

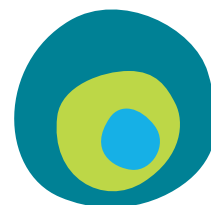
# The changing face of faith in Britain: How should Quakers respond?

Part 1: The changing face of faith in Britain

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Britain Yearly Meeting  
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working in partnership



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## Part 1: The changing face of faith in Britain

### Preface

The Quaker Committee for Christian & Interfaith Relations (QCCIR) is given the task of keeping Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) informed of the various movements towards cooperation within the Christian church and opportunities for interfaith dialogue, and responds on their behalf to other Churches and faith communities (*Quaker faith & practice* 9.13). In the rapidly changing world in which we live, the religious landscape in which we operate is also continuously on the move. Becoming aware of this, QCCIR began to ask questions, such as:

- How do Quakers fit into this changing religious landscape in Britain?
- What are the implications for British Quakers?
- What does it mean for the work of QCCIR now and in the future? Do we need to consider changing how we work, what we do or who we work with?

These are big, open questions and QCCIR agreed to commission a piece of work that would help us along our way. An application to use legacy funding was successful and we commissioned the work from the Centre for Research in Quaker Studies (CRQS) at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre. As can often be true of research projects, the answers we received are not necessarily those we expected. There is more work to be done, but the conversation has begun.

The brief given to CRQS was wide-ranging and complex. It encompassed an academic literature review, a survey of people new to Quakers to see what attracted them to the Society, a review of current contacts with religious or spiritual groups, and, finally, research on new faith and faith-based organisations in Britain with similar values to ours which QCCIR might wish to work with in the future. The timescale was tight, and further work may be commissioned to take parts of the brief further forward. The end result, entitled ‘The changing face of faith in Britain: How should Quakers respond?’, lends itself to division into various parts, each of which needs to be treated slightly differently.

In this first part, *The changing face of faith in Britain*, QCCIR publishes an academic paper which comprises an overview and commentary on religion in Britain today written by CRQS researcher Francesca Montemaggi.

In summary, Francesca suggests that religion in Britain has undergone significant changes. The rise of people who do not identify with a religion points to a change in people’s relationship with Christian religious forms, so that Christian discourse, symbols and authorities have far less relevance in today’s Britain. This should be understood as part of a changing understanding of religion that no longer reflects the Protestant Christian model of religion as a belief system, but is a multidimensional phenomenon, including community-building, experiential spirituality and ethical ways of life.

QCCIR trusts that this paper will be of interest to many in BYM.

### Introduction

The present study was commissioned by the Quaker Committee for Christian & Inter-faith Relations (QCCIR). Its stated aim was to explore the 'changing face' of religion in today's Britain and how this impacts on Quakers.

The report begins with an overview of religious affiliation in the UK according to the census data. This shows that religion has been undergoing significant changes. The last census registered a drop of 4m in people identifying as Christians. The percentage of people identifying as Christians has fallen from 71.7 in 2001 to 59.3 in 2011. Quakers have also been steadily decreasing in number since the 1990s. In contrast, people who say they have no religion have increased by 6.4m. These last are not necessarily atheists or humanists; rather, they do not identify with any mainstream religious organisation.

The increase in 'nones', those of no religion, is significant. However, it is symptomatic of a wider shift in religious organisation and religious narratives, rather than being a sign of an increasingly irreligious society. This shift needs to be contextualised, however. The popular discourse construes religion as a belief system, but this is erroneous, as the scholarship in sociology and anthropology of religion has demonstrated. Religion as personal conviction and belief in the supernatural reflects a Protestant Christian model that has been imposed on all forms of religiosity, misunderstanding their characteristics. Research also shows that contemporary Protestant forms do not conform to the notion of religion as a belief system. The following chapter explores the scholarly literature in the study of religion to provide a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon of religion and thus aid understanding of the changing face of faith today.

# The changing meaning of religion

## 1. Religion in Britain today

Christianity is the religion with the largest number of adherents in the UK. According to the 2011 Census for England and Wales (White, 2012; Stokes, 2013) more than 33 million people identify with Christianity; yet this is a significant decline from the 37m who did so in 2001. The percentage of people identifying as Christians has dropped from 71.7 in 2001 to 59.3 in 2011, in spite of an influx of 1.2m foreign-born Christians. Scotland, too, saw a fall in the number of people identifying as Christians. In 2011, Christians constituted 53.8% of the Scottish population, down by 11 percentage points since 2001, when they formed 65.2% of the population (National Records of Scotland, 2013).

This contrasts with the increase in the number of people identifying with another religion. Muslims are now the second-largest religious group in Britain. In England and Wales, 2.7m people (4.8% of the population) identify as Muslims, up from 1.5m (3%) in 2001, and in Scotland 77,000 (1.4%) do so, up from 43,000 (0.8%).

The fall in the number of Christians has been mostly among people under 60 years of age. Demographically, Christians in England and Wales are older than the rest of the population, and they are also more likely to be white. Twenty-two per cent of Christians are 65 or over, compared with 16% of the wider population; and 93% are white, compared with 86% of the wider population.

Quaker membership has also decreased significantly since 1990 (Chadkirk, 2014). The numbers of both members and attenders have continued to decline. In 1991, there were 26,757 members and attenders (Chadkirk, 2014: p. 253). This had fallen by 21.3% by 2016, when the Society listed 21,055 members and attenders, of whom 13,130 were members and 7,925 were attenders. Quaker decline thus reflects the wider decline of Christianity in Britain.

This is matched by an increase in the number of people declaring themselves to have 'no religion', often called 'nones'. In the 2001 census, nones in England and Wales totalled 7.7m, or 14.8% of the population. By 2011, that number had jumped to 14.1m, around a quarter of the population. The increase is particularly marked among those aged 20–24 and 40–44, and higher among women (up by 89%) than men (up by 78%). A similar increase was registered in Scotland, where 'no religion' went up from 27.8% in 2001 to 36.7% in 2011.

The more recent British Social Attitudes Survey for England and Wales (Harding, 2017) found that in 2016 the nones represented 53% of the population. Among 18–24-year-olds, the answer 'none' was given by 71%, compared with 40% of respondents aged 65–74 and 27% of those of 75 years or over. The increase in nones is not limited to the UK but has been observed across the Western world (Hackett and Huynh, 2015; Bullivant and Lee, 2012; Bowen, 2005; Kosmin, et al., 2009). Nones do not identify with a religion but this does not mean that they are not religious and/or spiritual. They are not a homogeneous group: rather, the category 'none' includes both atheists and religious people who do not identify with a religion. Nones seem to be more likely to have personal belief than to participate in communal religious practice (Woodhead, 2016: p. 250).

The census figures present a picture of decline of British Christianity. Christian institutions, narratives and forms of worship no longer seem as relevant and integral to British society as they have been in the past. The moral and religious self-understanding

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of British people has changed significantly. It is thus worth exploring when scholars believe this decline began and why, where they disagree, and the assumptions underlying their research. The overview of the scholarship below does not question the fundamental reality of a more secular Britain; rather, it presents a more complex picture of religious change and reveals the (often Protestant) assumptions made in the popular conception of religion and belief, which create dichotomies between religion and spirituality, believers and non-believers, religious and secular.

The analysis begins with the notion of ‘disenchantment’, formulated by Max Weber, one of the founders of sociology, on which many of the theorists on secularisation depend. This is followed by an overview of the secularisation thesis and a reflection on the radical changes of the 1960s. Much of the scholarship in sociology of religion has interpreted religion in terms of belief in the supernatural (propositional belief) and of organised worship. It has taken as universal a Protestant model of religion. Anthropologists of religion have for many years pointed to this cultural bias, which has only recently begun to be addressed by sociologists. Propositional belief models much of the scholarship on non-religion. This may be, at least in part, because nones are more likely to be former Christians and thus to have an understanding of religion as revolving around belief.

A more nuanced reflection on both religion and belief has begun to emerge which shows propositional belief to be marginal, even among conservative Protestants. The scholarship on Quakerism has sometimes understood Quakerism in opposition to religious belief (Kline, 2012). Among Quakers, lack of theological doctrine is a defining characteristic of Quakerism (Dandelion, 1996). The following reflection on how religion has been understood in the scholarly debate and how it has changed is helpful in contextualising the self-understanding of Quakers and attenders. This contextualisation, in turn, seeks to stimulate a reflection on Quaker identity and practice in the 21st century.



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### 2. Disenchantment, secularisation and the sixties

At the height of industrialised modernity, Max Weber saw in industrialisation the advancement of technology and science (Weber, 1905/2001 and 1919/1970). The type of rationality characteristic of modern technology and science was 'instrumental'. What was 'rational' was 'objective' – that is, that which could explain material reality, how it worked and how it could be manipulated for industrial production and scientific progress. Weber wrote at a time of absolute faith in scientific progress; yet his sombre considerations were a warning of the dangers of the dominance of instrumental rationality. His notion of 'disenchantment of the world' (*Entzauberung der Welte*, better translated as 'demystification'), captured how reality was being understood only in terms of scientific rationality, leaving no room to myth.

Weber thought that knowledge of the world was on a linear and progressive path of intellectualisation that had been under way for thousands of years. He described intellectualisation and rationalisation as the process whereby only modern scientific rationality produces legitimate knowledge. Other forms of knowing, such as the artistic and religious, are delegitimised. Weber attributes intellectualisation and rationalisation to the indirect influence of Protestantism and Puritanism, which shifted the focus from the knowledge of nature to be found among philosophers to the study of God's "works" in the "exact sciences" (Weber, 1919/1970: p. 142). Thus, in a now objectified world, religious meaning lost its authority and religion was reduced to the irrational human sentiment fighting against enlightened scientific rationality (Weber, 1919/1970: pp. 142–143).

The increasing intellectualization and rationalization do not, therefore, indicate an increased and general knowledge of the conditions under which one lives. It means something else, namely, the knowledge or belief that if one but wished one could learn it at any time. Hence, it means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service. This above all is what intellectualization means.

(Weber, 1919/1970: p. 139)

The process of intellectualisation has been central to the development of culture throughout history, yet Weber contrasts modernity with pre-modern times in terms of the changed conception of truth. He argues that while the truth of science was guided once by the search for a deeper transcendental truth, be it 'true being' in Plato, 'true art and nature' in Leonardo or 'God' in Protestantism, in modern times the truth of science serves only itself. Truth is lost in the self-justifying logic of modern science. Accordingly, science comes to be seen as "free from presuppositions" (Weber, 1919/1970: p. 143), in the sense that it has no ulterior motives; it is "value-free because it disregards all values in order to concentrate on the world of pure things and to constitute it as a theoretically closed object-domain" (Vandenberghe, 1999: p. 61). Yet the work of science is based on fundamental presuppositions that define, and thus confine, science.

The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world'. Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the

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brotherliness of direct and personal human relations.

(Weber, 1919/1970: p. 155)

Weber's notion of disenchantment referred to a concern with the dominance of instrumental reason over all other values, especially ethical values. Disenchantment has been seen as the reason for the ineluctable demise of religion and of religious authority. The key elements of Weber's thesis that have featured in the scholarship on secularisation are:

- rationalisation as the dominance of scientific rationality over other forms of knowledge
- Protestant individualism and rationality as the precursors of instrumental rationality
- the differentiation of different spheres of life as a result of industrialised modernity.

Most secularisation theories rest on a concept of modernity as characterised by the processes of individualisation, rationalisation and differentiation. Individualisation is the prominence of individual autonomy, rationalisation is the dominance of instrumental rationality, while differentiation is the separation of social life into separate spheres. One of the most influential secularisation theorists has been Peter Berger, who claimed that modernity led to secularisation, whereby religion would no longer provide a 'sacred canopy' (1967), an overarching narrative that legitimised a religious view of the world. For Berger, religion, as an agent of legitimation, sustained the way in which people thought of their social reality. Following Weber, he thought that Protestant individualism and rationality were responsible for undermining the legitimising role of religion.

Secularisation is the erosion of religion's power to legitimise social structures. It "has resulted in a widespread collapse of the plausibility of traditional religious definitions of reality" (Berger, 1967: p. 127). Berger thought that the secularisation of culture and society would lead in turn to the 'secularisation of consciousness', in which individuals understand the world through the framework they find more consonant with their own perspective, rather than religious interpretations (Berger, 1967: p. 108). The diversity of worldviews, which Berger called "pluralism", undermines traditional religious narratives.

This is further compounded by the now voluntary nature of religious allegiance. In an increasingly diverse religious landscape, religious groups must organise to "woo a population of consumers, in competition with other groups having the same purpose" (Berger, 1967: p. 138). The greater individualisation of society relegates religious 'reality' to the private sphere, thus turning it into a subjective concern.

Berger's contribution was a stepping stone towards the paradigmatic status of secularisation in sociology of religion. He later abandoned secularisation and acknowledged that the multiplicity of worldviews does not necessarily prevent the co-existence of one religion's truth with another (Berger, 1999). He sees in the thriving of 'orthodox' religion, especially Pentecostalism, a sign of counter-secularisation which ensures the survival of religion, although he also predicts that 'strict' religions will adapt eventually. Berger also holds on to the idea of "some secularising effects, more in some places than in others" (Berger, 1999: p. 3), that are the outcome of the cultural changes of industrialised modernity.

Differentiation engenders a separation between the religious and secular spheres, with churches losing control over social functions. For Bryan Wilson, the process of



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differentiation causes the institutions of society to grow apart and religious institutions to lose their access to and control of social activities (Wilson, 1966: p. 250). For Thomas Luckmann (1967), differentiation leads to religion losing influence over other spheres of life and becoming privatised.

David Martin (2005) understands differentiation as the loss of currency and legitimacy of Christian language in society. Secular languages, such as those of science and politics, emerge to compete with and delegitimise the language and overarching framework of religion (Martin, 2005: p. 187). In contrast, José Casanova (1994) considers differentiation to be inevitable, but not so privatisation and the disappearance of religion. He argues that religion has undergone a process of “deprivatization”, a term that he uses polemically against secularisation theories and liberal political theories that “prescribe the privatization of religion as a modern structural trend necessary to safeguard modern liberties and differentiated structures” (Casanova, 1994: p. 220), but also in relation to the “relocation” of religion (Casanova, 1994: p. 221).

As evidence of this process of deprivatisation, Casanova adduces the religious dimension of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the role played by the Catholic Church in the democratisation of Spain, Poland and Brazil, the development of liberation theology in Latin America, and the rise of Protestant fundamentalism in US politics. James Beckford has critiqued this thesis for assuming that public forms of religion cannot coexist with continuing privatisation and for neglecting the role of governments and states in using religion for their own purposes (Beckford, 2010b: p. 123). Over the years, Casanova has come to understand religion in terms of globalisation, which makes possible the coexistence of different forms of religion (Casanova, 2011).

A long-standing theorist of secularisation, Steve Bruce (1999, 2002, 2006), imputes the ineluctable decline of religion to social differentiation. This, he argues, fragments the structures of society, leading to the emergence of new social roles and classes; the rise of the industrial economy and urbanisation, which loosen community ties; and rationalisation. Following Weber, he claims that the Reformation demystified the world by enabling the individual to interpret the Scriptures without the mediation of the clergy, thus weakening the control of the Church over people’s beliefs and practices. Critics of theories of secularisation, such as Larry Shiner (1967), Andrew Greeley (1972, 2003) and Rodney Stark (1999), have pointed to the continuity of religious behaviour and to the erroneous assumption that the pre-modern world was more religious.

Overall, secularisation theories predict not the ‘end’ of religion but the decline of institutionalised forms of religion and the power of religious authorities (Chaves, 1994) in a more differentiated society in which the individual can choose how to express their religiosity. For Grace Davie (1994), the individualisation of religiosity is what leads to “believing without belonging”. Religiosity persists but in individualised form, detached from traditional religious institutions. Fewer people ‘belong’ although still ‘believing’. In contrast, Abby Day (2011) questioned the assumption that belief reflects one’s adherence to a religion and membership of a specific denomination. In an ethnographic study in the north of England, she found that half of the participants in her research who identified as Christians were not actually theists; rather, their belief often reflected their sense of belonging – their social values and norms.

The rapid change in social values and norms is central to Callum Brown’s (2001) thesis of “the death of Christian Britain”. In contrast to the focus of secularisation theorists on industrialised modernity as the seed of secularisation, Brown argues that it was the culture of the sixties, and in particular women’s rejection of conservative religious

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narratives, that led to the demise of Christianity. He provides an analysis of popular culture as well as individual accounts of people's lives that show a profound change in how people constructed their identities. He argues that religiosity in Britain was highly gendered and therefore dependent on both women's influence on children and men and their embodiment of Christian sexual virtue and domesticity. As women became emancipated in the sixties, they stopped maintaining and reproducing Christian social norms and narratives. Femininity changed and shed its Christian piety. This led to a new way to construct one's moral identity:

The 1960s' revolution was about how people constructed their lives – their families, their sex lives, their cultural pursuits, and their moral identities of what makes a 'good' or 'bad' person.

(Brown, 2001: p. 8)

Brown singles out women's rejection of traditional sexual and domestic values as the cause of the delegitimisation of traditional Christian moral narratives.

In contrast, Hugh McLeod (2007), while still focusing on the sixties, identifies multiple factors that have led to "the decline of Christendom", such as changes in family life, student protests, the divergence between law and Christian morality, and affluence. He does not support the idea of a progressive secularisation across the world, pointing out that many people were attracted to Eastern religions and spiritualities. The narrative of Britain as a Christian country gave way to a pluralist, secular and 'post-Christian' Britain. The sixties opened the door to a diversity of lifestyles, spiritualities and moral concerns, which undermined Christianity's cultural hegemony.

The cultural revolution of the sixties, which came to be dubbed 'the counterculture', originated in the youth culture of the post-war boom generation. The counterculture challenged the predominance of traditional lifestyles and social norms. It critiqued mainstream culture, which it saw as white, Western, patriarchal, and, indeed, 'hetero-patriarchal' (Valdes, 1996), with Christianity legitimising the social order by appealing to a divine and moral order. Secularisation theorists writing at the time saw a dramatic change in how religion was regarded in everyday life. The counterculture was not limited to feminism, peace protests, homosexual rights, and environmentalism, but extended to campaigns for the homeless, consumer rights and penal, educational and architectural reform, to name but a few (Marwick, 2005: pp. 782, 791).

The cultural and societal shifts of the sixties have led to the legitimisation of individual autonomy, thus opening the door for a wider reinterpretation of doctrine in the light of individual experience. The overarching narrative of individual choice of the sixties, aided by the growth of consumer society (Heath and Potter, 2005; Frank, 1997), has led to increasing freedom to choose to be part of a religious (or spiritual) group or to adhere to no religion at all. This has been so especially in the more individualistic Anglo-American culture. To highlight the pre-eminence of choice, Robert Wuthnow (1998) distinguishes between 'dwelling spirituality' and 'seeking spirituality'. Dwelling spirituality is the spirituality expressed in churches and centred around the family, typical of the 1950s; seeking spirituality characterises the sixties' search for the spiritual dimension in each individual's self-expression.

Wuthnow's distinction between dwelling and seeking spirituality is similar to Charles Taylor's between the "paleo-Durkheimian dispensation", in which people have a relationship with the sacred through belonging to a church, and the "neo-Durkheimian dispensation", which entitles people to join the denomination of their choice, which in

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turn connects them “to a broader, more elusive ‘church’ and, more importantly, to a political entity with a providential role to play” (Taylor, 2002: p. 93):

The neo-Durkheimian mode involves an important step toward the individual and the right of choice. One joins a denomination because it seems right to one. And indeed, it now comes to seem that there is no way of being in the ‘church’ except through such a choice... Coercion comes to seem not only wrong, but absurd and thus obscene.

(Taylor, 2002: p. 94)

The emphasis on subjectivity emphasised individual distinctiveness and self-expression, transforming all aspects of society deeply (Marwick, 2005). This expressivist turn made individual experience and meaning central to religious practice. Accordingly, religious life and practice “not only must be my choice, but must speak to me” (Taylor, 2002: p. 94).

The “expressive revolution”, as Bernice Martin (1981) called it, ushered in the seeking spirituality (Roof, 1993, 1999, 2003). In his book *A generation of seekers* (1993), Roof identifies in the ‘baby boomers’ a generation with a culture significantly different from that of the pre-boomers. They distrust authorities and seek self-fulfilment; they value experience over intellectual statements of belief and represent a new way in which individuals engage with religious organisations. The emphasis on spiritual seeking also reflects both the changed place of religious institutions in contemporary society and the rise of individualism:

Personal autonomy has a double face, one that reflects the dislocations of institutional religious identities in the contemporary world, and a second that mirrors a deeply personal search for meaningful faith and spirituality.

(Roof, 2003: p. 146)

The expressive and subjective turn opened the door to alternative expressions of religion and spirituality, such as new Christian forms, the increased legitimacy of non-Christian faiths, alternative spiritual practices, New Age spirituality, and New Religious Movements (NRMs). Much of the scholarship of spirituality has tended to construct spirituality as focused on the free expression of the self and immanence in contrast with religion, which is constructed in terms of transcendence, often betraying a normative attitude. Eileen Barker distinguishes between religiosity, which believes in a transcendent and personal God, and spirituality, which refers to belief in the God within (Barker, 2008: pp. 189–190). For Dick Houtman and Stef Aupers (2007), spirituality leaves behind religion’s focus on transcendence to shift towards immanence and the self. Accordingly, the sacred loses its transcendent character and “becomes more and more conceived of as immanent and residing in the deeper layers of the self” (Houtman and Aupers, 2007: p. 315).

In the accounts of Paul Heelas (1996a, 1996b, 2006a, 2006b, 2008; Heelas and Woodhead, 2005), religion becomes a caricature of blind faith and allegiance to an external authority. Heelas celebrates spirituality, understood as liberating and the expression of one’s deepest essence:

Spirituality is taken to be *life itself* – the ‘life force’ or ‘energy’ that sustains life in this world, and what lies at the heart of *subjective life*... Whereas New Age spiritualities are experienced as emanating from the depths of life within the here-and-now, the spirituality of the Holy Spirit, the spirituality of obeying the will of God, or the spirituality of experiencing the God-head itself are understood as emanating from the transcendental realm to serve life in this world. Take away the theistic God of religious tradition, and there

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is little left of Christianity (or theistic traditions); take away the God of theism, and New Age spiritualities of life remain virtually intact.

(Heelas, 2006a: p. 46)

He characterises spirituality as revolving around self-authority and self-expression, whereas religion is articulated by religious authorities through structured forms. Consequently, spirituality captures the liberating quest for inner meaning and truth, while theistic religion is reduced to adherence to “rationalistic, codified, legalistic prescriptions” (Heelas, 2008: p. 127). He conflates immanence with autonomy and transcendence with heteronomy. Thus, only immanent spirituality can guarantee self-authority, while transcendent religion gives rise to external obligation. Heelas thus fails to acknowledge the prescriptive aspects of spirituality: the communal values, the rules of conduct and language, the ‘taboos’, ‘principles’, ‘how to’ instructions, which he regards as merely aiding self-fulfilment:

Rules are followed for the sake of freedom. The voluntary exercise of obedience is experienced as enabling participants to express their spirituality through autonomous growth; to act as ‘true’ moral individualists.

(Heelas, 2006b: p. 233)

Matthew Wood, a fervent critic of ‘spirituality studies’, thunders against the “pre-eminence of self-authority” in such studies, “taken to accord with the nature of social life in a postmodernized, privatized, individualized or globalized world” (Wood, 2007: p. 36). He rightly notes that New Age studies distinguish between self-authority and external authority and that the former dominates in spiritual forms (Wood, 2007: p. 70). However, for him there are multiple ‘relativised’ authorities, so that “no single authority (or range of authorities) exerts a formative influence within the life of a group or individual” (Wood, 2007: p. 71). In short, the term ‘spirituality’ is often employed to denote those forms of spiritual expression that do not require, and indeed might reject, an external authority and a rigid organisation, while favouring a form of free expression of spiritual proclivities that are meaningful to the individual.

Early studies of spirituality fall for a romanticisation of individual autonomy and expression, failing to see relationships of power. They pit liberating spirituality against religion, presuming wrongly that religious belief in a transcendent God necessarily negates self-actualisation, and assume that individual self-expression is ethical in and of itself. Later studies show a more balanced perspective and recognise the blurred boundaries between religion and spirituality in their use of space (Ammerman, 2013; Palmisano, 2009; Pessi, 2013; Pessi and Jeldtoft, 2012) and in practices and beliefs (Bender, 2010; Woodhead, 2012). It has to be acknowledged, however, that in popular debates religion is associated with a belief system and organised worship, while spirituality is seen as more abstract and non-theistic (Schlehofer et al., 2008).

The rise in new forms of religion and spirituality, which often involved much borrowing from Eastern traditions, together with the wider culture of the sixties, had a significant impact on Christianity itself. The counterculture did not solely undermine traditional Christianity, it also spurred change. The baby-boomers of the sixties rejected what they saw as authoritarian bourgeois society and embraced the hippie lifestyle as a way to experience Jesus’ teaching more authentically. Christian groups such as the Jesus People Movement were at the forefront of the counterculture in the Bay Area of California. The Calvary Chapel Movement and the Vineyard Christian Fellowship,



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which have since spread around the world, also sprang from the counterculture. Donald Miller (1997) believes that Calvary Chapel, Vineyard Christian Fellowship and Hope Chapel, which he calls “new paradigm churches”, have been pivotal in “reinventing” American Protestantism.

These ‘new paradigm’ churches have combined contemporary tastes with the ‘traditional’ Christian message. Their buildings are free of religious symbols, dress is casual and attention is paid to creating a friendly atmosphere (Miller, 1997: p. 13). They also feature a high level of involvement of the laity (Miller, 1997: pp. 15–17) and looser structures. Their church culture stresses acceptance (Miller, 1997: p. 68) in an attempt to “meet people where they are at”, as Miller was told by an informant (Miller, 1997: p. 67). They reject what is felt to be the institutionalisation of religion, its formality, hierarchies and intellectualism, to locate religiosity in a personal encounter with God. Their worship is emotional and experiential, and music plays a prominent role.

The philosophy of ‘welcoming’ has been central to the restructuring of America’s evangelical churches and the rise of so-called megachurches. The most successful churches have been those founded by Bill Hybels in Chicago, Rick Warren in Los Angeles and Joel Osteen in Houston. The model of the ‘purpose-driven church’ (Warren 1995) was a response to the need for ‘relevance’ to contemporary lifestyles. Spiritual seeking was integrated in a religious setting by stressing the emotional support and practical help that a community can provide. This is particularly relevant for the post-boomer generation, which values “expressive communalism” (Flory and Miller, 2008) in which they seek spiritual experience and fulfilment in community. These Christians are ‘spiritual *and* religious’.

In the UK, Christian alternative worship, such as the Nine O’Clock Service, emerged in the 1980s (Guest, 2002). This was aimed primarily at young people, but opened the door more widely to experiments in worship in Britain that emphasised experience and hermeneutical deconstruction. The ‘emerging church movement’, which began in Britain, New Zealand and Australia (Guest and Taylor, 2006), sought to marry experiential worship with ‘contextual theology’ which reflects critically on Christian tradition and the contemporary world. The ‘emerging church’ is conscious of being in a ‘post-Christendom’ environment, where Christianity is no longer culturally hegemonic but is part of the wider pluralistic framework.

The emerging church movement in the United States has a much narrower spectrum of innovation (Labanow, 2009: p. 5) and is “defined by a deeply felt disenchantment toward America’s conservative Christian subculture” (Bielo, 2011: p. 197). It opposes bureaucratic, unwelcoming and judgemental churches as well as ‘consumer churches’. ‘Emerging’ Christians seek to create inclusive, non-hierarchical communities in which to grow spiritually (Marti and Ganiel, 2014). The movement pursues an ‘authentic Christianity’, just as did the early megachurches described by Miller (1997) which are now criticised by ‘emerging’ Christians for their commercialism and bureaucracy. However, unlike the ‘new paradigm’ churches that later became megachurches, emerging churches are engaged in a process of theological deconstruction and reinterpretation of tradition.

### 3. Religious pluralism

This theological deconstruction and reinterpretation are in part a result of the pluralism of contemporary society. The coexistence of multiple, often overlapping identities has given rise to a framework in which diversity is not only accepted but valued. Thus, pluralism, understood here as the acceptance and valuing of diversity (Beckford, 2003: p. 81), provides a paradigmatic shift in cultural framework for the redefinition of Christianity. Christian belief as exclusive truth has been challenged in liberal society by the value of pluralism, which places all religions on an equal footing, at least in principle. Thus, the emphasis is on being open to ‘unorthodox’ opinions and the focus is on formulating authenticity (Vincett and Collins-Mayo, 2010; Guest, 2007a, 2007b; Guest and Taylor, 2006; Tomlinson, 1995). Recent studies show that the self-understanding of mainstream evangelicals in the UK is framed in terms not of exclusive belief but of authenticity, understood as a distinctive communal identity and the individual’s ethical development (Montemaggi, 2017).

As Christians in the West, faced with the reality of a pluralistic society in which religious diversity is valued and Christianity is no longer the dominant and privileged religious culture, have had to reflect on their identities and beliefs, scholars of religion have had to confront their own biases. Sociologists, in particular, whether secularisation theorists or scholars of spirituality studies, have tended to construct religion in the image of Protestant Christianity. The understanding of religion that has dominated the scholarship has been that of a system of belief in the transcendent within a highly organised and hierarchical institution, which reflects a Protestant model. It follows that religion has been seen in terms of beliefs, practices and rituals belonging to an established tradition and legitimised by religious authorities, thus disregarding ‘informal’ beliefs and practices (often branded ‘popular religion’) and the role played by individual actors in legitimising both formal and informal beliefs and customs (Montemaggi, 2015).

The notion of religion as ‘propositional belief’ (that is, a statement on the supernatural) and personal conviction has developed within Christianity over time, yet it has been taken as a universal model regardless of the variety of religious forms and the way they have changed over time. Anthropologists of religion, who have benefited from exposure to non-Western and non-Christian religious forms, have criticised consistently this bias in the understanding of religion (Cantwell Smith, 1978; Needham, 1972; Ruel, 2002; Asad, 1993). Ninian Smart (1968) pointed to the various dimensions of religion, such as the experiential, narrative, ritual, social, ethical, doctrinal, and material. Rodney Needham (1972) and Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1978) showed that propositional belief was the product of Christian religion and could not be applied to other religions.

Belief is not merely a Christian notion which has become abstracted and universalised; it is also a notion that has evolved within Christianity. In his essay ‘Christians as believers’, Ruel details how the concept of belief in Christianity has developed from *pistis* (trust) to *kerygma* (proclamation). Originally, it was fundamentally a matter of trust; it then became associated with ‘becoming a Christian’ and, therefore, belonging to a specific community, which drew a dividing line between Christian and non-Christian. As the church organisation developed, clear religious boundaries were established. From the Council of Nicea in 325 CE emerged a set of beliefs that identified the ‘true Christian’. Propositional belief thus became a marker of identity.

In medieval Europe, dissenting voices criticised the organisation of the church and sought to promote different theological conceptions (D’Onofrio, 2003), and yet being a



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Christian was more and more a matter of affirming a set of beliefs. Propositional belief acquired a personal dimension with the Reformation. Martin Luther broke new ground by making personal faith the only way to salvation. For him, one needed to be 'possessed by faith' (Ruel, 1982/2002, p. 104), which stressed the need for sincerity, which became a hallmark of Protestant tradition (Robbins, 2007). Protestantism cultivated the intellectual, ethical and individualistic elements of Christianity, which found fertile ground in Enlightenment rationalism.

Propositional belief, being a statement on something, is a rationalist conceptualisation of belief that fits the post-Enlightenment, modernist, scientific paradigm. The dominance of the scientific, rationalistic and utilitarian paradigm, which took hold with industrialised modernity, has been pivotal in restructuring the notion of religion. The materialism of positivistic science came to dominate our perception of reality and to define it only in terms of materiality. As mentioned above in reference to Weber's thesis, the dominance of instrumental rationality meant a delegitimisation of other forms of knowledge. However, the fact that the 'statement' of propositional belief concerns the unproven and unprovable supernatural has confined religion to the 'irrational', outside of scientific knowledge (Ruel, 1982/2002; Tambiah, 1990).

Liberal Protestantism was quick to embrace the new paradigm and refashion religion in terms of private faith guiding one's moral life. By assuming a restricted but legitimate role in society, Protestant faith, as propositional belief, personal conviction and ethical behaviour, consolidated the boundary separating religion from magic. The latter came to be seen as a flawed attempt at manipulating nature, rather than the performance of a ritual or a philosophical practice (Tambiah, 1990). Modern rationalism provided a rationale to religious powers to label and order knowledge hierarchically. At the top was the abstract intellectualism of propositional belief, which claimed 'more' rational validity than the ritualism of Catholicism, not to mention the 'irrational' magic practised by non-Western peoples.

The distinction between religion and magic has often reflected an understanding of Christian monotheism as the only model of legitimate religious belief, and of Protestant Christianity in particular as the yardstick by which other religious and spiritual forms are measured (Tambiah, 1990; Styers, 2004; Magliocco, 2012). Magic has thus often been construed as an attempt to manipulate reality and as superstition, rather than as a form of knowing. The Enlightenment's 'restructuring of knowledge' (Asad, 1993) has posed belief as opposite to rationality. The dominance of instrumental rationality means that the narratives of practitioners of magic often reflect a complex construction of reality that oscillates between rational materialistic and spiritual (De Martino, 1959).

Many contemporary spiritual expressions, such as neopaganism and witchcraft, need to be understood as articulating a conception of knowing in opposition to modernist logical rationality (Magliocco, 2004; Luhrmann, 1989) and even capitalism (Taussig, 1977). For instance, neopagans use magic to reconnect with the sacred. They seek "to re-enchant the universe, expand human potential, achieve self-realization and planetary healing" (Magliocco, 2015: p. 637). In contrast, New Agers ground their conception of reality on a non-materialistic notion of science, which envisages unity behind all phenomena, in opposition to what is felt to be a reductionist scientific establishment (Magliocco, 2015: p. 637).

The scholarship on magic and folklore suggests that magic should be understood as 'participatory consciousness' (Magliocco, 2012), a form of knowing other than materialistic rationality. Magic encompasses practices, such as meditation, channelling, past-life regression, and communication with spirit guides, that stimulate one's participatory way

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of thinking, which goes beyond the 'logical' and the 'rational'. It is an altered consciousness from which participants gain insights into how to live their lives. Thus, in contrast to instrumental rationality and the utilitarian and capitalist mindsets, alternative spiritualities have given value to the experience of the numinous and altered states of consciousness. This form of knowing is in contrast and opposition to not only the rational materialism of modern science but also the rationalism of liberal Protestant Christianity.

In the 1990s, some of the scholarship in sociology of religion began to come to terms with the discipline's Protestant biases and the undue attention it paid to official religious doctrines, and to concentrate instead on the everyday practices of ordinary people. The focus on 'lived religion' (Orsi, 1985; Hall, 1997; McGuire, 1997, 2008) moved away from an understanding of religion limited to its 'official' elements, as established by religious authorities, to an appreciation of the narratives and practices of religious people in different settings. This approach, much closer to anthropological ethnography than to sociological macro-level theories and statistical analysis, opened the door to a much broader and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon of religion. This has included the way people express their religious identity through clothing (Arthur, 1999; Furseth, 2011), food (Diamond, 2002; Koepping, 2008), rituals of birth and death (Klassen, 2001; Laderman, 1995; Prothero, 1997), and spontaneous shrines and home altars (Grider, 2006; Konieczny, 2009).

The study of religion as the narratives and practices of religious actors recognises the agency of individuals (Avishai et al., 2015), including their role in redrawing the boundaries of their tradition (Montemaggi, 2015). This shift in approach has entailed a focus on the practices of religious actors, rather than beliefs (Neitz, 2011; Aune, 2015), but also on embodiment (Løvland and Repstad, 2014) and emotions (Riis and Woodhead 2010). Belief has not disappeared, however; rather, a less intellectualistic understanding of it is taking shape. The emotional and mystical dimensions have become more prominent also in the Protestant worship of Pentecostal and Charismatic congregations (Luhmann, 2012). Evangelicals in Luhmann's study believe in God, but are very uncertain about God's presence and struggle to commune with God. That experiential belief is hard work in training one's imagination to be able to be open to the divine.

Theological doctrine is perhaps even more elusive than belief. Research in Norway's 'Bible belt' (Repstad, 2003, 2008, 2009) has shown that evangelicals are also shifting in their understanding of doctrinal beliefs. Pål Repstad has documented a movement away from a more sectarian outlook towards an understanding of Christianity that stresses experience and community (Repstad, 2009: p. 127). According to him:

Differences are still expressed, but less dramatically than before. There is more talk now about practicing Christians and active Christians, less about saved people, not to mention about non-saved.

(Repstad, 2009: p. 128)

The subject of hell has become "an unpleasant dogmatic issue in conservative circles" (Repstad, 2008: p. 22). Repstad also sees a connection between the movement towards a more 'liberal' Christianity and the encounter with other worldviews: "Christian leaders... when asked to reflect... often say that changes in their views are caused by challenging encounters with people" (Repstad, 2008: p. 20). This lends credence to the broader cultural accommodation of evangelicals (Hunter, 1985, 1987; McConkey, 2001; Shibley, 1996).

This is echoed in the research by Putnam and Campbell (2010), which found that "83% of evangelical Protestants say that those not of their faith could go to heaven" (Putnam

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and Campbell, 2010: p. 535). When they were asked whether this included non-Christians, the figure went down to 54% (Putnam and Campbell, 2010: p. 536), which was still a significant proportion. The respondents recognised “basic truths in other religions”, with just over 20% stating that only one religion is the true one (Putnam and Campbell, 2010: p. 546). Putnam and Campbell argue that this level of tolerance is due to the high level of diversity in society and the fluidity of religiosity, which is often a matter of personal choice. About a third of all Americans, they say, “choose their religion rather than simply inheriting it”. In addition, about half of married Americans have spouses from a different religious tradition (Putnam and Campbell, 2010: p. 148), which suggests the coming together of different traditions.

Contemporary Christians are not defined by belief and doctrine. This will resonate with Quakers, for whom doctrinal belief is not set, allowing instead theological diversity. From the beginning, Quakerism has emphasised the personal experience of the numinous rather than doctrinal statements. On the other hand, Quakerism shows some of the hallmarks of Protestant Christianity, such as the ministry of all believers and the lack of mediation by religious authorities in the believer’s relationship with the divine. Quakerism has responded to societal changes with theological flexibility. Thus, in 1931 the Yearly Meeting introduced the phrase ‘be open to new Light’ (Dandelion, 2008: p. 24), which allowed Quakers to accept new theological insights as legitimate.

Quakers often define themselves in opposition to doctrinal statements and firm theistic beliefs (Kline, 2012; Dandelion, 2008; Pilgrim, 2008; Vincett, 2008; Bourke, 2003). However, a coherence and unity emerge from the adherence to form. Pink Dandelion argues that “the group is held together by a conformist and conservative behavioural creed” (Dandelion, 2008: p. 22). Quakers are not conformist in the sense of being influenced by social conditionings; rather, they are prescriptive in the way they conduct themselves at meetings and the way in which they believe. In particular, Dandelion employs the term ‘absolute perhaps’ to capture “the prescription of seeking as the normative mode of belief” (Dandelion, 2008: p. 34). Suspicious of certainties, “Quakerism is held together not by what it believes but by *how* it believes” (Dandelion, 2008: p. 34, emphasis in the original).

Quakers are theologically diverse, yet divergence in belief is balanced by a shared ethos and a conformity to form that bind the group together. Quakerism is characterised by a continuous search, a spiritual journey of self-discovery and questioning. Quaker theology is therefore always “a personal, provisional or partial truth claim” (Collins and Dandelion, 2014: p. 296). Quaker spirituality revolves around subjectivity, with its silent worship, personal and partial understanding of the truth, and focus on inner experience. Nonetheless, the pervasiveness of shared narratives of non-doctrinal belief, of personal search, as well as the practices aiming at creating consensus form a distinctive collective consciousness.

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Quakers share a way of life, not a set of beliefs. Quaker unity is based on shared understanding and a shared practice of silent worship – a communal stillness.

Quakers seek to experience God directly – internally, in relationships with others, and with the world. Local meetings for worship are open to all who wish to attend.

Quakers try to live with honesty and integrity. This means speaking truth to all, including people in positions of power. The Quaker commitment to peace arises from the conviction that love is at the heart of existence and that all human beings are unique and equal.

This leads Quakers to put faith into action by working locally and globally to change the systems that cause injustice and violent conflict.

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