying practices are a political spirituality insofar as they enact a dissent in the gathering of equals and an openness towards multiple perspectives. If they eschew the representation of an identity by instead articulating political demands

that confront as ‘the other’ the negation of their shared values, then there is a further Quakerly resemblance. In a politics of friendship, each may speak fearlessly against a common ‘enemy’ by essentialising neither ‘friend’ nor enemy as an identity. To demonise an identifiable other is inimical to its spiritual practice. The multiple enunciative positions from which individuals can speak are necessary to ethical reflection. Listening and decoding the text of another’s subjectivity as a sacred truth both valorises their words and verifies the subject. It is precisely the strangeness or unfamiliarity of the other’s experiences which supplies the resources for novel significations. A spiritual politics must open a social space, an open common, for these articulatory practices. For each to be ‘other’ *for* one another in a productive exchange of signifiers, everyone must be encouraged to do so. It is a practice of faith in the shared activity of sense-making.

This politics of friendship produces a political subject insofar as it directs dissent ‘outwardly’ against whatever impedes the realisation of shared values. The latter are *testified to* by individuals in speech and action. Shared values are particularised in self-narratives and re-told from *actually* lived experience. Since these values are floating signifiers, rather than creedal-like formulations, they are given their differential content in these narratives. Dissensual internal differences are thereby preserved by avoiding pre-given or authoritative interpretations. The contingency of any joint declaration of ‘what matters’ is not made with any certainty. A politics of dissent must make a space for these acts of hopeful resistance: to speak-out and thus name whatever impedes the hoped-for. If ‘liminality’ is “about how human beings experience and react to change” then these spiritually political spaces may be seen as liminal spaces for *permanently* liminal times that Bauman calls ‘liquid’ (Thomassen 2014: 1).

The concept of liminality that Turner (1968) drew from van Gennep (1960), helps to capture “what happens under ephemeral and fluid conditions of transition, or the dissolution of the given” (Szakolczai 2018: 23). A social, political or economic crisis is a large-scale moment of transition “in which the taken for granted, stable structures of social and human life are suddenly suspended, and there is an intense search for a solution” (2018: 24). On the one hand, liminality involves unlimited freedom from any kind of structure leading to creativity and innovation (Thomassen 2014: 1). These transitional times and spaces are, when the order of

things are shaken, ‘how the light gets in’. On the other hand, it “also involves a peculiar kind of unsettling situation in which nothing really matters, in which hierarchies and standing norms disappear, in which sacred symbols are mocked at and ridiculed, in which authority in any form is questioned, taken apart and subverted” (ibid.). The experience of freedom and anxiety are condensed: nothing really matters yet meaning becomes over-determined (ibid.). The contingency of dislocated structures is thereby revealed in conditions of liquid modernity. The latter can give rise to ontological insecurity: an anxious experience of ‘lack’ or of a dizzyingly freedom that has the postmodern subject reaching for handrails.

5.7.3. In-Between Worlds

As Bjørn Thomassen succinctly puts it: “Whenever previously existing borders or limits are lifted away or dissolve into fundamental doubt, the liminal presents itself with a challenge: how to cope with this uncertainty? Who can lead us out of here? How so?” (Thomassen 2018: 164). The spaces of otherness produced by the early Friends were suspended between two worlds: the actually existing and an ‘other’ world to-come. Their liminal experience was one that: “encapsulates the transformation of subjectivity in course of a passage to an ‘other world’” (Mälksoo 2018: 146, citing Thomassen 2014: 16). Of the lived experiences of transition Maria Mälksoo notes: “As liminal subjects fall in-between established structures and hierarchies, they inherently challenge them, thereby appearing as threatening to those concerned with their maintenance” (2018: 146). Defying the structure of the existing social order, the early Quakers inhabited a liminal situation in which the objective events in the world and their subjective experiences coincided (ibid.).

This liminal state of *transition*, the middle phase in the Turner’s ritual structure, may be permanent. Quakers today may similarly inhabit an in-betweenness by design through spatial and signifying practices that reproduce and intensify liminality. In this way they open spaces in which what might otherwise be taken for granted can be questioned or suspended. Moreover, conditional upon a prior separation, a permanent state of transition also memorialises separateness as an always already act of dissent. Meeting together logically precedes the opening of liminal space as its condition of possibility. For Quakers, silence functions as a

kind of anti-structure, a reversal (unsaid) or refusal (not said). By refusing the programming of thought, speech and action, Friends resist positioning by structures of power-knowledge that may ‘conduct’ their thoughts and actions. Silence offers peaceful resistance to powers that tell us who we are, what we must do or become. It is out of the relatively ‘pure’ contingency of silence that political demands may be jointly articulated in hope.

Speaking an unprogrammed ‘truth’ to power is felt as a solemn response-ability: one’s critical responsiveness to the promise of an ‘other’ world. Other contemporary spaces of gathered dissent may accomplish a similar in-betweenness through the suspension of a normal, regularised, and governable everydayness. The pilgrimages made by activists to Extinction Rebellion protests in London share the structure of a transformational journey (Gothoni 1993). Their joyful carnivalesque experience of its disruptive symbolic performances recall the social dramas staged in the courtrooms of seventeenth century England (Bauman 1983). These liminal or ritual spaces are undeniably political in their social aims (Aronoff and Kubic 2013: ch. 4). Subject to a free interpretation, however, their subjective effects may or may not be attributed a ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’ significance (Taves 2009). That does not mean, however, they are not in some deeper sense religious or spiritual.

As David noted, for activists responding to the *experience* of a call, the lines between politics and spirituality blur. Their political acts are animated by a ‘spirit’ or a motivation to which a ‘spiritual’ source or significance *may* be ascribed. Yet by doing so the experience can explicitly “move beyond” the religious-secular distinction (Bender and Taves 2012: 6). But even if the linguistic resources of a particular religious tradition or a ‘spiritual’ ascription are not employed to designate ‘what matters’, *mattering* is still happening. As Caputo insists, what matters is the *event* that inhabits, haunts and provokes our signifying words and actions. This event of ‘perhaps’, the glimpse of unexpected possibilities, is also an event of the ‘other’. As well as separateness (dissent), otherness is also a condition of possibility for liminal experiences of transformative change (‘convincement’). But these transitions are also unsettling. Making space for the other does not, as Tony said, make for a safe space. Rather, it nudges us out of our securities, exposes cracks in our structures of truth, and lets in a turbulent world.

By amplifying a sense of insecurity the transitory conditions of liquid modernity can therefore produce a marked reluctance to make space for the dangerous other. Insofar as a reactionary politics of identity dims ‘the light’ of otherness it can therefore lead to darker alternatives. The ‘perhaps’ has its enemies as well as its friends. The safety and stability felt within the circle of the same may well be ascribed a ‘spiritual’ value. A process of saming-the-other might even be called ‘spiritual’ by its practitioners. But it is not the difficult self-discipline bequeathed by radical Quakers. It reveals instead that the absence of fullness is not something to which all may come to terms. This failure can result in a radicalism that is not native to the postmodern condition; one not at peace with postmodernity but intensely hostile to it. It issues in a politics that does not descend from the insurrections of conduct or the intensification and dispersal of pastoral power.

Rather, reactionary radicalism is a way of governing through a sovereign power of purifying exclusion. A one-sided salvation of the whole at all costs that is a violent principle “completely at variance with the pastoral theme that the salvation of each is the salvation of all, and the salvation of all is the salvation of each” (Foucault 2007: 263). To the contrary, it is a way of governing by selection, exclusion, and the sacrifice of some for the whole (ibid.). As such, the radicalism of ‘perhaps-not’ does not cut off the King’s head but cuts off heads in the name of a sovereign power. As a political practice, absent is any *ethical* care for the other as the ‘spiritual’ dimension of a discipline of self-government. This other radicalism is instead the ideological closure that Richard warns of. A discursive practice that submerges the individual in a certain kind of collective built on a fantasy of wholeness; a totalising attempt to fix meanings that makes no ‘sense’ at all.

In short, the politics of identity is not the practice of a political spirituality we have discovered among Friends. The *spiritual* politics they have gifted to postmodernity is instead a politics of becoming—which is to say, it is a politics of difference. The ‘spirit’ of Quakerism prompts and provokes friends to come together not in spite of their differences but *because* of them. To speak-out as uncounted others *for* one another and against injustice and violence. Answering its insistent call, Friends articulate the truth that another world is possible. By befriending the ‘perhaps’, they enjoy a deeper, more uncertain faith. By sharing their concerns for the world,

they embody a hope opening-up within it. The ontologically unstable ground of reality is an infinite possibility revealed in the encounter with a ‘holy’ other. In the end, the gift to postmodernity from the Quakers is a politics of faith, hope and love. As such, it is a politics of ‘religion’ in a liquid form; a discursive formation that blurs its own boundaries. A fluidity of form for liquid times that may not *necessarily* go by the name ‘religion’ at all.

5.8. Liquidating Religion

We began our journey among Friends with the notion of a ‘liquid religion’, a phrase coined by two Quaker scholars (Collins and Dandelion 2014). We have ended with a description of the practices of a ‘political spirituality’ that can give postmodern religion its fluid form. Rather than offering an identity, the ‘gift’ from the Quakers to liquid modernity is something altogether more fluid: a way of becoming ourselves together. This is the way of life of a fugitive ‘on the move’ who, slipping silently from the chains of categorisation, evades being captured by fixed ideas. To the question posed in Chapter 2, ‘what is a Quaker?’ may come an indignant reply: I am not a ‘what’. To refuse the ‘whatness’ of identity is thus to resist self-containment and answer a different question instead: how to live *other-wise*. That is the ‘point’. To orient one-self to what is coming. More precisely, live-out a welcoming responsiveness to the insistence of the other. ‘What can you say?’ is therefore an invitation to participate in a pluralising discourse in which the subject emerges from untold possibilities exposed by an encounter.

As the means of escape and refuge, Quakerism is necessarily a fluid ‘thing’. Although it may lack solidity, it does not however melt into the air. Radical plurality does not inevitably lead to dissolution. The liquidity of Quakerism’s social form is instead the product of a ‘healthy balance’ of discursive practices—political dissent and ethical dis-enclosure—that loosens its discursive bonds and softens its edges. Its social logic is the gathering *in-common* of the dis-positioned and dis-possessed. The ‘spiritual’ activist may indeed ‘run a mile’ from ‘religion’ concretised in a set of fixed propositions. A creed is a rigid structure of belief that Alma says does not require the ‘faithful’ to think too much. Conversely, a fugitive faith makes no such claims to Truth and wriggles uncomfortably in its grip. To ‘refuse who you are’ is not to be at one with oneself, safe within the circle of the self-same. Resisting a sovereign authority, an impossible community disperses power instead and intensifies its energy through a mode of inclusive participation.

5.8.1. Critics of Religion

Thus, for these radicals everything is political because every ‘thing’ or ‘what’ can be found to be abundantly lacking. To think, speak and act *otherwise* is to beg to differ and to test the limits of intelligibility and reason. To refuse a programme of conformity, to speak and act differently, is henceforth to expect something unexpected to happen. The subject of an *abundant* ‘lack’ senses possibilities that exceed all reasonable expectations. All that is unsaid and yet to happen is what Derrida called the possibility of the impossible. The unconcealment of historical contingency exposes a mystery, gap, or rupture. The shaking of one’s *certain* faith (an oxymoron) attends the possibility that perhaps I am mistaken. Thus, Quakerism, as Collins and Dandelion (2014) suggested, is always ‘movement’. It is a movement of two co-constituting parts—the 'self' and the 'institution'. It is ‘radical’ insofar as both the individual and collective resist themselves. Neither claims to ‘know’ with certainty ‘who’ or ‘what’ they are. They have instead an unfolding ‘sense’ of reality, the ‘mystical’ opening of the world in and through an encounter with ‘the other’.

Openness to self-transformation is therefore also an openness to social change. As Foucault claimed, the practices of ‘political spirituality’ can be those of a ‘religious’ or a ‘political’ movement. It is *both* and *neither* of these ‘things’. As a ‘spirituality’ it is a political-ethical practice that deconstructs the binary categories ‘religious’ or ‘secular’. It is this deconstructive gesture, rather than a fixity of ‘form’, that the Quakers of early modernity have bequeathed to the postmodern seeker. The ‘Light within’ and its perceived power of ‘convincement’ recast the Spirit / Flesh binary as an undecidability that caused no end of trouble. By attempting to give form to a heretical idea, the political spiritualists of the seventeenth century’s radical milieu were demanding the impossible. Their subsequent defeat saw modernity embark on its secularising course: the purifying separation of the private-religious domain from the public-secular.

Freighted within these linguistically constructed domains of ‘religion’ and ‘politics’ are a metonymic chain of substitutable binary terms, now all too familiar to modern Western subjectivity. They include: inward / outward; experience / expression; belief / practice; invisible / visible. Together they form a system of meanings that

naturalise the sacred-secular division. Scholars critical of these essentialised categories point out the 'political' nature of their discursive 'fabrication' (see Arnal and McCutcheon 2013; McCutcheon 2018). Timothy Fitzgerald argues that the separation of the 'political' from the 'religious' domain began towards the end of the seventeenth century. Hobbes had underpinned the restoration of the monarchy with a contractarian defence of the sovereign's symbolic role as the head of the body politic. But, according to Fitzgerald, it was Locke's *Second Treatise on Government* (1690) that installed at the heart of Western modernity the sanctity of private property in the constitution of the political community (Fitzgerald 2015; 2020). The enlightened secular liberal state and an 'illiberal' neoliberal capitalism thereby eventually emerged in response to the severe social and economic disruptions of the short-lived commonwealth era.

As we noted in Chapter 1, according to this critical account 'religion' is not a stand-alone category. It can instead be historicised along with others related to it, including: secular, politics, nation state, modern, economics or progress (Fitzgerald 2020). 'Critical religion' therefore names the *historical* deconstruction of religion and its related categories (ibid.). Whether as a 'folk' category or a creation of the academy, the modern invention of 'religion' was accompanied by the invention of 'politics' as separate spheres of social life. Although both are unstable and contestable terms, the parasitic relation of the 'non-religious secular' to 'religion' makes the latter the primary point of reference (ibid.). In modernity 'religion' and 'politics' therefore became naturalised abstractions in the context of an evolving governmentality. Consequently, contemporary political theorists are careful to define their terms. Scholars of religion have tried to do the same. As we noted in Chapter 1, in the hands of contemporary theorists 'politics' is not regarded to be a universal, isolatable domain of existence. Rather, it is an ordering of human coexistence by partially 'fixing' a *particular* social form. The latter is not a *necessary* object since other configurations are possible. We therefore proceeded from the notion of a 'politics of religion' as a contingent ensemble. A particular assemblage conventionally deemed a 'religion'.

Quakers call *their* discursive formation a 'Religious Society of Friends'. If one simply accepts its designation as 'religious', its object (a 'society') remains unquestionably so. To the modern liberal mindset it therefore cannot be—at the

same time or in the same space—also ‘political’. But by calling Quakerism a ‘liquid religion’ Collins and Dandelion (2014) open the floodgates to critical questioning. If the practices of a religion can unpick its form, can it be called ‘religion’ and how so? Can a heterogeneity of *both* belief and practices exist in any substantive form? As my bemused Baptist guide asked: what kind of religion doesn’t know what it believes? If the answer is a shared practice, how much room for *practical* differences can be tolerated? The paradox is a form of faith that Bonhoeffer called ‘religionless Christianity’ and Derrida called ‘religion without religion’. It is an impossibly inclusive form open to change by open-minded practices of dissensual dis-enclosure. The mutability of Quakerism therefore consists in a self-reflexive, self-critique by those prepared to sacrifice their self-certainties in the restless search for truth.

The original radicals were betrayed in their search by the discursive separation of *their* way: the purification of ‘politics’ from ‘religion’ as a solution to the problem their separatist dissent posed to the dominant order. The steady march of secularisation that began in the wake of ‘radical religion’ (‘our’ term not ‘theirs’) proceeded to separate the private from the public realm as a condition of toleration. But at the early modern roots of radicalism we find a resistance movement occupying a space in-between these now familiar categories. Today this in-betweenness may be called ‘spiritual’ (Bender and Taves 2012). Like the Diggers opening and occupying the common as a shared possession, today’s radical spiritualists may offer symbolic resistance both to the enclosure of private property and the self-sufficiency of the individual. By overcoming the dichotomy of the individual and the collective, they can open a third space that is both and neither. Consequently, the ‘coming community’ (Agamben 1993) of the Quaker Common is not a safe space secured within carefully patrolled borders. It is instead a disparate migrant settlement of refugees caught between worlds. Dwelling on the margins of the order-making state they inhabit instead an ambiguity set-up by the advance of liberal secular modernity. In so doing, these disorderly sites put to question the givenness of the permanent order.

5.8.2. The Spirit of Change

Like Foucault, social historians thus find evidence for an overcoming of the individual-collective dichotomy in ‘religiously’ inspired political action. Gerrard Winstanley, the mid-seventeenth century radical who articulated a compelling ‘True Leveller’ vision of society, later identified with the Quakers in their common cause. Outlasting the other radical groups, the Quakers testified to a more just and equitable society. They posed a problem but the solution we now call secularisation also unwittingly bestowed upon religion a new role. Thanks in part to the radicals, ‘religion’ may instead name a force for social change—and a permanent source of trouble for the state.

As we noted in Chapter 2, the religious radicalism that emerged in the mid-seventeenth century had unintended consequences. According to one version, the political history of religion is “an effort to recapture what was given away in the original institution of the sacred: the human and social capacity to institute the meaning of our own action and to determine a future that is different from the past” (Dumouchel 2018: 117 referring to Gauchet 1997). It may have found alternative means by which society could transform itself, but the institution of the state also reinstated precisely what the ‘sacred’ had consigned to a mythical origin: hierarchy and inequality in the division of society (ibid.). The dawn of the seventeenth century nevertheless marked a moment in history in which society asserted a theocratic power over itself. A claim to transform the givenness of origins that by its close ended up redividing society between (divine) rulers and the ruled (subjects).

Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (1650) was published only ten years before the Restoration of the monarchy. Religion had become a problem to which he offered a comforting solution. On the one hand, the inward turn of the religious radicals in the preceding decades made them complicit in the subsequent separation of private religion from secular politics. But on the other, secularisation may also have reserved a role for ‘religion’ in social innovation. Liberal secularisation legitimised religious dissent by marginalising it. As we saw in Chapter 2, these were the terms of a truce accepted by the Quakers at the close of the seventeenth century. Politics subsequently took over the *functions* of the ‘sacred’ as the mythic foundation of a social order. The

Hobbesian social contract installed in place of religion a territorial, juridical sovereign power over its subjects. The roots of radical religion therefore lie at the margins of the modern secular state. A place from which resistance to sovereign power, as Newman says, may be offered as indifference. The disciplinary power of the pastorate is instead dispersed among its members as a signifying agency. An existential agency of 'voice'—in words and actions—that is prefigurative of an alternative, radically democratic, social form animated by a spirit of change.

According to this account of the sacred / secular binary, the history of religion is of the withdrawal of the sacred in which Christianity is complicit as the religion of the "exit from religion" (2018: 118). It is a theory that rests on the functional equivalence, and hence substitutability, between the sacred and secular in the pursuit of a common objective: the foundation of society. At the same time, by separating religion and politics, Hobbes' solution to the political problem of religion had the effect of assigning to the latter a *new* permanence. Paul Dumouchel proposes two explanations. Firstly, *fear* is the common cause that underlies both institutions. Fear of other men and fear of invisible spirits respectively. "It is the same fear of the unknown and uncertainty of the future that drives men to submit to an earthly Sovereign and to worship supernatural powers" (2018: 119). In response, each claims for itself a different kind of authority. Hobbes insisted that religion is not a power of command but of *counsel*; its authority lies in a capacity to *convince* (ibid.). Consequently, "religion is a system of authority that always escapes to some extent the power of the Sovereign" (ibid.). It is the manner of this 'exit', however, that is peculiar to the post-Christian 'gift' from the Quakers.

Secondly, the permanence and continuity of the state founded upon a fictional contract also implies its immutability. As a result, "all that tends to transform that structure weakens the state and threatens to destroy it" (2018: 120). Political authority must therefore be absolute in the Hobbesian state, the latter frozen in time with no provision for change. It is therefore religion rather than politics that serves as the engine of change. It accomplishes its permanence *through* transformation. As a result, "religion changes but it never disappears because the basic needs that occasion its coming into the world—fear of the unknown and hope for the future—can neither be eradicated nor satisfied permanently" (ibid.) As

a *response* to these fears and hopes, religion is thus a changeable form that *expresses* the fears and hopes of its participants.

According to this account, Quakerism can be understood as a liquid religion precisely because its practices of political spirituality give an especially fluid shape to the hopes and fears of its practitioners. Its fluidity owes much to its decentralised, networked, participatory, democratic and leaderless pattern of 'organisation'. It resists the exercise of hierarchical sovereign power by dispersing pastoral power among its members. Power flows to the periphery. First to the Local Meeting and then to its individual participants as active subjects. In their signifying exchanges, each can voice their hopes and fears in the expectation that a convincing sense may be collectively discerned. The sense of the meeting, a contingent articulation of common concerns, flows the other way towards the centre (through representation in the Meeting for Sufferings and the Yearly Meeting in session). Quakers bring the same expectation of intersubjective *convincement* to their participation in political protest: fearlessly speaking 'truth to power' as a collective sense of hope. In this gathering of senses, individual fears are transformed into a hopeful *solidarity* (a solidness) by expressions of a *shared* concern; a common commitment to a 'political' project; and the communitas felt in the jointness of its declaration. In *both* the meetinghouse and on the streets, F/friends can therefore testify to a transforming collective experience that is not deconstructible. While the valorisation of 'spiritual' to 'what matters' may indeed transcend the sacred / secular binary (Bender and Taves 2012), their discernment ('sense') is found in responses 'prompted' and 'led' by an undeconstructible event.

If the 'event' in question corresponds to something 'deeper' going on in political dissent, scholars critical of 'religion' and political theorists may find an explanatory resource in 'radical theology'. That is to say, in a logic that is not an onto-theo-logic but draws instead a careful distinction between deconstructible co-dependent 'religious' or 'political' discourse and the 'event' going on in or beneath them. The latter is the unconcealed contingency that disrupts—and therefore makes 'fluid'—any fixed form. Any rigid structure of meaning (a system of words, beliefs, actions and actors) can be put to question. This *questionability* is the mystical or spiritual 'depth' dimension to political action. If so, not only can we talk of a 'politics of religion' but we may also speak of a 'religion of politics'.

5.8.3. The Religion of Politics

The early Quakers gave (political) form to (religious) ideas articulated in metaphors they claimed were motivated by *experience*. The radical's claims of an experiential or existential ground therefore complicates the 'critical' account of 'religion' as *merely* a fabrication. Fitgerald (2020) notes that when we talk about religion today, there is always a tacit exclusion of whatever is considered to be non-religious. While this may be so at the level of discourse, 'liquid' religion ambiguates this exclusion by exposing the fixity of *form* to a wider *field* of possibilities. As we discussed in Chapter 4, in moments of crisis or dislocation, the relation of form to field is negotiated according to opposing political logics. A 'healthy balance' between the unitary hegemony of a distinctive 'people' and a dissolute bio-political 'multitude' has thus been proposed as an agonistic commons. It is occupied by Newman's 'post-anarchists' who, while refusing to assault its ramparts, fearlessly speak truth to sovereign power instead. These rebellious ranters demand that the truth be told by those who possess it. For the Quakers among them, the dispersal of a truth-telling agency transforms power into a productive encounter. A 'mystical' force for personal and social change.

Radical Quakers have therefore been, from their earliest beginnings, wary of the power relations entangled with claims to a privileged knowledge of Truth. Quaker 'faith' is precisely that. The same distinction between faith and knowledge lies at the heart of John Caputo's philosophical reflection *On Religion* (2019). It begins with the two questions Augustine poses to himself in his *Confessions.* '*Who* am I?' and '*what* do I love when I love my God?' In the entanglement of these loves its object may be justice or love itself, he muses. Augustine teaches that love drives our search to know. Since there is no 'The Answer', the only thing we can do is *respond*; to *do* the truth is to make the truth happen (2019: 28). As it was for the Hebrew prophet Amos, truth is—like 'God' or justice—something made or done.

The larger point that Caputo wishes to make about 'religion', however, is similar to Laclau's account of a 'mystical' absent fullness or 'lack' in any discursive formation. Caputo argues similarly that the 'religious' is a basic structure of human

experience (2019: 8). That is not to say it is the same thing for everybody: a common ahistorical, universal or transcendental structure. Rather, Caputo says, ‘religion’ more deeply understood is what Derrida meant by the ‘possibility of the impossible’ (2019: 9). It is an experience that draws us out of ourselves and draws us on as our sense of reality—of what is possible and impossible—is disturbed and destabilised, becoming unsteady and uncertain (2019: 14). Thus, in a *form* of life open to a *field* of possibilities, “we are exposed, vulnerable, expectant, in motion, moving, being moved, by the impossible. We are transformed.” (ibid). In short, “the religious sense of life has to do with exposing oneself to the radical uncertainty and the open-endedness of life ... which is why faith, hope, and love have to kick in” (2019: 15).

Caputo argues not for any particular form of concrete religion. Rather, life itself has a mystical element to it (that elsewhere he calls the ‘event’ or ‘perhaps’) and ‘religion’ is its theo-poetic response. The experience of non-knowing, awe and wonder—as well as of fear and anxiety—are matters of deepest concern to the human condition (2019: 83). But the failure to find a final *why* is not a failure as such. It is an *insight* into a groundless ground (the unconditional), a break-through to a living mystery (ibid.). Consequently, Caputo is in agreement with the scholars of ‘critical religion’. Religion is neither an isolatable category nor a regional domain of existence. It is instead the deep structure of experience itself.

As a result, the practice of a political spirituality cannot uphold the opposition of ‘religion’ to the ‘secular’ within strict boundaries. The transgressive, dis-enclosed faith of the postmodern subject *knows* no such limits. For Caputo, this deconstruction is good news for the church (Caputo 1997). Postmodern faith does not consist in propositional fences but in a searching, questioning undecidability that tunnels beneath them. There are no final answers, only a *response-ability* to *do* the truth. To answer the call of truth, justice, God, love is to respond to the ‘promptings’ and ‘leadings’ (as Quakers say) of a world to-come (as Derrida says). Viewed as an intensification of the mystical element in the general structure of experience, the gathering of senses in the liminal silent spaces of an unprogrammed meeting is deeply subversive.

On this account, the religionless religion of a fugitive kind of faith cannot be easily defined or contained. Its open-endedness motivates aquatic metaphors as well as those of ‘movement’. The absent fullness, lack, or mystery is the ‘beyondness’ of historical contingency revealed in the encounter with the other. It is the revelation that, beyond all reasonable expectations, things may be otherwise. The self-discipline of dis-enclosed openness to the im/possible is at the same time a dissent from what merely ‘is’. The form is opened to the field. Therefore, for the practitioners of this mystical spirituality everything is political precisely because beyond everything lies a hopeful *anything*. Anything can happen.

5.8.4. Who am I to say?

Caputo therefore agrees with Tony concerning the liberal Quaker’s birthright. They have no theology. At least not in the confessional sense. Instead, “people who are doing justice but have no theology or philosophy, no list of approved creedal pronouncements, or even a name of God at their disposal, are far closer than the theologians or philosophers would like to think to what the Rhineland mystic Meister Eckhart liked to call the ‘divine God’” (2019: 202). Closer to the ‘divine God’ than perhaps the scholar of religion, the sociologist or the anthropologist would like to think too.

I began Chapter 1 with a promise that the pages that follow would inscribe ‘a political anthropology of religion’. I have attempted to articulate a perspective on Quakerism in which anthropology and political science converge upon my object of study (Aronoff and Kubic 2015). By framing the research with the ‘politics of religion’ I have also shared the core concerns of contemporary political anthropology: “central themes of institutionalised domination, political hierarchies, and distributional conflicts” that can be viewed in terms of socio-symbolic, political, and historical processes (Wydra and Thomassen 2018: 2). Thus, networks, interpretations of meaning, and forms of action have been brought within the purview of a ‘critical discursive ethnography’.

I have nevertheless employed the conceptual resources of classical political anthropology sparingly (for a review, see Lewellen 2003). In the interests of

brevity, for the most part the perspectives of political anthropology have hovered in the background. Foremost among these are the illuminating insights of Victor Turner on the politics of schism and continuity (1957); the liminal anti-structure of ritualised communitas (1968); and on social dramas, fields and metaphors in symbolic action (1974). Other relevant perspectives may be found in the Comaroff's work on everyday practices of dissent (1985) and the postcolonial struggle against hegemony (1991). I have instead brought to the foreground a band of 'postmodern' theorists and philosophers who have influenced both anthropology and the study of religion. A postmodern approach to political anthropology has coalesced around interpretive (i.e., symbolic) anthropology, poststructuralism and critiques of cultural postmodernism (Lewellen 2003: 182). But since a number of these influential thinkers have, each in their own way, also embarked on a 'religious turn' (de Vries 1999) they have something to say about 'postmodern religion'. In our journey of inquiry into the shape of a religiosity native to our 'liquid' times, the ideas of Laclau, Derrida, Foucault, Nancy, together with their important interpreters, have come to our assistance at various points along the way.

By proceeding in this fashion I have tried to stage a productive dialogue between, on the one hand, the ethnographic accounts of people's lived experiences. And, on the other, a discourse theoretical critique of these self-interpretations that, when supplemented by various poststructuralist extensions, may approach an explanation. At our point of departure, this inquiry set-out from an epistemological commitment to the historically contingent structuration of reality. By our journey's end, however, we find an explanation for Quaker practices in a deep structure to experience itself. This ontological turn accounts for the innumerable socio-symbolic forms 'religion' can take. Or any other discourse structure for that matter—including those we may still prefer to call 'political' movements. In order to overcome these arbitrary conventional distinctions, a 'mystical' ontology can span the gap between radical politics and radical theology as the 'spirit of' social change.

Further, by focusing on the practices of a 'political spirituality' we have been able to discern its liquifying effects. Informed by a 'mystical' ontology, these political-ethical practices are also efficacious. They are the special 'spiritual'

means by which the goals of personal and social transformation can be accomplished (Taves 2009). The ‘promptings’ and ‘leadings’ to *do* the truth of ‘equality’ and ‘peace’ have a power to ‘convince’ through a discipline of openness in relationships. The otherness of the other discloses a mystery, a wider field of im/possibilities that are beyond ‘me’ in the here and now. Practitioners of political spirituality are therefore self-reflexively critical, practising a common discipline that insistently puts ‘who’ and ‘what’ to question in order to invite answers.

In this sense ‘critical religion’ is not an activity reserved exclusively for academics. Liquid religion is the practice of a ‘critical’ form of faith that resists the certainties of any self-assured confession. It is the faith of a fugitive on the run from the ‘religion’ of knowing, suspicious of any regime that claims to already know the Truth. *Theirs* is a deeper, more mystical sense of the ‘religious’ as the possibility of the impossible; an event that calls for signifying actions—in words and deeds equally available to all. The intensification of this ‘deep’ experience is the proving ground for a movement united by a shared sense of response-ability. This is the inessential ‘essence’ of what Friends today have inherited from their earliest forebears. As such, the common is not a safe space. Radical Quakers know this. It is why the insights that the first Quakers bequeathed to them they, in turn, are eager to offer back to liquid modernity. The ‘ready-made’ inheritance they wish to share is the ‘spiritual’ common ground for an open, inclusive and diverse society. However impossible it may seem.

5.8.5. Postscript

When is a Quaker not a Quaker? Towards the conclusion of my fieldwork with Hereford Quakers I noticed that Tony had been absent from Meeting for Worship for a few weeks. This seemed unusual so I asked Judith if he was okay. She reassured me that he was ‘just taking a break from Quakers’. Her knowing smile signalled that this may not have been the first time Tony had beat a temporary retreat. In my conversations with him, I sensed Tony’s relationship with Quakerism was a complicated one. He explained that his refusal to become a member stemmed from a certain frustration with it. Yet Tony epitomised for me in many ways a Quaker faithfully committed to its truly ‘radical’ origins. Like Judith, Tony

spoke with a closely studied authority about the early Friends and the subsequent history of the movement.

Other Friends like Richard, while less well-versed in Quakerism's canon, were nonetheless actively engaged in its common concerns. The self-confessed story-teller, Tony insisted that politics is about changing the narrative. As a learned writer and speaker on environmental issues, doubtless Richard would agree. Maggie and Wendy were equally committed to Quaker's discourse of equality and inclusion. Both have attended courses at the Woodbrooke Quaker Studies centre which they told me had a profound impact on them. But neither struck me as deeply immersed in nor conformed by its textual tradition. They did not routinely appropriate tropes and phrases from *Quaker Faith & Practice* as their own. Like Peter, David and Jane, all the Friends I interviewed at length were nevertheless deeply thoughtful and eloquent exponents of *their* Quaker faith. Charlotte signalled her passionate rededication to its everyday practice of 'honouring that of God in everyone'. She was entering a new chapter, she told me, and whatever lay ahead would likely involve her ongoing participation in a collectivity.

With hindsight, I should not have been surprised to learn a few months later that Charlotte had resigned her membership in the *Religious Society of Friends* to return to the Catholic Church of her youth. Her permanent departure, like Tony's temporary absence, was sudden and unexpected at the time. And yet perhaps it is precisely in their taking leave of Quakers that we may detect what Peter called its 'essence'. The practice of a fugitive faith cannot be contained, knows no bounds and cannot be tied to any particular form. It is after all an act of dissent in a faithful response to a call. If one can arrive already-a-Quaker, as John insists, presumably one can leave as a Quaker and remain so. It is a question I would have gladly taken up with Tony, whose reflections on the matter may have added to my account of political spirituality. Sadly, I will not have the opportunity. Tony died suddenly just before Christmas 2020. This monograph is dedicated to his memory. A Radical Quaker if ever there was.

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7. Appendices

7.1. Appendix A: Interview analysis exhibit

Alma	IV:9.08		Past: Methodist upbringing	On Religion	THEO
Alma	IV:5.04	[No Creed]: [..] then you don't have to spend a long time explaining why that means something to you and something to somebody else	Difference / uniqueness	The Individual	ETHOS
Alma	IV:5.04	[No Creed]: then you come with where you are / a help for people coming in	Difference / uniqueness	The Individual	ETHOS
Alma	IV:5.04, 8.09	[No Creed]: it allows you to change	Difference / uniqueness	The Individual	ETHOS
Alma	IV:5.04, 27.24, 45.03	Honouring God in everyone..means their life..leads to pacifism	Core principle(s)	Principle / Value	ETHOS
Alma	IV:21.03-23.19	[Become a Quaker] Why should they? They're living their ideas; [Quakers]: right ideas / smug / superior / conceited / ungenerous / not inclusive	Difference / uniqueness	The Individual	ETHOS
Alma	IV:45.03	[ToG]: The Light / human value; we're trying to be inclusive of everybody. We are all different. I don't think you need to be ashamed of the fact	Difference / uniqueness	The Individual	ETHOS
Alma	IV:24.21	[Universal]: A spiritual unknown / power or light or something in the world leading people on / drawing people to the good	Personal experience / beliefs	The Individual	ETHOS
Alma	IV:24.21	[Universal]: Power or light..leading people on: that's where your history is important.	Difference / uniqueness	The Individual	ETHOS
Alma	IV:28.57	Un-literal view..then you can..change / grow..come around and [to] thinking something different	Apophatic / Epistemology	God concept	THEO
Alma	IV:8.09	[The Creed]: They don't get disturbed [because] they're just saying it..and [don't] have to think about it very much	Religious authority	On Religion	THEO
Charlotte	IV:2.54, 7.12, 18.11, 31.45	[Practice] (May 23rd CPD): I was not relational: twenty-four seven I live my Quaker practices; practice of upholding the eternals of equality..	Everyday practices	Activism & Spirituality	ACT
Charlotte	IV:5.59	[Change] At fifty-three (realising) a depth within the testimonies	Everyday practices	Activism & Spirituality	ACT
Charlotte	IV:5.59, 20.45	[Counselling / CPD]: I'm a big picture person I'm not..(let's) microanalyse this one thing..it's not where I'm at.	Movement & Growth	The Individual	CHG
Charlotte	IV:20.45	Stepping into the unknown: what have I got / what should I do?	Movement & Growth	The Individual	CHG
Charlotte	IV:20.45, 34.33	Create a kind of collective in this world; a collective commitment / commitment to the collective	Political Community	Commonality	COMM
Charlotte	IV:20.45	A frightening horizon ahead of us	State of the World	Sense of crisis	DISLOC

Charlotte	IV:27.26, 48.30	I want to hear..let's just talk; Our mind—What's going on..you're entitled to share it; so speak and honour and trust yourself..I'm doing my end to go vulnerable..to role model	Spiritual Community	Having a voice	ETHOS
Charlotte	IV: 48.30	[Spoken ministry] Getting God in-between humans: If I'm too loud I might not hear that of God within someone else. By learning, enabling it to be told [and] shared to me, I enable God between us	Spiritual Community	Having a voice	ETHOS
Charlotte	IV:48.30	Diversity: (The raisins illustration) Honouring God in everyone isn't bringing everyone to 'spirituality', it's going where they are and it will keep me holding diversity. I can be inclusive 'cos I have no..no conditions or anything: what have you got?	Difference / uniqueness	The Individual	ETHOS
Charlotte	IV:7.59	The whole journey was full of academia..	Movement & Growth	The Individual	CHG
Charlotte	IV:7.59, 10.58, 48.30	To understand the puzzle of humanity; underneath the surface / inner self; [in MfW] I'll take that and put in my puzzle..I don't want a theory..	Movement & Growth	The Individual	CHG
Charlotte	IV:7.59, 10.58	[Practice] inclusiveness; the way I relate; honour people; herald humility & respect..honour what I hear	Openness & Inclusion	Self-Other relations	ETHOS
Charlotte	IV:34.33	[Practice] Ego: Do something you're amazing. But it blindsided me. I sat with an ego..My actual Quaker theories demand that I practice equality which doesn't involve my ego	Everyday practices	Activism & Spirituality	ACT
Charlotte	IV:7.59, 19.47, 20.45, 32.34, 54.39	[Theory] Acquiring / entering into theories..delivering them as practice; how many Quakers only hold the theories?; I stopped listening cos I listened with a theory; Quakers: put your theories into practice, if you don't mind!	Everyday practices	Activism & Spirituality	ACT
Charlotte	IV:7.59, 10.58, 20.45, 48.30	Honouring ToG in other people / their uniqueness; help people..open them up..we're establishing ToG in them; you are like some people and you are like no-one	Difference / uniqueness	The Individual	ETHOS
Charlotte	IV:28.07, 31.45	The last Russian doll is God; the last port of call (at the end of all explanations)	Apophatic / Epistemology	God concept	THEO
Charlotte	IV: 31.45, 32.34	Quakers enables me to have my view on what God is. It's MY that God within me condones me to live out my practices..those testimonies are all that, you know, walk with me as I, as I live..I only have MY God within me.	Personal experience / beliefs	The Individual	ETHOS

7.2. Appendix B: Publication analysis exhibit

HNL	01/09/2019	MfS	[MfS]: XR is a worldwide movement using nonviolent civil disobedience to achieve radical change in response to the climate emergency. It is supported, and guided, by many Friends, its ethos and way being very much in harmony with the Quaker Way.	Political Community	Activism & Spirituality
HNL	01/09/2019	Editor	AM has sent a Minute (AM 19/54) to Sufferings regarding BYM prioritising its support for action to alleviate the Climate Emergency and Environmental Breakdown.	State of the World	Sense of crisis
FRD	08/09/2018	Editor	Quakers are upholding Friends' decisions to take part in a campaign of civil disobedience as part of their witness against climate change.	Political Community	Activism & Spirituality
FRD	08/09/2018	Ian Bray	The dire situation we're in isn't being acknowledged by the government or state. It's the whole institution. The media doesn't report it, the politician's don't act. We're trying to call out all these things.	State of the World	Sense of crisis
FRD	08/09/2018	Sue Hampton	The gathering in sunshine was remarkable for its emotion (most of us cried at least once or twice), the quality of the speeches but also for the peaceful spirituality. "Love" was at the core of the message. When we moved into the road in front of the Houses of Parliament, we did so quietly, with purpose and solidarity, singing.'	Political Community	Experience of Protest
FRD	08/09/2018	BYM	Upholding all those acting under concern and standing up for the planet today', along with an Extinction Rebellion hashtag.	Political Community	Activism & Spirituality
FRD	15/11/2018	Molly Scott Cato	The public realm has grown increasingly conflicted in recent years and, without a strong grounding in personal morality or spiritual belief, it is easy to become buffeted by the winds of disinformation and attacks from opponents.	Personal experience / beliefs	Activism & Spirituality
FRD	15/11/2018	Molly Scott Cato	What Canst Thou Say?' [..] (Fox) drew a contrast with those whose actions were guided by tendentious interpretation of the written word. It can become bewildering when religious authority can be used to justify conflicting political positions	Personal experience / beliefs	Activism & Spirituality
FRD	15/11/2018	Molly Scott Cato	As a Friend, I am guided rather to seek the correct path through discernment.	Identity	Self-Other relations
FRD	15/11/2018	Molly Scott Cato	For me, this means trying to reflect on the motivations of my actions.	Personal experience / beliefs	The Individual
FRD	15/11/2018	Molly Scott Cato	I've found the inspiration of the early Friends – who were forced to operate outside the law – to be very supportive [..] George Fox made explicit our personal responsibility to study our own spiritual path and follow the guidance we receive from a power greater than ourselves, what we call the Inward Light.	Personal experience / beliefs	The Individual

FRD	15/11/2018	Molly Scott Cato	The great wisdom of the Quaker path emerged in the wake of the civil war, the last time our country was so fundamentally divided on questions of identity and values..This has left our community with some important understanding that could provide great benefit to the public realm.	Difference / uniqueness	Activism & Spirituality
FRD	15/11/2018	Molly Scott Cato	I'm astonished by how often people are deeply moved when I manage to agree with an opponent, or acknowledge a mistake. In political life, I find the advice 'think it possible that you may be mistaken' to be one of the most useful.	Political Community	Activism & Spirituality
FRD	11/04/2019	Mark Smalley	People who are attracted to the values promoted by XR	Political Community	Principle / Value
FRD	11/04/2019	Mark Smalley	The [XR] organisation has grown massively since then, and Quakers need to be part of it.	Political Community	Activism & Spirituality
FRD	11/04/2019	Mark Smalley	Quaker Meetings are offering room space to their local XR groups.. I would like to see this formalised..as an expression of Quaker faith and practice.	Political Community	Activism & Spirituality
FRD	11/04/2019	Mark Smalley	I see the links between social responsibility, social justice, faith, action, state authority and our Peace Testimony... It feels to me that there is considerable shared ground between Quaker values and those of XR	Political Community	Principle / Value
FRD	25/04/2019	Gill Sewell	[Marble Arch]: a lovely atmosphere. It was nice to see people passing by and taking an interest. I think we've just done a significant piece of outreach, too.	Political Community	Experience of Protest
FRD	25/04/2019	Clare Scott Booth	[Marble Arch]: Moving, still and gathered. The sounds drifting in added to it all..I did feel like this was a good exercise of my Quaker responsibility for the planet. It's very important for us to be here.	Political Community	Experience of Protest
FRD	25/04/2019	James Priestman	It's been a fantastic experience, and friendly: the behaviour of people at Oxford Circus is really impressive. ..there's been no opportunity for people to take photographs and insinuate that it was a riot.	Political Community	Experience of Protest
FRD	25/04/2019	Ruth Leonard-Williams	There's a really beautiful intention to be deeply peaceful and non-confrontational..were no bad feelings with the police. People are trying to retain that peaceful way of being. Some of it is quite spiritually profound. When I knew I was going to be arrested, I was trembling. I felt a great connection with whatever you want to call it: Spirit, the light, love. I felt really liberated – being able to put my body on the line for something I have put my life into.	Political Community	Experience of Protest
FRD	25/04/2019	Clerk (Marble Arch)	[Minute]: Called here in a spirit of Peace, Love and Truth to bear witness to the pain of our planet	Political Community	Activism & Spirituality
FRD	25/04/2019	Linda Murgatroyd	There was some discussion about the purpose of the minute, and some Friends were concerned that it did not explicitly state support for the three XR demands. Others thought that was implicit	Political Community	Principle / Value

FRD	03/05/2019	James Deane	I think the city is feeling us today. There are lots of bemused bystanders and people thanking us, saying it is necessary and the only way to get the corporations to listen to us / this automated system is alien to what we need in the world and we need more humanity / We're causing temporary disruption to get people's attention. The idea is that when people are disrupted they change their behaviour	Political Community	Experience of Protest
FRD	03/05/2019	Letter	It is not a peaceful protest when, by your actions, you may be depriving people of essential income, affecting their health or even inadvertently causing their death..Friends have a long and admirable history of protesting on ethical issues, often at great personal risk, but please let us do so with loving consideration for the practical effects of our actions upon others	Faith & Politics	Activism & Spirituality
FRD	03/05/2019	Sue Hampton	Once I had become part of a beautiful, loving community actually living differently, I found hope – and with it determination.	Political Community	Experience of Protest
FRD	02/05/2019	Sue Hampton	I have taken part in protests where, as a Quaker, I have been uncomfortable with some of the things being said around me...	Identity	Self-Other relations
FRD	02/05/2019	Sue Hampton	..but here at Extinction Rebellion (XR) my soul has found deep peace in the nonviolence that holds and unites, regardless of diversity. There has been nowhere I would rather be, spiritually and physically.	Political Community	Experience of Protest
FRD	02/05/2019	Sue Hampton	I felt that deep peace of knowing we were serving the truth, and all people and species. Knowing that others were grateful..	Political Community	Experience of Protest
FRD	02/05/2019	Sue Hampton	It's frightening to watch police vans arrive and officers advancing with purpose. Arrest is a profoundly serious matter and I think all of us arrested..felt the weight of that seriousness.	Political Community	Experience of Protest
FRD	02/05/2019	Sue Hampton	In spite of the heat, overcrowding and tension, the spirit was warm and strong, with songs and chants, and dancing on the pink boat..	Political Community	Experience of Protest
FRD	02/05/2019	Sue Hampton	..I returned to be arrested. I walked to the police var rather than being lifted, and as I took my seat a kind of disbelief set in. I'm well-behaved! Within minutes, a mother with a young child looked in at me, touched her heart and then held out both hands, saying: 'Thank you.' There was bonding in the van with the other three 'prisoners'; the police were friendly and courteous.	Political Community	Experience of Protest

7.3. Appendix C: Extracts from Quaker Faith & Practice

Do you respect that of God in everyone though it may be expressed in unfamiliar ways or be difficult to discern? Each of us has a particular experience of God and each must find the way to be true to it. When words are strange or disturbing to you, try to sense where they come from and what has nourished the lives of others. Listen patiently and seek the truth which other people's opinions may contain for you. Avoid hurtful criticism and provocative language. Do not allow the strength of your convictions to betray you into making statements or allegations that are unfair or untrue. Think it possible that you may be mistaken.

Source: Quaker Faith & Practice (Fifth Edition):ch. 1.02, Advices & Queries 17

*****

This statement comes in George Fox's letter to ministers, which he sent in 1656 when he was in prison in Launceston in Cornwall. It was written down for him by Ann Downer (1624–1686), who had walked from London to help him. Later she was a very influential Friend in the women's meetings in London. George Fox wrote:

Friends,

In the power of life and wisdom, and dread of the Lord God of life, and heaven, and earth, dwell; that in the wisdom of God over all ye may be preserved, and be a terror to all the adversaries of God, and a dread, answering that of God in them all, spreading the Truth abroad, awakening the witness, confounding deceit, gathering up out of transgression into the life, the covenant of light and peace with God.

Let all nations hear the word by sound or writing. Spare no place, spare not tongue nor pen, but be obedient to the Lord God and go through the world and be valiant for the Truth upon earth; tread and trample all that is contrary under.

Keep in the wisdom of God that spreads over all the earth, the wisdom of the creation, that is pure. Live in it; that is the word of the Lord God to you all, do not abuse it; and keep down and low; and take heed of false joys that will change. Bring all into the worship of God. Plough up the fallow ground… And none are ploughed up but he who comes to the principle of God in him which he hath transgressed. Then he doth service to God; then the planting and the watering and the increase from God cometh. So the ministers of the Spirit must minister to the Spirit that is transgressed and in prison, which hath been in captivity in every one; whereby with the same Spirit people must be led out of captivity up to God, the Father of spirits, and do service to him and have unity with him, with the Scriptures and with one another. 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 every one.

Source: Quaker Faith & Practice (Fifth Edition):ch.19.32

7.4. Appendix D: Extract from Quaker Faith & Practice

George Fox found the 'great people' to the north in and about Sedbergh and Preston Patrick. Journeying on from there he came to Swarthmoor Hall near Ulverston, the home of Thomas Fell (1598–1658) and his wife Margaret (1614–1702). She later described his visit:

In the year 1652 it pleased the Lord to draw him [George Fox] toward us… My then husband, Thomas Fell, was not at home at that time, but gone the Welsh circuit, being one of the Judges of Assize, and our house [Swarthmoor Hall] being a place open to entertain ministers and religious people at, one of George Fox his friends brought him hither, where he stayed all night. And the next day, being a lecture or a fast-day, he went to Ulverston steeplehouse, but came not in till people were gathered; I and my children had been a long time there before. And when they were singing before the sermon, he came in; and when they had done singing, he stood up upon his seat or form and desired that he might have liberty to speak. And he that was in the pulpit said he might. And the first words that he spoke were as followeth: 'He is not a Jew that is one outward, neither is that circumcision which is outward, but he is a Jew that is one inward, and that is circumcision which is of the heart'. And so he went on and said, How that Christ was the Light of the world and lighteth every man that cometh into the world; and that by this Light they might be gathered to God, etc. And I stood up in my pew, and I wondered at his doctrine, for I had never heard such before. And then he went on, and opened the Scriptures, and said, 'The Scriptures were the prophets' words and Christ's and the apostles' words, and what as they spoke they enjoyed and possessed and had it from the Lord'. And said, 'Then what had any to do with the Scriptures, but as they came to the Spirit that gave them forth. You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this; but what canst thou say? Art thou a child of Light and hast walked in the Light, and what thou speakest is it inwardly from God?'

This opened me so that it cut me to the heart; and then I saw clearly we were all wrong. So I sat me down in my pew again, and cried bitterly. And I cried in my spirit to the Lord, 'We are all thieves, we are all thieves, we have taken the Scriptures in words and know nothing of them in ourselves'… I saw it was the

truth, and I could not deny it; and I did as the apostle saith, I ‘received the truth in the love of it’. And it was opened to me so clear that I had never a tittle in my heart against it; but I desired the Lord that I might be kept in it, and then I desired no greater portion.
1694

Source: Quaker Faith & Practice (Fifth Edition):ch.19:07

7.5. Appendix E: Waterfall Poster

EQUALITY
SUSTAINABILITY
PEACE

STILLNESS
SIMPLICITY
TRUTH

1647 GEORGE FOX RECOGNISES THAT GOD'S LIGHT IS WITHIN EVERY PERSON **1660** AMID OPPRESSION FROM A RESTORED MONARCHY, QUAKERS DECLARE THAT THE SPIRIT "WILL NEVER MOVE US TO FIGHT" **1663** A GROUP OF CHILDREN CONTINUE TO HOLD QUAKER MEETING WHEN THE ADULTS ARE IMPRISONED FOR GATHERING ILLEGALLY **1666** MARGARET FELL, MOTHER OF QUAKERISM, PUBLISHES 'WOMEN'S SPEAKING JUSTIFIED' **1670** A COURT REFUSES TO FIND WILLIAM PENN AND WILLIAM MEAD GUILTY OF PREACHING TO "AN UNLAWFUL ASSEMBLY". IT SETS A PRECEDENT FOR THE INDEPENDENCE OF JURIES **1678** ROBERT BARCLAY'S APOLOGY ARGUES THAT DIRECT EXPERIENCE OF GOD IS MORE MEANINGFUL THAN SCRIPTURE **1698** THE FIRST QUAKER IS ELECTED TO PARLIAMENT BUT REFUSES TO SWEAR AN OATH, PREVENTING HIM FROM TAKING HIS SEAT **1758** PENNSYLVANIAN QUAKERS DECLARE SLAVE-TRADING AN ACT OF MISCONDUCT AND STEP-UP EFFORTS TO ABOLISH A TRADE THAT FRIENDS HAD BECOME ASHAMED TO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN **1763** JOHN WOOLMAN URGES QUAKERS TO "LIVE ANSWERABLE TO THE DESIGN OF OUR CREATION", CALLING THEM TO LIVE A SIMPLE LIFE WITH CAREFUL USE OF THE EARTH'S RESOURCES **1796** QUAKERS PIONEER HUMANE MENTAL CARE AT THE RETREAT IN YORK **1798** THE ADULT EDUCATION MOVEMENT BEGINS WHEN SAMUEL FOX HELPS SET UP A SCHOOL FOR YOUNG FACTORY-WORKING WOMEN **1813** ELIZABETH FRY STARTS PRISON REFORM WORK AT NEWGATE PRISON **1832** JOSEPH PEASE BECOMES THE FIRST QUAKER MP AFTER A REFORM BILL ALLOWS PEOPLE TO AFFIRM THEY ARE TELLING THE TRUTH RATHER THAN SWEARING AN OATH **1847** WILLIAM BENNETT PUBLISHES 'SIX WEEKS IN IRELAND', ENCOURAGING DONATIONS FOR FAMINE RELIEF BEING CARRIED OUT BY IRISH QUAKERS **1860s** QUAKER BUSINESS PEOPLE, PROHIBITED FROM ENTERING UNIVERSITY, PROFIT FROM THEIR INSISTENCE ON FAIR AND FIRM PRICES FOR GOODS. CHOCOLATE-MAKERS CADBURY AND ROWNTREE'S BUILD HOMES AND SCHOOLS FOR THEIR WORKERS AND ARE AMONG THE FIRST FIRMS TO OFFER PENSION PROVISIONS. BARCLAYS AND LLOYDS BENEFIT FROM THE QUAKER IMAGE OF TRUSTWORTHINESS, FRUGALITY AND PRUDENCE. TODAY WE CAMPAIGN TO HOLD ALL COMPANIES TO THE STANDARDS THESE ONCE MET **1895** THE MANCHESTER CONFERENCE DECLARES AN OPENNESS TO "NEW LIGHT" FROM OTHER FAITHS AND TRADITIONS, AND AN ENGAGEMENT WITH CONTEMPORARY SCIENCE AND SOCIETY **1914** THREE QUAKER MPs DRAFT THE PROVISION FOR CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION IN THE 1916 MILITARY SERVICE ACT (NOW PART OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS) **1939** QUAKERS HELP EVACUATE CHILDREN FROM NAZI GERMANY ON THE KINDERTRANSPORT **1942** EDITH PYE'S FAMINE RELIEF COMMITTEE NETWORK SPAWNS THE OXFORD COMMITTEE FOR FAMINE RELIEF, WHICH BECOMES OXFAM **1947** QUAKERS AWARDED THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE FOR POST-WAR RELIEF WORK **1961** QUAKERS HELP FOUND AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL TO CAMPAIGN FOR PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE **1963** 'TOWARDS A QUAKER VIEW OF SEX' IS PUBLISHED, ESPOUSING A POSITIVE UNDERSTANDING OF SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS **1963** QUAKER BAYARD RUSTIN ACTS AS LEAD ORGANISER OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR JOBS AND FREEDOM, WHERE MARTIN LUTHER KING GIVES HIS FAMOUS 'I HAVE A DREAM' SPEECH **1982** QUAKER HOUSE BELFAST IS SET UP "TO FURTHER THE WORK OF RECONCILIATION AND OF BEFRIENDING ALL PARTIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND" **1988** THE FIRST 'TURNING THE TIDE' NONVIOLENCE TRAINING WORKSHOP IS HELD. TODAY THESE RUN AROUND THE WORLD, INCLUDING IN EAST AFRICA **1997** QUAKERS WORK AT THE UN TO BRING ABOUT THE LANDMINE BAN TREATY **2013** FOLLOWING A CAMPAIGN FOR MARRIAGE EQUALITY, SAME-SEX QUAKER MARRIAGE CEREMONIES ARE LEGALLY RECOGNISED **2014** QUAKERS IN BRITAIN DIVEST FROM FOSSIL FUELS.

TODAY, INSPIRED BY FAITH, WE CONTINUE TO WORK FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE, SUSTAINABILITY, PEACE AND THE EQUALITY OF ALL PEOPLES. READ MORE AT **WWW.QUAKER.ORG.UK** AND FIND A MEETING NEAR YOU.

In turbulent times...
be a Quaker

QUAKERS

Source: Quakers in Britain website accessed 27th April 2021

https://www.quaker.org.uk/resources/free-resources/outreach-materials

7.6. Appendix F: Hybrid Symbols

Source: *The Friend* Publishing, website accessed 14th January 2021
https://thefriend.org/magazine