

And then I was as one who hath a key and doth open
An ethnography of silence: The Meeting for Worship of the
Religious Society of Friends

Being
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B.A.

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*"If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
If the unheard, unspoken
Word is unspoken, unheard;
Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,
The Word without a word, the Word within
The world and for the world;
And the light shone in darkness and
Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
About the centre of the silent Word."*

-from Ash Wednesday, Part V
T.S. Eliot

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Abstract

This paper is an ethnographic account of communication processes involved in the unprogrammed Meeting for Worship of the Religious Society of Friends (the Quakers). The first part of this paper provides a brief outline of the history, beliefs and practices of the Quakers, and a review of existing literature in the social sciences that deals with Quakerism in order to provide some background to the reader unacquainted with Quaker beliefs. The second part of this paper provides a description of the Meeting for worship and attempts to formulate a working definition of the Meeting that takes into account the ritual, societal and religious functions of the Meeting for Worship. Building on this working definition of the Meeting, the third section explores the communicative processes involved in the Meeting for Worship through multiple theoretical paradigms, namely those of the ethnography of communication, linguistic integrationism and Symbolic Interactionism. The paper ends with a discussion of the nature of Quaker mysticism and metapragmatic awareness of ritual processes amongst worshippers.

Chapter One *An Introduction to Silent Worship: The Background*

Containing
A brief overview of the historical origins of Quakerism, its principal beliefs and practices, and its
organizational structure

And
A review of the existing literature in the social sciences on the Society of Friends

Introduction

"Just as the most eager speaking at one another does not make a conversation (this is most clearly shown in the curious sport, aptly termed discussion, that is, "breaking apart," which is indulged in by men who are, to some extent, gifted with the ability to think); so no sound is necessary for a conversation, not even a gesture. Speech can renounce all the medium of sense and it is still speech.

Of course I am not thinking of lovers' tender silence, resting in on another, the expression and discernment of which can be satisfied by a glance—indeed, by the mere sharing of a gaze that is rich in inward relations. Nor am I thinking of the mystical shared silence, such as is reported of the Franciscan Aegidius and Louis of France (or almost identically, of two rabbis of the Hasidim) who, meeting once, did not utter a word but "taking their stand in the reflection of the divine Face," experienced one another. For here, too, there is still the expression of a gesture, of the physical attitude of the one to the other.

What I am thinking of I will make clear by an example.

Imagine two men sitting beside one another in any type of solitude of the world. They do not speak with one another; they do not look at one another, not once have they turned to one another. They are not in one another's confidence; the one knows nothing of the other's career, early that morning they got to know one another in the course of their travels. In this moment neither is thinking of the other; we do not need to know what their thoughts are. The one is sitting on the common seat, obviously in his usual manner—calm and hospitably disposed to everything that may come. His being seems to say it is not enough to be ready; one must also be really *there*. The other, whose attitude does not betray him, is a man who holds himself in reserve—withholds himself. But if we know about him, we know that a childhood spell has been laid on him, that his withholding of himself is something other than an attitude; behind all attitude is entrenched the impenetrable inability to communicate himself. And now—let us imagine that this is one of the hours that succeed in bursting asunder the seven iron bands about our heart—imperceptibly, the spell is lifted. But even now the man does not speak a word; he does not stir a finger. Yet he does something. The spell has been lifted from him---no matter from where---without his doing. But this is what he does now: He releases in himself a reserve over which only he, himself, has power. Unreservedly, communication streams from him, and the silence bears it to his neighbor. Indeed, it was intended for him, and he received it unreservedly as he receives all genuine destiny that meets him. He will be able to tell no one, not even himself, what he has experienced. For where unreserve has ruled, even wordlessly, between men, the word of dialogue has happened sacramentally.

Therefore, although it has its distinctive life in the sign, that is in sound and gesture (the letters of language have their place here only in special instances, as when, between friends in a meeting, notes describing the atmosphere skim back and forth across the table), human dialogue can exist without the sign, but admittedly not in an objectively comprehensible form. On the other hand, an element of communication, however inward, seems to belong to its essence. But in its highest moments, dialogue reaches out even beyond these boundaries. It is completed outside contents, even the most personal, which are or can be communicated (Buber 2002:190-91)."

It is important to state the subject of this study early on to avoid confusion. As the lengthy quote from Martin Buber (reproduced in its entirety) indicates, human dialogue can exist in the absence of the sign, not merely in the tenderness of lovers but also in the 'sacramental dialogue' which transcends boundaries. One such form of sacramental dialogue where 'communication streams' from participants and the 'silence bears it to his neighbor' is the shared silence of the act of communal worship, where the word of dialogue works mysteriously without speech and a complete unity of worship is achieved without a word being exchanged.

This paper is an investigation of one form of this sacramental dialogue, the silence of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). It is an ethnographic study of the Quaker Meeting for Worship, an inquiry into the 'liturgy of silence' where essences communicate and dialogue transcends boundaries.

Linguists (Tannen and Saville-Troike 1985, Basso 1972, Bruneau 1973), psychologists (Cook 1964), anthropologists (Hymes 1972, Bauman 1983, Samarin 1965), rhetoricians (Jensen 1973, Lippard 1988) and philosophers have all described various aspects of silence and the tension between the spoken and unspoken forms. Yet, as they themselves admit

"The logo centrism of our culture in general and of the linguistic disciplines in particular fosters a tendency to view silence as merely an abstention from speaking or as an empty interval between utterances, but the Quaker case not only helps to suggest how richly textured and multi-dimensional the kinds of meanings of silence can be... (Bauman 1983: 11) "

Silence exists everywhere in communication-- in the form of pauses, in the expression of reverence and awe, as a 'form of oppression,' a 'display of emotion,' a 'boundary marking function,' a 'metaphor for malfunction' or an indication of hesitance. This paper is not a study of those forms of silence, but of silence in worship as an **expression of the inexpressible**, a 'mutual

and reciprocal communication (Jones 1948)' with an invisible, divine Inner Light that defies speech and language. It is a study of **communication** in silence understood as an act of listening and the performance of a 'mystic state of consciousness (James 1960)'—a state simultaneously of *knowing* and of *doing*.

Silence has had a long history of use in the ritual practices of religions across the world, and its communicative aspects have been perhaps better studied by theologians than by anthropologists. Echoing the words of the Quakers and recognizing the importance of silence in worship The Second Vatican Council, said

"The interior man is aware that times of silence are demanded by love of God. As a rule he needs a certain solitude so that he may hear God "speaking to his heart." It must be stressed that a silence which is a mere absence of noise and words, in which the soul cannot renew its vigor, would obviously lack any spiritual value. It could even be harmful to fraternal charity, if at that moment it is essential to have contact with others. On the contrary, the search for intimacy with God involves the truly vital need of a silence embracing the whole being, both for those who must find God in the midst of noise and confusion and for contemplatives. Faith, hope and a love for God which is open to the gifts of the Spirit, and also a brotherly love which is open to the mystery of others, carry with them an imperative need for silence (from *Evangelica Testificatio*, 29th June 1971 retrieved from www.vatican.va)."

Silence in liturgy is then not only contemplative and renewing; it is 'imperative' and 'demanded by love of God.' Understanding this communicative silence is to 'hear God "speaking to his heart."' It is this 'finding of God in the midst of noise and confusion' in a silence that embraces the whole being that is the focus of this ethnography and the subject of our study.

Outline of the Religious Society of Friends

History

The Religious Society of Friends has its genesis in the religious and social upheaval of seventeenth century England that led to the creation of numerous 'non-conformist,' Protestant faiths such as the Diggers, Ranters, Seekers and Muggletonians. While it had ideological precursors that held very similar beliefs, most historians point to George Fox (1624-1689) as the founding figure of the faith and his first sermon in 1647 as the starting date of the movement.

Under the leadership of Fox and other early Friends such as Robert Barclay, William Penn, Margaret Fell Fox, James Nayler etc the Religious Society of Friends won a number of converts, established itself as a significant minority religion in England (at one point comprising almost 10% of the English population) and evolved many of the practices and beliefs that are still held by Quakers worldwide. However, this early period was characterized by a great deal of persecution and the frequent jailing of its leaders. Historians note that

"This combination of persecution and expansion yielded important consequences. First, the Quakers' sense of themselves as a distinct people with a divine mission became stronger. Their refusal to take oaths under any circumstances, to serve in the army, to take of their hats to persons in authority, to use formal speech, and to dress like the "world's people" all date from this period (PYM 2002:3)"

In their search for tolerance (which the British Friends did not obtain until the Glorious Revolution) some members of the Religious Society of Friends, (pejoratively called Quakerism because early Friends enjoined non-believers to quake before the might of God, but now a term used by Quakers themselves) left for the New World and founded colonies in New England as early as 1656. Present-day American Quakerism---including the Central Philadelphia Monthly

Meeting of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (the subject of this ethnography) has its origins in these early meetings set up by William Penn in the 1670s.

Even in America the Quakers did not readily find acceptance, with colonies such as Massachusetts hanging Quakers like Mary Dyer (who was the last person hanged in America for religious beliefs) and expelling members of the Religious Society of Friends. Ostracized by other colonists, Quakers founded their own settlements in Rhode Island (1661), Jersey, Delaware and Pennsylvania (where they comprised a majority of the population until 1720, and retained political control till 1755 when they choose to give up their seats in the colony's Assembly rather than endorse war measures against the French and the Native Americans).

When persecution of the Quakers ceased in 1689, the Quaker 'missionary zeal abated' and the Quakers began to turn inward, focusing on creating a code of conduct for members, organizing their membership into meetings and developing their distinctive rules and customs—the Quaker peculiarities. Gradually the Religious Society of Friends became more insular and began to shut out contact and debate with other faiths and in the 1700s stopped proselytizing and began debarring members if they married into non-Quaker families. In this period Quakers simultaneously, deepened their sense of being a 'distinct people with a divine mission,' clarified their beliefs, organized their religious hierarchy and consolidated their practices and customs into a rigid code of conduct and behavior.

New trends in mainstream Protestantism (particularly the rise of Methodism and the Holiness Movement) and the continuing tension between one group of Friends who emphasized Biblical scripture and another that emphasized continuing revelation by the Light led in the nineteenth century to a radical upheaval of Quaker beliefs and practices and resulted in a schism in the organizational structure of the American Friends, with the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting

splitting into two groups—the Hicksite Friends, led by Elias Hicks who believed in continuing revelation and the Orthodox Friends who considered Scripture paramount in 1827.

Other schisms followed further splintering the Friends into groups such as the Evangelicals, the Wilburites and the Guernseyites in America and Britain. It was also in this period that some members, swayed by Revival movements in Protestantism modified their worship practices to include some degree of pastor-led, “programmed” worship and began proselytizing again. Others such as Lucretia Mott and Elias Hicks, concerned about the status of women in America, continuing wars around the world and practices such as slavery began to involve the Quakers in larger political movements and actively fight for justice and equality for all people.

A process of reconciliation between the various groups was initiated with the Manchester Conference of 1895, and joint opposition to the World Wars, the creation of pan-Quaker organizations such as the American Friends Service Committee and the work of elders such as Rufus Jones, Joseph Elkinton and others helped resolve differences amidst the Friends. A partial reconciliation was affected in the 1920s and 30s with the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting’s two schismatic branches—the Orthodox and Hicksite Friends finally reunifying in 1955.

The racial troubles of the 1960s, the Vietnam War, the environmental movement, feminism and the gay rights movement all created new concerns for the Religious Society of Friends and led to further modification of beliefs. Members protested the Vietnam War (with several members of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting being sent to jail for their protests), refused to pay military taxes, set up community projects to help develop African American neighborhoods, began performing gay marriages and adopted new testimonies regarding good ecological stewardship of the planet. Some issues, such as the degree of assistance the Quakers

provide to underprivileged African Americans, the validity of homosexual marriages (which some meetings of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting began performing in the early 1990's) and the exact nature of good ecological stewardship of the planet are still debated by the Meeting and remain unclarified.

Quakerism is one of the best documented of the world religions, with an abundance of records tracking its origins and development across the three hundred and sixty years of its existence. Several scholars such as Jones, Brinton and Braithwhite have all written extensive multi-volume histories of American and British Quakerism. The brief sketch provided in the above pages does not claim to be a comprehensive history of the Quakers, but merely an aid to understanding the historical background within which the modern faith operates.

Quaker Faith and Practice

A tremendous diversity of belief characterizes modern Quakerism. Quakerism incorporates within it groups that believe in the Trinity and Christ as Messiah and, groups that deny the Trinity and Christ-nature of Jesus; groups that believe in plainness of speech and dress and groups that deny the use of such 'Quaker peculiarities;' groups that believe in the efficacy of silence, and groups that hold that 'silence is a sin when praise would be more appropriate.' All sorts of beliefs are accommodated within the Quaker spectrum, and the Religious Society of Friends has traditionally shied away from creedal statements of any kind, distrusting theological talk of any kind.

While some Quaker denominations such as the Evangelical Friends and the Friends United Meeting do now have creedal statements of a sort, such as the *Richmond Declaration of Faith* and the official doctrines of Evangelical Friends Church that contain a summary of the basic beliefs that members need to adhere to—such as the divinity of Christ, belief in the Trinity

(for Evangelical Friends) etc more traditional groups such as the liberal Friends refuse to define their beliefs, leaving belief to individual discretion. This makes summarizing beliefs and answering the question, what do the Quakers believe? almost impossible to answer.

Evangelical Quakers, distrustful of the idea of continuing revelation have moved from a traditional understanding of Quakerism and while still sharing in such Quaker testimonies such as the peace and equality testimonies, and other social concerns no longer practice the original silent form of worship, called 'unprogrammed worship.' Instead they choose to adhere to 'programming' in their worship practices; hiring pastors to conduct sermons that include singing, Bible readings and short periods of silent prayer and call their congregations 'churches' (as opposed to 'meetings'). They emphasize the primacy of Biblical scripture, belief in the Trinity and the idea that Christ was the son of God and are not entirely comfortable with the idea of continuing revelation, rejecting any revelations that contradict scripture. While they adhere to a uniquely Quaker interpretation of scripture stemming from George Fox's theology, thus rejecting outward rituals like water baptism and the Eucharist they share more in common with mainstream Protestant denominations than they do with traditional Quakerism. Traditional Quakers comprising of two groups—the liberal Quakers and the Conservative Friends on the other hand cling to a very different theological worldview that rejects the Trinity and emphasizes continuing revelation.

Since the focus of this paper is on the liberal Quaker movement we will discuss liberal Quaker theology in greater detail. The theology of liberal Quakerism is best described as *post-Christian* (a term that the Quakers themselves employ). They recognize that Quakerism has its origins in Christianity but also emphasize that it has since moved away from its Christian roots to a more inclusive, pluralistic belief system. Christ is recognized as an important teacher and the

Bible is read by members as a source of spiritual guidance and solace but few, if any of the liberal Quakers believe doctrines such as the Trinity, the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection of Christ or that Jesus was God on Earth and the Messiah. This and the refusal to create a creedal statement have caused liberal Quakers to refuse to join ecumenical Christian movements such as the World Council of Churches (WCC). In response to the Lima Report issued by the WCC British Quakers wrote an epistle, called 'To Lima, with Love' that outlined some of their beliefs and explained the stand of Christ and the Bible.

"We are not generally drawn to speculative theology. We try as individuals and as a body to be faithful to the truth we have discovered. We prefer not to crystallize our understanding of the truth; our corporate experience is a growing and living tradition. We understand the Bible as a record arising from similar struggles to comprehend God's ways with people. The same Spirit which inspired the writers of the Bible is the Spirit which gives us understanding of it: it is this which is important to us rather than the literal words of scripture. Hence, while quotations from the Bible may illuminate a truth, we would not use them to prove a truth.

We respond to the Lima text, in Christian language, but many Quakers would prefer less specifically Christian terminology. We worship, live and work together in unity, however, valuing the variety of expressions of truth which each individual brings. (from *To Lima, with Love*, in LYM 1986)"

As the text of this epistle, the closest liberal Quakerism came to defining its religious beliefs makes clear matters of faith are left to the individual (who may or may not accept Christ or the Bible), though there are boundaries of what constitutes acceptable beliefs and what does not.

Buddhist Quakers, Atheist Quakers Hindu Quakers, Muslim Quakers, Universalist Quakers and Christocentric Quakers are all members of liberal Friends Meetings. Quaker members will agree that it is impossible to find any two members that share an identical notion of God. However, this does not mean that Quakers do not share some beliefs in common. They all believe in the efficacy of silence as an aid to worship, in the testimonies of peace and

simplicity and the power of the Inner Light. Some theological views that unite all liberal Quakers are

- A belief in direct experience by individuals of the Inner Light, unmediated by priests or clergy and discerned through the act of silent worship
- A belief that in vocal ministry this direct experience with God/Inner Light is given form and words
- A belief in Continuing revelation that can modify and 'critically reappraise' older revelations, including revealed Scripture
- A belief that all wars, even defensive ones are morally reprehensible and incompatible with Quakerism known as the Testimony of Peace
- A belief in the equality of all of God's people, known as the Testimony of Equality
- A belief in living a life of simplicity and obedience to the Spirit, which in modern times has expanded to include the idea of good 'ecological stewardship of the planet, called the Testimony of Simplicity
- A belief in the importance of service, manifested through such 'social concerns' as the American Friends Service Committee
- A belief that all life is sacramental thus rejecting all outward sacraments such as baptism, christening, the Holy Eucharist and Extreme Unction.

The liberal Quakers only use 'unprogrammed worship' that consists of the 'silent waiting upon God' for their services and emphasize the importance of a life of obedience to the call of the Inner Light in their doctrines. The Inner Light, (a deliberately vague term that in early Quaker writings was synonymous with the third person of the Christian Trinity, the Holy Spirit

but now has a more diffuse meaning) also called the Inward Light, the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Spirit of Truth, the Divine Principle, the Christ Within, the Seed etc is

“...the fundamental and immediate experience for Friends. The Light Within is not the same as the conscience or moral faculty...It is, most importantly, our direct and unmediated experience of the Divine (PYM 2002:16)”

While the Quakers worship God, they listen for the workings of God through the Spirit within—the Inner Light that manifests itself through silent worship and reveals Truth to the members. All Quakers (liberal, Conservative and Evangelical) would agree with this minimal statement. The point of divergence is whether this Inner Light can modify earlier revelations (such as Scripture), and what the objective standard for verifying the validity of the revelation is.

We have thus far briefly outlined shared Quaker beliefs and the unprogrammed and programmed worship traditions. There were once several other Quaker practices and rules of conduct—the ‘peculiarities’ that distinguished Friends from others and reinforced their sense of being a distinct people chosen by God. Most non-Quakers continue to associate these distinct behavioral practices and codes of conduct such as a plainness of speech and dress (wearing only ‘Quaker gray’), a refusal to use titles or honorific pronouns (such as you), a refusal to swear oaths, bargain, raise hats to superiors or curse, a compulsory endogamy and an insistence on addressing people by their given names with the Quakers but these practices are relics of a bygone age and have largely fallen into disuse.

While the early Quakers adopted these practices and several other Quaker ‘peculiarities’ to distinguish themselves from others, over time they lost their significance and theological importance. Some Quakers began to question the relevance of wearing simple, Quaker gray dress when ‘heathens and disbelievers’ wore them too, and noted that a tailor’s scissors did not make a Quaker, while declining numbers and a growing Evangelical Quaker movement led others to call

for a change to Quaker rules of conduct that disowned members for marrying non-Quakers. Further, other Quakers argued that the Testimony of Simplicity which had lead the Quakers to use plainness of speech and the Testimony of Equality, which was the theological basis for the use of the continued use of the word 'thou' in place of 'you,' and for the refusal to use titles could be realized in other, less obvious ways. They held that discarding these practices would not entail doing away with the important Testimonies of Simplicity (earlier called Plainness) and Equality but that these testimonies needed to be realized through their way of life and through addressing social concerns, and not by behavioral codes. In 1859, the British Quakers relaxed their rules on endogamy and in 1860 gave up their 'Quaker peculiarities' that governed conduct, while sticking with the Testimonies of Simplicity and Equality. The American Quakers, then split into two factions—Orthodox and Hicksite agreed with some of these positions and the peculiarities gradually disappeared, though some Orthodox groups continued to employ them.

The Conservative Friends movement, a tiny denomination comprising of three Yearly Meetings based in Ohio and North Carolina continues to hold to these peculiarities, choosing to remain Conservative in its behavioral practice (though sharing a liberal belief system with the Liberal Quakers) and is the only group that still follows these rules of conduct. The Evangelical Friends and the liberal Quakers have largely given them up, though some of the older members of the Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting (who came from an Orthodox background before the reconciliation of 1955) do sometimes still use the word 'thou,' and corrected this writer when he addressed them as Mr. X (preferring to be called by their given name, or Friend X).

Organizational Structure

The terms Quakerism or Religious Society of Friends in their current usage can refer to any of the numerous groups that claim continuity with the original movement established by

George Fox in the seventeenth century. The various schisms and reform movements of the nineteenth century resulted in the formation of four distinct Quaker groups with widely varying theological beliefs and worship practices. Primary differences between the groups that have prevented any reconciliation from taking place involve disputes regarding the nature of worship (programmed or unprogrammed), the place of Scripture in Quakerism, the importance of rules of conduct in modern life and the role, if any of paid pastors within the Religious Society of Friends.

Conscious of trends in mainstream Protestantism such as the holiness movement, Methodism and under the influence of Quaker theologians such as Joseph John Gurney, some Quakers adopted 'programmed worship' and started actively recruiting new members (proselytizing had fallen in to disfavor and Quakers began to stop recruiting new members in the eighteenth century) again. A majority of Quakers in North America, and worldwide follow some form of 'programmed worship' practices and are affiliated with one of two organizations—The Friends United Meeting or the Evangelical Friends International.

The Friends United Meeting, an umbrella group consisting of twenty six yearly meetings from Canada, Cuba, Jamaica, Kenya and the United States is a Christo-centric, evangelical group that has its roots in the Gurneyite movement of the nineteenth century. FUM, the successor group to what was called The Five Years Meeting (FYM) is a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and has a theology that is centered in a belief in Christ and scripture. The Friends United Meeting employs paid pastors that conduct services (but are not considered 'priests') and largely follows programmed worship (though some unprogrammed meetings are cross-affiliated with it). FUM's website calls its worship 'pastoral' and programmed and describes it as "often including hymns, Scripture reading, a children's message and a sermon. Usually there will be a period of "open" or "unprogrammed worship" lasting between five and

twenty minutes, either before or after the sermon. We generally close our worship by shaking hands and exchanging greetings (from FUM's website)." While adopting programmed worship, and an evangelical outlook FUM still retains some aspects of traditional Quaker organizational and behavioral practices.

The Evangelical Friends International, originating in the holiness revival of the last century is the largest 'Quaker' group in the World, comprising of over one thousand churches with 140,000 members in 26 countries (almost half of the global Quaker population). This group has moved furthest away from the older Quaker understanding of worship, and prefers to call itself a Church, rather than a Meeting (all the other groups still prefer using the term Meeting). The EFI employs paid pastors, believes in the Trinity and the Resurrection of Christ (but not in outward forms such as water baptism) and believes that Scripture is essential to knowing God. It has a sometimes hostile attitude to silence, with some members going so far as to say that 'silent worship was a sin when praise would be more appropriate.' EFI conducts active mission work and some of the largest Quaker churches in the world--Kenya, Guatemala and Bolivia are all affiliated with EFI. EFI's website identifies it as 'both conservative [referring here to theology] and evangelical,' and churches in the EFI conduct services that incorporate singing, prayer, Bible readings, 'adult offerings' and a sermon.

A majority of Quaker congregations around the world, consisting of 80% of the global Quaker population are affiliated with either FUM or EFI and employ 'programmed worship' for their services. 'Unprogrammed worship,' which consists of the 'silent waiting upon God' that Quaker founders such as George Fox and William Penn used is still practiced by two other Quaker groups—the liberal Quakers (for whom the Friends General Conference is the umbrella

Global distribution of Quakers according to country

1. Kenya	115,966
2. United States of America	105,835
3. Bolivia	30,300
4. Guatemala	20,630
5. Great Britain	16,468
6. Burundi	12,000
7. Peru	5,000
8. Uganda	3,500
9. Rwanda	3,234
10. Taiwan	3,200
11. Tanzania	3,000
12. Indonesia	3,000
13. Honduras	2,000
14. Ireland	1,591
15. Congo	1,303
16. Canada	1,160
17. Australia	1,019

Global population of Quakers

337,507

Source: Quakers around the World, published by the FWCC World Office, London, 1994

Note: Most Quaker congregations in Great Britain, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have been declining in number since the 1940s. Most congregations in Africa, particularly the churches in Rwanda, Congo and Burundi have been newly 'planted' and date back to the last 30-50 years.

group in North America) and the Conservative Friends. This form of worship is practiced by around 20% of Quakers worldwide, i.e. 61,000 people and is the sole 'expression of Quakerism in Europe, the Middle East, Australia and New Zealand (Vogel 1996:1).' This is also the sole form of worship employed by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's 12,000 members.

The liberal Quakers do not have a global umbrella body like the Evangelical Quakers, and comprise of Yearly Meetings in Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and USA. In the United States, the liberal Quakers associate with each other through the Friends General Conference, but are independent of it. The liberal Meetings in USA (of which the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting is one) comprise a fifth of the American Quaker population (primarily concentrated in the New England area) and only use 'unprogrammed worship' for their services. Each Yearly Meeting decides its practices and beliefs independently but liberal Quakerism is generally characterized by a pluralistic belief framework where the emphasis is on continuing revelation and not on Scripture. The liberal Quaker movement grew out of the theology of Elias Hicks, and following Rufus Jones most liberal Quakers see their religion as a form of post-Christian mysticism.

The only other group that continues to use only unprogrammed worship in its services is the Conservative Friends movement, the smallest of the four major Quaker groups comprising of three Yearly Meetings in USA and one bridging Canada and Britain consisting of less than a thousand members. Like Liberal Quakerism, it has no global umbrella body though the Yearly Meetings maintain contact with each other. The Conservative Friends movement, despite its name is not conservative in its theological outlook, sharing many of the beliefs of liberal Quakerism and emphasizing silent worship and continuing revelation. The name 'Conservative' stems from its continuing adherence to a form of 'primitive Quakerism' characterized by

plainness of speech, simplicity of dress and other behavioral codes that all the other modern Quaker groups have now given up. Making a distinction between belief and codes of conduct, Pink-Dandelion (1995) calls the liberal Quakers liberal-Liberal Quakers (the first liberal refers to beliefs, and the second to practices) and the Conservative Quakers liberal-Conservative Quakers (since they have a liberal theology but a conservative attitude towards codes of conduct).

In addition to these four Quaker denominations, there exist a large number of pan-Quaker organizations funded by these groups such as the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC which won the Nobel Prize in 1947 for its work on peace), the Friends Committee on National Legislation, Friends World Committee for Consultation etc that work on social concerns considered relevant to the testimonies of the Quakers—such as the Peace Testimony. All four Quaker denominations maintain friendly relations with each other, and unite for social action; though in matters of faith and practice they emphasize a decentralized organizational structure with individual congregations deciding such questions independent of any larger Quaker body.

Out of the four major Quaker denominations, three (excluding the Evangelical Friends International) have kept the organizational structure that the early Quakers evolved. While George Fox wanted some kind of organizational structure to help members worship together, and share news of the persecution of other members he consciously avoided using the word ‘church,’ partly to differentiate Quakerism from other Christian faiths and partly because he associated the word with clergy; choosing instead to use the word ‘meeting’ in its place.

The continued use of the word ‘meeting’ to refer to Quaker congregations worldwide, and using the same word to refer to the act of worship, the place of worship, the coming together of various committees and the local, regional, and global organizational body at the same time

Chart summarizing the principal differences between the four forms of

Quakerism

	Evangelical Friends	Friends United Meeting	Liberal Quakers (incl. FGC)	Conservative Friends
Unprogrammed	No	No	Yes	Yes
Pastors	Yes	Yes	No	No
Organizational Structure	Church	Meeting with pastors	Meeting	Meeting
Christ is Messiah	Yes	Yes	Multiple views	Multiple views
Belief in Trinity	Yes	Yes	No	No
Christo-centric	Yes	Yes	Pluralistic (includes Christocentrism)	Yes
Theology	Evangelical	Protestant Christian	Liberal post-Christian	Liberal Christian
Peace Testimony	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Testimony of Equality	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mission work for new converts	Yes	Yes	No	No
Population changes	Increasing rapidly	Increasing	Declining Numbers	Declining Numbers
Quaker peculiarities	No	No	No	Still adheres to speech and dress codes
Creedal Statement	Yes	Yes (does not call it a creed)	No	No

creates a tremendous amount of confusion in people unacquainted with the Society's organization.

Since the focus of this thesis is on the unprogrammed worship of the liberal Friends in America, we will describe the organizational structure of the Friends General Conference (FGC). Conservative Friends and the Friends United Meeting follow a similar organization, though the lack of sufficient numbers in the case of Conservative Friends means that there is no umbrella group of Conservative Friends.

The word 'Meeting' in the corporate sense of the term can refer to the Monthly Meeting, the Quarterly Meeting, the Yearly Meeting or the broader Quaker denomination, as in the case of the Friends United Meeting. When used unqualified, it usually refers to the Monthly Meeting which is a congregation of Quakers that meets every Sunday for the Meeting for Worship. Despite meeting every week, the congregation is not called Weekly Meeting (there is no such term), since the Monthly Meeting refers to the Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business which is held once a month to conduct corporate business.

A Monthly Meeting worships at a Meeting House and is usually named after the area the congregation covers. This is similar to the use of the word church to refer to a particular church, for instance, when one says Church of the Assumption it is understood that this refers to a particular church not the mother church in the sense of the Roman Catholic Church. The term *Meeting for Worship* refers to the act of worship, similar to the terms 'services' or 'mass' used by other Christian groups. Thus, the Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting (the congregation) of the Religious Society of Friends (the mother church) meets for the Meeting for Worship (the service) at the Central Philadelphia Meeting House (the physical church)

The Monthly Meeting is 'the fundamental spiritual community in the Religious Society of Friends... It has the sole authority to enroll or release members and oversee marriages. The entire range of a monthly meeting's activities includes the conduct of worship, the care of members, religious education, the management of property, decisions on membership, issues of social action, and oversight of institutions...(PYM 2002:177)."

Several Monthly Meetings in geographic proximity meet together four times a year, and this is called the Quarterly Meeting. The Quarterly Meeting does not have authority over Monthly Meetings though it can choose which Meetings affiliate with it, and primarily serves to provide oversight and guidance to Monthly Meetings that request it and conducts prayer retreats, disburses funds and manages graveyards. Monthly Meetings covering an extended geographic region meet once a year at the Yearly Meeting and an organization called the Yearly Meeting is the closest thing that Quakerism has to a mother church. The word Yearly Meeting refers to both the annual session, and the total membership of all the constituent monthly meetings. Each Yearly Meeting publishes its own book of discipline (that summarizes procedures, matters of belief, behavioral codes, testimonies, and queries for further consideration) called Faith and Practice that is used by all the Monthly Meetings affiliated with it and updated in consultation with them every ten years. It also controls the budget of the Friends organization, issues epistles clarifying the Society's position on various social or faith-related issues, maintains contact with other Yearly Meetings, provides informational resources and addresses issues of concern raised by members. When the Yearly Meeting is not in session, its business is conducted by the Interim Meeting (which grew out of a Meeting called the Meeting for Sufferings that originally served to inform members of the status of fellow Quakers who were being persecuted in England).

While FUM and EFI employ paid pastors to conduct a part of the services, the liberal and Conservative Friends have no clergy or paid positions (except certain administrative staff that are employed to maintain meetinghouses, records and oversee the budget). The Monthly Meeting's worship and business practices are overseen by officers selected from within the Meeting. Each Monthly Meeting appoints a clerk, a treasurer, a recorder and a recording clerk. These positions do not give the office-holder any religious or spiritual authority though and are primarily administrative positions. In addition several committees such as the Committee on Worship and Ministry, Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business and the Committee of Overseers conduct the business of the Meeting, and offer advice and oversight on worship practices.

The Quarterly and Yearly Meetings have a similar organizational structure and usually consist of two to five members selected from each Monthly Meeting affiliated with the Yearly Meeting. Business is conducted through the offices of the clerk and treasurer, and select committees discuss and handle issues relating to worship and social action. These committees and Meetings are open to all members who wish to attend and are conducted in religious fellowship with a few minutes of 'prayerful silence' at the start of the Meeting.

The Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting

Since the complicated organizational structure of the Friends can be confusing, discussing it in terms of a concrete example—the place and role of the *Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting* (the subject of this ethnography) within the larger Religious Society of Friends will help create some degree of clarity.

The Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting holds its Meeting for Worship every Sunday morning at its Meeting House on 1515 Cherry Street. It also holds a Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business once a month at the same Meeting House and several committees meet

through the week to discuss other issues such as governance of the Friends Select School that the Meeting oversees, peace and social concerns and maintenance of Quaker properties.

The Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, together with six other Monthly Meetings in the greater Philadelphia region form the *Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting* which oversees the Fair Hill Quaker burial ground, a school in the Delaware Valley, a retirement community and other Quaker resources. The Quarterly Meeting also provides guidance and ministry to monthly meetings that request it.

The Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting, together with twelve other Quarterly Meetings forms the *Philadelphia Yearly Meeting* (which despite its name covers a much larger area that includes most of Eastern Pennsylvania, parts of New Jersey and Delaware) which dates back to 1681. Originally called the 'General Yearly Meeting for Friends of Pennsylvania, East and West Jersey and of the Adjacent Provinces' it meets once a year (at the Friends Center in Central Philadelphia) for its annual session. When not in session, its work is conducted by the Interim Meeting which itself dates back to 1756 and was originally called the Meeting for Sufferings.

The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (hereafter referred to as PYM) is associated with the Friends General Conference (which is the umbrella body of the liberal Quakers of the United States) and holds to a liberal, post-Christian theology. While matters of faith are largely left up to individual worship groups it does maintain dialogue with other Quaker groups and publishes a written statement of its beliefs called *Faith and Practice: A book of Christian discipline*.

The property and monies of the CPMM are controlled by the *Friends Fiduciary Corporation*, which is a 'tax-exempt, church-related, legally separate, Pennsylvania non-profit corporation' that holds the 'bare legal title of the real estate' controlled by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, one of the oldest Friends Meetings in the world underwent a schism in 1827 when the Orthodox and Hicksite groups set up to competing Philadelphia Yearly Meetings that covered the same area and had the same name. The Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting (CPMM) was a member of the Hicksite PYM while the Arch Street Meeting was a member of the Orthodox faction. Reconciliation was achieved in 1955, and at present there is only one PYM of which both the CPMM and the Arch Street Meeting are constituents.

The CPMM is one of the largest constituents of the PYM and has over a thousand members on its records, not including several frequent attenders who do not choose to affiliate for personal reasons. The entire membership of the PYM is around twelve thousand making it the second largest meeting in the liberal Quaker tradition (after the Britain Yearly Meeting). PYM while emphasizing a liberal theology and practice includes members with both Christocentric and Universalist leanings. Membership in the PYM, like in all liberal Quaker groups has been declining for several years now (the only Quaker denomination to show an increase in numbers is the EFI), though converts from other religions have helped stem the tide to a certain extent. The CPMM leans towards a more Universalist Quakerism and consists of a large number of converts from other branches of Christianity and from Judaism who are attracted to its liberal, post-Christian theology but also includes several older members that hold to a more Christocentric Quakerism. There is sometimes a tension between the two wings that manifests itself in vocal ministry, and one member in conversation said that some of the new converts from Judaism didn't quite know what to do with the silence but on the whole even the Christocentric Quakers admit the validity of a pluralistic approach to a certain degree, while holding that Quakerism must still look to its Christian origins for spiritual guidance.

In the pages that follow, this writer will build on the brief outlines presented here and discuss in greater detail the *Meeting for Worship*. However, before we proceed a review of the extensive literature on the Quakers is presented as a useful tool to aid the reader's understanding of the *Meeting for Worship*.

Review of existing literature

A significant body of literature exists, dating back to the seventeenth century that attempts to understand and explain the nature of silent worship and the practices of the Religious Society of Friends. While initial writings on silent worship were invariably theological writings by Quakers (Fox 1660, 1694, Barclay 1678, Penn 1694,) or polemical outbursts by their opponents (R.H. 1672, Fowler 1678), a more scholarly, unbiased literature developed beginning in the nineteenth century that discussed various aspects of Quaker life such as history (Jones 1906, 1914, Brinton 1952), costume, political views and pacifist beliefs.

Beginning in the early 20th century several mystics both Quakers such as Rufus Jones (1914) and L. V. Hodgkin (1919) and non-Quakers such as Thomas Merton (1948), Evelyn Underhill (1936), and philosophers like William James (1902), Bertrand Russell and Charles Hartshorne (who was a student of Rufus Jones at Haverford) explored aspects of the Quaker experience and produced accounts that described the Meeting for Worship. Quaker participation in ecumenical movements, and their pacifist stance during the two world wars, the experiences of Friends fighting for equality in places like Africa, India and the Middle East renewed interest in Quakerism and resulted in publication of several books discussing the service aspects of the faith. However most of this literature of the early period, with the notable exception of Braithwhite (1912) and Jones' (1927) histories of Quakerism and James (1902) *The varieties of Religious Experience* is of little anthropological interest since it is primarily oriented towards a readership interested in mysticism and theology.

However, the Religious Society of Friends attracted little sociological, anthropological or linguistic interest until fairly late in the twentieth century. No comprehensive ethnographic studies of the Religious Society of Friends exist, and early social science literature on Quaker

worship focused primarily on Quaker rhetorical practices (Graves 1972). The development of sociolinguistics and the ethnography of speaking led to important research into Quaker language use and the relationship between speech and silence. Pioneering sociolinguistic studies of Quaker pronominal usage and Quaker 'plain speech' were conducted by Darnell (1972) and Irvine (1979). Further progress in the area was made when Bauman (1974, 1983) applied an approach that combined social history, sociology of religion and ethnography of speaking to produce an 'integrated study of the role of speaking and silence in the early development of Quakerism (Bauman 1983:8).'

While Bauman's research focused on seventeenth century Quakers and used historic evidence extensively to understand 'language as a behavioral constituent of social action,' and the central role accorded to speech/silence in early Quakerism more recent research has studied modern Quakerism. Depending on their scholarly orientation these writings can be classified broadly as 1) rhetorical/linguistic 2) political philosophy and 3) sociological.

Renewed interest in the communicative and rhetorical aspects of silence created by Tannen and Saville-Troike's 1985 book on silence spurred linguistic research into Quaker worship. Baer (1975) had earlier discussed similarities between silence and glossalia, a theme echoed in Maltz (1985)'s study which compared Quaker silence with Pentecostal 'joyful noise' (speaking in tongues). Building on this work, Davies (1988) employed discourse analysis to analyze data gathered from fifteen meetings across Britain and America, focusing on language learning aspects of the Meeting for Worship. Unable to fit the Meeting for Worship into existing models of language learning, Davies argues that while the Meeting approximates a 'continuing state of incipient talk' it also resembles certain aspects of language learning processes like 'informal conversation and purposeful talk in formal settings.' Davies tries to explain what

'doing being silent' involves, and argues that 'in their emphasis on experience and on the common interpretation of that experience by one another, the Quakers were primitive ethno methodologists of a kind, recognizing and interpreting the rules of experience in the process of that experience (Davies 1988:107)'

Lippard (1988) used the ideas of Kenneth Burke to understand the 'participatory rhetoric' of silence, and explained Quaker Meeting for worship as a means not of persuasion but of 'group identification where the source and audience merge in the emergent vocal ministry (Lippard 1988:145).' In the absence of a power dynamic in the Meeting, a collaborative rhetorical transaction takes place that creates 'consubstantial identification.'

Michael Sheeran, a Jesuit priest who studied the Philadelphia Meeting for Business in the 1970's wrote a book, *Beyond Majority Rule: Voteless decisions in the Religious Society of Friends* that discusses the political philosophy and pragmatism of Quaker religious decision making. The book, endorsed by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and sold at the coffee room after worship emphasizes processes of 'communal discernment' and vocal ministry in the Meeting for Business. In contrast to Bauman who argues that 'Quakers viewed speaking in essentially negative terms and disvalued it (Bauman 1983:10)' and other writers who emphasize the silent aspects of worship, Sheeran argues that there is 'no such thing as a shy Quaker,' and does not conceive of the Meeting in terms of a 'creative tension between speech and silence.' His observations however, do not necessarily contradict those of other writers since the subject of his study, The Meeting for Worship with attention to Business (Business Meeting) differs significantly from the Meeting for Worship in that it is goal oriented and seeks to address specific corporate concerns of the church through the guidance of the Inner Light, and progress in a situation like that is impossible in silence.

Compared with the multiplicity of studies that focus on the communicative aspects of Quaker worship little social science research has focused on developing a sociological understanding of Quakerism. Doherty (1967)'s book, an important step in that direction focused on the nineteenth century Hicksite separation of the Quakers in America provides an interesting sociological analysis that suggests that the split (which directly affected the PYM) had less to do with genuine theological differences and more to do with a rural-urban divide. That this religious schism continues to influence the 'life of the meeting' was revealed in conversation by a senior member who remembers being forbidden by his parents from talking to Orthodox Friends, and recalls family members who were disowned from the meeting from marrying outside the Hicksite Friends; and by another member who referred to the tensions that continue to exist between the Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting (which was once Hicksite) and the Arch Street Meeting House(once Orthodox).

Despite the multiplicity of approaches to the Meeting for Worship that various social scientists have employed (using tools as diverse as linguistic anthropology, social history, discourse analysis, rhetoric, political philosophy and sociology) there are several common threads that seem to run through all their work. They all uniformly agree that the silence itself has meaning. While they vary in their understanding of *how* it means, they all quote from various 'canonic' Quaker texts such as Barclay's Apologetica, Fox's Journal and the writings of Quakers like Isaac Pennington, William Penn, Elias Hicks etc to describe *what* it means (or at the very least, what it *should/has the potential to* mean).

However, that is problematic since Quakerism; unlike other religions is an iconoclastic faith that has no canon. The emphasis on continuing revelation means that there has been a significant shift in Quaker doctrine over the years. Braithwhite discusses the various stages of

Quakerism such as the Quietist and the Evangelical Period but those were nineteenth century ideological shifts that do not directly concern us. Sheeran's book discusses in some detail the phenomenon of Universalism and Christocentrism but since its emphasis is not on theology but rather on political process it does not go far enough.

Beginning in the 1920's with the writings of the Quaker mystic Rufus Jones, and the development of the global ecumenical movement in Christianity, Quakerism began to move from its conventional Christocentric worldview to its present day, post-Christian pluralism. A rapid decline in the number of members by birth, and an influx of worshippers from non-Christian faiths (primarily urban Jews and Catholics dissatisfied with their faith's political or moral views) exacerbated the ideological shift, moving Quaker belief in a more Universalist direction. As the Quaker writer Janet Scott put it in her famous Swarthmore lecture, "Thus we may answer the question "Are Quakers Christian?" by saying that it does not matter. What matters to Quakers is not the label by which we are called or call ourselves, but the life (Scott 1980:70)."

The juxtaposition of current ethnographic evidence with historic accounts of silent worship, and a reliance on the original theological position is somewhat problematic since the evidence suggests that those theological views are no longer held. Since the Quakers do not have a creedal statement, and the Yearly Meeting's Faith and Practice does not explicitly discuss theological issues, it is difficult to ascertain what exactly is believed.

Several studies by Ben Pink-Dandelion (sic), a British Quaker sociologist have tried to discover the nature of modern Quaker belief. Pink-Dandelion's 1996 book, *A Sociological Analysis of the Theology of the Quakers* used detailed survey questionnaires sent to every meeting in Britain to determine what the theological beliefs of the Quaker members were, while his 2005 book, *The Liturgies of Quakerism* uses data from his survey research and participant

observation to discuss how changing theological considerations have affected the meaning of silence. As this paper will discuss later, his research is not free of bias, and can not claim to be an objective study but nonetheless, some of his findings remain significant.

Pink-Dandelion (1996) argues that a 'Quaker double culture' exists that comprises of 'a liberal attitude to belief which promotes the possibility of non-conformity and change, and a conservative attitude to the behavioral and organizational rules of the group, which promotes a conformity to practice and a resistance to change (Pink-Dandelion 1996:194).' The book documents 'the creation of distinction, within an undifferentiated Quakerism of the seventeenth century, between behavior and belief' and holds it complicit in the 'establishment of modernity.' Thus, Pink-Dandelion says, while the forms of worship of Quakerism have remained largely unchanged since their origins in the seventeenth century, the liberal attitude towards belief means that Quakers now hold a diverse variety of theological views and lack any form of theological cohesion, they are no longer a group because they share a common belief, but a community held together by a common, inflexible **behavioral** creed.

Using the survey responses he collected in his 1996 book to understand the nature of belief in Quaker meetings and historical data, Pink-Dandelion in 2005 produced a new book, *The Liturgies of Quakerism* which contains his more controversial ideas. He analyses various historic stages in the evolution of Quakerism and relates their practices to Quaker eschatology. The early Quakers, including George Fox and William Penn believed that the Second Coming (foretold in Revelations) was at hand and their worship and beliefs were designed in accordance with that apocalyptic vision of the future. Over time, as the religious fervor of the seventeenth century cooled the emphasis on the end of days was replaced with a worldlier attitude towards secular life. With the advent of modernity and the development of a post-Christian, Universalist

Quakerism however the Pauline eschatology became irrelevant. Pink-Dandelion holds that this loss of belief in an imminent second coming has direct consequences for the meaning of silence.

He says,

‘Post Christian Quakers and those of other faiths cannot subscribe to this Pauline map, given their theology. Without a First Coming, a Second one makes little sense. If the first Friends heard the alarm clock of the Second Coming ringing, if the Quietists pressed the ‘snooze’ button, and the Evangelicals turned the hands back a little, it seems as if most liberals have removed the batteries or thrown the clock away... The view in either its Liberal or Evangelical versions brings with it complications... Either the early Quaker insights regarding liturgical form which have been presented here as consequential to a particular sense of the end times are optional, or not. If not, it means that the unprogrammed way is still the legitimate and authentic mode of worship in these end times. In this case, the ecumenical position of Friends is tricky (Pink-Dandelion 2005:72-73).’

The loss of a Christian theological worldview, according to Pink-Dandelion is responsible for a loss of shared meanings of silence. Pink-Dandelion holds that the pluralistic attitude leads to a loss of intimacy with God, for liberal Quakers no longer necessarily believe that the Holy Spirit speaks in silence, and instead use the silence as a tool to meditate and listen to their own inner voices. He says, “The liberal-Liberal Friends no longer justify their liturgical form in relation to Scripture or a biblical understanding of time, but, rather, in terms of the experience of the method itself. Because it works, because it isn’t broken, it doesn’t need fixing. In this sense, the Liberal choice of a liturgical form is self-validating (Pink Dandelion 2005:93).’ Hence, in his reading, liberal Quakers aren’t merely post-Christian, but they are post-Quaker, to the extent that they no longer hold to Quaker beliefs about the Inner Light.

While religious understandings of silence are lost, a ‘culture of silence’ based on the devaluation of speech and a position that holds that it ‘is not appropriate to try and verbalize religious belief’ means that the silent worship is no longer even worship.

“Through the invisibility of belief, fostered by the culture of silence, change in individual and group belief is both accommodated and concealed... The lack of a vocal confession

of faith, or a structural requirement to subscribe to any set of words, allows silence over matters of belief to continue. This silence is supported by a gear of self-included ostracism (p.110)... Thus; the silence operated by Friends can conceal diversity, both of theology, and of the theology of worship. Whilst the form of worship operates as a means of cohesion to the group, its varying interpretations may at some stage begin to unpick the form (p.112)... For some the intimacy is no longer with God but with self and with community (p.125)... Silent worship is no longer the same as silent worship. There may be no experience left to feign, other than the self made one... Silence can be the beginning and the end of authentic religious expression. At the same time, where God does not exist for those present, the absence is absolute. Silent worship then is no longer a consequence of a keen sense of the inward covenant of Jeremiah 31 or a means to the inward supper of Revelation 3:20 but is an end in itself. Liberal-Liberal Worship holds both these possibilities in tension at present (p. 126)." (Pink-Dandelion 2005)

To say that this flies in the face of other understandings of silence is to put it mildly. If Dandelion is correct, then the Quakers at the Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting are not only no longer Christian, they are no longer really Quakers but rather seekers 'who prefer to seek than to find. To travel hopefully is better than to arrive, and the suggestion of a final destination point is treated with suspicion (Pink-Dandelion 2005:94).'

Is Pink-Dandelion correct? On one hand, his exhaustive knowledge of Quaker theology and texts provides him with a more comprehensive awareness of silent worship than Maltz, Davies or Lippard can manage. Further, his reliance on sociological method and survey questionnaires helps situate his reading in the context of modern belief, while other writers focus on a linguistic or rhetorical analysis of ministry to understand silent worship. On the other hand, Pink-Dandelion is far from an unbiased observer. The biggest problem with Dandelion's reading is his own personal beliefs. As a sociologist who is also a Quaker theologian who hopes for a return to the Christocentric roots of Quakerism he lets his beliefs interfere with his reading of the silence, making his work polemical. Uncomfortable with the Universalist, liberal shift in Quakerism Dandelion suggests that the silence has now become meaningless and a tool to suppress theological discussion. His preference for a more evangelical Quakerism, and his

endorsement by conservative Quaker's like Arthur Roberts all suggest that he lets his beliefs interfere with his analysis.

However his analysis is not entirely flawed. His emphasis on eschatology, his idea of a Quaker 'double culture,' the notion that a theological shift from silent worship as listening to the Inner Light (as an entity independent from self) to silent worship as being attuned to one's own inner self are all potentially valid, interesting readings of the Meeting for Worship. While Pink-Dandelion's survey data is valid, and his findings that the Quakers have moved from a Christocentrism to a more Universalist pluralism that conceives of Christ merely as a teacher or guide are backed up by various Quaker literature, anecdotal observation and conversations with members conducted during this ethnography the conclusions he draws from this data, which suggest that a 'culture of silence' exists, and that a process of 'spiraling out of control' due to a heterogeneity of belief is underway are no way proved by the survey data or by ethnographic observation. The loss of belief in the 'Inner Light' as a distinct entity independent of the self that results in the loss of the meaning of silence is also not true, at least in the PYM since every member interviewed believed in the Inner Light as a distinct entity and emphasized that silent worship and meditation were two separate process. Further, PYM in its Faith and Practice makes a clear distinction between the Inner Light and the 'consciousness' of the self.

So, is Pink-Dandelion correct, when he argues that silence is meaningless? Is it a process of 'consubstantial identification' as Lippard (1988), merely the communal doing of a ritual while being simultaneously conscious of its working (Davies 1988) or just one end of a spectrum between noise and silence (Maltz 1985) or an experience of the divine? All of these ideas will be discussed in greater detail, and verified with ethnographic observation and data from field research in the pages that follow, but before we proceed any further we need to provide a

detailed description of the silent worship itself, including a description of the setting in which the Meeting for Worship occurs.

Chapter 2

The Meeting for Worship: An ethnographic account

Containing
A description of the Meeting for Worship,
A brief account of the communication processes involved in the Meeting for Worship
And
A preliminary framing of the ethnographic question

An Ethnography of the Meeting for Worship

The Setting

A larger than life metal sculpture of a woman in colonial costume with folded hands lying on her lap greets visitors at the intersection of 15th and Cherry Streets. A deliberately drab, three storey brown-stone and glass building that resembles an office block more than a church looms in the background. The small plaque below the sculpture identifies her simply as

Mary Dyer

Quaker martyr of religious freedom

Hanged on Boston Common in 1660

A larger sign, adjacent to the plaque informs visitors that the building is the Meeting House of the Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting. The Meeting shares its space with other Quaker organizations such as the American Friends Service Committee and the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Upon entering the foyer visitors are greeted by a receptionist, usually a retired Quaker who now volunteers her time for the Meeting. A Quaker 'Information Kiosk' is located on the right, and a library (which is usually only open when the Meeting can find a volunteer) is situated adjacent to the information kiosk. A corridor behind the receptionist leads from the reception into Quaker offices that occupy the building and the American Friends Service Committee on the second and third floors. Another corridor to the left of the reception leads down a passage to the Meeting Room of the Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting on the right, and the Cherry Street Room, where members drink coffee and eat biscuits after worship is held on Sunday on the left. On the way to the Meeting Room one crosses the office of the Monthly Meeting on the left and a place where members can hang their coats during the Meeting for Worship on the right.

The receptionist directs first time visitors to the Information Kiosk where they can pick up various Quaker pamphlets, and explains to them when the Meeting meets for Worship if they care to join. On weekdays, the Meeting Room or the Cherry Street Room is used for discussions on Quakerism, choir singing or other informational events. On Sundays, when the Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting has its Meeting for Worship the chairs in the corridor leading to the Meeting Room have boxes with name-tags identifying members placed on them, for members to pick up on their way to the Meeting Room.

Meeting for Worship—the Ideal

CPMM holds its Meeting for Worship every Sunday (First Day in Quaker usage) morning between 11:00 AM and 12:00 AM. The Meeting follows the traditional form of worship through 'silent waiting,' called unprogrammed worship. The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (PYM)'s *Faith and Practice* defines unprogrammed worship as

"A Friend's Meeting whose worship is based on quiet waiting for the presence of God revealed through spirit-led vocal ministry and the gathered communion, sometimes called open worship. (PYM 2002:221)"

Meeting for Worship begins when members enter the Meeting House and seat themselves on the wooden benches arranged in a hollow square shape. While the Meeting starts at 11:00 AM the preparation for it involves a continuous process of 'thoughtful reflection and listening to the Inward Teacher in the course of daily life and service (PYM 2002:18).' Some members arrive an hour ahead of official meeting time and sit in quiet meditation, to 'center' the Meeting ahead of time. Two senior members of the congregation who wear name tags that identify them as greeters usually position themselves at the entrance of the meeting room and shake hands and welcome new attenders till about five minutes into the Meeting when they enter and seat themselves. Members continue to arrive and seat themselves on the benches till about ten

minutes into the Meeting. Members and first time attenders are free to seat themselves wherever they wish, though they are advised not to sit in the back since the acoustics of the room are poor. The facing benches are raised and usually seat officials such as the Clerk of the Meeting and members of various committees, though anyone can sit there if they so choose.

The room is unadorned and contains no furniture besides the benches and one table at the entrance where first time attendees can put their name and address down to be entered into Quaker records should they wish to do so. A Bible, the PYM's *Faith and Practice: A Book of Christian Discipline*, donation envelopes and copies of the newsletter of the Meeting are placed on either end of the facing benches by the entrance.

The Meeting begins 'with stilling the mind and body, letting go of tensions and everyday worries, feeling the encompassing presence of others and opening oneself to the Spirit (PYM 2002:19). No spoken words or signs indicate the start of the Meeting, and members usually sit in silence for the first ten to fifteen minutes. During this time the Meeting 'centers' down till there is 'unity of worship.' Centering, a uniquely Quaker term refers to the 'initial stage of worship when Friends clear their minds and settle down to achieve a spiritual focus (PYM 2002:215).' Once this is done, the meeting 'becomes a gathered meeting, and out of the deep silence will eventually come, in spoken contributions, examples of ministry which will be 'in the life', i.e. relevant to that occasion, that meeting and will speak to the condition of all present (Davies 1988:109).'

The members meditate, refer to passages from the Bible or *Faith and Practice*, listen for the Inner Light to guide them, and 'gather for worship in quiet waiting upon God.' As the silence gradually becomes a total stillness in the light, Spirit filled ministries arise. There are usually three to five verbal ministries during the course of a Meeting. Anyone is free to speak though it

is expected that the 'leading' is from the Spirit and everyone is expected to pay attention even if they feel that the ministry is not relevant to them. The first ministry usually starts ten to fifteen minutes into the Meeting for Worship. Ministries last around fifty seconds to two minutes, though sometimes they can last as long as five minutes. In some meetings oral ministry is entirely absent and the entire Meeting is conducted in silence, while at other times there have been as many as eight ministries within the span of an hour. 'Vocal ministry may take many forms, as prayer, praise of God, song, teaching witnessing, or sharing. These messages may center upon a single, vital theme; often apparently unrelated leadings are later discovered to have an underlying unity (PYM 2002:20).'

Ten minutes before twelve o'clock, children of members left in Friends day care and brought into the Meeting Room by their caretakers, and enter and seat themselves by their parents to join in the prayerful silence. At twelve noon, after an hour of worship has passed, one of the elders on the raised benches signals that the meeting has drawn to a close by rising and shaking hands with his neighbor. The rest of the members follow in similar fashion and shake hands with their neighbors (similar to a practice followed by various Christian groups after Mass). An elder from the raised benches then stands, introduces herself and welcomes members to the Meeting for Worship of the Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, he/she then asks any members present if they have any 'Joys or Sorrows' to share with the Meeting. Various members rise to narrate incidents they feel a need to share, some of which are accompanied by other members raising their hands above their heads and shaking them in congratulations (a Quaker form of applause, since clapping is frowned upon at the Meeting). Once members have shared their 'Joys and Sorrows,' a brief process which takes between three to seven minutes the elder rises again and asks if there are any other announcements (usually there are none, but

occasionally a member of the a Friends Committee rises to inform members of various activities that they have undertaken, or plan to undertake). Then first time attenders or members who are returning to the meeting after a long absence are asked to rise and introduce themselves. The elder informs them that there is a book at the entrance where they can write their names to be entered into the Quaker record, and informs them of where they can find Quaker literature, if they are interested. The Meeting is then concluded, with members and first time attenders invited to attend coffee hour in the room across the hall.

This form of worship is one which has remained unchanged in over three-hundred and fifty years of Quaker existence. One of the earliest surviving written accounts of a Meeting, Alexander Parker's *Epistle to Friends* describes a process which is remarkably similar in form to what happens at present. Parker says,

"So Friends, when you come together to wait upon God, come orderly in the fear of God: the first that enters into the place of your meeting, be not careless, nor wander up and down, either in body or mind, but innocently sit down in some place, and turn in thy mind to the light, and wait upon God singly, as if none were present but the Lord; and here thou art strong. Then the net that comes in, let them in simplicity of heart sit down and turn in to the same light, and wait in the spirit; and so all the rest coming in, in the fear of the Lord, sit down in pure stillness and silence, of all flesh, and wait in the light...Those who are brought to a pure still waiting upon God in the spirit, are come nearer to the Lord than words are; for God is a spirit, and in the spirit is he worshipped...In such a meeting there will be an unwillingness to part asunder, being ready to say in yourselves, it is good to be here; and this is the end of all words and writing---to bring people to the eternal Living Word.(Parker 1660 quoted in part in Bauman 1983:121 and in PYM 2002:100)"

The Meeting for Worship—In Practice

However, the ideal form of a meeting is not necessarily always what happens in practice. The silence is sometimes punctuated with sounds like coughs, shuffling in the wooden benches and the occasional crying of babies that members bring with them. At other times, some members fall asleep, stare vacantly into the distance or provide idiosyncratic vocal ministry which can be quite inappropriate. Nowhere is this more evident than in the account the Trappist

monk, Thomas Merton provides of his experiences with a Quaker meeting in his book, *The Seven Storey Mountain*. In it he talks about how he sat in silent worship with the Quakers, adjusting to the peace of the silence when a female participant suddenly stood up and whipped out a photo of the Lion of Lucerne. He writes,

“...for presently one of the middle-aged ladies thought the Holy Ghost was after her to get up and talk. I secretly suspected that she had come to the meeting all prepared to make a speech anyway, for she reached into her handbag, as she stood up, and cried out in a loud earnest voice: “When I was in Switzerland I took this snapshot of the famous Lion of Lucerne...” With that she pulled out a picture...held it up and tried to show it around to the Friends...The Friends accepted it in patience, without enthusiasm or resentment. (Merton 1998(1948): 127-28)”

Sometimes ministry follows predictable, formulaic patterns which do not necessarily ‘arise in the Spirit.’ A recurring phenomenon, observed frequently by this writer and referred to as ‘daffodil ministry,’ where members launch off into a long winded, pointless digression about the beauty of the world which usually starts with ‘On my way to Meeting today, I noticed....’ is also fairly common in the Meeting. Quaker jargon mocks how, “every spring a Friend notices how lovely the daffodils look as they come to meeting for worship, and they minister about how lovely the world is. Generally a pejorative term to describe uncritical and predictable ministry (Quaker jargon undated, unpaginated pamphlet).” A related phenomenon is the ‘candle ministry’ where members in an attempt to emphasize diversity repeat platitudinous sentences like, “the candles are like people - all different, but they all have the spirit burning within them.”

At other times, events occurring outside the Meeting disturb members so deeply that a process of ‘centering’ does not take place. At one meeting, which occurred a few days after Tom Fox, a Quaker member of a Christian peacekeeping team in Iraq had been kidnapped and killed by Iraqi insurgents the silence was painful, with several members weeping softly during the Meeting. Some members had known him personally, and could not understand why he had been

killed. There was no vocal ministry for most of the meeting, and members reported that they found it difficult to stay focused. Towards the end of the meeting one member rose up crying, and mentioned in her ministry how difficult she found it to sit in silence and wait upon the inner light that morning, when all she could think of was the murder of Tom Fox.

Members admit readily that the 'gathered meeting' where 'one is bathed in silence' is an infrequent occurrence, yet one that does happen. Quaker literature suggests that vocal ministry that does not 'speak to one's condition' should be allowed to pass, since it might be intended by the Spirit to be for someone else.

Faith and Practice warns that,

"Speaking carried on in a spirit of debate or lecturing or discussion is destructive to the life of the meeting for worship and of the meeting community... Any who habitually settle into silent reading or sit in inattentive idleness cut themselves off from their fellow worshippers and from the pervasive reach of the Spirit. If hindrances to worship occur within a meeting for worship, members of Worship and Ministry [a Quaker committee] or others as appropriate should move quickly and in love to provide counsel (PYM 2002: 20)"

Yet while mechanisms exist to manage the silence and prevent disruptive ministry, as Merton points out, self-aggrandizing, pre-prepared speeches, formulaic ministry or mangled silences are usually accepted in patience by Friends for even they contribute to the worship. "Meeting for worship—which includes troubled silences, pompous speechifying, and uncertain searchings, as well as clear leadings—has taught me that the difficult things are often the most fruitful (Bishop 1994:69)."

Communication in the Meeting for Worship

From the brief description of the Quaker Meeting for Worship in the preceding pages, it is clear that multiple processes of interaction and communication are involved in the ritual. The analysis that follows elaborates and builds on these processes to provide a more thorough

description of the worship but a preliminary enumeration of the processes follows. At this stage we can identify three *modes* of interaction,

1. Interaction in silence
2. Verbal Interaction
3. Interaction through gestures

Further, taking senders and receivers into consideration (though Harris (1996) warns that the sender-receiver model of communication seems to have its intellectual origins in the village post-office) we can distinguish between

1. Ego-centric Communication (A worshipper talking with herself, contemplation, meditation, 'turning away from worldly matters to rediscover inner serenity, 'centering')
2. Interpersonal Communication between the Spirit and the worshipper ('leadings from the Spirit,' revelations)
3. Interpersonal Communication between the Spirit-filled member and the group (Vocal ministry originating in the Spirit)
4. Interpersonal Communication between Members (Vocal ministry **not** originating in the spirit, daffodil ministry, candle ministry)
5. Group Communication in silence ('heightened sense of the presence of God through the cumulative power of group worship (PYM 2002:19), 'gathering,' 'awareness of the utter interdependence on one another (Gorman 1982:88)')

This is a preliminary enumeration of the communicative processes involved in this Meeting. It is immediately obvious that this is problematic, since the Quaker Meeting does not allow for exhaustive formalization, several of these processes are unobservable; others merely

reflect Quaker-internal understandings of the worship and none of them are discrete. However, this is only a frame that facilitates organizing the ethnographic data.

Defining the Meeting for Worship

The approach that this thesis employs is primarily ethnographic description. The Meeting for Worship is 'a bounded episode of social history in which persons encounter each other through communicative behaviors amenable to recording- and transcript-based study (Agha 2005:1).' As a complex phenomenon that is informed by other 'socio-historical encounters' and has 'enduring consequences' it necessitates a comprehensive approach that takes into account the religious beliefs that inform and shape it.

Unlike other communicative behaviors however, as an event whose principal mode of communication is silence the Meeting for Worship presents unique problems. A profound mistrust of words informs Quaker linguistic ideology (Bauman 1983), and it is not in words, but in 'pure stillness and silence of all flesh, and wait[ing] in the light' that one comes 'nearer to the Lord than words are (Parker 1660).' The 'invisibility of action' means that transcripts and recordings are of little relevance to understanding the silence, undermining traditional ethnographic means of understanding and rendering conventional tools of analysis useless for the study of a signifying order without 'signs, codes or texts (Danesi 1999:22).' Pink-Dandelion warns of the pitfalls students of Quakerism fall into when he says,

"Observing this Quaker rite presents the sociologist with a different problem, that of the invisibility of action. Participants may cough occasionally, shift in their seats or arrive late... Otherwise; it is a fairly static liturgical form. Body language, whether eyes are open or closed, might become the desperate last attempt of a sociologist to locate meaning or difference within the group, only the words of ministry, if there is any, offering any clue to what might be happening behind this mask of silence (Dandelion 2005:2)'

Further, the fact that the silence is 'not in an objectively comprehensible form (Buber 2002:191)' means that a participant account of the Meeting is necessarily incomplete for as Buber points out, the silence is such that "He will be able to tell no one, not even himself, what he has experienced, For where unreserve has ruled, even wordlessly, between men, the word of dialogue has happened sacramentally (Buber 2002:190).' Quakerism is a linguistic tradition, and an ideology of language, but one informed by a belief in linguistic fallibility. Words are carnal, and fail to capture to mystery and glory of the light.

This mode of communication rests on the experiential, for as George Fox said, 'I came to know God experimentally' (*meaning experientially*), 'and was as one who hath a key and doth open.' As a non-linguistic sign, to impose the structure of language onto something that both Quakers and non-Quakers consider inexpressible would be to succumb to what Harris calls the fallacy of Verbalism. The silence of the Meeting for Worship is a liturgical form, and

"Liturgy belongs in the order of 'doing' (*ergon*), not of 'knowing' (*logos*). Logical thought cannot get very far with it; liturgical actions yield their intelligibility in their performance, and this performance takes place entirely at the level of sensible realities, not as exclusively material but as vehicles of overtones capable of awakening the mind and heart to acceptance of realities that belong to a different order (Dalmais 1986:259).'

To fully comprehend the silence, and the Meeting for Worship we need to work towards a functional understanding that orients this study, with the fact that it belongs to the order of 'doing' not 'knowing' as a frame of reference. What then, are we studying exactly?

Firstly, we are studying a *ritual performance*. As an ethnography of the Meeting for Worship, our unit of analysis is a form of the religious life of the Quakers. Dalmais points out, liturgy is of the order of *ergon* (doing) and is clearly performance, but is it ritual? Do Quakers even have rituals? As an iconoclastic religion that eschewed an adherence 'to any outward rites,' that emphasized that the 'Christ in them, who is the end of outward forms (Fox 1831)'

Quakerism has consciously rejected any attempts towards developing a ritual form of worship. Its genesis and evolution stemmed from a deliberate, ideological rebellion against forms of ritual worship to emphasize the primacy of individual mystic experience. As a result, there is no canonic form of the Meeting for Worship, no ritual formula that is invoked in the performance (even if there are unstated boundaries that delineate acceptable and unacceptable behavior). The absence of a canonic form, distrust of outward forms, and emphasize on individual ministry means that the ritual is a dynamic form that resists routinization. Further, as Durkheim points out, religious life is predicated on a

‘...classification of the real or ideal things that men conceive into two classes—two opposite genera—that are widely designated by two distinct terms, which the words profane and sacred translate fairly well. The division of the world into two domains, one containing all that is sacred and the other all that is profane—such is the distinctive trait of religious thought (Durkheim 1995:34).’

Quakerism does not make that distinction. One of its reasons for denying the validity of Christian forms like the Eucharist, the Adoration of the Host and baptism by water was because it held all life to be sacramental, not just specially demarcated religious events. A central tenet of Quakerism as described by the PYM holds that, ‘The power and love of God is over all, erasing the artificial division between the secular and religious. **All of life, when lived in the Spirit, becomes sacramental.** Quakerism is thus a way of life, putting faith into daily actions (PYM 2002).’ While Durkheim makes a distinction between a rite and a moral practice stating, that ‘The rites can be distinguished from other human practices—for example moral practices---only by the special nature of their object. Like a rite, a moral rule prescribes ways of behaving to us, but those ways of behaving address objects of a different kind (Durkheim 1995:34),’ Quakerism blurs the difference between rites and moral practices creating a division between the sacred and profane where the sacred is life lived in the Spirit, as opposed to the ‘carnal’ speech, which stems

from outside the Spirit. 'The sacred and the profane cannot coexist in the same space or the same time' in the Quaker universe they do, and the sacred does not necessitate the creation of a space (as evidenced in the deliberately un-Churchlike, drab Quaker architecture, and unornamented rooms), demarcation of a time or a specific ritual process.

Yet, Quakers do meet every Sunday morning for the Meeting for Worship. They do sit in silence till moved by the Spirit. They do end the Meeting with a shaking of hands, and do share a set of common beliefs about the efficacy of the ritual. In earlier times, Quakers followed a more extensive set of prescriptions when conducting the Meeting for Worship (taking off hats, speaking in a nasal tone while providing vocal ministry etc). However, 'the dangers of formalism were present to the Quakers from the very beginning of their movement in the behavior of the made ministers against whom they set themselves, and although the formulaic and conventional elements of ministerial speaking by the Quaker ministers themselves were documented... the mainstream Quaker leadership was forced to take a position on formalism in worship (Bauman 1983:140).' Bauman 1983 suggests that formalism developed to guard against misled ministry, after Quakers like John Perrot and James Nayler got carried away and produced prophetic vocal ministries which were controversial and a testimony was adopted in which 'individual guidance is subordinated to the corporate sense of the Church, which is treated as finding authoritative expression through the elders who are sound in the faith (Braithwhite quoted in Bauman 1983:143).'

While the faith consciously shuns ritual forms, the difference is between Quaker worship and other canonic, religious practice is only one of the degree of ritualization. It might lack a canonic form, eschew outward signs, and deny liminality to the occasion, yet it is still a ritual, albeit one that permits participants a great deal of performative latitude. Ritual is 'not just a

pattern of meaning; it is also a form of social interaction (Geertz 1973: 168).’ The Quaker Meeting for Worship is an interesting paradox, a ritual that is consciously not one.

Secondly, the ritual does not occur in the absence of participants. As an ethnography of the Religious Society of Friends, our concern is with the Meeting for Worship as a *societal* mode of expression. While the distinction between religion and society may seem obvious Quakerism again deliberately blurs the boundaries between the two, and further, between society and the individual. It is a set of religious beliefs, but the concern is ‘not with the label, but the life.’ The emphasis in modern Quaker literature and pamphlets is uniformly on the ‘corporate sense of the meeting’ and the language that Friends use to describe themselves emphasizes societal aspects of Quakerism (Meeting instead of Church, Society instead of religion etc). As the name reflects, Quakerism emphasizes its existence not as a religious form but as a *societal* one. While a tension exists between individual revelation and societal approval in Quakerism, it is only when they are compatible, i.e. the ministry has been subjected to ‘the corporate sense of the Meeting’ is it accepted. At this point the individual and the society are of one mind, and “the Quaker conviction is that as we go deeper into ourselves we shall eventually reach a still, quiet center. At this point, two things happen simultaneously. Each of us is aware of our unique value as an individual human being, and each of us is aware of our utter **interdependence** [bold mine] on one another (Gorman 1982:104).”

Thirdly, as a study of a *religious* society, this ethnography is incomplete without an investigation of belief. Unlike other religions, the fact that Quakerism lacks a creed and eschews any attempt to define its theology means that it is impossible to formalize an ‘emics of belief.’ Belief is not centered in the society, but in the individual, and a multiplicity of beliefs coexists in harmony. Dandelion (1996)’s idea that a dichotomy exists between belief and behavior in

Quakerism might be valid, but the behavior is informed by belief, and the ethnography is incomplete without a theology. The formalism that resulted from mangled ministry in the seventeenth century that Bauman and Braithwhite discuss now seems to operate only to regulate behavior not belief, and unless manifested in vocal ministry belief is unobservable. As a religion that permits a diversity of views as to what it necessarily means to *be* Quaker, and leaves the meaning of Quakerism not to the whole, but to the individual the Quaker faith, like the label is polyphonic.

Finally, as a study of silence in the Meeting for Worship our focus is on the processes of *communication* and interaction that make silence meaningful. As myriads of accounts of believers testify, the silence *is (or can be)* meaningful, even if oftentimes indescribably so. Fox and the first Quakers believed that communication happened with the Inner Light in a Meeting, and this is a belief Quakers continued to hold. The very definitions of a 'gathered meeting' and 'ministry' that Faith and Practice provides, ("A meeting for worship or for business in which those present feel deeply united in the divine presence (PYM 2002:220)" and "Sharing or acting upon one's gifts, whether in service to individuals, to the meeting, or to the larger community (PYM 2002:222)") presuppose that communication happens, even if in silence.

Our study then is a study of the Meeting for Worship as a 1) *communicative* form involving 2) *ritual* 3) *performance* that functions as a 4) *societal* mode of expression within 5) a *religious* framework. While this may seem unnecessarily wordy, it serves as a useful starting point from which we can base our understanding of the meeting. Using this preliminary definition of sorts and the multiple processes of communication that we untangled in the earlier section as frames of reference we now need to describe and analyze this 'communicative form

involving ritual performance that functions as a societal mode of expression within a religious framework.'

Chapter 3
Finding the Inner light: Theorizing the Meeting

Containing
An etic schema of description,
An Integrationist account of the Meeting for Worship
And
An discussion of Quaker mysticism and preoccupation with language

As a communicative form, perhaps the most productive theoretical approach towards the Meeting, one that would help us frame an adequate 'descriptive etics' is the ethnography of speaking/communication approach pioneered by J.J. Gumperz and Dell Hymes. The ethnography of communication approach helps us provide a 'description of the interaction of language with social life' at the level of 'individual communities and groups (Gumperz 1972: 53). In the context of the Meeting for Worship of the Quakers, it gives us the tools to develop an organizing framework

'...comprising four levels of specificity, which while analytically separable, ultimately link together. The first area concerns communicative events and the close description and specification of the participants, modes, channels, codes, settings, message form, attitudes, and content whose simultaneous ongoing activity characterize the event. The second area extends this to the varieties and forms of co-occurrence among these components. The third area reaches out more directly into the social arena to question how capacities and forms relate to function, differential competence and performance, and general salience of activities to participants and society. Fourth, and finally, the activity of the system is considered as a whole in terms of its ongoing sustenance, maintenance, and balance, as well as its character in relation to other systems (Feld 1990:15)."

However, while the ethnography of speaking approach and in particular tools like the SPEAKING model of description, the ethnographic guide to the study of speech use by Sherzer and Darnell (1972) and Bauman's (1983) work provide a useful organizing schema, the intangible nature of silent worship renders does not allow this approach to fully capture its nuances. The semiotic dimensions of Quaker ritual require an understanding of processes of communication which the ethnography of speaking can not provide by itself, and it is here that the ideas of linguistic Integrationism (Harris 1996) prove most useful. While Harris holds that there is something 'odd about trying to explain talk by reference to the kind of speech-act theory elaborated by philosophers (Harris 1981:1456)' and employs an alternative approach that holds that human communication is not amenable, *'even if the requisite knowledge were*

available, to exhaustive formalization (Harris 1996:46)' his ideas prove to be particularly fruitful in analyzing Quaker worship practices.

This paper examines the Meeting for Worship through the twin theoretical frames of the ethnography of speaking, and Integrationism to provide a comprehensive, even if sometimes mutually contradictory description of the Meeting, yet one that can not 'exhaustively formalize' the Meeting. Finally, we are concerned with the management of the silence and ministry in the Meeting for Worship. 'By what techniques do [the Quakers] as talkers and listeners demonstrate their skills to mutual satisfaction? How do they know when to speak and when not to? What counts as fulfilling the demands talk makes on them? What are recognized as "mistakes" in talk, and how do they rectify them with minimum loss of face? How do they exercise control over the relevance and consequentiality of what is said from one moment to the next (Harris 1981:1456)?' and it is here that the ideas of Erving Goffman and Symbolic Interactionism provide a productive organizing frame.

While our concern is with "talk" (and silence as another mode of "talk") the fact that it is the ritual form of a religion (a 'liturgy' of a sort) as well as a statement of a belief in the *ideology* of linguistic fallibility necessitates other considerations, and this study attempts to situate this approach within a Quaker religious view as depicted in the Pendle Hill pamphlets and the works of Rufus Jones and Douglas Steere. A discussion of the nature of mysticism, as described by William James and of how it informs a uniquely post-modern, 'Quaker epistemology' is also included.

This thesis therefore combines an ethnographic approach with linguistic analysis to uncover the meaning of Silent Worship in modern twenty-first century Quakerism. While it may seem that such a multi-pronged approach is fraught with confusion, lack of clarity and over-

theorizing, as Bauman (1983) points out the 'genre mixing that Clifford Geertz (1980) has identified as part of the contemporary refiguration of social thought' is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon as complicated as Silent Worship.

The Ethnography of Communication—An 'Adequate Ethics'?

Using the working notion of what the Meeting for Worship constitutes that we have discussed in the earlier sections we need to move in the direction of providing a description of the life of the Meeting at the level of the individual and the group. A prelude to reaching 'descriptive adequacy' is the formalization of observation within the framework of an 'adequate ethics' that helps us uncover the norms governing the interaction.

Our concern here is with the Quakers as a *speech community*, i.e. a 'community sharing rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech, and rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety (Hymes 1972:54).' The particular context we are concerned with here, the *speech situation* is the communal ritual of worship.

This analysis hinges on the construction of the Quaker Meeting for Worship as a speech (or more appropriately a communicative) event. To clarify, a *speech event* refers to 'activities, or aspects of activities, that are directly governed by rules or norms for the use of speech (Hymes 1972:56).' The unit of analysis is then the *speech event*, 'that is in some recognizable way bounded or integral' and has several rules or norms governing speech (and the abstention from it) that apply only to the Meeting. It is marked off as an event distinguishable from other social interaction by the existence of special norms governing behavior during it and, explicit acts that demarcate the episode (Welcome by Greeters, Announcements at the end of the Meeting).

This is not an arbitrary imposition of a descriptive model onto the social life of the Quakers, but a distinction that is also emic. Though the Quakers believe that the light may speak

to members and guide them whenever they are open to it (within or outside of the Meeting), they recognize that special rules are at play during the Meeting itself and accord it a unique status.

Within this speech event whose norms we wish to uncover, multiple forms of communication, both verbal and nonverbal are at work. We can not restrict our understanding of communication to only the verbal processes involved, since 'the strict ethnographic approach requires us to extend the concept of communication to the boundaries granted it by the participants of a culture.' It also requires us to 'restrict it to those boundaries (Hymes 1964:28).' Since in the Quaker understanding of the Meeting silence does have the ability to communicate, silence is one of a class of speech acts amongst which a choice is made at points in the interaction. The speech act, as 'a minimal term of a speech event' is a problematic idea when applied to the Quaker Meeting since it is hard to distinguish what constitutes minimal terms for the event. Durranti (1997) points out that while Hymes insists on events as a unit of analysis 'given the dynamic nature of speech it makes more sense to think of those components as constitutive parts of speech acts (p. 290)'. However, we will adhere to Hymes' notion of the event as the unit of analysis, not the speech act, since we have used the event as the unit of analysis elsewhere in the paper. The spoken utterances are not independent of the silence but are rather seen as stemming from it, a form of continuity and verbal representation of the silence itself that makes the entire Meeting one event. The act of communication in silence is a *performance*, an *illocutionary act* where silence is the form through which the intent of gathering in worship, or listening for the light is fulfilled and communicated.

The act of sitting together in silence is the performance of the intention of gathering in prayer. It does not follow from this that any silence is an *illocutionary act* of worship. The *illocutionary force* is only present when the meeting gathers together to worship, the silence

becoming meaningful as a performance only within the context of the speech event, the Meeting for Worship.

The vocal ministry arising out of the silence is the fulfillment and reporting of the silence, just as the silence in a group is the performance of prayer. As an act that transmits (at least in Quaker theological understandings of it) the message arising from the light, with the intent of informing and producing effects upon the feelings, thoughts or actions of the audience it is a *perlocutionary act*. The receiver here is the audience who listen to the vocal ministry, while the speaker is the individual who is a vessel for the light.

The notion of 'minimal terms' to the speech event is not something that is consistent with Quaker understandings of the event, since at least in theory the entire process is one act, with the vocal ministry flowing from the silence, verbalizing the message that the Spirit delivers in silence and the difference is only one of communicative mode. Further, the communicative process is contextual and only understood within the framework of a Meeting. As we shall discuss later, Harris (1996) opposes the use of speech act theory in its entirety holding that it is flies in the face of actual processes of communication that are integrated by participants. Finally, the notion of a silent speech act is paradoxical since the idea of a performative utterance emphasizes the performance of the act by stating it, not by abstention from doing so.

We will return to a discussion of the validity of the ethnography of communication approach and the idea of a speech act in later passages but moving from a working notion of a speech act we can now proceed to uncover other aspects of the communication processes in the Meeting. Our concern is with describing the styles, ways and components of communication in this context. There is no Quaker-specific fashion of speaking, no language to the liturgy. While

in earlier times Quaker attitude towards language insisted on a simplicity of form, an emphasis on 'plain speech,' and vocal ministry was conducted with a peculiar nasal intonation (to emphasize that it arose in the Spirit not in the individual) few of these practices are prevalent today. Quakers use the same language as the larger society they belong to, though certain expressive styles can be distinguished. Several ideas and forms of ministry repeat themselves, but the nature of **performative latitude** allowed to participants makes it impossible to talk of a ritual formula of any kind. Daffodil ministry, candle ministry etc repeat certain ideas that are considered platitudinous by members but they do not follow a standard format. Certain verbal cues serve as stylistic markers that help members identify 'consistent patterns of speaking.' An illustration of this is presented in the chart on the following page which reproduces Signe Wilkinson's humorous cartoon, a '*Field guide to Quaker (Unprogrammed) Ministry.*'

Wilkinson distinguishes between recurrent patterns which surface weekly and occasional (spontaneous eruptions). The Editorial Bored form for instance refers to ministry which focuses on political issues occurred frequently during the period of observation. It usually involved references to Iraq and cues that helped identify this form were references to conscription, Iraq, news articles, war etc.

Davies (1998) distinguishes between 'religious English' and other forms of the language. He says

"The interesting thing about the semantic structure of theological language is the way in which there is a clear linguistic center to which all lexical terms can ultimately be referred, namely the term "God." [quoting Crystal and Davy 1969:171]... It is probably the most clearly marked variety of all. They point to the use of unspecific words"

He proceeds to give a list of these words such as 'waiting on God,' 'Holy Spirit,' 'pearl of great price' etc. While Davies (1988) found that religious language was common in the Meeting for Worship, this was not as prevalent during the period of observation. Some members

alluded to ideas of George Fox, and on a few occasions quoted passages from the Bible, but the overwhelming portion of ministry emphasized mapped onto a domain of personal experience. Most vocal ministry emphasized a sense of awe at the nature of life itself, and did not specifically discuss God. Prayer, especially prayer to help end war, or solve social issues did not refer to the Spirit or God but emphasized the agency of the individual, with a typical ministry saying 'I pray for an end to....' This is consistent with Davies (1998)'s observations. He says, 'That is to say, the style was very rarely of the traditional prayer variety with second-person address to God forms. That did occur, but rarely. Far more common were prayers which used the statement as a form of indirect address, *declaratives for imperatives* (italics his) (Davies 1988:128)."

Before we proceed in the direction of analyzing content, we need to describe the components of speech. Following Hymes' SPEAKING model, and Sherzer and Darnell's (1972) guide to ethnographic study of speech use we can discuss the meeting in terms of a etic, heuristic schema. Hymes' extended model is not entirely productive, since some of the components of the model are irrelevant to the Meeting, and as Durranti (1997) points out this heuristic schema can 'tends to be particularly dull to read (p.289) but is still an important first step towards organizing the data. The components of speech that this model emphasizes are—settings, participants, ends, act sequences, keys, instrumentalities, norms and genres.

The setting and scene for the speech act has already been described as the Meeting Room of the Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, with the 'cultural definition of an occasion' as specially demarcated for the purposes of prayer, and listening to the Spirit. The participants in the speech acts are the members of the Meeting, first time attenders and if one extends communication to the boundaries Quakers extend it to, the inner light or Spirit also participates.

It is not necessary to class the participants as speakers, receivers, addressors and addressees for the purpose of this description, though if we follow the Quaker interpretation of the Meeting, the only speaker is the Spirit, unless ministry is mangled.

The ends are not immediately obvious. While the Meeting for Worship with attention to Business has a clearly defined agenda, that is not the case with the Meeting for Worship. The Meeting does not have a communally defined goal, and there is no particular outcome. 'If a component seems irrelevant to certain acts or genres that should be asserted, and the consequences of the assertion checked (Hymes 1974:66)." In some instances there is an individual goal in view when a member provides Ministry (to make a political statement, to assert a social concern etc), but this is not the communal agenda of the group.

The key of the act lies in the ritual nature of the Meeting, since norms govern the interruption of the silence. The ritual seriousness of the event sets the tone of the Meeting and governs the content of the act itself. The channels or modes of communication, discussed earlier are silence, and speech itself. Bauman (1983) and Davies (1988) discuss the tension that exists between silence and vocal ministry, and in terms of a relative hierarchy of channels the emphasis is on the silence. However, the two modes are not independent, with the vocal ministry ideally flowing from the silence itself.

The ritual context governs the forms of communication, and the norms of interaction and interpretation. Davies (1988) discusses some of the normative constraints to behavior in the Meeting,

"It is not open-ended (it has a fixed termination), it does not encourage frequent speaking in concert or questions requiring answers—or answers to rhetorical questions in earlier ministry, or many forms of speaking that are entirely normal in other situations. Thus among the non-mentionables are vocative invocation in order, e.g. to insult or to make arrangements or propose marriage, and reference to some informational data which do not have overt general significance... Of course, these examples are not strict

unmentionables, They are just not among the mentionables, they don't get said. (Davies 1988:131)"

The informational literature handed out to first time participants makes these norms of interaction clear. It says, "Therefore, this is not a time for debate or discussion. If a message is offered that does not speak to your condition, it may be meant for another so let it pass. If you are moved to offer a message, please allow some time to pass after a previous message. In this way, all messages can be given the respect they deserve (PYM undated: no pagination)." Norms of interpretation however, are left to the individual, as Thomas Merton pointed out. All ministries are accepted in silence, though a ministry addressing a specific social concern may result in other members answering the ministry with support. If someone's ministry does not have direct relevance to a member it is allowed to pass. On one occasion, a member provided a long, rambling ministry which discussed a particularly vivid hallucination that he had had, and referred to a vision of Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson on the grass outside his window. It adhered to the general style of ministry, by recounting a personal experience, punctuated with long pauses but did not relate it to the Spirit in the way most other ministries nor did he state why he felt compelled to share this experience. Facial expressions and the closing of eyes to meditate indicated that several older members were clearly uncomfortable with the content of the ministry, and its relevance to the meeting but let it pass, while others found the content refreshingly different from the usual daffodil ministry and smiled and indicated their appreciation by shifting in their seats to look at the speaker.

Norms of interaction and interpretation will be discussed in greater detail later in the ethnography, but we now need to direct our attention to the task of devising models of explanation. A key concept underlying the ethnography of communication approach is the idea of *communicative competence* which helps us develop a set of rules that govern speaking.

Communicative competence is 'the ability to produce or understand utterances that are not so much *grammatical*, but more important, *appropriate to the context in which they are made* (Campbell and Wales 1970:247)." Communicative competence extends beyond a strictly grammatical or linguistic competence, focusing instead on those sociolinguistic cues and contextual understandings that a descriptive grammar fails to capture.

"Within the social matrix in which it acquires a system of grammar a child acquires also a system of its use, regarding persons, places, purposes, other modes of communication, etc.—all the components of communicative events, together with attitudes and beliefs regarding them. There also develop patterns of the sequential use of language in conversation, address, standard routines and the like. In such acquisition resides the child's sociolinguistic competence (or more broadly, its communicative competence), its ability to participate in its society as not only a speaking, but also a communicating member (Hymes 1974)."

It is this set of patterns and rules that we are concerned with uncovering. However, the question arises whether it is even possible to formulate an exhaustive set of rules that govern Quaker ritual given the open ended nature of the event. There is no 'standard routine' and 'no closures, no adjacency pairs, no turn-taking sequences (Davies 1988:133).' There is an attitude and set of beliefs towards communication though,

"The reconciliation of the human necessity of speaking with the spiritual need for silence was a problem every member of the Society of Friends had to contend with throughout his or her life as a Quaker... The tension between the natural and spiritual faculties—between speaking and silence—was a necessary component of the Quaker experience (Bauman 1983:136)."

This tension between speech and silence helps us formulate basic rules concerning the speech event. In his 1988 study, Davies observed that 'Members recognize one another by keeping to the (linguistic) rules of (a) silence, by doing silence together and (b) when speaking some combination of religious language and first-person reference, the (God) → I → God linearity (Davies 1988:132).' However, in this meeting the rhetoric of God was only occasionally present,

and is not a necessary rule of communication. Lippard (1988) argues that the Quaker ministry is 'participatory rhetoric' directed towards

"Creating "consubstantial identification" with a perceived other. A is not identical with his colleague B, but insofar as their interests are joined, A is identified with B. In being identified with B, A is "substantially" one with a person other than himself (Burke 1969:20)" ... [However] the preservation of a particular identification cannot supersede commitment to the means of achieving willing identification (pg 147)"

It follows then that there is (a) a tension between silence and speech, causing (b) a devaluation of speech (due to a belief in linguistic fallibility), which results in the 'keeping to the (linguistic) rules of' (c) silence, and (d) vocal ministry stemming from the Spirit that is geared towards creating a (e) consubstantial identification while recognizing the (f) the validity of individual perspectives.

Thus in a situation where all ministry (unless deliberately disruptive) is permissible, sociolinguistic competence lies in the 'receiver choosing to identify with the source's perspective—a choice that is, to a greater or lesser degree, consciously owned and understood (Lippard 1988:146)." So, communicative competence does not lie in speaking even, but in listening, in attention and openness towards the workings of the Spirit (since the source is not the individual but the light that guides him). A great deal of the bombast of George Fox in the *Journal*, and the *Mystery of the Great Whore unfolded* is reserved for people who are not open to the working of the Spirit within them. Communication fails, when one is closed to the 'Light,' both when one provides ministry that does not originate in the light and when one doesn't listen for the Light in others.

The idea of *communicative competence* stems from a notion of language and communication that emphasizes the existence of a system of rules governing use independent of the communicative processes. Hymes talks of 'the patterns of the sequential use of language in

conversation, address, standard routines' but the absence of any such pattern makes it difficult to formalize the Meeting in terms of the idea of competence. This is because,

"As communication in practice involves action in indefinitely variable sets of circumstances, with many different kinds of participants and many different kinds of purpose, and because success in communication depends on the contingent satisfaction of a variety of unforeseeable conditions on particular occasion, in what sense can it be claimed that communication is subject to the mastery of rules?...as long as the notion of competence remains tied to the formulation of generative rules, there is a fundamental difficulty about extending that notion to cover communication in general. For successful communicative behavior is situationally determined in ways that offer no analogy to the production of grammatical sentences (Harris 1990:126)."

While the SPEAKING model helps us reach a degree of descriptive adequacy, and the idea of communicative competence helps explain some aspects of the Meeting its emphasis on uncovering rules governing communication and formalization serves as a barrier to understanding silent worship. An alternative model that of linguistic integrationism, which attempts to understand the communicative process not in terms of competence but in terms of the basic integrational conditions required *for participation* in a communicative agenda, and the constraints to participation is more productive.

Constraints to Communication—An Explanatory Account

Integrationism provides 'an explanatory account of communication which will accord with our lay understanding of human existence without prejudging fundamental questions about how and why human beings communicate (Harris 1996: x).' The only assumptions that Integrationism makes is that '*Signs presuppose communication*' and that this communication is 'not something additional to or separable from the rest of human life and the constantly changing circumstances that it presents, but an integrated part of it (Page 12).' As Harris makes clear, it is merely an elaboration of 'our lay understanding of human existence' without prejudging the processes involved.

What does this mean for our understanding of Quaker worship as communication? It means that we conceptualize the event *not* in terms of participant intent and communicative choices, or in terms of communicative competence required to take part, or even in terms of an autonomous domain of semiological knowledge onto which we map the communication but that rather that we understand the communication itself as part of a process of *integration*, as an open-ended opportunity within a contextual framework that exists in **time**, where signs are created as part of a continuously reflexive process. We do not attempt to define communication but rather understand it in terms of the 'activities it integrates, the particular constraints on integration involved, and the signs produced to implement the process (Harris 1996: 63).' This is radically different from other ways of understanding communication in that it does not assume the autonomy of the sign, does not conceive of communication through the 'metaphor of transportation' of telemental sender-receiver models or turn forms of non-linguistic communication into 'copies of linguistic knowledge (Barthes 1967: 11).'

So, why is integrationism a valuable way of understanding Quaker worship? It is because it does not fall into the trap of linguistic reductionism and reduce the silence (which is a communicative process) to another form of language, because it situates these communicative process within a larger ritual and social context, because it factors in a temporal dimension to the analysis and because it does not require a 'Who said what to whom, and how?' understanding of communication.

As Harris himself points out though,

'It is important, however, not to be deluded... into supposing that human communication is amenable, *even if the requisite knowledge were available*, to exhaustive formalization. From an integrational point of view, it is not. The reasons why this is so have to do with the indeterminacy which characterizes all communication processes (Harris 1996: 46).'

This is in contrast to the ethnography of communication approach that we discussed earlier. This is because the underlying assumptions of the two approaches are very different. They diverge on multiple levels, basing their understanding of communication on different principles. The primary point of divergence between Integrationism and the ethnography of speaking is their positions on the ontological primacy of the sign. Roy Harris is quite emphatic in his statement that in Integrationism 'Signs presuppose communication.' While sociolinguistic approaches do not frame their understanding of language in those terms their emphasis on the existence of a system of rules governing use independent of communicative processes mean that communication necessarily requires the existence of an autonomous system of signs before the process starts. The implications for these in approaches toward Quaker ritual are obvious in the kind of questions these approaches seek to ask for while one approach, Harris' would look to understand communicative processes the other would look to uncover rules governing the interaction of language and social life. The ethnography of speaking, like Integrationism emphasizes the importance of situating communication *within a context*, as evident from the passage from Hymes, 'which talks about the patterns of the sequential use of language in conversation, address, standard routines' but while both emphasize the importance of context where they diverge is in how they choose to understand this context. Integrationism would hold that it is impossible to conceive of context-specific rules that govern communication.

Beyond conflicting ideas about the ontological primacy of the sign, the approaches have different notions of what signs and communication are. The sociolinguistic idea, drawing on a different epistemological approach dating back to Aristotle, Locke and Saussure is a surrogational and segregationist one, in that it sees the sign as 'standing for' or a surrogate for something else. Its idea of what to limit communication to draws from its grounding within

ethnography, limiting communication to whatever the participants consider it to involve.

Integrationism eschews such an approach, and Harris has even gone so far as to call the idea of a 'language' as a system of signs existing independent of communication a 'myth.'

However this is not the place for a more detailed discussion of the differences between integrationism and the ethnography of speaking. Using the 'individuality of experience' as the point of departure (as opposed to an observance of social behavior), we can theorize in terms of the constraints on integration that the communicative infrastructure places, and as Harris postulates these are of three types,

- Biomechanical, relating to the physical and mental capacities of participants
- Macro social, relating to practices established in the community
- Circumstantial, relating to the specific situation

Following Harris' sketch of the integrational processes and infrastructural constraints involved in the Church of England's Solemnization of Matrimony ritual we can examine the worship with '(a) with respect to what it presupposes and, (b) with respect to the communicative latitude (communicative space, if we wish to keep the metaphor) which it allows its participants (Harris 1996: 80).'

As discussed earlier, multiple forms of communication take place within the Meeting. These processes differ not only with respect to who the participants in the communication are (Self-Self/Spirit, Self-Group) but also in the form and methods they utilize (silence, verbal Communication, Non-verbal gesture, self-communication). There exist a set of integrational relations between these 'modally diverse forms of communication' and the processes are not independent of each other but one 'integrated system' regardless of the 'means or communicative channels.'

While they may be one integrated system of communication, the biomechanical, macro social and circumstantial constraints of each modal form are not necessarily the same. The silence within the worship itself, following Bauman, needs to be understood as not just 'an empty interval between utterances or as an abstention from speaking' but as a communicative mode. All this means is that all silences have the *potential* to be communicative, and in this particular situation silence lives up to that potential.

Silence is communicative on multiple levels, as contemplation (Egocentric self-Communication), as listening for 'leadings from the Holy Spirit' (Interpersonal Communication), as a ritualized sharing of mystic experience that occurs on the level of the group, and as the statement of a linguistic and religious ideology.

As a multimodal communicative process unprogrammed worship has few biomechanical capacity constraints. It requires an idea of the self, and the capacity for one to communicate with the self, and with the Spirit. As Quaker theology and social agenda make explicit this is something anybody can do, for the Spirit works in all people. As George Fox and other early Quakers emphatically stated, the 'movement of truth could be well observed among Native Americans, even though they were unacquainted with Jesus of Nazareth.' John Woolman, a contemporary of George Fox found the Indians 'measurably acquainted with that Divine Power which subjects the forward will of the human creature.' Even deafness is not a capacity constraint for in the past CPMM had made special provisions (they hired an interpreter who could translate the 'life of the meeting' into ASL for the deaf attender), for one does not need the ability to hear to understand silence. However, following the distinction Harris makes between capacity and ability the lack of extensive biomechanical *capacity* constraints does not mean that everybody has the *ability* to integrate the communication.. This distinction between having the

inner light within you and being open to its working is itself an ability constraint, in terms of a mental attitude towards mystic experience.

The most extensive presuppositions that need to be addressed before the communicational processes involved can be fully integrated into individual experience are the macro social constraints. Harris distinguishes between two macro social practices—proficiency, which refers to ‘practices of which a general awareness exists in the community’ and conformity, which refers to ‘unconscious processes of alignment which show up only when behavior is studied *en masse*.’ Beyond the obvious macro social constraints of knowledge, i.e. knowing where the meeting occurs, what time it occurs and how to get there that require *external integration* with everyday life prior to even entering to communicative space there are other explicit presuppositions. As a ritual form and a shared social institution, Quaker worship lays down extensive requirements to participate and requires integrating past experience with the present. The requirements to participate are made explicit to members in *Faith and Practice: A Book of Christian Discipline*, brought out by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, and to visitors through a Welcome Pamphlet handed out at the entrance of the Meeting Room. The Pamphlet opens with, ‘This pamphlet, and the map on the reverse side, is designed to help you navigate our Meeting’ and consists of a series of guidelines about what to expect. Since Quakerism presents itself as a creedless religion it sidesteps issues that codification might raise by not framing the meeting in *Faith and Practice* in terms of any formal, explicit rules about what must happen but mostly in terms of individual testimonies of fellow Quakers led in the light that it feels provide ‘practical advice regarding how to prepare for and settle into worship (PYM 2002:100).’ A typical testimony reads like this, “We earnestly advice all who attend our meetings to lift their hearts to God immediately on taking their seats. The avoidance of distracting conversation beforehand is a great help to this

end, and the walk to meeting may often prove a true preparation for divine worship... (Selection 46 from PYM 2002).'

Some testimonies however present themselves as more than merely 'practical advice.'

Selection 146 by Brenda Heales and Chris Cook from 1992 states,

"[Some] need to share their pain... [and] come for the healing of their hurts, but they come with only an incomplete acceptance that the mystery of God's presence is at the heart of Meeting for Worship. Because their audience does not include God they don't listen for an answer... If you don't believe God is present, what answer are you expecting and from whom? (PYM 2002: 127)"

Here we have a macro social requirement made explicit. In order to adequately integrate the communication processes in worship, the participant has to listen for God. What constitutes this is deliberately left open-ended but 'acceptance that the mystery of God's presence is at the heart of Meeting for Worship' is a requirement to worship.

Further, this meeting for worship does not occur in a vacuum. It can only be understood and integrated in light of previous experiences in worship. In terms of macro social proficiency, the participant is proficient because of her participation in prior meetings, and integrates this meeting into her 'individual experience' in light of *prior communication processes*. Quaker theology formalizes this communicative continuity in the primacy it places on the Inner light, or continuing revelation. Worshippers do not make meaning of the silence independent of prior communication processes but integrate it into a *processual* conception of revelation.

However, at the same time another requirement to enter into communication with God is a 'stilling of the mind and body,' and a 'turn[ing] away from worldly matters to rediscover inward serenity (PYM 2002: 19).' So while participants make sense of revelation in light of past communication processes, they also do so by integrating it with their own selves.

The macro social requirements for proficiency in unprogrammed worship can therefore be understood in terms of theological underpinnings, understanding of canonic procedures and in terms of prior communicative procedures that worship presupposes. The levels of presupposition required to integrate the worship proficiently exist therefore on at least three levels, those of belief, behavior and pre-established macro social practices.

These requirements are not analogous with conformity to the worship though. At any given meeting there were at least four to ten first-time attenders. Assuming that their prior awareness of Quaker theology and meditative practice was minimal (as they themselves admitted in their introductions after worship) that did not impinge upon their ability to participate in the worship. Further, on at least one occasion a first-time attender stood up to deliver a message that he felt originated in the Spirit. This ease of participation is a function of the tremendous latitude a wholly improvised communicational process allows, while at the same time ensuring its own 'macro social survival' by occurring within a codified, ritualized space.

These presuppositions merely scrape at the surface of unprogrammed worship though. 'Communicational behavior makes sense *in the circumstances in which it is produced*' and any theorizing about Quaker ritual without anchoring it to the twin pegs of a temporal framework and circumstantial context is preliminary. Since integrationism holds that signs are made up during the process and are not autonomous to the processes involved, this is where the temporal dimension enters our analysis, for 'All signs, *in order to signify*, require temporal integration (Harris 1996:99).' The basic axioms of integrational semiology are

1. What constitutes a sign is not given independently of the situation in which it occurs or of its material manifestation in that situation.

2. The value of a sign (i.e. its signification) is a function of the integrational proficiency which its identification and interpretation presuppose. (Harris 1996: 154)

That silence here itself means is therefore something that follows from these axioms. Silence means regardless of intent, and it means through itself—not through tactile or gestural communication. There is no semiological structure given to participants in advance of actions, and through the process of contextualization silence is sign, in the absence of sign. It is neither autonomous nor invariant. How does it become intersubjectively available? The point of departure for an answer to that is the second axiom. The integrational proficiency which this sign requires is the constraint on interpretation. That such availability is a genuine possibility was evidenced throughout the ethnographic observation, and is perhaps best elucidated in a testimony by Clive Sansom from 1962 found in *Faith and Practice* which states, ‘There can be complete unity of worship without a single word being said. I have known a few such meetings and shall never forget them. It was their silence, not their words, that was memorable... (PYM 2002:127).’

We have already discussed the constraints on interpretation, as consisting of macro social factors such as the necessity of belief in the working of the inner light. Following Pink-Dandelion (2005) who suggests that in the absence of this belief, a ‘culture of silence’ develops where the old meaning of silence is lost and it disintegrates into a group meditative practice of sorts we can talk of integrational proficiency as consisting of prior experiences with the light (either in terms of attendance in earlier meetings or familiarity with Quaker theology), and for ‘consustantial identification’ to occur the existence of prior social relations between participants. As the ministry of first time attenders suggests, integrational proficiency may not necessarily require this knowledge, but eliminates the likelihood of rejection of ministry and removes macro social constraints to the communication.

So when the silence is shared amidst the members and first time attenders, temporal integration occurs and integrational proficiency is created simultaneously with the silence. Silence however is only one mode in the universe of modally diverse processes that constitute Quaker worship. As a sign it occurs 'in and as a product' of communication processes that *precede* it. The map is not the territory though, so while silence is always mode and communicative process (in the sense of it being integrated, but it is not *the* communicative process of integration which involves integrating the multimodal communicative processes with each other—internal integration and with other macro social practices—external integration), it is only sign *contextualized*. The silence is simultaneously mode, communication process and sign contextualized.

Yet no more can be said about silence, since it is a form that is syntactically indeterminate. The absence of a propositional syntax allows for a multiplicity of understandings to exist while yet permitting communication within the Meeting. Pink-Dandelion (2005) may be right, but even this existence of an alternative meditative practice does not eliminate the possibility of silent communication. Integrational proficiency with regard to interpretation is available to all since the syntactic indeterminacy of the sign allows for a multiplicity of interpretations of silence to flow, once again an idea in accord with the pluralistic theology of Liberal Quakerism.

Using this basic semiotic understanding of silence and of the constraints to communication, partial as this understanding is we can move towards better theorizing the nature of the communication with the Light. Since in total silence, i.e. a gathered ministry we have little in terms of observable social behavior we need to describe the nature of the relationship between participants and the norms of interaction that inform it.

The Gathered Meeting—Mysticism, Demeanor and the Light

We have thus far discussed creating an etic, descriptive schema of the Meeting, the constraints to communication, and some semiotic aspects of silence. This helps us understand the norms governing interaction, the meanings of the silence, constraints to communication and forms of performance. However, we have not yet explained what how participants deport themselves, what 'doing' the silent waiting upon the light involves, nor attempted to understand the nature of the relationship and interaction between participants and the Inner Light that communicates to them. In the pages that follow, attention is directed to these aspects of the Meeting for Worship, using ethnographic data from a meeting considered by some members to be 'gathered.'

The meeting did not involve any vocal ministry, something that happened only three times during the entire period of observation. It was conducted entirely in silence, without any interruptions. Whether it was a 'gathered' meeting, i.e. one where there was unity of worship in the light is impossible to say since that is a subjective judgment involving belief made by members though several members did report that they felt a unity of worship.

We have earlier described communicative competence as involving the 'doing of silence together,' an act not of speaking but of listening in attention and openness to the workings of the Spirit. This leaves us with little in terms of recordable, observed behavior that would help us understand the process of 'consubstantial identification' of the participants during a gathered meeting. Quaker writers from the very beginning have emphasized the experiential in the act of listening for the inner light. The silence is imperative to this act of listening, since it is impossible to capture the depth of the experience through speech but what kind of experience is the act of listening?

Several writers, Quakers and non-Quaker scholars have described the Meeting for Worship as being a genuine *mystic* experience, or at least having the potential to be one. Jones (1908) distinguishes between negative mysticism (which believes that 'everything finite is a shadow, an illusion—nothing real' and that God is in the negation of all things finite) and positive mysticism (which according to him, the Quakers experience) which

"seek(s) to realize the presence of God in this finite human life. That He transcends all finite experiences they fully realize, but the reality of any finite experience lies just in this fact, ... The mystic of this type may feel the light break within him and know that God is there, ... His whole mystical insight is in his discovery that God is near, and not beyond the reach of the ladders which He has given us. (Jones 1906: unpaginated)"

The crucial word in Jones' description of positive mysticism is **presence**. Quakerism is a religion of presence where the worship is typically understood by members as a process of communication between participants with the Spirit and each other that dissolves the individual till there is a unity in worship. It is this 'state of consciousness' when 'consubstantial identification' takes place that is potentially a mystic state.

What does it mean to talk of a mystic state of consciousness as a communicative act? As several writers have pointed out, mysticism is a 'vague, sentimental' term that eludes proper definition. We are not concerned here with defining mysticism, or the intent of worshippers. The point of departure is the belief shared by worshippers that the light guides them in silence, and that a gathered meeting is a profoundly *mystical* experience. To theorize this mystic experience in terms of intent, or to explain its working is beyond the scope of study, especially when there is so little in terms of observable behavior to support any hypothesis.

William James (1960) avoids defining the 'mystic state of consciousness' and instead provides us with 'four marks, which when an experience has them, may justify us in calling it mystical (James 1960:342).' The marks are

1. Ineffability, where the 'subject of it immediately says that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words...its quality must be directly experienced (James 1960:343)
2. Noetic quality, which refers to the feeling by subjects that the experience is a state of knowledge, and that profound deep insights have materialized
3. Transiency, or the inability of these mystic states to last more than a half hour or an hour at most
4. Passivity, where the 'mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as if he were grasped and held by a superior power (James 1960:344)

While he states that 'from the point of view of his nervous constitution, [George] Fox was a psychopath or a *detrache* of the deepest dye (James 1960:18)' (a sentiment echoed by Rufus Jones) James recognizes that he was a genuine mystic and calls the Quaker religion something 'which was impossible to over praise.' He recognizes the importance of mysticism and the presence of the four marks of mysticism in the faith.

The Quaker Meeting for Worship exhibits all these marks of a mystic state. The very foundation of the Quaker attitude towards language lies in the conviction that the experience is unreportable, and cannot be captured by words. The noetic quality and passivity of the experience is evident in the kind of testimonies that Quakers present of their meeting, with almost all of them emphasizing how profound revelations resulted from the experience and how much they were moved by another, the light. In fact, the entire basis of George Fox's theology was on his personal knowledge of God, and the most famous passage from George Fox's Journal, known and believed almost universally by all Quakers refers to exactly such a mystic process of communication when it says,

"And when all my hopes in them [i.e., preachers, and "those called the most experienced people"] and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could I tell what to do; then, oh then I **heard a voice** which said, "There is one, even Jesus Christ, that can **speak** to thy condition": and when I **heard it**, my heart did leap for joy. Then the Lord did let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give Him all the glory; for all are concluded under sin, and shut up in unbelief, as I had been, that Jesus Christ might have the pre-eminence, who enlightens, and gives grace and faith and power. Thus when God doth work, who shall let it? And this I **knew experientially**. My desires after the Lord grew stronger, and zeal in the pure knowledge of God, and of Christ alone, without the help of any man, book, or writing. For though I read the Scriptures that spake of Christ and of God, yet I knew Him not, **but by revelation**, as He who hath the key did open, and as the Father of Life drew me to His Son by His Spirit. (Fox 1694, bold mine)"

The meeting rarely ever lasts more than an hour, and a significant part of the first half is geared towards centering down, and entering a mystic state. The actual experience of being 'gathered' in silence has temporal constraints, almost never lasting more than half an hour, so the mark of transiency is clearly visible in worship.

The act of listening for a message from God is the theological cornerstone of the Meeting for Worship. This listening is not one sided, but a genuine dialogue between God, and the members and the mystic experience is one of mutual communication with an invisible other, which results in experiential knowledge of the light through revelation. "If God ever spoke, He is still speaking. If He has ever been in **mutual and reciprocal communication** with the persons He has made, He is still a communicating God as eager as ever to have listening and receptive souls (Jones 1948:65, unbolded in original)."

While there is little in the form of a universally held Quaker belief, one of the few beliefs that is held universally amongst all Quakers is the belief in revelation, a personal communion with God. Rufus Jones' statement about a 'communicating God' is a belief integral to Quakerism, one that would be impossible to deny and still be a Quaker.

That a communicating God who communes with receptive souls constitutes the sum of mystic experience does not tell us why a Meeting for Worship is necessary to talk to God. Quakers have never denied that this communication can happen outside of a Meeting, in fact George Fox's most profound revelation, where he came across 'Christ experimentally (experientially)' happened when he was all alone. However, communion with the Light is only one aspect of the mystic experience for the Quakers, for it also includes communion with God's creation, what Lippard (1988) (following Burke (1965)) refers to as 'consubstantial identification.' As the London Yearly Meeting points out,

"True worship may be experienced at any time; in any place—alone on the hills or in the busy daily life—we may find God, in whom we live and move and have our being. But this individual experience is not sufficient, and in a meeting held in the Spirit there is a giving and receiving between its members, one helping another with or without words. So there may come a wider vision and a deeper experience (Revision Committee 1925)."

A further scriptural justification is offered by more Christocentric Quakers who cite Matthew 18:20 which says, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." The communal experience 'heightens the sense of the presence of God through the cumulative power of group worship, communicated in silent as well as vocal ministry (PYM 2002:19).'

Thus far we have sought to understand mystic experience as a process of (a) communication with (b) the Light and (c) fellow participants which occurs in (d) silence resulting in (e) a unity of worship, which is both a state of knowing, and 'doing.' But what does it mean to talk of the Meeting in terms of an unspoken communication with an invisible Other? How do we know when this communication has been successful, and when the meeting fails to gather?

Quite clearly, we can not uncover what the message was since as James (1960) points out the subject is unable to express the depth and profundity of it in words. Typical reports of the experience never mention what exactly was said, instead focusing on various aspects of the experience (for instance, 'divers meetings have passed without one word; and yet our souls have been greatly edified and refreshed, and our hearts wonderfully overcome (Barclay 1677).')

However the fact that this communication is unspoken and involves an invisible participant does not necessarily mean it is unobservable. Earlier in this paper, we mentioned Dalmais (1986)'s theory of liturgy, where he says 'Liturgy belongs in the order of doing (ergon)...liturgical actions yield their intelligibility in their performance...as vehicles of overtones capable of awakening the mind and heart.' It follows then that in the silent doing of the gathered meeting, we can find evidence of this communion with the Light in the ritualized behavior of the participants, in particular their demeanor during the silence, in the processes of meditation and 'centering' that they undertake to achieve 'unity of worship,' and in the extensive religious and mystic writings of Quakers.

In the ritualized behavior that consists of the 'doing' of listening, i.e. the silent waiting upon the light we can distinguish two activities. The first is the process of centering, where the participants try to free their minds of other thoughts, and meditate to 'center' the meeting and create an environment where the Light can work. The second is the process of the Light revealing itself to the participants through the silence, and normatively through vocal ministry that 'is in the light.' The first process is always attempted in that participants always spend the first few minutes of the meeting trying to center down. Whether the second happens or not is debatable, with participants recognizing that sometimes there is an inexpressible presence in the Meeting, and that 'unity of worship' where boundaries between participants dissolve while at

other times this unity is not achieved and mangled, sometimes political vocal ministry results. The second hinges on the 'success' of the first, with the unity not being achieved unless centering takes place.

James (1960) recognizes that the onset of a mystic state of consciousness is 'facilitated by preliminary voluntary operations, as by fixing the attention,' and describes the process of 'orison, or meditation, the methodical elevation of the soul towards God... The first thing to be aimed at in orison is the mind's detachment from outer sensations, for these interfere with its concentration upon ideal things... Sensorial images, whether literal or symbolic play an enormous part in mysticism (James 1960:367).'

Thus, centering consists of silent meditation aimed at two things—detaching the mind from other thoughts, and meditating on God. Since there are no prescribed images to meditate on, such as an idol or an external object and the faith leaves the exact process up to whatever each member feels facilitates herself best, this process of centering is an individual process through which ideally, one gradually becomes more aware of the interconnectedness of the members.

An unwritten rule of conduct exists which emphasized that this first part of the Meeting, lasting anywhere between ten to thirty minutes must always be conducted in silence. Some members arrive ahead of time, before the start of the Meeting to center themselves and enter a more contemplative state. Members resort to different practices, such as closing their eyes and shutting off external stimuli, fixing their gaze at some distant faraway object, reading from the Bible or other inspirational literature or taking in the arrival of various members and silently acknowledging them with a smile and a nod.

While the emphasis is on listening for the light, worship is not the same as prayer. Faith and Practice recognizes the importance of prayer, but also that worship is a distinct process

involving the coming together of participants in the light. The emphasis is on the collective, not on the individual and is marked by the interpersonal rituals in 'which the individual must guard and design the symbolic interpretations of his acts while in the immediate presence of an object that has a special value for him (Goffman 1967:57).'

The process of centering can be understood in terms of the interpersonal ritual of showing respect and deference for each other. Quakers understand centering as a process where members facilitate each other's meditation through the awareness of the fact that they are all engaged in a common ceremonial behavior. This awareness is the awareness of a symmetrical relationship between members where all participants are equal in their social status as worshippers and is reflected in the 'presentational rituals through which the actor concretely depicts his appreciation of the recipient (Goffman 1967:73).'

So what then are the presentational rituals that centering comprises of? As a non-linguistic form of interaction where the process of consubstantial identification is achieved between members the interpersonal ritual consists of the act of deference to each other as participants in a symmetrical relationship. The function of this form of communication is phatic, establishing amongst members that they are all present together in waiting upon the light and are 'open to one another in love...aware of our utter interdependence on one another (Gorman 1982: 87).'

This deference is performed in part merely by being present, since presence in the meeting is a tacit agreement on the part of members to worship together. Centering is in part the process of establishing this agreement, and an acknowledgment of the respect and deference they have for each other. Buber recognizes this in a passage from *Dialogue* where he says,

"Accordingly, even if speech and communication may be dispensed with, the life of dialogue seems...to have inextricably joined to it as its minimum constitution one thing.

the mutuality of the inner action. Two men bound together in dialogue must obviously be **turned** to one another (Buber 2002:191, bold mine)."

This being 'turned to' is also indicated in part by other behaviors such as demeanor. The demeanor of members is a form of presentational deference indicated by posture, attentiveness and awareness of the communal act. Goffman defines it as

'that element of the individual's ceremonial behavior typically conveyed through deportment, dress and bearing, which serves to express to those in his immediate presence that he is a person of certain desirable or undesirable qualities (Goffman 1967:77)"

In an attempt to regulate demeanor, Faith and Practice warns that, 'any who habitually settle into silent reading or sit in inattentive idleness cut themselves off from their fellow worshipers and from the pervasive reach of the spirit (PYM 2002:20).' Thus, it is not merely enough to just stay silent, but necessary to stay silent in attention to the group's communal worship. The way members deport themselves is mostly framed in terms of behaviors that are not acceptable, allowing latitude regarding what is permissible.

At a minimum the deference, i.e. the presentational rituals of members are shown by their body language. This usually involves the adoption of a look of composed serenity, with smiles or half shut eyes. If eyes are open they do not usually fixate on an individual member but rather as an unfocussed looking towards of the group as a whole. Members sit upright on the wooden benches, bodies oriented towards an imaginary point in the center of the room and remain respectful of the distance between members. If a certain member stands up to provide vocal ministry the members show deference to the Light working in him by turning their bodies in his direction, smiling or closing their eyes to suggest that they are receptive to his message and not interrupting him during or right after delivery.

‘There exists a ritual relation whenever a society imposes on its members a certain attitude towards an object, which attitude involves some measure of respect expressed in a traditional mode of behavior with reference to that object (Radcliff-Brown 1952:123).’ This measure of respect is communicated to members not only by presentational rituals in the form of non-verbal cues governing presence, deportment and attentiveness but also through avoidance rituals comprising of proscriptions.

This is evident in an incident narrated by a member of a Quaker committee in conversation. The member reported that in her capacity as a senior attendee of the Meeting who held workshops in Quaker worship she was invited to minister and advice another meeting which had had problems with its worship practices. After attending a few meetings, she discovered that a certain member consistently came in late, in a somewhat agitated state. She appeared visibly distraught and often rose to provide ministry during the course of the meeting that discussed personal psychological problems and other issues that were traditionally considered inappropriate in the Meeting. While other members did not admonish her they were clearly uncomfortable with the content of her ministry, and their deportment reflected this attitude. Since the process of centering failed, the purpose of worship was not achieved and members expressed their dissatisfaction with the state of the Meeting.

This incident is instructive in that it tells us how important the process of centering is to the life of the meeting, and casts light on the kind of behaviors that are proscribed. The doing of the deference between participants in a symmetrical relationship involves a keeping of the social distance between participants that continues to exist on a non-spiritual level (while simultaneously becoming aware of the interconnectedness of participants *in worship*), not

arriving late or in a distraught state and not interrupting the process of centering with vocal ministry that did not arise from the Spirit.

That such non-verbal cues communicate and influence the outcome of the interaction is clear in the failure of the meeting to center due to non-performance of the ritualized behavior by one participant, but also in the solution that the meeting adopted to overcome this hindrance to worship. Once the committee member had identified the source of the problem, she suggested to a few worshippers that they arrive an hour ahead of time to the Meeting and start the process of centering, so that at least some unity of worship would be reached before the disruptive attendee appeared at the Meeting. When the disruptive member did arrive, she sat in silence for the entire meeting, and according to the narrator was in tears by the end of the meeting. The meeting passed undisrupted, with members reporting that a unity of worship was achieved. At the close of the meeting the disruptive member rose and said that she had come to the meeting worried about various work pressures and psychological issues that she had been facing and was planning to share them with the meeting but upon arrival was so swept away by the silence that she was rendered speechless. She reported that this was the first time she had felt the genuine presence of the spirit working within her and that catharsis had been achieved.

While such sudden conversion stories may seem dubious, the narrator said she herself did not know what had happened; but had experienced the workings of the Light in that meeting. One explanation is that the Meeting had achieved a centered state by the time the disruptive member arrived, and the deportment and deference of the members indicated the same to the disruptive member. 'Acts of deference typically contain a kind of promise, expressing in a truncated form the actor's avowal and pledge to treat the recipient in a particular way in the on-coming activity (Goffman 1967:60)' and the deference she received from fellow members

(something she had not happened in the past due to the unease they had shown at her disruption) resulted in her maintaining face to reciprocate this deference. Her behavior in the past stemmed from the failure of members to provide her with 'anticipated acts of deference... [Which resulted in] the recipient feeling that the state of affairs which (s)he had been taking for granted had become unstable (Goffman 1967:61)' and her disruptive vocal ministry, as an attempt to regain this deference reflected the existence of this asymmetrical relationship unleashing a process of schismogenesis that effectively blocked the centering. When this symbolic appreciation was provided to her, by the already centered meeting there was no longer any requirement on her part to claim deference through disruption.

Yet, this respectful interpersonal ritual presentation and adherence to rules of conduct are not enough by themselves to result in centering. As discussed earlier, during the course of one meeting (which occurred soon after the death of Tom Fox, a Quaker Peacemaking team member in Iraq) while members did not flout rules of conduct, and maintained a respectful attitude towards each other they were clearly very distraught by the incident. Some members wept softly, while others closed their eyes indicated their anguish through facial expressions. Others stared out into the window, and avoided looking at each other (a behavior that is not normally observed) and nobody smiled. Just as the intent to worship communally is communicated in silence, so too is the awareness of hindrances to worship. While presentational rituals were adhered to, the demeanor of participants clearly indicated that their minds were elsewhere, unable to focus on the light and this prevented the centering.

However, when centering does occur a process of mystic communication with an invisible other is initiated and 'a profound and evident sense of oneness with God and with one

another (PYM 2002:19)' is felt. The meeting then becomes 'gathered or covered' and the presence of the light is experienced amongst members.

Even when the meeting is centered there are barriers to entering the mystic state of consciousness. An essential precondition that needs to be met for a mystic state of consciousness to happen is a belief in the workings of the Spirit. Pink-Dandelion (2005) suggests that, the influx of members from other faiths who do not share a Christocentric worldview means that the Quakers no longer share a common belief in the working of the Inner Light, and for some the meeting is not one involving mystic communication with another, but merely a process of group meditation within oneself. These members don't want to find God, according to Pink-Dandelion since they do not necessarily believe in him, but rather 'prefer to seek than to find. To travel hopefully is better than to arrive (Pink-Dandelion 2005:94).'

When the meeting attains a 'gathered state,' i.e. what James (1960) calls a 'mystic state of consciousness' there is a belief that the light has revealed itself to the group, and a 'mutual and reciprocal communication has been set up (Jones 1948).' What is the exact nature of this relation? Buber (2002) writes,

"There are the spheres in which the world of relation arises... [the third] is life with spiritual beings. Here, the relation is wrapped in a cloud but reveals itself; it lacks but creates language. We hear no You and we feel addressed; we answer, creating, thinking, acting. With our being, we speak the basic word, unable to say You with our mouth. But how can we incorporate into the world of the basic word what lies outside language? In every sphere, through everything that becomes present to us, we gaze toward the train of the eternal You; in each, we perceive a breath of it, in every You, we address the eternal You... (Buber 2002:183)"

Here we have in Buber's own words a restatement of the Quaker belief in the fallibility of language, but also a statement that this relation is felt through 'every sphere' and 'in each.' This relation is integrated into all aspects of the 'life of dialogue' and all communication that happens in the meeting flows from this presence of the You.

As James (1960) pointed out, most accounts of mysticism are 'vague and sentimental,' (Buber included) and we need a more coherent model to understand this 'mutual and reciprocal communication.' Since the Light is an invisible entity, present but not in a physical form amidst the members to try to explain the interaction through gestural communication and the ideas of deference and demeanor is pointless since these are ceremonial components of concrete behavior directed towards the physically present, not entities present in the minds of members. The deference and demeanor of members continue to be presented when they enter a mystic state of consciousness but these are behaviors directed towards each other, and the social group not towards the Light. An alternate model of thinking about mysticism, although one that robs it of most of its sheen is to understand it as a form of *para-social interaction*.

The domain of the You is beyond the scope of this paper, and is impossible to express adequately in words anyway according to Quaker theology so we will not venture in that direction, but without saying anything about the nature of the You (the light) beyond what has already been said we can understand the I-Thou relation between members as a form of interaction with an invisible person present in the minds of members.

Parasocial interaction is a process that "occurs when individuals interact with a mediated representation of a person as if the person were actually present. That is, individuals behave as if they are having an interaction with a *source* when in fact they are *only* relating to the *medium* (Nass and Sundar 1994)." The idea of parasocial interaction, developed by psychiatrists in the 1950's (Horton and Wohl 1956) to refer to new forms of behavior they had begun to notice amongst television viewers, where viewers began to fantasize about imaginary relationships they had with characters appearing on television programs such as daily soaps due to the interactive nature of television and its perceived 'reality.' This relationship was necessarily one sided, since

the television character could not really interact with audiences, and the viewers were aware of this fact, but it did not prevent the development of an imagined relationship where in the minds of television audiences interaction happened between the two.

An example of this form of behavior is seen in the sort of relationships fans have with actors or musicians, for example teenagers were noticed talking to posters of George Michael put up in their bedrooms and wishing the poster Good Night when they went to bed. They were aware of the 'unreal' nature of the interaction but this did not prevent them from developing significant bonds of attachment and a fantasy relationship that was mutual and reciprocated.

Horton and Wohl 1956 note that,

"The audience, for its part, responds with something more than mere running observation; it is, as it were, subtly insinuated into the program's action and internal social relationships and, by dint of this kind of staging, is ambiguously transformed into a group which observes and participates in the show by turns. The more the performer seems to adjust his performance to the supposed response of the audience, the more the audience tends to make the response anticipated. This simulacrum of conversational give and take may be called *para-social interaction*. (p. 215)"

It might seem like a presumptuous, reductionist stretch to call a 'mystic state of consciousness' a simulacrum of conversational give and take between the members and the Inner Light, but yet it is precisely this form of interaction that characterizes the Meeting for Worship. Without saying anything about the reality of the existence of the inner Light we can talk of this state as being one where there is a simulated communication between participants.

Parasocial interaction has been observed in other forms of mediated communication such as the Internet and in movies. It is important to note though that not all mediated interaction (such as between two people on a telephone) is parasocial since by definition parasocial interaction needs one participant to be an 'imagined one' and "the illusion of face-to-face relationship with the performer. The conditions of response to the performer are analogous to

those in a primary group. The most remote and illustrious men are met *as if they* were in the circle of one's peers; the same is true of a character in a story who comes to life in these media in an especially vivid and arresting way. We propose to call this seeming face-to-face relationship between spectator and performer a *para-social relationship* (Horton and Wohl 1956). ”

Is the Meeting for worship sufficiently ‘vivid and arresting’ enough for such a simulacrum of interaction to exist? It can be argued that that might be the case, since the extensive preparation for it in the form of centering, and the unitary focus of the ‘waiting for the light’ create the atmosphere necessary for this illusion of interaction to develop.

It in no way diminishes the value of a mystic state of consciousness to describe it in terms of an atmosphere where a suspension of disbelief creates a simulacrum of interaction, but in the absence of an objective way of verifying this idea (Social scientists in communication studies and psychiatry have developed and tested extensive survey questionnaires that seem to demonstrate the existence of parasocial interaction in television viewers. A similar survey could have been conducted amongst the Quakers but the Worship Committee of the Meeting for Worship did not allow this writer to collect such data, believing that such surveys might obstruct worship and interfere with the functioning of the Meeting) it is difficult to say more about the unspoken communication with the inner Light. That it exists, and that God is known and felt amidst the members is all that we can say.

Conclusion

Quakerism is not the only religion built on the idea of a divine message, and offers little that is unique in its belief in revelation. All major religions had their genesis in the belief that some sacred truth was revealed by God to Prophets (Mohammed, Joseph Smith, Zoroaster, Mani etc) or by a deity himself (Christ). The belief that revelation continues to occur, even in the

present time is not particularly unique either, since religious groups such as the Pentecostals (who believe that the Spirit descends upon members), The Church of the Latter Day Saints (who appoint a President who is 'Prophet, Seer and Revelator') etc share similar beliefs. Even its refusal to formulate a creed is not unique, with other churches such as the Unitarian Universalists also refusing to do so. However, the role that continuing revelation plays in Quakerism is unique in how it is recognized as such and how it translates into social action.

A problem that Quakerism faced early in its existence was one of what to make of divine revelation. Early Quakerism had to contend with all sorts of prophetic, apocalyptic leadings from members that foretold the End of Days, the coming of a new Messiah or dealt with other controversial matters. One incident involved the Quaker leader, James Nayler riding into Bristol in 1656 on a horse while followers strewed the path with clothes, and sang 'Holy, Holy, Holy' in an attempt to re-enact the arrival of Christ into Jerusalem. This created tremendous controversy and indicated how revelations could go wrong, early on.

There are three ways of responding to vocal ministry and assessing its value to the 'corporate sense of the Meeting.' One response, as Thomas Merton pointed out was of indifference, and this is the response that occurs most often to other people's ministry (especially to ministry that does not seek social action, but recounts special experiences.) When the woman in Seven Storey Mountain talked of the Lion of Lucerne the Quakers neither accepted nor rejected her revelation but merely listened patiently because they felt it had no particular relevance to them.

Another response (used frequently in the past, and still used amongst Evangelical Friends) was of evaluating the content of the ministry in comparison to Biblical scripture, and rejecting it

if it contradicted Biblical interpretation. Thus, if X rose during worship and declared himself a Messiah, the Meeting would not accept the revelation as valid since it had no basis in scripture.

The third response (and this is the criteria for assessing the worth of revelation that the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting employs) is acceptance if the ministry arises out of 'obedience to the light within' and is ratified by the 'corporate sense of the Meeting', i.e. other members present through a social consensus of sorts (in worship) as speaking for them too. Thus, 'Truth' is recognized as being socially produced from its origin in a divine spark. This is a radical notion, unlike anything found in other faiths.

"Quaker epistemology in any case has a lot in common with postmodern epistemology; in its denial of a knowable absolute standard vested in Church tradition or a priesthood or a creed, and in its acceptance... that the light may be revealed to different people in different ways (thus allowing for the possibility of pluralism) and acknowledging that knowledge has a *social* basis—the test of corporate knowledge being its validation by a Meeting (Williams 1992:2)"

Thus, while anyone can rise if they feel called by the light to provide vocal ministry, members recognize that they might be wrong in believing that it arose in the light, and it is only if others in the Meeting validate the vocal ministry does it become 'True.'

As Rufus Jones pointed out, the Quakers are 'positive mystics' in their attempts to integrate the understanding of the 'Infinite' into their finite, worldly lives. Scientific developments of the nineteenth century led to attempts by Quakers to reconcile religion with science. Since no Quakers adhered to a literal version of the Bible in any case, and had always believed that science was compatible with faith, doctrinal beliefs were not called into question by developments in science. While they recognize that knowledge has a social basis, the validation of ministry by a Meeting rests on a belief that it should be congruent with a scientific understanding of the world.

Paraphrasing Davies (1988)'s statement that 'Quakers are primitive ethno-methodologists,' we can say that the Quakers have always been cultural anthropologists of a sort. They were always aware of the influences of culture on religious practices and their iconoclastic behavior and adoption of cultural peculiarities was a deliberate subversion of existing cultural norms, in an era when people believed that these practices were from God. In a faith so preoccupied with the role of language and cultural practices in the expression and understanding of 'truth,' it was impossible not to arrive upon a meta-awareness of the nature of their practice.

So what then do Quakers make of social science readings of their faith, and in particular the ideas mentioned in this ethnography. Several faiths are hostile towards a non-faith based, critical reading of their practices and theology, especially when they uncover social facts that they feel call into question or somehow diminish the worth of their beliefs but not so with the Quakers. The following edited field note from the ethnography discusses an incident that occurred during a 'Friendly dinner' (capital F for the Religious Society of Friends)

"Over dinner I was asked to introduce myself, and I mentioned that I study anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania and was working on an ethnography of the Quakers. People at the dinner seemed amused, and asked me if I had found anything interesting yet. I said I thought I had and then smiled uncomfortably, unsure if discussing the work would offend them or not. Pressing the point, they asked me what I thought of Quakerism, and I said it was an interesting religion and that I was fascinated by its use of silence in worship and by the idea of the light. I mumbled a feeble joke about how anthropology of religion was probably incompatible with faith in God, and it invariably brought up uncomfortable ideas. A few members smiled, and the rest of the conversation over dinner focused almost entirely on what I had said.

It reflected a skeptical bias on my own part, more than anything concrete when I said that the social sciences made people lose their faith, the unstated assumption being 'How could anybody intelligent believe in things like the Inner Light, and leadings from the Spirit?' and they were remarkably perceptive for they seemed to realize that. They did not seek to defend their faith, instead choosing to discuss Durkheim, William James, J.L. Austin and other writers.

What struck me more than anything else about the dinner was how remarkably well informed they were, for they were all aware of 'modern, social science readings of their faith.' They were aware of and **agreed** with William James' assessment that George Fox had a psychopathology of some sort, with ideas regarding the nature of communication,

the functions of language, the 'mystic states of consciousness' and the social basis of knowledge and how the Inner light probably worked.

So then, I had to ask them if this knowledge didn't somehow diminish their beliefs, that a 'social scientific' reduction of their practices didn't make them irrelevant, and then one of the people at the dinner said he didn't see why it should. The Friends had always been aware of how their practices worked—of how language operated in the meeting, of the tension between speech and silence and between ritualization and the individuality of experience but an understanding of it only bolstered what they experienced. Faith was in no way infallible, but it was precisely because they didn't know for sure that they had to keep on seeking. Other ways of knowing God were just as valid as their own, but they had felt his presence in worship. The experience could be explained in terms of processes of communication or as a psychopathological state or in a myriad different ways but the experience of knowing the Light needed no explanation, God needed no proof (field notes)."

While Quakerism beyond doubt is a mystic faith, it is also a tremendously pragmatic one. William James (1960) writes, "No authority emanates from them[mystic states of consciousness] which should make it a duty for those who stand outside of them to accept their revelations uncritically... non-mystics are under no obligation to acknowledge in mystical states a superior authority conferred on them by their intrinsic nature (James 1960:385).' Friends were never required to believe in the revelations of others or even in their own, unless this truth was itself revealed to them by the light, and accepted by the Meeting.

What James stated in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, the Quakers knew already. Silverstein (1993) discusses the idea of a metapragmatic awareness—an ability to articulate the context for the use of certain linguistic expressions. The meeting this writer attended comprised of a highly educated group of worshippers, including two practicing anthropologists, and one sociologist, several members with degrees in the social sciences or comparative religion and at least eleven members that had written books of various kinds. They were all aware of anthropological enquires into the nature of religion, showed a remarkable familiarity with the linguistic work done on Quakerism, and did not think they were incompatible with Quakerism.

This awareness of how language was used in the Meeting for worship, and how it informed their ideas of God did not reduce the worship through a 'going through the motions for the sake of tradition' form of it, rather it gave them an awareness that the silence—a statement of the inexpressibility of the communion with God served a metalinguistic function (Jakobson 1960). Pink-Dandelion (2005) believes that the silence was a tool used to suppress God-talk and foster a 'culture of silence,' but it isn't. Instead it simultaneously is a performance of mystic communion and a metalinguistic use of the inexpressibility topos. As A Quaker pointed out, 'the language chosen to express spiritual experience was of secondary importance to the experience itself (Scott 1980).'

The Quaker Meeting for Worship then is a remarkable thing, the practice of a remarkably well informed, pragmatic mysticism that arises not out of a 'system of symbols which acts of establish a powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing of these conceptions with an aura of factuality (Geertz 1973:90)' but out of a genuine, 'scientific' understanding of the nature of worship. Walt Whitman, writing over a hundred years ago described a Quaker as 'a wonderful compound of the mystic with the logical reasoner,' and that is exactly what they are.

Sources

Data for this ethnography was collected from the Meeting for Worship of the Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, a Quaker congregation affiliated with the Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and the Friends General Conference (FGC). The Meeting for Worship was held every Sunday, between 11:00 AM and 12:00 AM at the following address.

Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting (CPMM)
1515 Cherry Street,
Philadelphia, PA-19102-1403.

Permission was granted by the Committee on Worship and Ministry and by the Clerk of the Meeting in October, 2005 to attend services with the intention of using data collected from the Meeting for Worship for an undergraduate thesis. The Clerk of the Meeting and the Committee on Worship and Ministry however forbade any recording of the services, the conducting of surveys, interviewing members or approaching members after meeting to specifically ask them about the nature of their vocal ministry. It permitted this writer to take short notes during the Meeting as long as it was unobtrusive, and did not interfere with the life of the Meeting. An elder was appointed by the Worship and Ministry Committee to supervise and guide the process, and to deal with any problems that arose in the course of the study. After permission was granted this writer attended a total of eighteen Meetings for Worship on the following days:

10/23/2005	01/15/2006	05/14/2006
10/30/2005	01/22/2006	06/11/2006
11/06/2005	02/12/2006	
11/13/2005	02/26/2006	
11/20/2005	03/05/2006	
11/27/2005	03/12/2006	
12/04/2005	03/19/2006	
12/11/2005	04/02/2006	

Information was drawn from the data collected through observation in the Meeting for Worship on the aforementioned days, from conversations with members during Coffee Hour after worship and from three 'social events' organized by the CPMM to help new attenders to get to know each other (the 'Friendly Eights Dinners'). In addition to these sources, this writer also attended a series of lectures conducted by the Friends Center on various aspects of the Quaker religion, prayer groups that discussed issues of concern to the Meeting and used a variety of pamphlets, brochures and other organizational literature distributed by the Meeting after worship for its members to peruse. Since these miscellaneous pamphlets, while vital to this study are often undated, unpaginated and do not list an author they are listed here (named after the first few words of each pamphlet) and authorship (unless explicitly stated) is ascribed to the CPMM.

Newsletters

Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting of Friends Newsletter	October	2005
Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting of Friends Newsletter	November	2005
Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting of Friends Newsletter	December	2005
Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting of Friends Newsletter	January	2006
Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting of Friends Newsletter	February	2006
Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting of Friends Newsletter	March	2006
Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting of Friends Newsletter	April	2006
Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting of Friends Newsletter	May	2006
Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting of Friends Newsletter	June	2006
Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting of Friends Newsletter	July	2006
FLGBTQC Newsletter	Fall	2005
Weekly Bulletin of the CPMM for 35 different weeks		

Pamphlets

Welcome Pamphlet for First Time Attenders
 An invitation to Quaker Worship
 CPMM: Committees of the Meeting
 A Brief Reading List for Attenders
 Quaker Information Center
 Welcome to our Visitors
 Witness and Testimony
 History of Our Meeting
 A Guide to Becoming a Member of the CPMM
 Becoming a Member (Goetz, Jennifer)
 Answers to Frequently Asked Questions about the Wider Quaker Fellowship

Vanessa Julye's Ministry
On being a Member of the CPMM
Arranging for Visits from Seasoned Friends
Nurturing Calls to Ministry in Friends Meetings
Finding Quakers around the World
Quakers in the Ecumenical Movement
Pendle Hill Pamphlet on Silent Worship
Universalism in the Quaker Faith
Spiritual Responsibility in the Meeting for Business
Quaker jargon

Brochures

Change your life: Become a Legislative Intern for FCNL
American Friends Service Committee
Friends World Committee on Consultation: Section of the Americas
Friends United Meeting: Listening to Christ
Friends General Conference
Philadelphia Yearly Meeting
Pendle Hill Quaker Center
Evangelical Friends International
The Universalist Quaker Fellowship
www.Quakerinfo.org

Packet

Attenders Packet for the Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting

In addition, several websites provided a great deal of information about the Quakers. All of these were run by various Quaker groups and a brief list of the important Quaker websites accessed, and referred to in this study follows

Websites

<http://www.fgcquaker.org/>
<http://www.quakerbooks.org/>
www.afsc.org/
www.fcnl.org/
www.evangelical-friends.org/
www.fum.org/
www.quakerinfo.org/
www.quaker.org/
www.pym.org/
www.religioustolerance.org/quaker.htm
www.quaker.org.uk/

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