

## SCHISM AS COLLECTIVE DISAFFILIATION: A QUAKER TYPOLOGY

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### ABSTRACT

This research note builds on a study of British Quakers who have resigned their Membership in the last five years (Dandelion 2002). Quakers leave either because they are 'de-convinced' or because, in a group which places emphasis on continuing revelation, they are grieving the loss of what has passed before. A third type resigns because they feel the group is too slow to support new revelation. In these latter two cases, the disaffiliated feel left by the group. This typology is placed across the concept of the 'double-culture' to give six types of ex-Quaker. It is suggested that this extended typology of the disaffiliated, while originating in a study of individual leavers, could be usefully employed in studies of collective schism. Examples of types of schism are given.

### KEYWORDS

Schism, Conservative Quakerism, Beaconites, Duncanites, David Updegraaf, Children of Peace

### INTRODUCTION

This paper builds on a study of ex-Quakers who have resigned their Membership within the last five years. Drawing on this data, I suggested that Quakers leave because they are 'de-convinced' or because, in a group which places emphasis on continuing revelation, they are grieving the loss of what has passed before. A third, smaller, group resigns because they feel the group is too slow to support new revelation. In other words, there are those who leave and those who feel left (behind or ahead of the group). This typology was placed across the concept of the Quaker 'double-culture' to give six ex-Quaker types (Dandelion 2002). This research note extends that typology to collective disaffiliation or schism.

### PREVIOUS WORK ON QUAKER DISAFFILIATION

Some work has been done on those who convert into Quakerism. Alastair Heron's two studies, one of why Attenders (those who attend regularly but who are not formally Members) may not be seeking Membership (1992), and the other of those who had recently become Members (1994), have focussed on the increase in the numbers of Attenders who do not join. Kenneth Ives in America has looked at the growth in Membership in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in the mid-seventies and mid-eighties and has developed a typology of Member-types (1980). Hamm (1988), Holden (1988), Isichei (1970), Kashatus (1990), and Schrauwers (1993) have all written on schismatic groups. However, no work, prior to Dandelion (2002), looked at individual Quaker disaffiliation, and no work that I am aware of has tried to develop a typology of Quaker schism.

### THE DECONVINCED AND THE GRIEVING: THOSE WHO LEAVE AND THOSE WHO GET LEFT

In any religious group which places emphasis on continuing revelation, or which has undergone significant change, there will always be a portion of that group grieving the loss of what has gone before. I divide ex-Quakers into three: those who leave because they have become de-convicted of their Quakerism; those who leave because the group, not they, has lost its Quaker way, either in its over-eagerness to adopt new and inappropriate revelation, or because it is tardy in keeping up with God. These latter two groups are 'grieving Quakers', ex-Members and thus formally ex-Quakers, but not ex-Quakers in a personal sense, grieving the loss of what has gone before or what has not yet been fully realised.

The first category of grieving Quakers consists of those for whom new decisions bring into question the 'fit' between their own Quakerism and that of the new dominant corporate narrative. Quaker business method is innately conservative, depending on unity for action, but it is not democratic and participants can feel marginalized or silenced by a decision taken without them or by a clear majority. 'New Light', as perceived by some of the membership, can take local or Yearly Meeting in new directions, while new truth may not be shared by all of those who shared the old vision. There is a tension between change and continuity in the continual creation of new corporate discipline (Dandelion, 1996: 25). Those hankering after what has gone before need continually to make judgments about how appropriate their version of Quakerism still is to the new context being marked out by fresh statements of position and belief. The content of the contract between Member and organisation, connected with what 'real Quakerism' may consist of, is notoriously elusive within Quakerism, but carries with it high stakes for the continued commitment of the Member. This necessity to choose is made more complex by the fact that an individual's

formal membership is held locally, where they may feel accepted and understood, and may hold a majority view, whereas the cause of distress for grieving Friends is typically a Yearly Meeting decision or trend. The case of John Wilbur offers an example where the Yearly Meeting dissolved his Monthly Meeting in order to use a more sympathetic Monthly Meeting, to which his membership then became attached, to disown him (Hamm 1988: 28).

### THE QUAKER 'DOUBLE-CULTURE'

My doctoral research set out to investigate the nature and content of shared belief within a group (British Quakers) which celebrates diversity. I discovered a marginalization and pluralization of theology with unity in the group founded, rather, on the way in which the group practised its religion (Dandelion 1996). Whilst the group has historically opposed the adoption of credal statements, I suggested that there is a credal attitude towards the form of the group and the behaviour of its members within 'Quaker-time', the time in which they are explicitly together as Quakers (Dandelion 1996). Permissiveness towards patterns of belief contrasts with conservative and conformist attitudes towards procedural or behavioural deviation within the Meeting House. I described this asymmetrical phenomenon as the Quaker 'double-culture' and used this model as the basis for analysing patterns of identity, leadership, and change within the group (Dandelion 1996). For example, present day British Quaker identity is in terms of the conformist 'behavioural creed', not the content of the pluralised belief culture. Control of the behavioural creed is explicit, whilst patterns of belief are left unpoliced. The form of the group is collectively agreed on and conservatively maintained, whereas belief content is individualised and unchecked (Dandelion 1996).

This cultural pattern is a key characteristic of British Liberal Quakerism today, but we can find a 'behavioural creed' running through Quaker history back to the very earliest days. Fox's opposition to John Perrot's attempts at procedural reform (Carroll 1971), and the nature of George Keith's disownment in Philadelphia for inappropriate procedure rather than doctrinal unsoundness (Frost 1980: xv), provide evidence of earlier manifestations of a behavioural creed. The peculiarities and the Quietistic enforcement of the discipline are the prime examples of this (see Marietta 1984).

### SIX TYPES OF DISAFFECTED QUAKER

Within this double-culture, each of the three categories of ex-Member can be further sub-divided by arena of discontent, practice or belief, giving six ex-Member types.

	Practice	Belief
De-convinced	Type 1	Type 4
Grieving Quaker left behind	Type 2	Type 5
Grieving Quaker left ahead	Type 3	Type 6

I consider two examples of schism within each category in turn.

#### **TYPE 1: PRACTICE – DE-CONVINCED**

The de-convinced cease to be Quakers or cease to try to be Quakers. Rather, they create fresh religious identities, often in terms of both practice and belief. The 'shaking Quakers' of Bolton in the 1740s, who may have originally been Quakers, later to become the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, were initially dissatisfied with the dead formality of worship (Kirk 1997: 11). Rather than sit in silence, the group adopted charismatic practices (Kirk 1997: 12). As the leadership of the group moved from the Wardleys to Ann Lee, and as the group migrated to America in the 1770s, so did the doctrinal differences become more established, underpinned by her revelations and their interpretation (Stein 1992: 40).

In 1812, David Willson led six others also from Yonge Street Meeting into schism, forming the Children of Peace. By the end of the year, one quarter of the Meeting had seceded. Willson attacked the idea of Biblical inerrancy, preferring to emphasise the guidance of revelation. In this, he was reformulating traditional Quaker beliefs. However, his style was one of revival (Schrauwers 1993: 37). Initially, the group organised itself as a Monthly Meeting and sought to appeal against the disownment some of them had faced. Within four years, however, Willson had rejected the authority of Quaker committees to judge his action and the group became fully independent, focused around Willson's charismatic ministry (Schrauwers 1993: 51). The group rejected the peace testimony and admitted the possibility of being called to war, but only by God, and gradually adopted music into their worship. It was claimed at one point that they had the best silver band in the province (Dorland 1968:109).

#### **TYPE 2: PRACTICE – GRIEVING QUAKER – LEFT BEHIND**

In a group which has emphasised conservatism and conformity around practice, this group is likely to be the smallest. It is difficult to feel left behind in terms of practice in a group which has changed so little in the way in which it is religious. However, there have been changes. The length of worship has reduced from three hours to one hour of silence, and the 'recording' of 'those with a gift of vocal ministry' was abolished in 1924. The internal architecture of Meeting Houses has changed to reflect the flat ecclesiology of the group, with chairs or benches in a complete square or circle instead of lined up facing the Ministers and Elders. Plain dress and plain speech became optional in the 1860s and then

disappeared, leading to the Fritchley schism in 1868 (Lowndes 1981). Led by John Sargeant, a group of Conservative Friends seceded from the Yearly Meeting, concerned at the innovations of the larger 'backslidden' body (Isichei 1970: 55). For Sargent and his followers, their preferences for a sectarian spirituality were being challenged by a denominational worldliness.

Like the de-convinced, the grieving are distressed enough to leave their co-religionists. Unlike the de-convinced, the grieving are still committed to the Quaker identity and are simply seeking a purer interpretation of it. They need to both distance themselves from the apostasy of the body they are leaving but also maintain a connection with the practices or beliefs of a version of that body's tradition. In the United States, a series of Conservative schisms followed the introduction of the pastoral system into most Gurneyite Yearly Meetings after 1875 (Holden 1988: 109). They were able to validate their position through an appeal to tradition. It was the other body which had lost its way and was now wrongly named 'Quaker.'

#### **TYPE 3: PRACTICE – GRIEVING QUAKER – LEFT AHEAD**

Sometimes, schismatics wished for innovative reforms to counteract decline in, or to sustain, an active spirituality. When membership numbers were falling, British evangelicals reformed the rules on endogamy and the peculiarities but carried the bulk of the Yearly Meeting with them. John Perrot in 1662 failed to win most British Friends to his cause as he suggested reform of 'hat honour' and the abolition of fixed times of meeting (Carroll 1971). His innovation left him 'ahead' of the group. David Updegraaf and the Waterites, in their bid for toleration of water baptism for Quaker ministers in the 1890s, left him and eventually his (Ohio) Yearly Meeting out of the anti-water-baptism union (later to become Five Years Meeting and then Friends United Meeting) forged by the Richmond Conference in 1887 (Hamm 1988: 130-39). Updegraaf pleaded for toleration on an issue which had never been part of any Quaker tradition. Similarly the Free Quakers, disowned for joining up in the American War of Independence, asked for toleration:

This separation has not been sought by, but forced upon, us as the pride and folly of former churches... and there appears no reasonable ground of expectation that we shall ever again be united to those who disowned us; for they will not permit among them that Christian liberty of sentiment and conduct which all are entitled to enjoy, and which we cannot consent to part with. ('An address to those of the people called Quakers who have been disowned for matters religious or civil', 1781 in Kashatus 1990: 136)

Freedom was to become the keystone of their new organisation. Neither Updegraaf nor the Free Quakers wished to be marginalized, and both saw their practice as God-led and appropriate to their Quaker faith but in both cases, they

were left ahead of the majority of other Friends. Updegraff at least managed to remain within his own Yearly Meeting which was supportive; the Free Quakers were forced to build their own Meeting House, still standing in the heart of Philadelphia. As an example of a group innovative in worship practice still considering themselves Quaker, Hamm reports that revival Quakers rejected plain dress and plain speech as not being a sufficient mark of other-worldliness given that non-Quakers, such as Hicksites, maintained those practices (Hamm 1988: 85). Indeed, both groups would have felt they were the true Quakers.

#### TYPE 4: BELIEF – DE-CONVINCED

George Keith and Isaac Crewdson are notable examples of this kind of schismatic. George Keith was at one time one of the leading Friends, travelling with Fox, Barclay and Penn in Germany in the 1670s (Frost 1980: iv). However, he began to feel that Friends were not doctrinally sound and he and his group of 'Christian Quakers' sought a Quaker reformation in the 1690s. This led to conflict, his condemnation at Philadelphia in 1692, and eventual disowning in Britain in 1694 (Frost 1980: xiii, xviii). Deconvincing as a Quaker, he became an Anglican Minister in the Sussex village of Edburton and helped found the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG). Isaac Crewdson was an equally notable Friend. A recorded minister at a young age and a major benefactor to the Mount Street Meeting House in Manchester, he questioned the idea of the inward light as a 'delusive notion' in his 1835 *A Beacon to the Society of Friends*. Subsequently, this led to a critique of unprogrammed worship and the Beaconites, who resigned from Manchester and Kendal Meetings in and after 1836, were later to adopt programmed worship in their Grosvenor Street Chapel in Manchester and at their Bretheren Meetings in Kendal. (Isichei 1970: 49). However, unlike the Shakers, it was an alternative understanding of right belief which underpinned the tensions. The Manchester group called their church the Evangelical Friends Chapel and, as with David Willson's group, there was an initial attempt to maintain connections with the body they had left (Isichei 1970: 50), but they moved from a position of grieving to one of deconvincement. Once outside the mainstream Quaker culture, both groups were to reform further within a different internal logic.

#### TYPE 5: BELIEF – GRIEVING QUAKER – LEFT BEHIND

The Yearly Meeting of the Friends in Christ was set up in 1993. In the first issue of its journal *The Call*, it explained its position:

We believe that, very sadly, Britain Yearly Meeting has permitted itself to lose sight of the high ideals, courage, fortitude of those who began it, and of its proper role as the Church of which Christ is the head ('An Epistle to Friends in Britain Yearly Meeting', *The Call*, No. 1, 1996).

The epistle continued to grieve the admittance to membership of atheists, the individualisation of the interpretation of the testimonies, and that meeting for worship had been turned into 'a forum for the sharing of concerns rather than the apocalyptic event of waiting upon the Lord' ('An Epistle to Friends in Britain Yearly Meeting', *The Call*, No. 1, 1996). These Friends felt 'called together as a separate Yearly Meeting' ('An Epistle to Friends in Britain Yearly Meeting', *The Call*, No. 1, 1996). They use the 1802 *Queries and Advices*, a clear signal that they felt the larger body had moved a long way from true Quakerism.

John Wilbur was disowned as opposed to resigning but his views are very much of those of a Quaker grieving the loss of what has gone before. Wilbur was an evangelical Quaker, part of the Orthodox wing of Quakerism but one committed to the idea of the Inward Light. He travelled in England in the 1830s and became concerned, not only at the extreme position of Crewdson, but at the views of Joseph John Gurney. He felt Gurney placed too much emphasis on the letter alone (Hamm 1988:30), and when Gurney came to the United States in 1837, the stage was set for the controversy to become more acute. Gurney's views were to become more popular and dominant but seven Yearly Meetings were to be formed between 1845 and 1854 by Friends sharing Wilbur's views. Whilst evangelicals, they were traditional in their understanding of revelation and isolationist (Hamm 1988: 31).

#### TYPE 6: BELIEF – GRIEVING QUAKER – LEFT AHEAD

David Duncan died before he could appeal against his disownment in 1870 (Isichei 1970: 62). However, his appeal for toleration of his views was that of a grieving Quaker left ahead of the group. As early as 1861, he expressed sympathy with Darwin's ideas of evolution and the new rationalist Biblical scholarship. This caused tension with the dominant evangelical ideas of this period and the Meeting proceeded against him. In the years after his death, followers set up a discussion group and in 1870 started publishing a journal dedicated to free enquiry, *The Manchester Friend*. The group nevertheless declined after 1873 (Isichei 1970: 63). Progressive Friends who broke with Hicksite Yearly Meetings in the 1830s were similarly ahead of the larger body, notably they propounded ideas which were innovative to the tradition. Congregational in polity, and without ministers and elders, they were also more prepared than the Hicksites to mix with the world's people in their desire for political reform, particularly on the topics of slave-holding and women's rights (Holden 1988: 81). They eventually died out although most of their ideas have since become incorporated into Liberal Quakerism.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The analysis here builds on the idea that, as group culture is itself divided, so is

the typing of ex-Members and their routes out of the group. Organisational and theological change significantly adds additional types of ex-Member (for example, 'the grieving') which are then also divisible by arena of disaffection (belief or practice). Instead of a single grouping of ex-Members, this Quaker example presents six such groupings, into which schismatic groups can be easily fitted. Typing in this way could aid further reflection on patterns of corporate disaffiliation and allow more sophisticated comparative analyses of schism.

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