Ritual with a Little Interaction
and Grammar with a Small Vocabulary:
Exploring 'Afterwords' with Collins and Lindbeck

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Abstract

This article explores the results of an online survey about the British Quaker use of 'afterwords' – a period of semi-programmed sharing or discussion after unprogrammed worship. It uses interaction ritual theory as created by Randall Collins and cultural–linguistic approaches to religion as theorised by George Lindbeck to discuss the ways in which British Quakers are using and reacting to 'afterwords'. In particular, it considers the reasons why 'afterwords' are coming into use and the polarising effect this practice seems to have on the community. It concludes by offering a suggestion about what may be underlying current observations about 'afterwords'.

Keywords

afterwords, unprogrammed worship, ritual, online survey, Collins, Lindbeck.

Introduction

The development of 'afterwords', an addition to British Quaker unprogrammed worship, can be analysed in terms of interaction ritual theory and the cultural–linguistic view of religion. In this article I draw on the results of an online survey conducted in 2016 to describe and explore afterwords. I aim to address three issues: why afterwords exist at all among British Quakers; why the use of afterwords is so polarising in the British Quaker community; and what the use of afterwords says about the current needs of the community. In order to do this I use two theoretical tools: interaction ritual theory, as described by Randall Collins; and the cultural–linguistic view of religion developed by George Lindbeck from ideas

that are Wittgensteinian in origin.[1] This article begins with a brief description of the survey and a summary of the survey results, which also functions as a description of afterwords – a recently developed, malleable and rapidly changing practice that can take several distinct forms. I therefore also provide a rationale for treating these practices as a single unit for analysis.

The survey itself provides some answers to the three key issues named above. In particular, survey respondents describe directly some of their reasons for introducing afterwords in their local meetings for worship and, although they cannot explain the polarisation that takes place around afterwords, I offer some examples of very strong reactions both in favour of and against afterwords in order to show that this polarisation does take place. Further analysis is then conducted using interaction ritual theory and the cultural–linguistic approach to religion. This sheds light on the importance of the rhythm of ritual and the use of afterwords as a teaching tool for those not yet 'fluent' in Quaker ways. I conclude by offering a suggestion about what may be underlying current observations about afterwords, while acknowledging that the current research does not provide enough evidence to prove or disprove this.

Survey: Methodology and Results

The research data used in this article derive from an online survey I conducted between 5 May and 18 July 2016. The survey was in two parts: a brief first part asked participants to list Quaker meetings they had attended and those where they had experienced afterwords, and a longer second part asked participants to give details of a meeting's practice of afterwords.[2] Participants with experience of multiple meetings which use afterwords were able to complete the second part multiple times. Only the second part collected demographic data (from which duplicates were deleted before analysis).

The survey invitation was circulated widely in mainly British Quaker communities online, using central mailing lists and Facebook. A few respondents also agreed to circulate the invitation to their meetings using local email lists or newsletters, which accounted for some clusters of responses from a single meeting (in one case ten answers from the same meeting). The response was extensive. The first part of the survey received 95 responses covering 19 Yearly Meetings. The second part of the survey received 182 responses from 171 individuals. The responses to question 3 in survey 1 ('Is there anything else … ?') and questions 2 to 9 in survey 2 were treated as the core data and coded thematically for emerging issues. Responses from different Yearly Meetings had much in common, so

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1   Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton, NJ: Princton University Press, 2004); George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: religion and theology in a postliberal age* (London: SPCK, 1984).

2   Full copies of the survey questions can be found in the appendix.

they were used together in this analysis. With the exception of one or two semi-programmed meetings in the USA, all responses were from unprogrammed meetings.

I received at least some basic information on 333 local meetings, of which 37 were outside Britain Yearly Meeting. A few other Yearly Meetings gave enough reports to make generalisations: afterwords is widespread in Canada and Philadelphia and used in about half of German meetings. Within Britain Yearly Meeting, 126 local meetings were reported to have afterwords at least sometimes, while 151 are not reported as using any form of afterwords. Although practices of afterwords are not consistent, it seems likely that around half the meetings in Britain Yearly Meeting have experimented with afterwords in some form. Unfortunately, there were not enough responses from programmed traditions to allow a meaningful comparison to be made, and what follows attends only to unprogrammed Meeting for Worship.

In the survey responses, five fairly distinct varieties of afterwords are detectable. Sometimes 'afterwords' are held before the end of the actual worship. In this format, someone such as an elder or clerk speaks perhaps five minutes before the end of Meeting for Worship to ask if anyone has something to say which may not be quite ministry but which they wish to share. Much more commonly, there is a time after the handshake and before notices in which Friends are invited to share 'nearly ministry'. The characteristics of this variety are that it is after the handshake and before notices, and for the whole meeting – there is no specific invitation to leave the room. A slight alternative is for there to be a time after the handshake and before notices in which Friends are invited to either share 'nearly ministry' or leave the room to get their tea and biscuits. The latter is important because it transforms afterwords from a part of the whole group's process to an extra from which one can opt out.

A significant variation, often called 'joys and sorrows', takes place between the handshake and notices, but instead of sharing 'nearly ministry' Friends are asked to share news of themselves, their families and absent Friends. No 'opt out' version of this has been reported, but it can have a different emphasis – in 'joys, sorrows and reflections' some nearly ministry may be admitted, while in 'news of friends' the focus is much more clearly on individuals. Finally, afterwords can be moved a little later, after notices and even the serving of refreshments have taken place, and often into another room. Friends are then able to opt in to a time in which 'nearly ministry', reflections and questions about what has happened during worship can be heard – and, in some versions, discussed. This is perhaps the format most different from the others, because it has moved further from the worship in time (to after the notices) and perhaps in space (to another room).

Each of these five types of afterwords stands in a slightly different relationship to the Meeting for Worship, yet they have important points in common: they are after meeting, they involve speaking to a relatively large group rather than

remaining in silence or splitting up for conversations in pairs or small groups, and they enable the sharing of things that are neither ministry nor straightforward factual information (notices). That being so, I treat them together for the purposes of the analysis in this article.

The idea that meetings have 'afterwords at least sometimes' also deserves expansion, because this was a location of confusion in the data. Where respondents had visited a meeting at some point in the past, a change in practice was likely to produce conflicting reports. Fifty meetings had conflicting reports, in which two or more respondents did not agree on whether they used afterwords or not. Fortunately, many of these meetings also received fuller reports in the second part of the survey, enabling me to understand that respondents had known the meetings involved at different times in the development of afterwords. Furthermore, many meetings that do use afterwords do so only on some weeks – once a month or on fifth Sundays, for example – and so respondents who had only visited a meeting once might miss afterwords where it does exist.

Many meetings have introduced afterwords in the past 20 years. Although the survey asked a specific question about when the meeting began using afterwords, many respondents said they did not know and even more seem to have given unreliable responses. Where multiple responses are available for a single meeting, the answers to this question are often dramatically different, from which I conclude that Friends do not usually recall this clearly. This is especially the case in meetings where afterwords has been in use for some time (for example, two reports from a single meeting say 'about twelve years ago' and 'at least three years ago' – this does not give an impression of accuracy). A few reports claim that afterwords was in use in the 1980s, and one that it has been in use since the 1960s (although this is a supposition about continuity of practice and not a first-hand report). However, the vast majority of respondents give dates after 2000, suggesting that the current position has developed quickly over the past 16 years or so.

Motivations for Introducing Afterwords

All of the five formats of afterwords tend to be introduced by meetings for one or more of the following reasons: to get to know people better within the meeting and hence strengthen the community; to improve the quality of the spoken ministry given within the Meeting for Worship itself; or to help with the transition from Meeting for Worship into the world. Some formats relate more strongly to one or other of these purposes – sharing space is less likely to relate to the transition, usually framed as between worship and notices, while the joys and sorrows format is less likely to be used to reduce inappropriate ministry than one which focusses on 'nearly ministry'.

Three main reasons are given in the survey responses for meetings' decision to introduce afterwords: improving spoken ministry, community and smoothness

of transition. Issues about improving the quality of spoken ministry stand out as the key reasons for the introduction of afterwords, while improvements to the community more generally or the time of transition are reported less often. The latter two seem as likely to be findings, accidental but positive effects, as to be the specific purpose of the practice. There is also considerable variation in the form of improvement of spoken ministry that is desired, and unwanted side-effects are often mentioned.

Some meetings introduce afterwords hoping that inappropriate spoken contributions, things that have been deemed to be 'not true ministry', will move out of the Meeting for Worship itself and into afterwords. However, some find or suspect that this outward movement from worship to afterwords also affects appropriate or wanted contributions, with people giving 'real ministry' in afterwords and perhaps even, through uncertainty in their leadings or false modesty, saving contributions for afterwords that would have been better given in worship. On the other hand, some meetings introduce afterwords hoping that by speaking to the group when there is a lower bar on acceptable contributions people who have not previously spoken will be given the confidence to give spoken ministry in the future. Indeed, this does seem to happen and some survey respondents give first-person reports of speaking in the less daunting afterwords space before speaking during worship for the first time. This is not straightforward, though, as others report that those who are already confident or speak too quickly can easily dominate the time of afterwords as they do other situations. 'Improving ministry' is a central purpose of afterwords, and it sometimes works for some people in some meetings – but, based on this survey data, it would be impossible to say in general that afterwords does improve ministry. It is just as likely to diminish or detract from it.

Similarly, strengthening community may happen, but simply introducing afterwords did not appear to be sufficient based upon respondents' experiences. Although survey respondents feel that afterwords has enabled them to get to know one another better within the meeting, this seems to be a side-effect of their spending more time with one another and speaking more often. There is nothing in the data to suggest that afterwords is better or worse than other methods, such as holding a social evening or running a study group. The only advantage appears to be if the afterwords slot is one that suits members of the meeting for practical reasons; people are already in the room where Meeting for Worship is held and are likely to stay for a short period of afterwords. Obviously, some formats are less likely to have this effect, especially sharing space and afterthoughts alongside refreshments. It is also the case that many survey respondents mentioned the extra time taken by afterwords as a problem, either for themselves or on behalf of groups within the meeting, such as parents of small children, people with non-Quaker partners waiting at home and those who needed to return home by a specific time in order to eat a pre-prepared meal. Some responses also named or hinted at ways in which afterwords could polarise and divide the community

rather than bringing it closer: either practically, where a form of afterwords is used that divides the group between two physical spaces, or emotionally, where some in the meeting enjoy and appreciate afterwords and others strongly dislike it. That being so, it cannot be said that afterwords does strengthen communities in any straightforward way; it can, but this is neither an automatic nor a unique result of the practice.

Finally, afterwords may serve the purpose of easing the transition from Meeting for Worship to the next step. This is a minor theme in the responses, with only a relatively few individuals mentioning it, although some meetings have named the afterwords space 'The Bridge' or 'Bridging Time', which suggests a more general awareness of this as a possible use for the practice. Besides those who feel that afterwords does help 'to bridge the experience between meeting and tea', there are also one or two who find it jarring or a barrier and would prefer to go straight from the handshake into a welcome from the clerk and notices. This idea of needing a transitional space is a complex one that I address later in terms of the rhythms of interaction rituals; here, it is enough to note that some people do find the space helpful for this transition while others do not need it or do not find practices of afterwords helpful in this way.

Polarisation: A Characteristic of Responses to Afterwords

In coding the survey responses I found a large number of cases where the answers were clearly positive or negative about afterwords. There were also respondents who, whether or not they held a strong position of their own, noted that others in their meeting had a strong reaction to afterwords. Some noted that the introduction of afterwords, changes to afterwords or even raising the possibility of change could result in strong opposition. This was not always explicit, but someone who says they are 'an advocate' of a practice seems at least ready to meet opposition.

However, there is no clear overall pattern to this except that of polarisation: positively and negatively toned responses were roughly equal in number, with ambivalent responses rather less common (and often of the form 'people in my meeting take opposite sides although I can see merits in both cases', suggesting that polarisation is still happening even if the respondent is not participating). No meeting can please all of the people all of the time, and where there are multiple survey responses from the same meeting they often show very different perspectives on afterwords. Respondents who had experienced a change in the format of afterwords often had different opinions of the different formats, but no pattern emerged in this. Although it was often suggested that the size of the meeting affected the way in which afterwords worked or did not work, the survey results do not support this: positive and negative reports seem to come from meetings of all sizes. When asked whether they would recommend afterwords to others, people in small meetings predicted that it would not work in large

meetings, while people in large meetings predicted that it would be unnecessary in small meetings. Perhaps this arises from respondents' lack of experience of the use of afterwords in meetings of different sizes.

Whether the respondent's views are positive or negative, the language is passionate. For example, afterwords is described as 'dull, disruptive … and impossible to predict when you can leave to get on with the rest of the day', as well as 'moving', 'valuable' and 'very helpful'. Reasons for holding these views are not always given, but, when they are, positive comments mostly cluster around the community and confidence-building aspects or talk about afterwords as providing a transitional space from Meeting for Worship into the next step. Negative comments frequently focus on what might be understood as misuses of afterwords: 'a space for people to rant about their hobby horses; or alternatively for a general discussion'. Besides cases where it is dominated by one or two talkative Friends, or where it becomes a debate, there are other practical reasons for objections, usually that it takes up too much time and that it is hard to hear people.[3] The issue about time can also be linked to a more principled objection: either that afterwords is too vague – 'a drag of undefined time' – or that it is too formalised or programmed. The transitional space, felt to be useful by many, can be difficult for others: 'I have found it uncomfortable, neither one thing nor another, and nothing of any moment coming from it.' Here the intermediate status of afterwords is clearly identified and rejected as such – and is ripe for analysis in the following section.

Interaction Ritual Theory

Before applying interaction ritual theory to afterwords, I would like to offer a summary of what I take to be the relevant points about it. This is not a summary of Collins's work on the theory as a whole but a selection of those aspects which are useful to my analysis, set in the context of the structure of the 'interaction ritual'. Interaction ritual theory begins from observations of ordinary interactions – not necessarily practices that would be recognised as 'rituals', but elements of life such as going to work or a party. This makes it especially applicable to an analysis of Quaker rituals, which are much less prescribed than the liturgies of many other religions. In essence, Collins identifies four key ingredients and four key outcomes. Before a ritual can take place there need to be the ingredients:

1. group assembly, which Collins glosses as 'bodily co-presence'

2. a barrier to outsiders

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3   For some Friends, afterwords seems to upset a delicate temporal collage by adding slightly too much to their 'Quaker time'. For more on time-management among Quakers, see Judy Frith, 'The Temporal Collage: how British Quakers make choices about time at the beginning of the twenty-first century' (PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2008).

3. a mutual focus of attention

4. a shared mood[4]

When an interaction ritual takes places successfully, it has the following four outcomes:

1. solidarity created in the group

2. emotional energy (positive feelings) created in the individual

3. symbols of social relationships created in the group

4. standards of morality created in the group[5]

The movement from the ingredients to the outcomes requires a process of rhythmic entrainment, in which the mutual focus of attention and the shared mood form a feedback loop which reinforces gradually building feelings of attunement to others present and the group as a whole – Collins refers to this as the creation of 'collective effervescence'. Before going further, it is worth saying that Meeting for Worship and afterwords are more formal than most of the examples Collins explores – although he seems clear that his theory should apply to formal situations, that has been the focus of much previous sociological work on ritual and he wants to push the boundaries by expanding into areas such as sex and smoking, which are much less formal kinds of ritual.[6]

However, two elements of Collins's description of rituals are clearly applicable to Quaker worship: the creation of solidarity through the sharing of emotional energy in ritual, and the need for participants in ritual to be mutually entrained, working in the same rhythm. Another aspect of Collins's interaction ritual theory, which states that rituals require a shared focus of attention, is probably also applicable to Meeting for Worship, but risks raising complex theological questions that fall outside the scope of this paper. In the context of afterwords, where the focus of mutual attention can be assumed to be whoever chooses to speak in that moment, Collins's theory about this seems true but not very interesting. That being so, I choose to focus here on rhythm as the element in the success of interaction rituals which is most likely to vary and hence fail, and on emotional energy and solidarity as the concepts most closely linked to the ways in which survey respondents described the success or failure of afterwords.

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4 Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, p. 48.
5 Ibid.
6 This should reassure any readers who suspect that Quakers object to their practices being described as rituals. Although it is true that many Quakers today continue to reject what they call 'ritual', this use of the word is in 'a pejorative sense as an unthinking going through the motions', which Collins specifically describes as 'even more misleading' than some other casual uses of the term. In the terms Collins uses, Quakers object to *failed* rituals, which he says can be 'an empty going through of the forms, even a dead ceremonialism' (*Interaction Ritual Chains*, endnote 1, 375; 49).

Collins describes the ways in which successful interaction rituals – good conversations and enjoyable parties, for example – depend on mutual entrainment. This is made up of the many small-scale ways, visible in studies of body language and linguistics, in which people who are cooperating in an interaction mirror one another and use the same rhythms, so that they are able to anticipate the 'beat', the timing of someone else's speech. '[T]he rhythmic coordination that intensifies emotions' is both very important to a successful interaction ritual and can easily be broken, either by accident or by someone who takes control of a situation by changing the rhythm.[7] For some survey respondents, afterwords is a welcome change in the rhythm of the interaction, while for others it breaks the rhythm. In order to explain this more fully I need to contrast afterwords with what comes before – Meeting for Worship – and what most commonly comes after or alongside, namely refreshments and social time.

Considered as an interaction ritual, Meeting for Worship seems strange in some ways. For one thing, it is typically very low on visible interaction between people. There are greetings on the way in, and handshakes at the end. There may be some brief moments of eye contact during the worship – usually not sustained or encouraged – but even spoken ministry is only barely an interaction, especially as it is not usual to respond directly to it. It is also not clear that it has a 'mutual focus of attention': perhaps this can be identified with a listening silence, steering clear of theological questions about whether those gathered are all seeking to listen to the same source. However, it has most of the other ingredients of an interaction ritual. People come into the same space in order to participate in it – and 'bodily co-presence' is central to the way Collins explains interaction rituals.[8] Although public in a sense, it also has barriers to outsiders: those who arrive intending to worship act in ways such that they are identifiable as members of the group. Furthermore, it can create what Collins terms a 'shared mood' – which, he proposes, arises from the mutual rhythmic entrainment of those present. This is, I suggest, a slow rhythm, with the beats set by actions such as latecomers arriving, children leaving or arriving near the beginning or end, and spoken ministry. It is a rhythm often able to incorporate unexpected sounds, such as a cough, traffic noise or bird song, so that these do not give the impression of interrupting the silence. I am doubtful about whether a musician would regard it as a rhythm at all, but in a particular meeting where roughly the same group of people gather regularly it has a sufficiently discernible pattern to enable them to fall into it naturally.

7   Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, p. 121.
8   Collins, writing in 2004, seems deeply sceptical about the possibility that remote – e.g. online – interaction rituals can work in the ways which in-person ones operate. Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, pp. 62–63. Technology has changed considerably since then, but many Quakers still consider physical gathering to be required, or at least far superior, for worship. This would be a rich area for future research, especially as familiarity with online Meeting for Worship grows.

Afterwords – especially if placed at the end of Meeting for Worship, either just before or after the handshake – noticeably changes this rhythm, and perhaps the focus of attention. It does not usually change the group who are present significantly (although some might slip away), nor does it actually change the barrier to outsiders participating (although, as previously noted, it might change the barrier to newcomers' vocal participation). It might change the focus of attention, although those survey respondents who report that it maintains a worshipful atmosphere could be taken to be saying that they understand the focus of attention in afterwords to be consistent with the focus of worship. Some survey respondents clearly feel that it breaks a shared mood, however, and this is best explained by a change in the rhythm of the interaction. Afterwords is likely to feel faster – with more people speaking and with shorter gaps between them – and can be 'off-beat', especially if it is dominated by one or two individuals. Contributions that are too long or in some way erratic (including content that is felt to be inappropriate) could create this effect, and references to controlling afterwords, such as the idea of 'maintaining the discipline', could be interpreted as a desire to maintain the rhythm of Meeting for Worship.

Other people are clearly comparing afterwords with something else that they expect to follow Meeting for Worship: social time. After the very slow rhythm of worship, but one in which – when it works well – everyone is entrained, and the notices, in which little interaction takes place, the refreshments and social time are a welcome break from formal, structured ritual. These are the rhythms of casual conversation, much closer to most of the situations Collins considers, and usually made up of a series of short encounters in which mutual focus and shared mood work together to build up emotional energy and a feeling of solidarity exactly as per his description.

Afterwords occupies a middle ground between these two other forms of interaction ritual. This can work well for those who experience it as an opportunity to gradually increase the speed (and perhaps lessen the depth) of their interactions, but others who responded to the survey clearly feel that the change of rhythm is uncomfortable. The research for this paper did not include the kind of detailed recording that would be necessary in order to explore the issue of rhythm further, but the hypothesis that a change in rhythm underlies some of the strong responses to afterwords is plausible in light of the survey responses discussed earlier.

Grammar with Little Content: The Rules of Afterwords

The rules of afterwords, although they vary in format, are typically held at a half-way point between the rules of worship and the rules of casual conversation. Collins does not spend much time on how people know the rules of different interaction rituals – indeed, he seems to assume that most people pick them up by observation or are copying others in the situation – but where a deliberate change is made one way of achieving this is to make the rules, and hence the change

to the rules, explicit. This would help to explain the emphasis on introductions present in the survey results: an introduction needs to clarify what is acceptable in this ritual and, when it is new, complex or easy to misunderstand or forget, this needs to be done explicitly. This, though, leaves another question open: how does the emphasis on the structure and rules of afterwords relate to the content of afterwords? I am going to argue, using analytic tools drawn from Lindbeck, that understanding this relationship will reveal an ongoing pattern in British Quaker approaches to theology.

A few of the rules that survey respondents describe for afterwords do relate directly to content. For example, a small number of respondents mentioned cases where afterwords were used for material that was too explicitly political to be given as spoken ministry during Meeting for Worship. There was also a more widespread sense that afterwords could be used for content that was more personal – not having the general applicability required by ministry, but things the individual needed to say rather than that the meeting needed to hear. Despite this, however, the majority of survey respondents did not address the issue of the content of afterwords. The rules cited mostly focus on the structure of interaction ritual.

A key rule of afterwords in this context is that which requires people to leave a short period of silence between contributions. This – which could be read in the terms Collins uses as setting a particular rhythm – is an important way of signalling that afterwords is part-way between worship and conversation. A few forms of afterwords are considered to be a discussion space (usually those further removed from worship – after refreshments are served, or in a different room), but usually afterwords is thought to have failed, or the rules of afterwords to have been broken, if the rhythm speeds up to that of ordinary conversation. Instead, people with leadership roles in the community (typically Elders) are expected to maintain a 'feeling of worship' by restraining people from replying too directly or too quickly, but holding a period of silence between contributions. The silence can be shorter than that which would be required by the rules of Meeting for Worship, but that there is a silence is significant in maintaining an atmosphere of worship–like sharing even after the formal period of worship has finished.

This can usefully be understood in terms of George Lindbeck's work on the nature of church communities. His central work focusses on doctrine, but taking into account arguments I have made before that allow his cultural–linguistic approach to be applied to Quaker uses of religious language, some elements of the theory can also be extended to include an approach to practice.[9] In the case of afterwords, the use of a particular structure or set of rules to order and maintain a pattern of speech – rules that are largely independent of the content of the speech but pay close attention to the timing of and spaces between speech – can be regarded

9   Rhiannon Grant, 'Wittgensteinian Investigations of Contemporary Quaker Religious Language' (PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2014); 'Understanding Quaker Religious Language in its Community Context', *Quaker Studies* 19.2 (2015), pp. 260–76.

as analogous to the grammar of a sentence. Grammatical structures remain the same even when the content changes, in the same way that the rules of afterwords are expected to remain the same whatever the content of the spoken contributions.

This idea that the rules of afterwords are what matters is also a good fit for the survey responses that discuss afterwords as a training ground for improving ministry. In Lindbeck's terms, there is a need to create within the community a 'fluent elite'.[10] Lindbeck often envisages these as people who have grown up within a tradition and speak their religion as a native language, so that even without being aware of the grammatical rules as such they can feel when a new statement is or is not in line with standard grammar. In the British Quaker community, where a large number of those present enter as adults, there is a clear need to train people to participate correctly in Quaker practices. Some people manage to learn this successfully through observation over a period of time. Others struggle with this or find it helpful to have the rules articulated explicitly – like looking up the grammar of a new language as you learn it rather than simply picking it up through a series of examples. In this perspective, afterwords – which, unlike Meeting for Worship, routinely has a spoken introduction in which the 'grammar' of the practice is explained – has the structure of a training ground. It is also another way in which it sits partway between Meeting for Worship and ordinary conversation: it has some of the rules of worship, but others, especially those about content, have been relaxed in the direction of allowing more ordinary and everyday comments.

This perspective also helps to explain some of the acute discomfort other survey respondents feel about afterwords. The very introduction of it is a change in the rules of the 'attending worship' game – or, to use Collins's terms, a change in the rhythm of the whole ritual of attending worship. In this broader view, the rules of the ritual cover not just worship itself but the arrival (shaking hands at the door, entering the room, taking a seat), the worship (silence, shared attention, spoken contributions), afterwords if it occurs, notices (information and news), social time (refreshments and conversations) and leaving. For some the addition of afterwords to this ritual is helpful, either for the gradual transition it provides between different rhythms or for the way in which it calls attention to the rules of worship in particular and the ritual in general; for others, that transition is too slow or the attention to the rules is uncomfortable.[11] This can then become a focus for polarisation, as discussed earlier.

10   Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 100.
11   I sometimes suspected, although this cannot be shown from the data I have, that being asked to reflect on afterwords in the process of answering survey questions brought some people's anxieties to the fore. The theoretical question about the relationship between the content of spoken ministry, 'true ministry' as some survey respondents put it, and the content that is acceptable in afterwords, 'not quite ministry', whatever that is, raised anxieties for some respondents that they might not dwell on in ordinary circumstances but which could be heightened by the act of reflecting on afterwords.

Conclusion

The inclusion of afterwords as part of the overall ritual of attending Meeting for Worship is a recent development in British Quaker practice and by no means a universal one. It has rarely been written about, partly because of its recent and changeable nature, and the few previous published descriptions were casual or took the form of advice-giving. Where it has been introduced, it raises significant questions; although it does serve some of the purposes that survey respondents hope it will, especially as a teaching tool, it is also polarising of the community in general and does not make a straightforward positive or negative difference. Instead, individuals have widely varying reactions to it.

The use of interaction ritual theory to consider afterwords highlights the importance of rhythm in the construction of rituals. Afterwords is a ritual in which there is some, but relatively little, actual interaction. This means that once the basics of an interaction ritual have been established – being present, paying attention – the maintenance of a clearly defined pattern of contributions is central to the construction of afterwords as a transitional space between worship and ordinary social time.

In order to structure this pattern of contributions, many meetings use an introduction to afterwords which makes explicit the rules of the situation. Among these rules I have identified guidance about the rhythm of contributions and the silences between them as most important. Maintaining a pattern of contributions that is partway between the very long gaps required between items of spoken ministry during worship and the very short or non-existent gaps used in conversation may be as significant as any other feature of afterwords in creating the sensation of 'not quite ministry' that so many survey respondents mentioned. Further research would require a broader scope in order to demonstrate this: detailed work on actual examples of spoken ministry has not been undertaken since Davis in 1988,[12] and this would be required along with a recording-based approach to afterwords, and perhaps also conversations before and after meeting, to provide the material that would test this theory further.

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12   Alan Davis, 'Talking in Silence', in Coupland, Nikolas (ed.), *Styles of Discourse* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), pp. 105–37.

Appendix

Survey 1 – all answers were given in free text boxes.

1. Please list all the local Quaker meetings for worship you have attended.

2. Please list any local Quaker meetings you have attended where there was also an 'afterword' or 'bridging time'. This can include any space between the end of worship and the notices in which Friends can share items with the meeting.

3. Is there anything else you would like me to know about the meetings you have listed or your perspectives on 'afterwords'?

4. If you have listed any Quaker meetings which have an 'afterword', please open this link to the second survey which asks for more details. Otherwise, thank you very much for your help. If you would like to hear about the results of this survey, please enter your email address below, and remember to click 'done' below when you are finished.

Survey 2 – all answers were given in free text boxes.

1. Please give the name of the Quaker meeting for worship you wish to describe in this survey.

2. What name is used at this meeting for the space between the end of worship and notices? For example, I usually call it 'afterword', but it can also be 'bridging time', 'not ministry', 'afterthoughts', or known by another term.

3. What usually happens in 'afterwords'? For example, how long does it typically last and what kinds of things are said?

4. When did the meeting begin holding 'afterwords'? Answers such as 'before I began attending in 2014' are fine if you don't know for sure.

5. If you know, please describe why the meeting began holding 'afterwords'.

6. Is the meeting still using 'afterwords', or did they stop? If the meeting has stopped holding 'afterwords', please say when and why they stopped, if you know this.

7. In your experience, does holding 'afterwords' affect the quality or depth of worship at this meeting? If it does have any effect, please try to describe what effects it has.

8. Based on your experience, would you recommend 'afterwords' to meetings which do not currently use it? Why or why not?

9. Is there anything else you would like to say about this meeting's experience of holding 'afterwords'?

10. How old are you (in years)?

11. What is your gender?

12. What's the highest educational qualification you hold?

13. Are you in membership (of an Area Meeting within Britain Yearly Meeting) or an attender?

14. If you would be willing to discuss your experiences of 'afterword' in more detail, please enter your name and telephone number here.

15. If you would like to hear about the results of this survey, please enter your email address.

Author Details

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