

CONVERGENT FRIENDS:
THE EMERGENCE OF POSTMODERN QUAKERISM

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ABSTRACT

Postmodernism is ushering in radical change for the Church. Some theologians argue that this change, especially given the discontinuities between modernism and postmodernism, affords new opportunities. Because of these changes there is a decline in many Christian traditions in the West, but there is also a renaissance of ‘emerging churches’. The same can be said for Quakers who are experiencing a renaissance of their own. ‘Convergent Friends’ are a decentralized, international, body of Quakers seeking to renew their tradition through a growing awareness of the need to interact with culture missionally. Their origins and interactions are unique to *Convergence Culture*, which opens up new possibilities for community among diverse people. Thus, renewal for these Friends begins with participation and production. From the writing of blog posts about Quaker faith in today’s society, to initiating gatherings, and forming friendships over a variety of mediums, the convergent community bypasses older top-down institutional boundaries and renews from the bottom up. The end result is a hybrid Quakerism that incorporates both mission and tradition in at least six ways that may help the larger Quaker body navigate cultural change.

KEYWORDS

Convergent Friends, Emerging Church, Renewal, Postmodernism, Post-secular, Mission

I. NEW CHALLENGES, NEW OPENINGS

A. INTRODUCTION

In 1989, Nancey Murphy and James Wm. McClendon wrote, ‘There is a growing awareness today that the modern era, ushered in by Descartes and the Enlightenment, is passing’ (Murphy and McClendon 1989: 191). Modernism, especially in its philosophical, theological, and scientific forms, was a failed (or at least failing) project.¹ However, the contours of postmodernism are not yet clear, largely because those representing postmodern thought vary in their degrees of departure from modernism (1989: 192). In either case, Murphy and McClendon would agree with what Barry

Taylor says, ‘A revolutionary dynamic is currently at work in the culture. Western culture is in the process of completely reevaluating and revisiting virtually every aspect of the human condition’ (Taylor 2008: 14). This is because, as Anthony Giddens claims, postmodernity, in whatever amalgamation—late-modernity, hyper-modernity, Anglo-American and Continental philosophy, etc.—clashes with the social, epistemological, and organizational life known as ‘modernity’ (Giddens 1990: 1).

James K.A. Smith has suggested that while there are some ‘deep continuities’ between postmodernism and modernism,² it is important to highlight the discontinuities and fissures between the two, to show ‘the opportunities that this rupture represent for recapturing a more robust—and less modern—Christian faith’ (Smith 2006: 26–27). Some scholars, such as Slavoj Žižek and Barry Taylor, argue that the secularization of ‘public’ space, where ‘religion is no longer fully integrated into and identified with a particular cultural life-form, but acquires autonomy [through the process of universalization]’, has given way to a post-secular spirituality (Žižek 2003: 3; cf. Taylor 2008: 33–62).³ These and other cultural shifts brought on by globalization, economic collapse, constant wars, environmental deprivation, and the rise of ‘technoculture’ demand our attention and present new challenges, as well as ‘new openings’, for at least Christian theology as Smith puts it (Smith 2006: 73).⁴

A number of scholars argue that evidence of faith traditions being in crisis is confirmed by the continued decline of major denominations in both the United States and United Kingdom (Gibbs and Bolger 2005: 19).⁵ Eddie Gibbs, after reporting on statistics compiled concerning the decline of mainline denominations in the United States, suggests that, ‘In the face of such statistics researchers are predicting that if present trends continue, sixty percent of all existing Christian congregations in America will disappear before the year 2050’ (Gibbs 2000: 16). American denominations are not the only ones predicting their endpoints: a number of denominations throughout Europe and the United Kingdom foresee their last-days as well. For example, Pink Dandelion notes that British Quakerism has a projected endpoint of somewhere between 2032 and 2037 (Dandelion 2007a: 247). Therefore, it is not surprising that, for some within the church, ‘tradition’ is unnecessary baggage and out of touch with today,

Baggage in most cases means the perception of unnecessary and definitely unwanted dogmatics—arcane and archaic views that seem inconsistent with much of the rest of life—and a feeling that the traditional religions are out of touch and incapable of responding quickly enough to the massive social and cultural upheaval that many sense themselves navigating (Taylor 2008: 13).

If in modernity all of life disintegrated into separate spheres, then in the post-secular there is for some a desire to return to a holistic life. Where once Christendom was ‘the metanarrative of an entire epoch’, that metanarrative has now been dismantled (Frost and Hirsch 2003: 8–9). In a post-Christendom world, they argue that denominational institutions, church hierarchy, buildings, and ‘attractional’ programs and worship services are no longer viable for people who are not versed in Christian language and practice. Instead, many are turned away by the seeming inability of the church to adapt to cultural change because of historical sentimentality (2003: 15).

Despite these forecasts, a number of scholars have cited an emerging renaissance taking place among the younger (postmodern) generations of faith communities in the West (Barna 2005; Gibbs and Bolger 2005; Roxburgh 2005; Sine 2008; Taylor 2008). Two specific examples of faith communities, one Christian and one non-Christian, embracing these 'new openings and opportunities', as Smith (2006: 73) puts it, are the emerging Christian Church (Gibbs and Bolger 2005) and Emergent Jewish communities (Landres and Bolger 2007).⁶ These two groups share characteristics that display a hybridity of tradition and pop culture

Based on ritual innovation (retrieving traditional liturgy combined with popular culture) and a renewed commitment to community-based social justice. The innovators leading these communities dispute the mainstream perspective that small 'tweaking', that is, minor changes to worship services, will keep people from leaving the congregation. Instead, they suggest that it is a new world, a postmodern and increasingly globalized culture, and a gospel- or Torah-like response must be made within these subcultures (Landres and Bolger 2007: 229).

This kind of practice gives way to an emergence of newly retooled faith communities, best understood as hybrids because they blur the lines between tradition and global information culture (cf. Bolger 2007a).

In this paper, I report on one group of Quakers who are enacting an 'emerging' renaissance of their own. These 'convergent Friends', as they call themselves, claim to renew Quakerism through an engagement with postsecular culture, while remaining rooted within the Quaker tradition. To show how they do this I give a brief description of emerging church practices and the role both mission and tradition play in those communities; and second, I show how convergent Friends follow this path as a emerging and decentralized Quaker community.

B. THE EMERGING CHURCH: MISSION AND TRADITION

Between 2000 and 2005 Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger conducted a sociological study interviewing one hundred people from emerging churches both in the United States and United Kingdom (Gibbs and Bolger 2005). In their interviews, they found nine practices that contrast this group with churches influenced by modernity. They characterized these postmodern churches as Christians who:

(1) identify with the life of Jesus, (2) transform the secular realm, (3) live highly communal lives. Because of these three activities, they (4) welcome the stranger, (5) serve with generosity, (6) participate as producers, (7) create as created beings, (8) lead as a body, and (9) take part in spiritual activities (Gibbs and Bolger 2005, 44-45).

These communities are best thought of as decentralized networks of people, (usually urban) house-churches, or small-groups that fulfill the needs expected of more traditional churches: 'Rather than the large church "spectator" service, these small, organic, spiritual, and often "leaderless" communities create life together as they worship over a meal in their homes and serve the poor in their neighborhoods' (Landres and Bolger 2007: 229). Instead of following a 'mission-station' approach to being church, where the converted are brought into a Christian compound, uprooted from their social location, and lose their social ties, emerging churches are indigenous

expressions of faith: 'Christians must dwell in culture *now* and point to God from *within*, not from without. Only in this way can culture be redeemed and secularization overcome' (Gibbs and Bolger 2005: 79).⁷

A majority of emerging churches, at least those involved in the initial research above, did not claim a particular Christian faith tradition: Lutheran, Methodist, Catholic, Quaker, Mennonite, Brethren, and so on. Most of these communities left their church traditions and their corresponding institutional structures out of frustration or started up as an unaffiliated group. However, more recently this trend has shifted (cf. Gibbs and Bolger 2008). One example of emerging faith communities within an already existing tradition is found within the 'Fresh Expressions' of the Anglican Church (Mobsby 2007). In contrast to the most common forms of Anglicanism, what Mobsby calls inherited models (2007: 31), these emerging Anglican communities focus on friendships and belonging (2007: 39); 'pick and mix' spirituality, often drawing on 'pre-modern forms of mysticism' (2007: 42); use technology to enhance communication and dialogue (2007: 43); seek to reframe consumptive spirituality into an active 'producer' oriented faith; experiment in worship (2007: 45); renew focus on the feminine aspects of both the church and God (2007: 46);⁸ and finally, revive the use of public space for the church to interact relationally (2007: 47).⁹ Thus, according to Mobsby these communities are holistic in their re-appropriating tradition within their cultural context creating opportunities for renewal within and outside the church.

II. THE CONVERGENT FRIENDS

A. EVERETT CATTELL'S SYMBIOSIS AND QUAKER RENEWAL

Convergent Friends are a decentralized¹⁰ community of Quaker individuals, rather than congregations or other denominational structures, who stress friendship with those from other Quaker branches and display what Brent Bill calls 'theological hospitality' (Bill 2008b). They connect through the social aspects of the internet¹¹ and share a common desire to see renewal¹² within the Quaker tradition.¹³ Historically, renewal work among Friends is not new; at least since the great separations of the Quaker tradition in the nineteenth century, Friends have been interested in finding ways to work together and think about renewal and the future of Friends.¹⁴

One of the most notable renewal gatherings took place in St Louis in 1970 where more than one hundred prominent Friends representing every Quaker denomination (referred to as 'Yearly Meetings') reflected on the 'Future of Friends' (Cooper 1970: 1). Among keynote speakers present was prominent Evangelical Friends' missionary Everett Cattell, who argued that one form of renewal might come through a more 'organic' and 'symbiotic' relationship of Friends. This is a clear forerunner to a 'convergent' vision insofar as Cattell's understanding, of what he calls 'mutual symbiosis', signifies a joining of people around particular projects and shared concerns, working together for mutual benefit (Cattell 1971: 35). This image helps to suggest the possibility of disparate groups working together while refraining from ever fully assimilating back into one homogenous group. In other words, Cattell's vision was that the future was not in structures or institutions, which can hinder God's work in the

world, rather it is in the organic unity of those brought together by fellowship (what he consistently called *koinonia*) in the Holy Spirit. He believed that through *koinonia-rooted* relationships, Quakers could work on shared common causes while leaving room for theological and practical disagreements. In the final portion of this paper I contend that convergent Friends are the twenty-first century embodiment of Cattell's vision.

B. LINGUISTIC ROOTS OF 'CONVERGENT' FRIENDS

Convergent Friends are representative of the diversity of Quakers that came together in 1970. From Quakers who identify as Christians, to those who do not, to Conservative Quakers in plain dress, to Evangelicals and liberals, these Friends question what it means to be faithful to their tradition (conservative) while re-imagining it within a new cultural context (emergent) (Daniels 2006).¹⁵ Quaker Blogger Robin Mohr first employed the term 'convergent', as Quakers are using it, in 2006. According to Mohr, 'convergent' signified a decentralized group (that is out of their own motivation and outside of Quaker institutions) of Friends who come together, 'seeking a deeper understanding of our Quaker heritage and a more authentic life in the kingdom of God on Earth, radically inclusive of all who seek to live this life. It includes, among others, Friends from the politically liberal end of the evangelical branch and from the Christian end of the unprogrammed branch' (Mohr 2006a).¹⁶ Therefore, 'convergent' stems from its affinities with both conservative friends and the emergent church (2006a; cf. Mohr and Daniels 2007) and names what many saw as a changing trend among a new generation of Friends (cf. Kelley 2005).

C. CONVERGENT FRIENDS AND CONVERGENCE CULTURE

With the advent of what Henry Jenkins calls *Convergence Culture*,¹⁷ 'a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media', people more regularly engage in high levels of participation throughout all aspects of life. This cultural shift contrasts with 'older notions of passive media spectatorship' where the flow from producer to consumer was one-way (Jenkins 2006: 3). Interactive 'communal' media such as the Internet, social networks, and blogging has opened up new possibilities for community among people. This is because 'This emerging power to participate serves as a strong corrective to those traditional sources of power...' (2006: 245). In the same way, convergent Friends utilize communal media to construct a community that bypasses traditional Quaker structures, such as Yearly Meetings and top down organizations. Max Carter alluded to this when he spoke at the convergent retreat, 'A New Kind of Quakerism? Emerging and Converging With Young Adult Friends' in November 2008:

Also not dwelt upon in this essay, but also of importance, is the role that the 'new technology' of the mid-19th century played, breaking down the isolation of Quaker communities and forcing Friends into a broader world. Much of the Convergent Friends movement plays out on the Internet, in blogs, and in other electronic communication—which has also been effective in bridging the isolating communities of FGC, FUM, EFI, Conservative, and other Quaker in-groups (Carter 2008).

Martin Kelley, creator of the online Quaker social network www.quakerquaker.org, has argued that the Web undercuts Quaker institutionalization, which often makes it difficult for young adults to get involved. In his article, 'The Witness of Our Lost Twenty-Somethings', Kelley chronicled the rising problem of young unprogrammed Friends who feel isolated, lonely, and disconnected from Meeting-life. Nevertheless, these Friends find reasons to hope in a renewed Quakerism through these new relationships and conversations being created by the Internet.¹⁸

A great people might possibly be gathered from the emergent church movement and the internet is full of amazing conversations from new Friends and seekers... Most hopefully, there's a whole new generation of twenty-something Friends on the scene with strong gifts that could be nurtured and harnessed (Kelley 2005).

This community of Quakers spans countries, Yearly Meetings, and theological backgrounds, and is brought together because of the openness of the conversation: participation is possible regardless of theological persuasion, denominational affiliation or even age. (For instance, at a recent convergent Friends retreat, 'Reclaiming Primitive Quakerism for the 21st Century', of the thirty participants only seven were under the age of forty, and a diversity of people from the liberal unprogrammed branch, as well as Evangelicals or evangelical-minded people, were there.)

D. CONVERGENT FRIENDS: PRACTICES OF MISSION AND TRADITION

In this final portion of the paper I name six ways convergent Friends exhibit their rootedness in emerging styles of mission and tradition.¹⁹ As Quakers concerned about indigenous expressions of faith within culture, convergent Friends: (1) practice holism rather than adopt a dualistic faith; (2) take seriously the need to have a public presence within society; (3) meet and worship in whatever space is available; (4) seek to incorporate fresh ideas of what it means to be the church in the twenty-first century by offering contextual examples of Quaker practices; (5) work within the structures while not being contained or determined by them; and (6) place an emphasis on friendships and hospitality.

(1) *Practice holism rather than adopt a dualistic faith.* Convergents are unhappy with the disembodied individualism present within many modernity-influenced Quaker Meetings. They look to move beyond values and retrieve the Christian roots of historic Quaker practices like living plainly, bible-reading, testimony against war, truth-telling, hospitality, radical equality, and heeding the guidance of the Holy Spirit. For convergent Friends, much of Quakerism today lives in the wake of a modernity's detraditionalization, where the radical Christian testimonies have become modern-liberal 'values', rather than a consequence of an encounter with God (Dandelion 2007b).

In contrast to this, Ryan Bolger argues that emerging churches seek to embody holistic 'kingdomlike practices', such as communal living, reconciliation, hospitality, freedom (as in patriarchal and dominance free), and spirituality (e.g. 'disciplines of confession, confrontation and confession') (Bolger 2007b: 135-38). Taking cues from this type of holistic practice, convergent Friends desire a faith that deconstructs the

binaries of modernity: bible vs. experience, contemplation vs. activism, liberal vs. evangelical, belief vs. practice, church vs. world; in other words these Friends operate out of a both/and faith (Mohr and Daniels 2007: 40).

(2) *Take seriously the need to have a public presence within society.*²⁰ As Christendom fades in the West, the church can no longer rely on an ‘assumed influence by its connection to temporal, secular power’ to engage with its surrounding culture (Frost and Hirsch 2003: 15). Since the Enlightenment, the West has slowly lost its Christian identity leading missionary Leslie Newbigin and others to claim that ‘the greatest challenge to the Gospel was no longer the unreached masses of the world, but the peoples of Europe and North America... (Roxburgh 2005: 11). Thus, within post-Christendom, the church has been challenged to see its very character as missionary (Barrett 2004). Mission is no longer something done ‘out there’; rather, ‘God’s mission is calling and sending us, the church of Jesus Christ, to be a missionary church in our own societies, in the cultures in which we find ourselves’ (Guder and Barrett 1998: 5). In this context, convergents see the necessity to take on transformative activities and make ‘mission’ a way of living. One way this is done is through what might be called a postmodern re-imagining of the ‘Publishers of Truth’.²¹ They use weblogs to write essays that cover the gamut of contemporary life: politics, theology, cultural criticism, biblical commentary, technology, economics and poverty, justice issues, cooking, parenting, environmentalism, and so on. More often than not, these essays are written in a way that ties favorite aspects of the author’s life back to the practice of Quaker faith within contemporary society.²² Using the tools available to them, they ‘publish truth’ in ways both public and open in order to connect with today’s people.

(3) *Meet and worship in whatever space is available.* The Internet and communal media are deterritorializing physical space. ‘With increasing regularity, the social space of people is connected through flows, thereby disconnecting individuals from other people and locations. With deterritorialization, people no longer enjoy a one-to-one relationship with their culture or their location’ (Bolger 2007a: 188). This shift is forcing the church to restructure and reimagine itself in a world where space and place are relativized by the virtual (cf. Reynolds 2008).²³ As both a physical and virtual community, convergent Friends pioneer how faith and practice look in this new context.

Because Quakers claim that God fills every space, and Quakers believe that the ‘church’ is a people rather than a building, worship can happen in any space or place.²⁴ On social network websites like www.quakerquaker.org, there are groups of people reading the bible together, discussing outreach and how to practice plainness (such as dress, speech, etc.) in today’s consumeristic world;²⁵ email lists have, at times, worked as kind of virtual-clearness committees, prayers have been made on behalf of Friends people have never met face-to-face, even ‘eldering’ (Quaker discipline) has taken place. However, convergent Friends claim virtual relationships are meant to flow into physical gatherings. Writing about one workshop on convergent Friends, Mohr and Daniels wrote,

We were surprised and delighted to find that some people came to our FWCC workshop already enthusiastic about the idea of convergent Friends. Many brought serious questions, and that really helped the conversation go deeper. One question was, 'Is this just an Internet thing?' It is true that the Web has acted as a meeting ground for Quakers all over the world. However, these are conversations that have been waiting to happen, and the Internet has facilitated conversations otherwise not physically possible. And now, these friendships are finding their way more and more into people's living rooms, meetinghouses, and FWCC conferences, and being expressed in phone calls, mealtime conversations, e-mails, and blogs (Mohr and Daniels 2007: 40).

While many relationships begin through the use of communal media, convergent gatherings and worship extend into physical space with a mix of casual meet-ups, workshops, and retreats (Kelley 2007; Mohr 2008).

These previous three missional practices are done within the context of the Quaker tradition. Rather than giving into the anti-tradition sentiments of the Enlightenment, convergent Friends believe that tradition is the only grounds for innovation (Daniels 2008). Rather than dividing up and creating more subgroups, or resorting to modern trends of becoming non-denominational, convergent Friends set out to renew Quakerism from within. Three ways convergent Friends work for renewal are they:

(4) *Seek to incorporate fresh ideas of what it means to be the church in the twenty-first century by offering contextual examples of Quaker practices.* In his article, 'The World is Hungry for What We've Tasted', Kelley makes the point that emerging churches share Quaker sensibilities and even see themselves as reviving that primitive Christianity not unlike early Friends (Kelley 2006). The nine emerging church practices identified above (cf. section I.B., above) can be seen as postmodern expressions of many core Quaker beliefs (Daniels 2006). Kelley's sentiment represents a standard convergent Friend's conviction that Quakers have something the world is looking for, but have failed to communicate it compellingly to the world: emerging churches adopting practices so similar to Quaker peculiarities seems to reinforce the belief that Quaker convictions resonate with (at least some in) contemporary society (Bill 2008b). Nevertheless, Friends are not without ideas. For example, Jarrod McKenna, a young Australian who considers himself a convergent Friend, lives in an urban faith community called 'The Peace Tree' located in Perth. Among other things, this community works to train youth in nonviolence education and conflict transformation.²⁶ They also participate in 'guerilla gardening', conduct prayer vigils outside prisons, and work for reconciliation among victims of gang violence in their neighborhood (Sine 2008). McKenna and the Peace Tree call themselves eco-evangelist, radical Christians who seek to transform their neighborhood and city by living out the example of Jesus. While they embody many Quaker practices, they are also on the edge of imaginative responses to dealing with the needs of those in their local community.

(5) *Work within the structures while not being contained or determined by them.* Due to their commitment to the Quaker tradition, convergent Friends have shown a great willingness to work within the structures of the church, not just outside them. There

is an increasing demand for those who consider themselves convergent to speak at Friends United Meeting, Friends General Conference, Evangelical Friends International, Conservative Yearly Meetings, and Australia Yearly Meeting on topics such as: Christianity, the Bible, postmodernism and Quaker tradition, the emerging church, and online communities. Beyond presenting at Yearly Meetings, in the last two years the ecumenical Quaker body, Friends World Committee for Consultation, has had three workshops on convergent Friends. Their 2008 keynote address was by Rachel Stacy, a recent graduate of Earlham, whose senior research project was on convergent Friends (Stacy 2008). Besides this there have been presentations at the Quaker educator's gathering, Friends Association for Higher Education, weekend retreats, multiple publications across the denominational presses, and many dinner parties in Newberg, OR; Boston, MA; San Francisco, Berkeley, Pasadena, Los Angeles and Torrance, CA; Greensboro, NC; Northfield IN; Canton, OH; and so on. Finally, The Pickett Endowment for Quaker Leadership has been awarded to four convergent Friends in projects relating to convergent practices. All of these are examples of work done not simply on the margins of Quakerism but within the heart of its organizational structures.

(6) *Place an emphasis on friendships and hospitality.* Convergent Friends practice hospitality—online and face-to-face—among friend and stranger alike, by welcoming everyone to the table regardless of age, theology, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or class. This is not simply ecumenism; its main focus is on listening to others' stories and building relationships through hospitality rather than trying to agree on every doctrinal point (Bill 2008a). Convergent Friends do not all agree on theological doctrines, but the internet has opened up a space for unprecedented interaction where Friends can hear stories and build relationships among Friends often negatively stereotyped and avoided. Convergents have found that they share many interests: historical Quaker practices, theology and history, radical Christian discipleship, outreach, friendship, and making space for everyone to have a voice. This is why convergents are not afraid to wrestle with the Christian history of Quakerism, Jesus, the Bible, and Quaker testimonies, even if not all of them claim to be Christian (Oppenheimer 2006). There is nothing safe about traversing these theological barriers, but it has brought convergents together.²⁷ The stereotypes and structures are being challenged through the subversive nature of grassroots friendships.

III. CONCLUSION

Cultural change in the West creates many uncertainties and challenges for faith traditions, but also affords new opportunities for alternative expressions of that faith. Gibbs and Bolger (2005: 29) point to the emerging church as one example of an alternative form of Christian faith in this new culture: '...emerging churches are missional communities arising from within postmodern culture and consisting of followers of Jesus who are seeking to be faithful in their place and time'. These new communities represent a shift in understanding from the mission-station approach to more an indigenous 'postmodern' faith.

Until recently, most emerging churches have been non-denominational or have remained unaffiliated with particular traditions, one exception being the ‘Fresh Expressions’ of Anglicanism noted above. However, a growing emphasis on the synthesis between both traditional and emerging (‘missional’)²⁸ expressions of faith is gaining attention (Gibbs and Bolger 2008). If Gibbs and Bolger are correct in suggesting that new forms of faith within postmodern culture rooted in particular practices that resonate with that culture (Gibbs and Bolger 2005: 44–45) and that some emerging churches are located inside ‘traditional denominations’, yet dialogue beyond those denominations (Gibbs and Bolger 2008: 3), then convergent Friends can be considered postmodern or emerging Quakers who synthesize their tradition with indigenous forms of ‘mission’. As I have shown, convergents are Quakers who embrace participatory culture and: seek a holistic faith, have a public witness, create spaces for worship, experiment with Quaker practices, seek renewal within Quaker structures, and emphasize hospitality within difference.

NOTES

1. Murphy and McClendon are indebted to the work of philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre and his seminal work on this issue in *After Virtue: A Student in Moral Theology* (1984: cf. 50–77).

2. He writes that, ‘The most significant continuity is that both deny grace; in other words, both modernity and postmodernity are characterized by an idolatrous notion of self-sufficiency and deep naturalism’ (Smith 2006: 26).

3. Barry Taylor’s recent book, *Entertainment Theology: New-Edge Spirituality in a Digital Democracy* (2008), looks at the effects of the ‘postsecular’ on faith and the influence of media on spirituality, and traces out new ways faith and belief are being practiced today. Taylor is more emphatic of this change than the other authors mentioned; he sees ‘postsecular’ as the resultant shift from modernity to postmodernity. In other words, after quoting two Bob Dylan lines, ‘The Times They Are A Changing’ (1963) and ‘Things have changed’ (2000), he remarks ‘However it is termed, this is the reality’. Of particular interest, part two of his book covers a number of postsecular movements that display a return to spirituality within a postmodern culture, yet lay outside the boundaries of the Christian church (Taylor 2008: cf. 87–155).

4. Philosopher James K.A. Smith argues that inasmuch as the postmodern critique of modernism is correct ‘the modern notions of a neutral public space and secular sphere must be abandoned. The exclusion of faith from the public square is a modern agenda; postmodernity signals new openings and opportunities for Christian witness in the broad marketplace of ideas’ (Smith 2006: 73).

5. Gibbs and Bolger note that this decline has been happening since the mid-1960s and continues today. The numbers for both countries vary, and could be inflated, but one report they offer is that in the United States church attendance is at 40% and in the United Kingdom it is approximately 8%. Further, pollster George Barna argues that ‘by 2025, the spiritual profile of the nation [United States] will be dramatically different [than it was in 2005]. Specifically, I expect that only about one-third of the population will rely upon a local congregation as the primary or exclusive means for experiencing and expressing their faith; one-third will do so through alternative forms of a faith-based community; and one-third will realize their faith through the media, the arts, and other cultural institutions (Barna 2005: 49).

6. This group was not labeled ‘emergent’ until 2006, but has been around as early as 1998. Synagogue 3000 is the name of one main website community that is engages these issues (cf. <http://www.synagogue3000.org/> [accessed 21 January 2010]).

7. The distinction in mission-theology between ‘mission stations’ and ‘mass movements’ or ‘indigenous church’ finds its origins in the work of Indian Missionary and prominent twenty-first century missiologist Donald McGavran (cf. McGavran 2005).

8. Mobsby points out that some connect cultural change to a kind of 'birthing' process. Current changes have challenged the church with 'the need to assimilate a more nurturing approach towards people and cultural values'. The four features Mobsby sees as expressing these 'nurturing values' are: '1) Focus on the journey of faith and experience of God; 2) Desire for less structure and more direct involvement by participants; 3) Sense of flexibility in order and a distinctly non-hierarchical culture; and 4) Recognition that the experience of church is about the sustaining of discipleship' (Mobsby 2007: 46).

9. Inherited models of church are based in a translation model of contextual theology, where the translation of doctrines is performed within new contexts so that the original doctrine under translation is quite different in the way it looks and sounds in the new context (Bevans 1992: 39). Yet, these inherited churches work out of a secular-sacred binary where their presentation of the Gospel is taken as something absolutely new (and a-cultural) to that culture, rather than seeing God at work within secular space (1992: 41). Cell churches, Youth services, and Church Planting models are some of the manifestations of this approach (Mobsby 2007: 31).

10. Here I am referring to convergent Friends specific use of freely available tools to communicate and disseminate information, which allows them to remain decentralized and highly participatory. Henry Jenkins quotes Marshall McLuhan saying, 'Freedom is fostered when the means of communication are dispersed, decentralized, and easily available, as are printing presses or micro-computers. Central control is more likely when the means of communication are concentrated, monopolized, and scarce, as are great networks' (Jenkins 2006: 11).

11. This 'social' aspect of the web has come to be known as 'Web 2.0'.

12. In my research I have found that renewal among convergent Friends moves along four lines: the desire to embrace the tradition of Early Quakerism, especially as it pertains to practices of nonviolence, justice, plainness, equality, Bible reading, and the use of Christian language and faith; an emphasis on 'mission' and contextualization, where outreach is stressed over sectarianism so that Quakers might speak again to the 'agonies of today's needs', as Everett Cattell once put it; ecumenicism, or as many convergent Friends call it 'friendship' or 'theological hospitality', where there is a desire to build relationships and learn from those Quakers separated by denominational differences; and finally, the use of 'new media' technologies, especially blogging and social networking, as a means to accomplish these other three forms of renewal.

13. Much of the information gathered for this article has been through my participant observation of this group over the last three years. There is no centralized voice to the group because this group is relatively new, grassroots in its formation and not a part of any particular Yearly Meeting or formal structure. Information about them is currently limited to Weblogs and denominational publications; there has been no scholarly look into this group to date.

14. Three attempts at renewal in the nineteenth century were: the Orthodox Friends (those who held 'Orthodox' Christian beliefs) who utilized revivalist methods to bring new people into the Church, the Richmond Declaration of Faith where clear doctrines and beliefs were drawn up in an authoritative text, and the Evangelical-turned-modernist movement that stemmed from a scholarly event known as the Manchester Conference (1895). In the twentieth-century Quakers saw the formation of the American Friends Service Committee, the Birth of Evangelical Friends International, the formation of Friends World Committee for Consultation, and a St Louis Conference in 1970 where many Quakers from across the various denominational splits showed up. All of these gatherings, movements, and events were attempts, in their own way, at renewing all, or some, aspects of Quakerism.

15. Quaker worship is split between those Meetings that are unprogrammed and programmed. Unprogrammed Meetings do not have pastors and worship in expectant silence, programmed Meetings have pastors, sermons, singing, etc.

16. Robin Mohr's initial blog post defining this word was posted in January of 2006 (Mohr 2006b).

17. It is important to note that 'Convergence' is being used differently from 'convergent'. Convergence is a term borrowed from media sociologist Henry Jenkins: 'By convergence, I mean

the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want. *Convergence is a word that manages to describe technological, industrial, cultural, and social changes depending on who's speaking and what they think they are talking about*' (2006: 2-3, emphasis added).

18. While much of their influence stems from constant publishing and interaction online, especially as it pertains to weblogs and social networking, these online conversations and relationships have worked their way into the more traditional and institutional aspects of Friends. While there are not official convergent Meetings (because there is no official convergent body), their ideas and discussions around the emerging church, postmodernism, Christianity, and tradition seem to have influence in many Friends branches. Face-to-face 'convergent' gatherings are happening everywhere, and a growing number of Quaker Meetings are using the 'emergent' or 'convergent' language in their community's self-descriptions. For instance, one Meeting I interviewed in Oregon says they are working on the 'first convergent faith and practice ever', while other communities, such as City View Friends, Seton Hill Friends, and Hillel Friends Meeting draw more directly on emerging church language and describe themselves as 'emergent'.

19. 'Mission' as it is being used here is rooted in understanding that the church by its very nature is to be a 'sent people' who join a 'missionary God' already at work in all culture(s) (Guder and Barrett 1998: 3-7).

20. The popular theological word that signifies this sentiment is 'missional'. 'Missional' expresses theologically what is happening among convergent Friends though the word is not widely used among them. Missional and emerging church leader Alan Roxburgh explains that, 'The word missional was coined to express the conviction that North America and Europe are now primary "mission fields" themselves. *Missional* also expresses that *God's mission* (or *missioe dei...*) is that which shapes and defines all that the church is and does, as opposed to expecting church to be the ultimate self-help group for meeting our own needs and finding fulfillment in our individual lives' (Roxburgh 2005: 12).

21. A name used for early Quakers because they wrote so many pamphlets challenging the theological and biblical interpretations of their ecclesial rivals.

22. For example, in a recent video, one convergent Friend discussed the influence of Jazz musician Winton Marsalis on reviving the fractured tradition of Jazz for a new generation. Marsalis was able to do this only because he had a mastery of the tradition and its classics. In the same way, the convergent Friend suggested that they were attempting to reinterpret their past for new generations but faced the arduous challenge of having to master hundreds of years of tradition. He suggested that their faith needed to grapple with the classics if they hope to revive Quakerism (cf. 'Convergent Friends as the New Jazz Traditionalists', <http://is.gd/lui0> [accessed 21 January 2010]).

23. In 2006, Britain Yearly Meeting invited a number of young Friends, some convergent and some not, to capture the business as well as the more casual aspects of the Yearly Meeting in short video interviews, query-readings, images, and written pieces on a weblog (Britain Yearly Meeting 2007). One surprise outcome from this was that the weblog extended the space of Yearly Meeting to many who were not able to attend but wished they could have been there, while some at the gathering also left comments about their experiences and commented on written pieces. A number of Friends, elderly and otherwise, who were unable to be physically present found the experience of the Yearly Meeting through the blog to be a worshipful space.

24. Convergents also seek to borrow resources from other traditions and cultures that help further their worship and practice. One example of this is that some of these friends use videos, music, readings (biblical and otherwise), candles, body prayers, dance, and other tools to supplement silence and add a more holistic approach to worship.

25. For instance, Martin Kelley recently posted a homemade video on <http://quakerquaker.org> (<http://is.gd/lu2t> [accessed 21 January 2010]) on plain dress titled 'DIY collarless banded shirts'.

26. Cf. <http://suwa.org.au/epyc> (accessed 21 January 2010).

27. Robin Mohr writes: 'More unprogrammed Friends are getting over their Jesus-phobia. More pastoral Friends are infuriated and saddened that the name of Jesus is being used to spread fear and hate. Many unprogrammed Friends are looking for more preparation and support for ministers and more Spirit-led vocal ministry. Many pastoral Friends are looking for ways to cultivate universal ministry and Spirit-led vocal ministry. Unprogrammed Friends are turning to Quaker history to deepen their spiritual lives, going right into our Christian roots and the concept of Gospel Order. Evangelical Friends are turning to Quaker history in search of stronger connections to the Gospel message of Jesus and the poor, outcasts, and sinners' (Mohr 2006a).

28. Cf. n. 20.

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