

Wittgensteinian Investigations of Contemporary Quaker Religious Language

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis uses ideas from the thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein and a variety of Wittgensteinian thinkers to shed light on the ways in which religious language functions in contemporary British Quakerism. It does this by looking in detail at examples from published British Quaker literature. In the process of considering genuine modern examples of religious language within their community context, I uncover assumptions which enable these ways of speaking to make sense within that community. These include ideas about how language works, such as an assumption that it follows on from (rather than being prior to) religious experience, and beliefs about the relationship between other religions and Quakerism.

The complexities of these examples and the multiple relevant contextual factors enable me to refine the philosophical and theological claims which I draw from Wittgenstein and others. These include the understanding of meaning as use in context and the model of religion as like a language or culture. In the first part of the thesis, a series of tools – philosophical perspectives which can be applied to examples in order to gain insights – are developed, then used to illuminate a set of examples. In the second half of the thesis, factors discovered to be underlying the patterns of use found in British Quaker religious language are explored in more detail and finally considered in relation to some further examples.

As a whole, the thesis explains the community processes which create and maintain some central patterns of Quaker speech, and demonstrates the usefulness of Wittgensteinian ideas and methods. In particular, it utilises the turn towards observing the ways in which religious language is used rather than focusing on the truth-value of claims abstracted from their roles in religious life. I conclude that patterns of Quaker speech not only make sense within a community where certain assumptions are held, but also that they fulfil a role in the maintenance of the community as a single theologically diverse and inclusive Religious Society.

Contents list

Introduction	7
Method	11
Location.....	17
Contents	20
Chapter 1: Quakers and their Theologies	25
Quaker history: Development of today's Quakerism	29
Quakers and their language today	33
Initial exploration of these assumptions.....	43
Chapter 2: Tools from Wittgenstein.....	50
Formation of meaning	51
Private language problems	64
Irreplaceability	76
Conclusion	86
Chapter 3: The cultural-linguistic model of religion.....	89
Lindbeck's <i>The Nature of Doctrine</i>	90
Exploring the other positions 1: cognitive-propositionalist.....	99
2: Experiential-expressivist.....	105
3: Lindbeck's proposal, the cultural-linguistic	111
Importance of the three models.....	120
Chapter 4: Worked Examples 1, or, Using the Tools	124
Example 1: <i>Quality and Depth of Worship and Ministry</i>	126
Example 2: Rose Ketterer, quoted in <i>Quaker Faith and Practice</i>	134
Example 3: <i>Journeying the Heartlands</i>	142
Conclusion	148
Chapter 5: Pluralisms	152
Part 1: Three Pluralisms	154
1A: Hick (and Armstrong)	154
1B: Cupitt.....	164
1C: Quaker Universalists	171
Part 2: Critiques of pluralism(s).....	180
Part 3: Responses	187
Conclusion	190
Chapter 6: Multiple Religious Belonging	192
The existence of multiple religious belonging	193

Literature on multiple religious belonging.....	196
Criteria for belonging	200
Desirability of multiple religious belonging	204
Effects of multiple religious belonging on religious language use	222
Does multiple religious belonging help a community make multi-theology remarks?	227
Chapter 7: Further worked examples	232
Example 1: <i>The Pure Principle</i>	234
Example 2: <i>New Light</i>	242
Example 3: <i>Soil and Soul</i>	249
Overview of examples.....	254
Conclusions	259
Quaker questions	259
Quaker Question 1.....	260
Quaker Question 2.....	264
Quaker Question 3.....	267
Quaker Question 4.....	268
Reflections on the philosophical and theological tools used	269
The thesis considered as part of Quaker Studies.....	280
Glossary of British Quaker Terms	283
Bibliography.....	291

Introduction

In this thesis, I examine Quaker ways of speaking about "God or whatever we may choose to call it"¹ in order to show how these ways of speaking make sense within the community which uses them and for the people who struggle with the issues which produced them. This examination is undertaken using approaches drawn from Ludwig Wittgenstein and George Lindbeck. In the process, some features of the **Quaker**² case study will point to improvements which can be made in the Wittgensteinian and Lindbeckian methods. This innovative approach contributes to our understanding of religious language as a whole, Quaker religious language specifically, and Wittgensteinian methods of investigation. This thesis demonstrates that Quaker ways of speaking, despite the internal tensions which are visible within them, make sense within the community which uses them, so long as members of that community continue to accept the relevant premises – but also acknowledges that those premises are in no way obvious outside the community, and indeed have received significant critiques. The underlying premises receive significant attention in this thesis, and in the latter part of the thesis I attend particularly to the acceptance of a pluralism about truth in religion and the practices of multiple religious belonging and using language from multiple religious backgrounds.

By focusing on an 'ordinary' philosophy of religion, in which the actual uses of religious language are foregrounded rather than the abstracted versions often considered as philosophical claims, this thesis shifts attention from truth, which in any case requires what Wittgenstein would call a

¹ Rex Ambler, *The End of Words: Issues in Contemporary Quaker Theology* (London: Quaker Home Service, 1994). 24.

² A number of technical Quaker terms are of necessity used in this thesis and further explanation of them can be found in the glossary. Henceforth, the first appearance of a term which appears in the glossary is marked by **bold type**.

grammatical investigation, towards meaning as created in community.³ It continues a tradition of boundary-pushing which has recently emerged in philosophy of religion – in John Cottingham's work on making philosophy of religion more 'humane', Mark Wynn's work on religion and the emotions, and the perspectives of a number of feminist philosophers of religion, for example – by pushing the boundaries which have previously been drawn around religious language.⁴

Issues around religious language – how does it work? how should we understand it? – have been of interest to many philosophers of religion, and more or less Wittgensteinian approaches to them have been considered by George Lindbeck, D. Z. Phillips, Rush Rhees, and others. However, the method of considering examples drawn from our own experience of everyday (non-religious) language, often used in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* and other works from after his return to Cambridge in 1929, has an obvious extension which has not been generally taken up: the detailed and contextualised consideration of real, specific uses of language within particular religious communities. This thesis explores the application of broadly Wittgensteinian methods to examples drawn from the published literature of a religious group.

In doing so, the thesis draws together material from a wide variety of sources, linked by relevance to the method at hand. At the core of the method is the Wittgensteinian understanding of how language acquires its meaning – that it is continually produced through the uses of words and phrases, by speakers in particular contexts – and the resultant acceptance that the context of speech or writing and the patterns of use of a specific word or phrase are of the utmost importance for our understanding of it.

³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Chichester: Blackwell, 2009). §90.

⁴ Examples would include: John Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension: Religion, Philosophy and Human Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). and Mark Wynn, *Emotional Experience and Religious Understanding : integrating perception, conception and feeling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

That being so, in order to understand a remark we must attend carefully to the context in which it is made by a particular writer or speaker, and the previous uses to which the words and phrases in it have been put in relevantly similar contexts, since these will point us to the connotations terms have for the user and their audience. Taking this method, together with the development of it which Lindbeck produced in relation to doctrine and called the cultural-linguistic model, and applying it to specific examples from within a particular religious community bounds this exercise and makes it possible – although many details of the background and context will have to be left aside, the size of the literature involved makes it possible to detect patterns across the work of a variety of authors, and hence to reach specific conclusions.

The use of contemporary British Quaker literature as the source of such a case study is motivated partly by the necessity for just this kind of specific literature; for such a numerically small group, Quakers have written and published much, including a significant number of books and pamphlets produced in recent years and aimed principally although not exclusively at their own membership. The examples which are considered in detail in this thesis (in chapters 4 and 7) date from between 1987 and 2009, and were written by Quakers for Quaker, non-Quaker, and Quaker-curious audiences. The other motivation for using this literature as a case study is the features of interest which it provides. Firstly, British Quakers are not a classic church community with a set of central doctrinal statements, of the kind of which Lindbeck was thinking in developing his cultural-linguistic model, and applying the latter model to this new example will show up both some of the model's strengths and some points where the model needs adaption to fit. Secondly, the diversity of belief within the contemporary British Quaker community produces a need for particular ways of speaking, and the process of exploring the mechanisms by which such remarks are made and make sense will lead into a consideration of non-Quaker but related material

which puts Quakers in the broader context of some religious trends visible in Britain today.⁵

The conclusions which this Wittgensteinian method produces – some relating to the underlying assumptions and guidelines on which Quaker speakers rely when talking about God, and others relating to the usefulness and nuancing of the tools drawn from Lindbeck and Wittgenstein – have implications for three main fields of study. Firstly, for Quaker studies, and especially the consideration of contemporary British Quakerism, the outcomes of the case study itself are significant, in particular for what they reveal about the philosophical underpinnings of Quaker God-talk today.

Secondly, for philosophers and theologians concerned with religious language, the implications of any case study ought to be of interest, since although the Wittgensteinian method is broadly familiar it is rarely applied to any specific examples as done in this thesis – and the results of this process, especially for the importance of key concepts such as the irreplaceability of some religious language, should lead to a reconsideration of other examples. Similarly, for theologians and philosophers interested in the nature of religion, the detailed application of Lindbeck's religion-as-language metaphor to a single case study, and the changes which need to be made to his understanding of religion as a result, are potentially useful.

Finally, because the underpinnings of current Quaker uses of religious language turn out to be supported by a widespread acceptance of a form of pluralism and the practice of multiple religious belonging, the reflections on these produced by this case study should also be of interest to scholars considering pluralism and multiple religious belonging more generally or in other contexts.

⁵ The extension of these trends beyond Britain, especially to other Anglophone Quaker communities, is likely but outside the scope of this thesis.

Method

The innovative interdisciplinary method of investigation employed in this thesis owes, as said above, much to Wittgenstein – although it does not incorporate all of his methods – and also a significant amount to the Wittgensteinian theologian George Lindbeck. In the process, it draws on philosophical, theological, and sociological approaches alongside the primary Quaker literature. It is similar to some other theological methods, such as the 'ordinary theology' approach developed and used by Jeff Astley (discussed in more detail later in this section).⁶

One method which Wittgenstein employs in the *Philosophical Investigations* (among other places) is to take forms of speech which are familiar and often in regular use by his audience, but which seem to be opaque when the tools of standard analytical philosophy are turned on them. By rejecting those tools, and substituting his own understanding of the way language works (to be explored at much greater length in chapter 2), he seeks to clarify these familiar terms and phrases in light of their actual use in real circumstances. This is the method I use in this thesis – a method which is easy for me, since I am located within the Quaker community whose language use I want to discuss. However, this thesis also aims to speak to an audience who are not (prior to reading this) familiar with this 'Quaker dialect', and hence requires some adaptations from this Wittgensteinian method.

Wittgenstein, when faced with unfamiliar practices such as those described in James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, turns to an analogical method – looking for familiar comparisons to the unfamiliar, so that we can try and 'get inside' otherwise strange, even barbaric-seeming, practices and see how their internal logic may be similar to that of practices which do make sense

⁶ Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002).

to us⁷. Quakers are not the only people who make remarks utilising terms drawn from multiple religious traditions, although their style of and motivation for doing so may be distinct from those of others.

In discussing Quaker uses of religious language, I have chosen to focus on real examples, drawn from published material, which gives a concrete dimension to the research. This is not identical with Wittgenstein's method, which usually draws on everyday uses which we can all readily imagine, but the real examples provide a basis of evidence from which even those unfamiliar with the 'Quaker dialect' can begin to draw patterns. It would have been possible to provide further evidence of these patterns, from other published sources and by conducting interviews or focus groups, but this would have diluted the focused study of specific examples; in any case, the focus of a project of this kind is the existence of a curious or interesting way of speaking rather than any statistical observation about how common it is.

Another method found in Wittgenstein's work is the creation of imaginary examples with which we can compare our real language. A number of these, such as the builders who have a complete language with a very small number of words in it,⁸ will be discussed in chapter 2, as the consideration of imagined language-games is essential to explaining Wittgenstein's view of language; however, I do not create any further such examples in this thesis. Rather, I continue to turn to real examples from the published literature which functions as my case study. This is not because the imaginary examples have no use, but rather because I have fully accepted the point which they are designed to make: that our real language, our everyday speech and writing, is much richer and more complex than any example we create in the abstract. It is in this very richness and complexity that I find the most interesting aspects of language – in particular, because real language is not created for one use only, as are the words the imaginary

⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough* (Retford, Nottinghamshire: Brynmill Press, 1979). 10e.

⁸ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*: §6.

builders use, but is multi-purpose, moving between contexts and uses and carrying the weight of previous uses – connotations – with it.

Previous considerations of Wittgenstein's work have tended not to apply it directly to real documented examples in this way. Sometimes attention is paid to the positions of particular people – either philosophers, as in debates between Wittgensteinian and non-Wittgensteinian views, or of individual non-philosophers, as in some of Rush Rhees's letters.⁹ Often, however, the views of non-philosophers are abstracted from their real contexts – as when R. M. Hare fictionalises the characters in a debate in his essay on the 'Simple Believer'.¹⁰ These can be very plausible portraits, and they are useful for the construction of Hare's argument, but inevitably such fictionalised material is removed from the actual context and background from which it arises. By using real examples from Quakers, many of them writing in a specifically Quaker context, I am able to retain this important contextual information. Even where the author is anonymous, the process of editing and publication through named channels provides significant background information. There is also the suggestion of an acceptance by the group as well as the individual writer.

One feature of the complexity of British Quaker thought today which becomes visible in the course of this thesis and which has affected the methodological approach chosen is the diversity of theological perspectives present in the community and hence in the literature. To respond to this, I use the word *thealogy*, a term designed to capture the diversity of possible positions. It is descended from the common word 'theology', from the Greek for 'speech about God', but it is also related to two other more recent coinages: 'a/theology' and 'thealogy'. A/theology captures the concepts of atheism and theism together in the context of discussion, allowing secular, humanist, agnostic, and religious positions which do not accept the

⁹ D. Z. Phillips, ed. *Rush Rhees on religion and philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹⁰ R. M. Hare, *Essays on Religion and Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

existence of God to be represented in the conversation, including those which are non-realist, i.e. which speak of 'God' but do not understand this term to refer to any external reality howsoever construed. Theology is a term widely used by feminist theologians to denote theology done with an awareness of the divine feminine. In order to capture these ideas succinctly I use the vowel schwa, written ə and pronounced 'uh'; in English, this sound when used alone represents hesitation and doubt. By embedding ə in the centre of the word theology (theology, atheology) to make theəlogy, I avoid statements about people's beliefs about God's gender and existence while acknowledging that these beliefs are both varied and significant.

When more than one possible theəlogical (theological, theəlogical, and/or atheological) position seems to be evident within a remark, I call it 'multi-theəlogical'. The method of investigation I have used always needed to have room for the possibility of multiple competing views existing more or less comfortably in the same community, and the Wittgensteinian perspective of language in which words do not have any core essence or 'real meaning' but can change and be used in a variety of flexible ways is particularly compatible with this. Perhaps in time the meaning of 'theology' will broaden in such a way that the term 'theəlogy' is no longer necessary – indeed, more inclusive uses are already in evidence in some places, such as some feminist the(o/a)logical writing – but this change does not yet seem to be sufficiently widespread or radical to justify using 'theology' in this way in this thesis.

I also use the term 'religion' throughout this thesis. I discuss religions, religious traditions (referring to parts of world religions, such as 'the Zen Buddhism of Thich Nhat Hahn' or 'Roman Catholic Christianity', as 'religious traditions'), religious practices, and religious language. I do this on the understanding that this is the agreed use of the word and that although there will be cases where it is not clear whether the term 'religion' is applicable, there is a pattern of application within which it is obvious that certain things are correctly called 'religious'. This Wittgensteinian approach to language use and definition will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 2. Some of the compound phrases which contain the term 'religious' have

patterns of use of their own: in particular, the phrase 'religious language' applies to language used by members of a religious tradition – but not all of their language, since many things anyone says will be irrelevant to their religious understandings. The boundary is necessarily fuzzy, especially since remarks with no obvious theological content may express a religious attitude: consider the things said over tea and biscuits. 'Bob's been ill again' has no theological content but in some contexts includes an attitude of caring which reflects a religiously-motivated desire to, for example, take care of members of the community. However, it is not usual to regard this as 'religious language' for philosophical purposes. That being so, I take the interesting kinds of religious language to be those which express, or have embedded, theological opinions, and am particularly interested in this thesis in the naming of God.¹¹

A related method to the Wittgensteinian one is that described by Jeff Astley under the label 'ordinary theology'. Although this thesis is not, in and of itself, ordinary theology, Astley's category frames as important and useful a kind of theology which is by nature tentative and personal, exploratory and creative.¹² The examples which I use can be described as ordinary theology – some of them are informed by philosophical and formal theological work, but they arise from the needs of Quakers who are thinking through their theologies in the context of their ordinary worshipping lives. Quakers have little or no expectation of successful systematisation and are consequently free to think in these ways. Quaker theology in general is already outside the "clerical paradigm" (and so akin to Astley's "lay theology", although Quaker understanding, together with much other Protestant theology, prefers a 'priesthood of all believers') and does not consider itself in debt to formal or academic theologies even where these are familiar to the authors.¹³ My own project, of course, is itself much in debt to several formal and academic

¹¹ I use the term 'theological opinions' here to distinguish these implicit positions from 'religious beliefs'; authors may not even agree, at the explicit level, with the theological opinions which are embedded in their uses of language.

¹² Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology*: 57.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 62.

theologies, although it employs them as ways to understand the background, motivations, and possible interpretations of ordinary Quaker theologians rather than to claim that ordinary speakers are mistaken or misguided.

Overall, the interdisciplinary nature of this project means that it seeks to maintain links to a wide variety of secondary literatures. There is, obviously, the Wittgensteinian literature, and – after Wittgenstein himself – this thesis engages with four groups of writers which might be seen as subsections of this literature: philosophers working on Wittgenstein's linguistic approach to philosophy generally, including Saul Kripke and Cora Diamond; philosophers working with Wittgensteinian approaches to religion, such as Norman Malcolm, D. Z. Phillips and Brian Clack; theologians directly influenced by Wittgenstein, such as George Lindbeck and Don Cupitt; and theologians, mainly in the post-liberal tradition, who have been influenced by Wittgensteinians – Stanley Hauerwas and Kathryn Tanner, for example. Beyond this, I also engage with a handful of non-Wittgensteinian theologians whose work is particularly helpful in explaining Quaker stances, of whom John Hick is discussed in most detail, and with the sociological literature on multiple religious belonging, where Rose Drew and Gideon Goosen are the biggest names. It is in this process, especially in chapters 5 and 6, that I explore the premises on which Quaker uses of religious language are based and consider some of the critiques made of those premises.

Besides these scholars whose work I draw on to help understand the Quaker examples, there is also the Quaker literature itself. On the one hand, there is the primary Quaker literature, from which I draw my examples – a diverse literature, some written by individuals and some edited by groups, some in conventional books and others in cheaply produced or even homemade pamphlets¹⁴ – but with enough commonalities that patterns can be detected and typical examples selected for detailed analysis, as I do in chapters 4 and

¹⁴ I stuck mainly to printed material since there was such an abundance of it; blogs and other internet postings would be another rich source.

7. On the other hand, there is also a secondary literature about Quakers – much of it, actually, produced by Quakers, some of whom have also written material which should be considered in the 'primary' category, making this a somewhat artificial distinction. Sociological and historical studies by Pink Dandelion, Klaus Huber, John Punshon, and Martin Davie among others would all fit into this category. Within the small literature of Quakerism, a number of people – Rex Ambler, for example – have thought it worthwhile to explore the relationship of Wittgensteinian ideas to Quakerism, which suggests that, although they have not been able to expand this theme at length, this is a line of inquiry worth pursuing from the Quaker perspective as well as the Wittgensteinian one.

Location

"Knowledge is socially situated."¹⁵

This, described by Tracy Bowell as the first of three central claims made by feminist standpoint theory, is a reasonable one to make within the Wittgensteinian context – the intimate relationship between knowledge and language, and the Wittgensteinian view of the social and changeable nature of language, make it a plausible claim. It is also a methodologically significant one, both within sociology and within feminist work, since it points out that the producers of 'knowledge' – the authors of theses, for example – are located within particular social structures, and those structures will have important effects on the knowledge which is produced. This thesis does not mostly work from a feminist perspective, foregrounding philosophical material and the words of Quakers rather than the experiences of women in particular. However, the ways in which the location of an author can affect the work which they do are important – I assume throughout this thesis that knowing (at least some of) the context from

¹⁵ Tracy Bowell, "Feminist Standpoint Theory," <http://www.iep.utm.edu/fem-stan/>. Accessed 8th May 2014.

which someone writes or speaks is vital to understanding their remarks as fully as possible, and it would be hypocritical and methodologically unsound to ignore the effect that my own context has on the things I am about to say in this thesis. That being so, this section provides some personal background which is relevant to my approach to the topics raised by this work.

I began this project with the observation that people in my religious community, including myself, were saying things which seemed bizarre or nonsensical to people outside that community. In one sense, I had always had that knowledge – I was raised as a Quaker, and while I was at school a series of encounters with peers and Religious Education teachers showed that talk of 'silent worship' or 'being led to speak' would be met with bafflement. The more specific observation came later, though, with a wider exposure to ecumenical contexts and undergraduate study of Theology. In the Philosophy department my teachers and fellow students were rather inclined to view religious talk as nonsensical talk, or at least talk which could not be adequately verified for the purposes of a seminar discussion, but in Theology people were happy with much of it: 'I was led to give a message from the Spirit' and 'we enter into communion with God through waiting worship' were fine; perhaps not mainstream, but not out of the ordinary order of things, either. Some kinds of claim, not unusual or challenged within my Quaker community, remained out-of-bounds, however, and it is those to which I began to turn my attention. There is, therefore, a very personal question at the core of this thesis: what am I doing when I talk about God, goddess(es) and bodhisattvas, et al.?

To be a **cradle Quaker**, to attend **Children's Meeting** most weeks throughout childhood, to make the transition to sitting right through an hour of **Meeting for Worship**, to first serve on a Meeting committee at the age of seventeen, to come into formal **membership**, to find oneself led to speak to the **Yearly Meeting**, to be accepted to receive two Quaker bursaries, to serve as an **Elder** and a representative to **Meeting for Sufferings** – all these are ways to be thoroughly embedded within the community of the **Religious**

Society of Friends. I begin from this background and I have continued in this commitment throughout my studies.

It should be said, though – especially in light of what I will say about multiple religious belonging in chapter 6 – that the Religious Society of Friends is not the only religious community to which I belong. I became interested in neo-Paganism as a teenager, following my nose through the public library and looking for material on archaeology, history, and religion. The language of Goddess worship spoke to my condition as a budding feminist, unnourished by a Quaker community (who were not ready for me to be so well-read so young) and dismayed by the Christianity which I encountered among Anglicans and Methodists when attending Church Parade with Brownies and Guides. I have retained this interest and over the years come to participate actively in the Pagan community, by, for example, attending open rituals for the seasonal cycle and studying the distance learning course offered by the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids.¹⁶ This gives me an especial sympathy for those who wish to use the language of polytheism, Goddess worship, and the inherent value of nature, because I am inclined to speak in this way too.

In chapter 6 I also note that many Westerners who are expanding their religious horizons experiment with Buddhism, and I must count myself among their number. Although I have no commitment to any particular Buddhist group, and some philosophical and some practical difficulties with various Buddhist teachings and practices, I have attended meditation, worship, and retreats with Soka Gakkai International's British branch (SGI-UK), the New Kadampa tradition, the Foundation for Preservation of Mahayana Tradition, and the Community of Interbeing, the Vietnamese Zen tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh. In 2012, I received the Five Mindfulness Trainings from the latter – this does not technically include the Three Refuges, but does in practice mark a certain level of sympathy with the aims

¹⁶ OBOD, "The Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids," <http://www.druidry.org/>. (Accessed 2nd September 2014.)

of the community.¹⁷ It is also relevant that my first exposure to Buddhism outside books and the art collection of the British Museum was a course offered by Jim Pym and Andrew Burnham in 2005 called 'Quakers and Buddhists'.¹⁸ Multiple belonging has been a consistent feature of my Quaker landscape, with family members and some others in the Meeting in which I grew up also practising in this way.

Throughout my work on this project, I continued to find myself in Quaker settings saying things which, in my academic work, I was on the verge of discounting as nonsensical or condemning as offensive. I might talk, for example, about being led by 'Light, Spirit, Goddess, whatever we're calling it this week', or about there being in everyone 'that of God, or the holy, or the eternal' – and then I would often catch myself, and say or think something like 'if we can make any sense of that'. As it turns out, I have stopped short of either ridicule or condemnation, working instead to understand why and how Quakers come to make multi-theology remarks which may seem utterly bizarre to the outsider. In doing so, I have needed to step outside the Society of Friends, and view Quaker language and practices from other perspectives.

Contents

This thesis falls into two parts. The first half, comprising chapters 1 to 4, is more theoretical and – having introduced the Quaker material in chapter 1, Wittgenstein in chapter 2, and Wittgensteinian theologians in chapter 3 –

¹⁷ The Five Mindfulness Trainings are a version of five basic Buddhist principles for moral living, commonly known in English as the Five Precepts – the major change is a rewriting into positive language, e.g. 'Loving Speech and Deep Listening' replaces 'Do not lie'. Declaration of taking the Three Refuges – refuge in Buddha, Dharma (roughly, teaching), and Sangha (community) – has traditionally been considered the method by which one 'becomes a Buddhist'. They can be read in full at Plum Village, "The Five Mindfulness Trainings," <http://plumvillage.org/mindfulness-practice/the-5-mindfulness-trainings/>. (Accessed 2nd September 2014.)

¹⁸ At Charney Manor, a Quaker-run conference and retreat centre in Oxfordshire.

provides the key tools which I use. They are given their first outing in chapter 4, the first set of worked examples.

The second half, chapters 5 to 7 and the conclusion, delves into the underpinnings of the Quaker multi-theology remarks following the method laid out in the first half. It seeks to explore the assumptions which allow Quakers to speak coherently in the characteristic patterns identified so far. This involves a consideration of pluralism (chapter 5), multiple religious belonging (chapter 6), and is wrapped up with a second set of worked examples (chapter 7) which shows all the findings in action.

Before the philosophical work can begin, a clear view of the material to which the tools are to be applied is necessary, and so in chapter 1 I provide an introduction to the Quaker literature which provides my examples. I begin with a description of Quakers today, using both quantitative and qualitative evidence, and provide a brief history which places the remarks to be discussed in the broader context of the Quaker tradition. Having done this, I introduce a number of typical examples – several of which will be examined in more detail later in the thesis – and investigate in more detail the history of an organisation which sheds particular light on Quakers as a multi-theology community, the Quaker Universalist Group (to whose philosophical claims I return in chapter 5). I also show how several assumptions about the nature of language and (religious) experience are embedded in Quaker remarks, and make these assumptions visible so that they can be discussed and challenged. Finally, I open the key questions which this thesis will address, showing how they arise from the Quaker material.

In chapter 2 I introduce the three key tools which I draw from Wittgenstein and which will inform my later analysis of real examples of religious language drawn from the Quaker tradition. The concept of meaning as produced by use in context is central to these and is discussed at length as the first tool, followed by the related 'private language argument', which provides significant insights into the way that language works and also

challenges some of the Quaker assumptions about language and experience which were described in chapter 1. The resultant understanding of language constitutes the second tool. The third tool relates to the irreplaceability of certain words or 'pictures' in our understandings, and is refined from comments made by Wittgenstein about religious language. Overall, this chapter is interested in establishing some useful principles which will be applied to real examples later, rather than in exegesis of Wittgenstein's positions – some of which, especially in relation to the third tool, are in any case quite obscure.

The main focus of chapter 3 is the work of George Lindbeck, especially in relation to the cultural-linguistic understanding of doctrine. Two main things are accomplished in the consideration of his work: a clarification of the 'experiential-expressivist' approach to religion, which on examination bears significant resemblance to the Quaker assumptions identified in chapter 1 (especially about the primacy of experience and the simultaneous accuracy and inadequacy of language), and also the establishment of two further tools. These – the metaphor of religion-as-language, and the concept of the 'fluent elite' who are competent to judge new developments in religious language – are discussed in detail so that they are ready for use in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 puts the tools established in chapters 2 and 3 to work on the kinds of real uses of religious language described in chapter 1. In three detailed considerations of quotations from the Quaker literature, I show how the tools can illuminate the remarks and their underlying assumptions, while also allowing the tools themselves to be challenged by the examples. All five tools are shown to be useful, although some make use of assumptions which contradict assumptions commonly made by Quakers. For example, the Wittgensteinian concept of irreplaceability might stand in direct opposition to the usual Quaker assumption that all linguistic expressions can be 'translated' into other terms. It becomes clear in the course of these explorations that some require further nuancing or careful use (the religion-as-language metaphor needs to be taken in conjunction with the

Wittgensteinian view of language, for example). At the end of this chapter, the basic tools of this thesis have been established and tested, and a certain amount of progress has been made on understanding the central puzzle, the Quaker multi-theology remarks. In order to deepen this understanding, however, further background on the form of life and accompanying assumptions from which they arise will be needed, and chapters 5 and 6 aim to provide this.

Moving into the second half and looking more deeply at the assumptions which support Quaker multi-theology remarks, chapter 5 turns to pluralism as a philosophical position, considering the perspectives of theologians widely read by Quakers: mainly John Hick and Don Cupitt, but also Karen Armstrong. It holds the positions of these thinkers in tension with the position which can be generalised from documents produced by Quaker universalists, showing what they have in common but also where their differences lie. The similarities are strong enough that the academic work of the theologians can be used to explain and sometimes to support the Quaker universalist position, although the differences also introduce new ways of responding to the challenges faced by other pluralist positions. The chapter concludes that, although pluralism as a perspective has a number of flaws, only some of which have been satisfactorily addressed, it nevertheless makes sense within the context of the Quaker community and Quakers have a number of good reasons for accepting it.

Chapter 6 then goes on to attend to a form of practice within which pluralism is frequently embraced and which is visibly present within the British Quaker community, namely dual or multiple religious belonging. Using sociological material and what theological work on multiple religious belonging has been done to date, this chapter explores the situation of people who seek to belong to more than one religious tradition, considers some of the potential problems arising from the occupation of this location, and suggests that the presence of some practitioners of multiple religious belonging within the Quaker community may be an important factor in the movement of terminology from non-Quaker traditions into Quaker speech,

and the trend towards the use of list-format and multi-theology remarks. Although a direct causal link cannot be proved from the evidence available, seeing multiple religious belonging as a significant part of the context helps to make sense of the Quaker uses of religious language described in this thesis.

Having explored the themes of pluralism and multiple religious belonging, in chapter 7 I return to the format of chapter 4 and examine in detail three further examples of Quaker uses of religious language. Each of these three examples offers a further list of apparent synonyms, and the terms used and the surrounding contexts in which they are given provide more evidence about the forces which shape such remarks – including the desire to be inclusive, a pluralist approach to religious experience, and some struggles with the limits of what can acceptably be included. The chapter concludes that the factors identified in the thesis combine to make list-format remarks, which will often (although not always) be multi-theology in nature, seem natural and obvious within the British Quaker community.

Finally, my conclusion reviews questions about Quaker uses of religious language which were raised in chapter 1, and considers the implications of this thesis for future uses of the tools derived from Wittgenstein and Lindbeck, and hence for the disciplines of theology philosophy of religion. It also seeks to position the thesis within the broader context of Quaker Studies.

Chapter 1: Quakers and their Theologies

This chapter undertakes to provide, firstly, a general background concerning Quakerism in terms of history, theology, politics, and development; and secondly, plenty of contextualised examples of the more problematic language, leading into some lines of critique. These will not be developed here, because a full discussion requires use of the tools which will be considered in the following chapters, but the themes raised here will return especially in chapters 4 and 7 which discuss particular examples.

The tabular statement,¹⁹ a yearly report on the membership of the Society, reveals that at the end of 2012 there were 13,906 members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain.²⁰ Some further 8681 people are recorded as 'attenders', people who attend Meeting for Worship, are known to the community, and may think of themselves as Quakers, but who for whatever reason are not in formal membership. This gives us a total of 22,587 people in England, Scotland and Wales who can reasonably be called Quakers.²¹

This numerical approach to the description has some important weaknesses. Some people may have associations with Quakerism – having grown up in Quaker families, for example, or having been members or attenders at some point in the past – but no longer be formally associated with a Meeting, even if they think of themselves as Quakers. This latter group is, for obvious reasons, almost impossible to quantify. Another feature of Quakers today which makes it difficult to count them is the practice of multiple religious belonging, to be discussed in detail in chapter 6 – for now, it is sufficient to note that any survey which allows respondents to tick only one box under

¹⁹ Britain Yearly Meeting, "Tabular Statement," (2013), <http://www.quaker.org.uk/files/Tabular-statement-2013-web.pdf>. Accessed 12th May 2014.

²⁰ Which for the purposes of Quakers comprises England, Scotland and Wales, as Northern Ireland is part of Ireland Yearly Meeting. Ireland Yearly Meeting currently has around 1,500 members.

²¹ Or Friends; following ordinary Quaker speech, I use the terms interchangeably.

'religion' is unable to capture the complexity of many people's religious lives, since someone practising both Christianity and Buddhism (to pick a common example) will not be able to express all aspects of their religious identity in such a setting. Furthermore, the general habit of folding Quakerism into the broader label of 'Christianity' makes it invisible on many surveys, and since a significant number of British Quakers today do not identify as Christians this also introduces a certain amount of inaccuracy.

Within the Quaker community, some surveys have been done which try to capture the beliefs of British Quakers. These reveal considerable diversity – at least, in comparison with other churches. In a survey by Dandelion in 1989 (repeated in a modified form in 2003), roughly a quarter of British Quakers answer 'no' or 'not sure' to the direct question "Do you believe in God?"²² A more detailed follow-up question in the same survey reveals that Quakers prefer to describe God as "the inward light",²³ with "a spirit" and "love" nearly as popular. In some ways, their convergence on these terms produces quite a high form of agreement – somewhat different from the other Christian groups with whom Dandelion compares them, and distinctive in their use of the phrase 'the inward light', but clear that, of the limited set of terms on offer, those three are preferable to others. For the purposes of this thesis, these data are of limited use, because the examples in which I am interested use so many other terms: 'Buddha/Inner Buddha

²² Dandelion's comparative samples in Roman Catholic and Church of England congregations both scored 100% in the 'yes' column, and even in the non-religious control group, some undergraduate students, 54% said 'yes'. Pink Dandelion, *A Sociological Analysis of the Theology of Quakers: The Silent Revolution* (Lewiston, Queenston and Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996). 167.

²³ On being asked "Which of the following best describes God for you?" and being invited to tick multiple boxes if necessary. The complete list offers: "Father/mother/person/figure", "a spirit", "a process", "a being", "a principle", "the inward light", "best not described", "love", "creative force" and "friend/companion". The other options in the list were significantly less popular. Roman Catholics favoured 'love', the charismatic church preferred the 'father/mother' list with 'love' second and 'a spirit' third, and the Church of England group liked 'love' and 'a spirit' equally. It can be said, then, that Quakers are not unique in a certain fondness for these terms. *Ibid.*, 168.

nature', 'the Tao', and personal names such as 'Krishna' or 'Jesus' were not included on Dandelion's list for this question.²⁴ In any case, I am not mainly concerned with the statistical prevalence of particular ways of speaking, but with the philosophical interest which is to be found in one or two ways of speaking which, although perhaps not the most common, do exist widely enough to occur repeatedly in the writing of Quakers.

Another way to begin explaining Quakerism would be to begin with a rich description – which would be unlikely, perhaps unable, to represent all of British Quakerism as the numbers can, but might provide information about the form of life constituting Quaker worship which cannot be conveyed by statistics (the Wittgensteinian concept of the 'form of life' will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2). Some such descriptions are available in *Quaker Faith and Practice*,²⁵ and a leaflet commonly distributed in meeting houses called 'Your first time at a Quaker meeting' offers the following description, alongside various pieces of advice about choosing a seat, listening to vocal ministry, and information about the running of the meeting such as that the signal to close is the shaking of hands:

We are caught up in the still spirit of the meeting, and all of us are trying to come nearer to each other and to God, without reciting creeds, singing hymns, or repeating set prayers. We do not worship in isolation: we try to hold ourselves aware of all those gathered with us, uniting in a common purpose, so that the waiting and listening become an act of sharing.²⁶

²⁴ Other questions did cover attitudes to Jesus and the Bible.

²⁵ Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith and Practice: The book of Christian discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain*, 4th ed. (London: The Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, 2008). See especially chapter 2, 'Worship and Prayer'.

²⁶ Quaker Life Outreach, "Your first time at a Quaker meeting," (London: Britain Yearly Meeting, undated).

The details of this vary between **Meetings** – timings, books available, culture of hallway chatting, and so on – but the general shape of the practice is the same in all unprogrammed meetings.²⁷

Something should also be said here about *Quaker Faith and Practice: The Book of Christian Discipline of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain*, a key source for this thesis and a significant document in its own right. Quakers in Britain have long had a book of discipline, a collection of material found to be useful for future reference, which has been revised from time to time (approximately once in each generation) since it was "first issued – in manuscript form – in 1738".²⁸ It has borne various names and been issued as both one and two volumes; the present, tenth, version is also published online.²⁹ *Quaker Faith and Practice* might be said to contain, roughly speaking, two kinds of material: church governance and inspirational (in a previous version, these were published as two volumes, a book of discipline and a book of extracts). Much of the latter, and some of the former, takes the form of quotations from Quaker writers. This gives it something of the air of a compendium or commonplace book, and allows for a range of views to be represented without there being an 'official' position.³⁰ We will see later in this chapter that diversity of opinion is, on many although not all matters, the norm among Friends. The most recent revision of the Book of Discipline, approved by the Yearly Meeting in 1994,

²⁷ Programmed meetings do exist; they are common in the Americas and in Africa. They may include some silent worship (sometimes known as Open Worship or Communion After the Manner of Friends), but also hymn singing, Bible readings, and a sermon, and in general more closely resemble other Nonconformist church services. In Britain, there is one programmed meeting, London Friends Programmed Meeting, which affiliated with North West London Area Meeting (and hence with Britain Yearly Meeting) in 2012. Being small and relatively new, they are not represented in the literature on which this thesis is based, and it remains to be seen whether contact between London Friends Programmed Meeting and the unprogrammed majority of Britain Yearly Meeting will have any theological or liturgical effects.

²⁸ Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith and Practice*: Introduction. (Hereafter 'QF&P'.)

²⁹ <http://qfp.quakerweb.org.uk/qfpmain.html>. Accessed 12th May 2014.

³⁰ An example of this is provided by the range of attitudes to abortion in chapter 22 – most if not all of which were commissioned by the committee tasked with drafting QF&P.

may not quite reflect the state of the Society now,³¹ but it remains the closest thing Quakers in Britain have to an authoritative text and provides valuable insight into the community.

Quaker history: Development of today's Quakerism

The historical roots of the practice of unprogrammed, silent or waiting worship, and of Quakerism more generally, are worth tracing briefly, and so this section will provide a very brief introduction together with some more detailed comments about points which are relevant to the other themes of this thesis, in particular the development of liberal Quakerism in Britain today.

The Religious Society of Friends began in England in 1652, one of a number of religious movements which arose during that turbulent period in Britain's history immediately before, during, and after the English Civil War. George Fox, having travelled extensively and asked many questions about the established church of the time, had a vision of "a great people to be gathered" and found them in the north-west of England.³² He spoke to gatherings in the countryside and also went to churches – on one such occasion, he was heard by Margaret Fell, who wrote later that "I stood up in my pew, and I wondered at his doctrine, for I had never heard such before".³³ On one occasion, in a letter from a prison cell, he wrote that the newly convinced Friends should:

be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations,
wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among

³¹ Indeed, Meeting for Sufferings, following a nationwide consultation, concluded in February 2014 that it does not, and therefore recommended to the Yearly Meeting that the process of revision should begin.

³² QF&P 19:06 & 07

³³ QF&P 19:07

all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.³⁴

We will encounter that final phrase – 'that of God in every one' – repeatedly in the course of this thesis; it is often used by Friends today to express the core of Quaker beliefs. Also important to early Friends was unmediated access to God; it was available to everyone and people therefore had no need of the university-trained priests whom Francis Howgill called "hireling-shepherds".³⁵

It is conventional for Quaker historians to define the rest of Quaker history in terms of periods. After the death of Fox and other first-generation Quakers there is generally understood to be a time of 'quietism' during the eighteenth century, in which much of the structure of today's Quakerism (the Book of Discipline, for example) has its roots.³⁶ In the Victorian era evangelicalism became a dominant force, in British as well as American Quakerism, before the development of liberalism in the first part of the twentieth century.³⁷ The trends examined in this thesis are best considered as a continuation of this latter movement.

With their focus on unmediated access and individual experience, British Quakers have never adopted a shared creed or confession of faith. The closest they have ever come to adopting one was the proposal to accept the Richmond Declaration, drawn up by the Richmond Conference of all Gurneyite Yearly Meetings in 1887. Although London Yearly Meeting did

³⁴ QF&P 19:32

³⁵ QF&P 19:08

³⁶ John Punshon, *Portrait In Grey: A short history of the Quakers* (London: Quaker Home Service, 1984). 102, and see also chapter 6, 'The Creation of a Quaker Culture'. I use the term 'quietism' here in the interests of brevity and familiarity, but note that much of what was said about it by, for example, Rufus Jones has been challenged in more recent work such as Rosemary Elaine Pryce, "An Exploration of the Theology of Quietism: its historiography, representation and significance in the Christian mystical and Quaker traditions" (University of Birmingham, 2013).

³⁷ Punshon, *Portrait In Grey: A short history of the Quakers*: 216, 29.

seriously consider this, in 1888 they "declined to adopt" this statement of Evangelical Quaker belief, not least because in England "the tide of opinion [had] started to flow against Evangelism".³⁸ Instead, thinkers such as William Charles Braithwaite,³⁹ Rufus Jones and John Wilhelm Rowntree, who were to be at the front of liberal Quakerism in the early twentieth century, came to the fore, and the Manchester Conference of 1895 is frequently taken to be the beginning of a new era in Quaker history.⁴⁰ Characteristic concerns of this period, such as those "for roots, for organisation and for outreach... remain on the agenda for today".⁴¹ The new liberal Quakerism also had a distinctive theological position, or rather a series of interlinked positions, and since these form the basis of the modern Quakerism which I will be discussing throughout this thesis, it is worth examining these in depth.

Martin Davie, writing in 1997 and himself a former Quaker who found the modern form of Quakerism too liberal, identified seven beliefs, all common to liberal theologians outside Quakerism as well as those within it, and described by speakers at the Manchester Conference, which are the foundations of this. Of these, the most significant for this thesis are the last two: an emphasis on "the immanence of God", which Davie links both to the acceptance of the theory of evolution, especially the idea that God must now be seen at work "in and through the evolutionary process rather than as making occasional interventions into His creation", and the claim "that theology had ultimately to be based on an appeal to immediate experience of God".⁴² This emphasis on experience will prove to be an important

³⁸ Martin Davie, *British Quaker Theology Since 1895* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997). 50.

³⁹ Whose son, R. B. Braithwaite, will be discussed briefly in chapter 3.

⁴⁰ Both Davie and Heron use it at the starting point for their work, for example. Davie, *British Quaker Theology Since 1895*; Alistair Heron, *Quakers in Britain: a century of change 1895-1995* (Scotland: Curlew Graphics, 1995).

⁴¹ Punshon, *Portrait In Grey: A short history of the Quakers*: 210. Although this comment is now thirty years old, these concerns are in evidence in more recent publications: reports from the 2013 **Kindlers'** conference touched on them all.

⁴² Davie, *British Quaker Theology Since 1895*: 72.

feature of Quaker belief today, affecting especially the approach to pluralist or universalist theologies, introduced below and discussed at length in chapter 5.

One final comment on this matter and the historical development of Quakerism comes from Pink Dandelion, who sounds a note of caution about claims of historical continuity, saying that although early 20th century liberal Friends "imagined that they were reclaiming original Quakerism" they in fact established "the biggest departure from the rest of Quaker tradition to date".⁴³ In particular, Fox's understanding had been that divine revelation, although primary, was "always confirmed by Scripture even whilst he was not looking for such verification", whereas the new liberal tradition of Quakerism placed "authority in experience alone" and tested it in the group if it needed testing at all: "theological reliability comes in numbers or collective experience for these Friends".⁴⁴ Another shift, identified by Carole Dale Spencer in her study of the holiness tradition in Quakerism, was towards an "'affirmative' mysticism" in the work of Rufus Jones especially, who, she says, "overlooked the potential to synthesize the dialectical and paradoxical nature of the early Quaker movement, which included both a joyous affirmation of life and the mystical embrace of the reality of suffering".⁴⁵ This move towards emphasis on the positive, also found in a decreased attention to sin and evil in modern Quakerism as compared with early Quakerism, might also find echoes in the mid-twentieth century shift in the framing of testimonies, from 'testimonies against' (war, oath-taking) to 'testimonies of' (peace, truth, equality).⁴⁶ In this thesis, the Quaker emphasises on the importance of truth and equality will be particularly

⁴³ Pink Dandelion, *An Introduction to Quakerism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). 130.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Carole Dale Spencer, *Holiness: The Soul of Quakerism, An Historical Analysis of the Theology of Holiness in the Quaker Tradition* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007). 198.

⁴⁶ Rex Ambler dates this formulation (with four headings: equality, simplicity, honesty, and peace) to Hugh Barbour's 1964 book, *The Quakers in Puritan England*, making this also part of the mid-twentieth century developed of liberal-Liberal Quakerism. Rex Ambler, *The Quaker Way: a rediscovery* (Alresford, Hants: Christian Alternative Books, 2013). 112.

important, as the values of seeking to speak the truth as one sees it, and to treat all people as equal, come into tension in the face of theological disagreement between people who seem to be equally honest.

A final development comes in the form of 'liberal-Liberal' Quakerism, Pink Dandelion's term for the recent pluralistic and consequentialist type of earlier liberal Quakerism just described. This might have roots in some Quaker writers as early as the turn of the century, such as William Littleboy, who tended to turn away from a mystical view of Quakerism towards one in which it is doing good, rather than feeling the presence of God, which is significant in a religious life.⁴⁷ Dandelion dates the shift to as early as 1930 but says that it was complete by 1966, and adds that it is characteristic of liberal-Liberal Quakerism that "belief is pluralised, privatised, but also marginalised: it is not seen as important".⁴⁸ As a result of this attitude to belief, form is emphasised instead: there is a 'behavioural creed' (one aspect of which is the resistance to creeds formulated in words⁴⁹) and pluralist theologies (discussed in chapter 5) and multiple religious belonging (discussed in chapter 6) become common. Again, this is visible in attitudes towards the testimonies, where especially in recent years acceptance of the peace testimony, or being a pacifist, has been seen as mandatory for Quakers, more important than theological beliefs or a particular kind of spiritual experience.

Quakers and their language today

It has often been observed of (and by) today's unprogrammed, liberal-Liberal British Quakers that a diversity of language for discussing religious experience has become common, and Quaker documents both note this and offer some attempts at explanation and a suggested attitude to be taken

⁴⁷ Spencer, *Holiness: The Soul of Quakerism, An Historical Analysis of the Theology of Holiness in the Quaker Tradition*: 225.

⁴⁸ Dandelion, *An Introduction to Quakerism*: 134.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

towards this fact. For example, the introduction to Britain Yearly Meeting's *Advices and Queries* (1995 edition) says that:

Within the community there is a diversity of gifts. ... There will also be diversity of experience, of belief and of language. Friends maintain that expressions of faith must be related to personal experience. Some find traditional Christian language full of meaning; some do not. Our understanding of our own religious tradition may sometimes be enhanced by insights of other faiths. The deeper realities of our faith are beyond precise verbal formulation and our way of worship based on silent waiting testifies to this.⁵⁰

That contemporary Quakers consider some things are "beyond precise verbal formulation" does not mean, however, that words are unimportant to them. As the Quaker Women's Group says in another extract republished in the 1994 Quaker Faith and Practice:

The language in which we express what we ... say is of vital importance; it both shapes and reflects our values.⁵¹

They go on to discuss the ways in which "Christian teaching and language has been used to subordinate women to men", but the point about language more generally is clearly applicable to other areas of discussion as well.

With concerns of this kind in mind, I have found myself fascinated by cases in which Quakers use religious language from a variety of different faiths, traditions or contexts. A typical example occurs in the acknowledgements section at the beginning of *Spirit Rising*, published in 2010. There, the editorial team remark that:

We have many names for the Divine—Spirit, God, Heavenly Father, Universe, Papa, Mother, Light—and we know that without it this work would not have been possible.⁵²

⁵⁰ Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith and Practice*: 1.01.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 23.44.

⁵² Angelina Conti et al., eds., *Spirit Rising: Young Quaker Voices* (Philadelphia, PA: Quakers Uniting in Publications, 2010), xiv. Of the editorial team, one member was British. Although my focus is on British material, it has proven impossible to entirely separate British Quaker material from the worldwide context, especially North American, especially other unprogrammed, Friends.

In this context – an edited collection of writing by young Quaker authors from around the world and across the spectrum of Quaker theology and practice – this comment reflects the lengthy and complex process which the editorial team undertook in their quest to understand one another's language and belief. It also reflects an approach to theological diversity which we are going to see is a continuing tradition in Quaker speech.⁵³ It describes a theology of diversity within unity, in which the "many names for the Divine" nevertheless refer to a singular Divine "without [which] this work would not have been possible".

Repeatedly in the Quaker literature we see attempts made to be open to a variety of ways of discussing "that which we are seeking to worship" — several books giving guidance on Quaker discussion and exploration pose the issue of language as an open question. For example, volume 5 of the Eldership and Oversight handbook series, *Quality and Depth of Worship and Ministry*, phrases it as a simple question, giving some possibilities but trailing off into a visual form of silence:

What do you call that which we are seeking to worship?
 The ground of our being,
 the ultimate reality,
 the meaning,
 the father,
 the mother,
 the everlasting arms,
 the spirit,
 God...⁵⁴

⁵³ And, as my previous footnote implies, not just British Quaker speech. For a good and purely American example, see Patricia Williams, who writes in her volume of Quaker theology that in worship we are "in correspondence with the Divine, whether conceived of as the Tao, the Buddha-nature, the will of Allah, the Holy Spirit, or the Light within". Patricia Williams, *Quakerism: A Theology for Our Time* (West Conshohocken, PA: Infinity Publishing, 2008). 105.

⁵⁴ Committee on Eldership and Oversight, *Quality and Depth of Worship and Ministry* (London: Quaker Books, 2001). 3.

(I discuss this example in detail in chapter 4.) In a similar way, the *Becoming Friends Companion's Handbook*⁵⁵ asks experienced Friends to reflect on the words they use. The exercise says:

It can be interesting to reflect with other Friends on words or ideas that you have each found tricky or liberating on your spiritual journey. As a companion, you will need to be sensitive to the spiritual language that a newcomer uses, which may be very different from your own.

1. In silence, write down words or ideas, one idea per note, as many as you like, that:
 - you use or have used when you speak of 'that reality which is unnameable'
 - you do not or no longer use when you speak of 'that reality which is unnameable'⁵⁶

It goes on to ask people to say these words out loud and attend to the emotional power of doing so. As we will see later, the emotional power of words is an undercurrent in much of the literature, although not often treated explicitly or in detail.

Although there is very little literature on how British Friends are currently using religious language, these examples are augmented by hints in a range of sources which name and recommend something like the process discussed above. For example, Ben Pink Dandelion, in the opening paragraphs of his booklet *Celebrating the Quaker Way*, asks readers to "'translate' or hear where the words come from" when he chooses to "talk of God in the way Friends have traditionally talked of the divine".⁵⁷ Taken together, a collection of these comments begins to reveal some assumptions

⁵⁵ *Becoming Friends* is a programme, workbook, and website which is aimed at encouraging newcomers to the Quaker community to explore their beliefs and those of other Quakers, usually working one to one or in a small group with a Companion, an experienced Friend who has been given a small amount of training. The *Becoming Friends Companion's Handbook* outlines this training. Ginny Wall, *Becoming Friends: Preparing to Be A Companion Handbook*, (Birmingham: Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre and Quaker Life, 2010). pdf.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵⁷ Ben Pink Dandelion, *Celebrating the Quaker Way* (London: Quaker Books, 2009). 3.

about religious language which seem to be widely shared among British Quakers today.⁵⁸

There is, of course, no single Quaker agreed explicit account of how language works. However, it is possible to piece together from a variety of sources a relatively coherent picture; what follows is my attempt to do so, supported by a similar exercise undertaken by John Lampen in his pamphlet *Finding the Words*,⁵⁹ one of very few publications entirely devoted to the issue of religious language in Quakerism.

Three major assumptions underlie the picture of (religious) language found in recent British Quaker texts. The primary assumption is that words are secondary to experience. The story goes that people have experience, mundane or religious, which is not mainly or at all verbal, and then must choose language in which to express that experience. Something gets lost in this process, because words are not experience, and so any language used will always be inadequate to the task. This makes Rex Ambler say, in a remark typical of the Quaker position I am outlining, that the problems of formulating experience into words are so extensive that in the end, we must leave religious experience as a "mysterious and finally inexpressible common ground".⁶⁰

As well as containing this primary assumption, which I will refer to as the experience-first assumption, this quotation points to the other key assumption found in these texts, namely that even when different words are in use, religious experiences are fundamentally the same – this leads to repeated claims or even an insistence that 'we mean the same thing' by our many choices of words. This is an assumption which I will call the unity-of-religious-experience assumption. Although there is sometimes a slippage between the two, encouraged by an understanding that religious experience

⁵⁸ Or at least that subset of them who write and publish books, booklets, pamphlets, lectures and articles about Quakerism.

⁵⁹ John Lampen, "Quaker Experience and Language," (The Hope Project, No date).

⁶⁰ Ambler, *The End of Words: Issues in Contemporary Quaker Theology*: 29.

is a direct, unmediated experience of 'God', it seems that it is religious experience which is held in common, and not notions about 'God', so that there is room for a variety of understandings and renamings of the latter without any threat to the commonality of the former.⁶¹

A third assumption which can be linked to these two is the ineffability assumption, an accepted understanding that God cannot be adequately named. This is easily produced from the experience-first assumption, since an experience which is pre-linguistic and only has words applied to it later may well not find satisfactory words in a particular language. However, sometimes there is an implication that ineffability is demonstrated by the combination of the unity of religious experience and the observation of many different descriptions which happen to exist in history. This argument is something like: a variety of words are in fact in use to describe that-which-is-experienced-in-religious-experience across different religious traditions, but religious experience is all of the same kind and/or all experience of a single Deity, and therefore the words used must be secondary to and inadequate for the ineffability of the Reality which we are seeking to describe. There are many reasons for questioning this line of reasoning. Not least of these reasons is that it is circular and uses unsupported assumptions to reach the conclusions which are expected. However, for the time being it is sufficient to note that it seems to exist in some modern Quaker thought, and that it embeds within a framework (which has a certain internal consistency) the following assumptions: ineffability, monotheism, pluralism, primacy of experience, and unity of religious experience.

⁶¹ The Quaker picture ignores the possibility that people having 'religious experiences' are perhaps having entirely different experiences, assuming that 'religious experience' is indeed a common experience – in terms of intellectual genealogy, this is traceable to the claims about universal mystical experience made by William James and especially the Quaker Rufus Jones, and perhaps in terms of forms of life the communal setting of Meeting for Worship in which people have religious experiences while behaving outwardly in similar ways tends to support this impression.

Two of the central assumptions about religious experience – its primacy over language and its unity across humanity – can also be found in the first six points of John Lampen's twelve "suggestions for finding the words we need":

1. There is something more in reality than whatever we can perceive with our senses and measure or hold in our minds.
2. This "something more" is not merely the object of belief; it is experienced by the individual as a presence — and an absence. Some of us experience it as an encounter with something personal. It is not simply an individual experience since we can also meet it as a group.
3. We believe that *all people have the potential for this experience*.
4. This is the experience which has been given such names as "God", "The Light", "The Tao", "The Inward Christ", "The Spirit", and "that of God in everyone". *It is not the naming which is important but the experience.*
5. The heart of worship is the desire and attempt to experience this presence.
6. *The "something more" is essentially indescribable.* Theologies, at best, can only point towards it; but they can be helpful, even essential, to some of us, while unnecessary for others. So tolerance should be the rule in religious discussion, and there is nothing incongruous in people worshipping together who have wildly differing belief-systems, if *they are trying to experience together the reality which underpins all creeds and honest seeking.*⁶² (my emphasis)

(I will be returning to the first part of this passage in chapter 5.) These assumptions have a considerable history in Quaker thought, and parallels in non-Quaker thought. Although a few carefully selected quotes can root them in Quaker thought as far back as William Penn,⁶³ the turn in this direction really begins with the work of Rufus Jones, who, as I briefly mentioned in the section on history above, produced "an interpretation of Quakerism that captured a whole generation of the silent tradition" and is still deeply influential today.⁶⁴ As summarised by John Punshon, the key assumptions of Jones' reading of Quakerism are that humans – universally – have an

⁶² Lampen, "Quaker Experience and Language," 6.

⁶³ See, for example, the long list of alternative names for "the Eternal Word" as – Penn says – it was discussed by Greek and Jewish philosophers. William Penn, *The Peace of Europe, The Fruits of Solitude and Other Writings* (London: J.M. Dent, 1993). 118.

⁶⁴ Punshon, *Portrait In Grey: A short history of the Quakers*: 227.

"inward junction of the soul with God",⁶⁵ which can be known in Quaker terms as "the Light within" or "the seed of God", and which "the wider mystical tradition has recognised as that of God within the soul",⁶⁶ and therefore that "religion must be a matter of personal experience".⁶⁷ It is easy to see how these ideas underlie the Quaker thinking found in more recent texts – the Quaker Universalists to be discussed in chapter 5 have especially relied upon them. Jones' work included extensive study of seventeenth-century mystics – in particular, unearthing the influence of Jakob Böhme on early Friends – and popularising previously lesser-known parts of George Fox's work, such as the now-ubiquitous "that of God in every one".⁶⁸

Many other historical sources exist for these assumptions, including Quaker writers such as Robert Barclay, Isaac Pennington, and Caroline Stephen, as well as non-Quaker thinkers including William James. However, one historical incident will serve to illustrate the general tendency and to show the origin of a much-used Quaker phrase. The story of Papunehang's reaction to Quaker Meeting for Worship has often been retold, discussed, quoted, and misquoted. It was originally told in *The Journal of John Woolman*.⁶⁹ Woolman was travelling with other Quakers among the Native Americans (with whom the English were at war at the time; Woolman along with some others refused to pay taxes which would fund this), and found in Wehaloosing a chance to be present at their meetings. He was given permission to speak if he wished to do so. At one such meeting, he felt called to speak. To begin with, some interpreters tried to translate his words "but found some difficulty, as none of them were quite perfect in the English and Delaware tongues, so they helped one another, and we laboured along, Divine love attending". Later on, however, he asked the translators not to try and interpret, and Woolman simply prayed aloud in English. He then says

⁶⁵ Rufus Jones, *The Trail of Life in the Middle Years*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/005786632>. 34.

⁶⁶ Punshon, *Portrait In Grey: A short history of the Quakers*: 228.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁶⁸ Claus Bernet, *Rufus Jones (1863-1948)* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009). 13.

⁶⁹ John Woolman, *The Journal of John Woolman: with appendices, including 'A word of remembrance and caution to the rich'* (London: Headley Brothers, 1900).

that:

Before the people went out, I observed Papunehang (the man who has been zealous in labouring for a reformation in that town, being then very tender) speaking to one of the interpreters, and I was afterwards told that he said in substance as follows: "I love to feel where the words come from."⁷⁰

Retellings of the story (written and oral) may bring out different aspects - it is common to, for example, emphasise the fact that Papunehang did not speak English as evidence that the ways of Quakers and other Christians were wholly strange to him, although in fact when Woolman arrived there were already Moravian preachers present and some of the Native Americans had converted to Christianity.⁷¹ As retold, the story offers us a clear picture of a situation in which (some of) the participants in a Meeting for Worship do not have a common language. It also suggests that despite this, the people present were having (at least at some important level) the same experience. With this origin in mind, we can see that the concept of feeling the source of the words, rather than words themselves, is an important Quaker paradigm for approaching multi-theology conversation.⁷² In turn, looking for the source of words rather than focusing on words themselves rests on the experience-first assumption – without it, there would be no reason to think that this move was possible – and also on the unity of religious experience assumption, which suggests that the same experience can be detected through very different expressions, and, bringing the process into a full circle, supports the practice of 'feeling where the words come from'.

Moving forward through Quaker history, we find that Friends continue to make comments which embody these assumptions. For example, Silvanus

⁷⁰ Ibid., 179.

⁷¹ Woolman records that, when they arrived in Wehaloosing, "the first Indian that we saw was a woman of modest countenance, with a Bible..." *ibid.*, 177.

⁷² Among other places, the story is used in the editor's introduction to *Spirit Rising*. Conti et al., *Spirit Rising: Young Quaker Voices*, xv.

P. Thompson,⁷³ writing in the *Friends Quarterly Examiner* in 1906: "By whatever name we call it – whether Inner Light, or Holy Spirit, or Christ Within – it is the same thing."⁷⁴ From this position, firmly rooted in the Christian tradition (Thompson's other examples include that which "George Fox meant by the words, the Christ within; the same that the Apostle Paul meant when he said... 'Jesus Christ be formed in you'"), it is but a short hop to the position taken by Quaker universalists – as we start to see when we discover David Murray-Rust, in 1982, building on Thompson's ideas to argue that "the source of... unity is 'Divine Illumination', by whatever name we call this light."⁷⁵ I will return to a more detailed discussion of this universalist trend, and the Quaker Universalist Group, an organisation which has published extensively on this perspective, in chapter 5.

Following the brief overviews of Quaker history and the Quaker present in Britain, I now turn to examine in more detail some of the assumptions which I have uncovered in the process – assumptions which will be explored from various angles in the rest of the thesis, but which will benefit from further clarification before they are exposed to the philosophical analysis produced by the 'tools' which I will be exploring and refining in the next couple of chapters.

⁷³ Heron observes that Thompson was also "a distinguished scientist" who supported J. W. Rowntree's calls to London Yearly Meeting 1893 for change in the Society to reach out to, and use the language of, younger members. Heron, *Quakers in Britain: a century of change 1895-1995*: 17.

⁷⁴ Silvanus P. Thompson, "The Drift of the Society," *Friends Quarterly Examiner* 40(1906): 531. He was also one of the speakers at the Manchester Conference. Joanna Clark, and Julia Hudson, "Silvanus P. Thompson (1851-1916)," Library of the Religious Society of Friends, <http://www.quaker.org.uk/silvanus-p-thompson-1851-1916>. (accessed 11th August 2014.)

⁷⁵ David Murray-Rust, "The Source of Quaker Unity," *The Open Letter* Collection 13(1982): 8.

Initial exploration of these assumptions

In this section, I consider some other perspectives on the three assumptions which I identified in my consideration of Quaker religious language today – experience-first, unity-of-religious-experience, and ineffability. In order to do this, I look at some cases where doubt has been expressed about these assumptions, offer some further examples of ways in which they manifest in the literature, and lay out key questions which arise from my explorations and to which I will be returning in the conclusion.

The first step is to ask whether there are any expressions of doubt in the Quaker literature about the underlying assumptions. There are not many, but one does occur in Rex Ambler's editorial introduction to the Quaker Theology Seminar's 1995/6 Proceedings, where he questions the ineffability assumption and the assumption of a (current) unity of religious experience, asking whether what happens in Meeting for Worship is "beyond articulation",⁷⁶ pointing out that George Fox used the language of Christ, and raising the possibility that previous generations of Friends relied on a "unity of the group's experience that no longer exists".⁷⁷ He concludes that we should keep traditional language because modern (he implies secular) language is insufficient to the task of articulating religious experience. He does not tell us what had previously created that unity of religious experience within the group, or how he knows that it existed, and nor does he address other possibilities, such as the idea that an apparent 'unity of religious experience' may be created by, rather than reflected in, the use of a series of common words and phrases for describing the experience. Although this is an expression of doubt, it seems incompletely carried through, and does not question the full network of assumptions but only touches on ineffability, leaving experience-first and unity-of-religious-experience firmly in place. In fact, in seeking to question the ineffability assumption, Ambler points towards the idea that some language is

⁷⁶ Rex Ambler, ed. *The Presence in the Midst*, Quaker Theology Seminar Proceedings (Quaker Theology Seminar with Woodbrooke, 1996), 1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

irreplaceable for describing certain experiences – an idea which I will explore in more detail in conjunction with my discussion of Wittgenstein in chapter 2.

The assumptions of experience-first and the unity of religious experience, then, go generally undoubted within the Quaker community and underlie a number of other observable features of Quaker talk about language. For example, there is often an acknowledgement that words are emotive and that many Friends are uncomfortable with a substantial subset of the terms available for describing religious experience, where the discomfort seems to be more visceral than intellectual.⁷⁸ However, this is not treated in the texts as genuinely important,⁷⁹ with Friends who do name their own discomfort preferring to point to worldviews rather than specific words, and the possibility of 'translating' held up as an optional method for Friends to use in dealing with their discomfort.⁸⁰ Andrew Greaves puts his finger on this phenomenon when, in an essay for an anthology "on being a Quaker today", he describes Friends using language "rather as does the Red Queen in *Alice in Wonderland*. When confronted by 'difficult' words such as 'worship' or 'prayer', one response in discussion with others may be to redefine them, whether mentally or outwardly, in terms with which we can feel more comfortable."⁸¹

⁷⁸ Partly because it is not addressed very directly, a variety of possible kinds of 'discomfort' seem to be confused here.

⁷⁹ The refusal to deal with the emotional aspects of this discussion in print is perhaps a topic for another time, but it is worth noting that workshop leaders report informally that emotion is more important than theory or theology in this matter (Ginny Wall, in conversation about *Becoming Friends* Companions trainings, May 2012). One possible motivation for seeking to downplay or ignore the issue of different language preferences within the community is to hold that community together.

⁸⁰ See, for example, Dandelion, *Celebrating the Quaker Way*: 3. and Roswitha Jarman, *Breakthrough to Unity: the Quaker Way held within the mystic traditions* (London: The Kindlers, 2010). throughout.

⁸¹ Harvey Gillman and Alistair Heron, eds., *Searching the Depths: essays on being a Quaker today* (London: Quaker Home Service, 1996), 4. It is likely that he means Humpty Dumpty and not the Red Queen; although he may have the White Queen's 'jam every other

We see all of these things in the opening pages of Peter Parr's 2012 Kindlers booklet, *Answering that of God*. He writes that "at best, words are pointers" which "are tools we can use to describe an experience, but... are no substitute for experience itself",⁸² then on the next page explains that he uses 'God' as "shorthand for that which is eternal: Being, Essence, Is-ness. Some would call this Light, or Love, or Christ."⁸³ Noting that some Friends might be uncomfortable with some, many, or all of these words, he announces his intention to keep using them but also issues an invitation to the reader to translate into their preferred terms. In the process, he has given examples of all three assumptions, experience-first, unity-of-religious-experience, and ineffability – "words are pointers" because experience comes first, we have a unity of religious experience (of 'that which is eternal') which enables us to translate from one term to another knowing that we are all describing the same experience, yet that experience is ineffable and words cannot substitute for it. The ease with which the reader is expected to translate the terms is supported by the general looseness with which the words are held in the first place: assumed to be only somewhat related to the single, but ineffable, experience of contact with the Divine.

Friends clearly can and do 'translate' in this way, but it raises questions: why would a religious community need to behave in this way? What forces lead individual Quaker speakers, as well as those who are speaking from committee positions, to make these kinds of list-format remarks, or ones which make explicit in other ways the diversity of possible theological positions? In some ways, the practice seems at odds with the assumption of the unity of religious experience, because if all the words point to the same reality, why would you bother translating them? If you do, is it really 'translation' or something more like relabeling? If the latter, how is it working?

day' rule in mind, if 'jam' is the sticky but rewarding theological conversation which Quakers are avoiding.

⁸² Peter Parr, *Answering That of God* (London: The Kindlers, 2012). 4.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 5.

Another trend becoming visible in Parr's work is that of Friends seeking to overcome their discomfort and reclaim traditional English religious language, which is almost always Christian in connotation. Peter Eccles writes that although he is uncomfortable with the Christian religious worldview, he loves the language associated with Christianity which, he says, "reflects an experience of reality which is ours, too".⁸⁴ This acknowledges the social dimension of language choices. Christine Trevett makes an interesting variant of this point in her 1997 Swarthmore Lecture, *Previous Convictions*, when she compares the 'de-Christianised' language of the 1994 *Quaker Faith and Practice* with the linguistic situation in Wales, writing about a sense that "'they' have taken away my language".⁸⁵ In saying this, she uses a 'religious language as natural language' metaphor (a metaphor which I explore in detail in chapter 3) to make a clear plea for the retention of Christian terminology. There are various possible motives for this – natural language loss is linked to the loss of history and community identity, but there is also the suggestion that some words are irreplaceable (because untranslatable).

With this wider picture in mind, we can see that Quaker multi-theological remarks are a relatively small sub-set of related comments about language for the Divine, some others of which may have similar motivations. The closest cousins of the list-format remarks are the requests for the reader to translate, and the 'or whatever you want to call it' statements, and I want to look briefly at these and the possible reasons why Quakers use them. 'Or whatever you call it' statements usually have a list format (and so are not clearly separated from list remarks), ending with the key phrase, and sometimes, although not always, are multi-theological as well. It may be significant that the 'or whatever' phrase seems to shorten the length of the list, sometimes to almost nothing: for example, Rex Ambler uses the phrase

⁸⁴ Peter Eccles, *The Presence in the Midst*, Swarthmore Lectures (London: Quaker Hopme Service, 2009). 9.

⁸⁵ Christine Trevett, *Previous Convictions*, Swarthmore Lecture (London: Quaker Home Service, 1997). 75.

"God or whatever we may choose to call it".⁸⁶ Ambler is a relatively self-aware writer and goes on in this piece to a discussion of a few possible reasons why Friends may hesitate in choosing language – reasons which will be discussed in more detail later, especially in chapter 4. He mentions secularisation and feminism as well as a general sense of vagueness among Quakers – contrast this with Christine Trevett's claim that 'escapism' leads to demands among Friends to avoid painful language.⁸⁷ The existence of a recognisable 'shortcut' for this form of speech hints at how common it has become; but the 'or whatever' phrase also invites us to ask why any particular words are in use at all. There are simultaneously explicit claims that words do not matter, based on the experience-first assumption, and a good number of implicit clues that particular words matter very much to those who are using or refraining from using them. Holding these ideas in tension seems to be a key contributory factor to the production of multi-theology list-format remarks, although in the course of this thesis I will also discuss other factors which support this practice.

In workshop exercises such as those found in the *Becoming Friends: Preparing to be a Companion Handbook* and *Quality and Depth of Worship and Ministry*,⁸⁸ phrases like "that which we are seeking to worship" and "that reality which is unnameable" do multiple things. As well as striving towards a kind of neutrality by coining new terms with fewer previous connotations,⁸⁹ they gesture at the unity-of-religious-experience assumption, in which there is a single thing 'out there' which we are able to name in a variety of ways, none really better or worse than the others. It is therefore worthwhile gathering possible names and exploring the emotional responses which Friends may have to them – emotional responses which are

⁸⁶ Ambler, *The End of Words: Issues in Contemporary Quaker Theology*: 24.

⁸⁷ Trevett, *Previous Convictions*: 57.

⁸⁸ Wall, *Becoming Friends: Preparing to Be A Companion Handbook*; Committee on Eldership and Oversight, *Quality and Depth of Worship and Ministry*.

⁸⁹ They remain, themselves, attempts at naming, however – just as 'the Divine' in the *Spirit Rising* example is still a name even though it is before the dash which indicates the beginning of the list.

mentioned regularly in the literature, but without detailed exploration.⁹⁰ A useful insight into possible answers can be gathered from Klaus Huber's survey of 'Buddhist-Quakers'. He asked respondents to give words which they preferred to 'God', if any, and lists those which occur more than once: "love, Light, the Unborn, Spirit, energy, and Gaia".⁹¹ None of these terms seem especially Buddhist, and 'Gaia' is even more surprising in such a list since it is not traditionally Quaker either. One answer may be that we may be seeing the effect of the Community of Interbeing which uses that name for a 'Mother Earth' Bodhisattva in an otherwise obviously Buddhist liturgy; another might be that this particular sample includes some Quakers who have been influenced by the work of James Lovelock. However, there is evidently a community sense of what belongs in such a list – and a general acceptance that multiple answers are possible or even encouraged – which facilitates the asking and answering of such questions.

Having noted the patterns of list-making and the inclusion of multi-theology items, and observed the existence of this 'community sense', I set out to address three key questions about Quaker multi-theology and list-format remarks, which can be summarised as follows:

- What are the unwritten guidelines for this language usage? Or, to put it another way, in what ways do Friends generate that community sense of correct language use which enables them to see that terms such as 'light' and 'seed' belong on a list of synonyms for 'that which we encounter in Meeting for Worship' but would make them laugh at 'potato'?
- What are the criteria on which these forms of Quaker language, especially the multi-theology remarks, might be judged and how does this depend on the position of the person judging? How do

⁹⁰ See, for example, a discussion of language used in vocal ministry from a 1986 conference entitled *Exploring the fundamental elements of Quakerism*, quoted as Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith and Practice*: §2.63.

⁹¹ Klaus Huber, "Questions of Identity Among 'Buddhist Quakers'," *Quaker Studies* 6, no. 1 (2001): 95. It should be noted that his sample was small and may not be representative.

ethical, pragmatic, coherence, and truth considerations figure in the construction of these criteria?

- Do any of the remarks under consideration make truth claims? If so, what claims do they make and do they succeed on their own terms?

In order to address these issues, I turn in the next chapter to Wittgenstein's philosophy of language and specifically Wittgensteinian approaches to religious language.

Chapter 2: Tools from Wittgenstein

In this chapter, I will introduce, discuss, and refine a series of concepts – drawn from the later work of Wittgenstein and the secondary literature surrounding it – in order to produce a set of tools or lenses for analysis which in the course of later chapters I will apply to the kinds of Quaker uses of language which I described in the previous chapter. The work of this chapter, then, is to introduce three key concepts, to argue that the view of language and community which they produce is a plausible one, and to use some of the debates which have arisen around these concepts to sharpen our understanding of them. Although some interpretation of the work of Wittgenstein himself will be involved, in this chapter (and throughout this thesis) I am more interested in pragmatic considerations, such as whether the ideas are coherent, plausible, and useful, than in questions of exegesis such as whether Wittgenstein himself actually held such-and-such a position. Questions of exegesis cannot be entirely avoided – they are inevitably entangled with the issues just outlined – but to focus on them can lead to the exclusion of other, more useful considerations.

It should also be noted that in the process of applying the ideas I find in Wittgenstein's work to religion specifically, I draw on theological as well as philosophical interpretations. Although the bulk of my discussion of Lindbeck's work will be reserved for chapter 3, he and other theologians who have used Wittgenstein appear in this chapter as indicators of the ways in which Wittgenstein's ideas may be useful.

In the method of the *Philosophical Investigations*, observation is primary and although it presents a picture of how we might understand language, those who turn to it for a complete theory find themselves disappointed. Thus, as Fogelin puts it, we see "the development of Wittgenstein's thought as a movement from a proxy theory of meaning to a constructivist theory of meaning"⁹² and can, like him, find that although "Wittgenstein's later

⁹² Robert J. Fogelin, *Wittgenstein* (London, Henley and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976). 206.

philosophy is of fundamental importance; it is also radically incomplete".⁹³ For this reason, I am not seeking a theory in the work of Wittgenstein,⁹⁴ but rather a series of tools, based on his work and drawn out through the secondary literature, which can be applied to real uses of language and hopefully help us to unpick and understand them more fully.

All of the Wittgensteinian ideas introduced in this chapter arise from one central insight, which will be detailed first: namely, that words do not obtain meaning through definition, ostensive or otherwise, but gather it by their use. Use is made of words by particular speakers in specific contexts and within communities of speech and practice, and in this process words both gain and change their meaning. Because of this, there can be no language which is both meaningful and truly private – admitting of only one speaker – and the implications of this will be explored in the second part of this chapter. Finally, this understanding of how language works will lead us to think that many words, and the 'pictures' we attach to them, are irreplaceable or cannot be rephrased (to, for example, remove theistic content) without also losing the original meaning of the remark.

Formation of meaning

At the beginning of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein rejects his previous way of thinking about language – the way laid out in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, closely related to the views of language held by philosophers such as Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell,⁹⁵ and traceable to much earlier sources, such as Augustine. Wittgenstein quotes the latter extensively at the opening of the *Philosophical Investigations*, using a passage in which the infant Augustine supposedly learns the meanings of words by ostensive definitions provided by adults:

⁹³ Ibid., 207.

⁹⁴ Although some have done so since Fogelin wrote; see, for example, David Bloor, *Wittgenstein: A Social Theory of Knowledge* (Macmillan: London, 1983).

⁹⁵ Mark Addis, *Wittgenstein: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2006). 1.

When grown-ups named some object and at the same time turned towards it, I perceived this, and I grasped that the thing was signified by the sound they uttered, since they meant to point *it* out.⁹⁶

Wittgenstein regards this picture as "a less sophisticated version of that view of language which received greater elaboration in the pages of the *Tractatus*."⁹⁷ In the *Philosophical Investigations*, he will argue that this theory, sometimes called the picture theory of language because each proposition is held to give a picture of a state of affairs,⁹⁸ is not entirely wrong, but that it is extremely limited, and does not do justice to the complexities of language as we actually use it. One of the main problems is that the soon-to-be-rejected theory rests heavily on the understanding that names are the most basic signifying unit. As Marie McGinn says, in this theory:

Each name stands for an object. By putting names together to form propositions we construct *pictures* or *models* of possible states of affairs, where the latter are conceived as constructions out of the objects from which names stand.⁹⁹

Although we can imagine – and Wittgenstein describes – a language in which naming objects is indeed the only function of words,¹⁰⁰ this theory is not, as McGinn goes on to say, "based on observing how our everyday

⁹⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*. I.8; cited in Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*: §1. That Wittgenstein ignores parts of Augustine's account, and indeed of his own previous account, substantially weakening it in the process, does not concern me here because I am seeking to demonstrate the plausibility of one account rather than the implausibility of any others. Similarly, Fogelin argues that Wittgenstein ignores the nuances of the previous theories because he is concerned with the domination of a single picture which has led philosophers to underestimate the importance of the difference between observed and theorised language. Fogelin, *Wittgenstein*: 96-98.

⁹⁷ Brian R. Clack, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999). 13.

⁹⁸ Addis, *Wittgenstein: A Guide for the Perplexed*: 28.

⁹⁹ Marie McGinn, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations* (Abingdon, U.K.: Routledge, 1997). 34.

¹⁰⁰ The 'block and slab' language of the two builders, elaborated further below. As we will soon see, to come close to representing a real language, a good deal must be added beyond the list of nouns.

language actually functions" but rather motivated by the need to solve problems in previous philosophical analyses of language (in particular, puzzles about the nature of propositions).¹⁰¹ When we turn to look at real language, or even imagined but slightly more complex language, we see that naming objects is far from the only function of words.

It is worth following Wittgenstein step by step through this stage of the argument, because it introduces key concepts and terms to which we will be returning later. In §2, Wittgenstein describes for us an imaginary language "for which the description given by Augustine is right".¹⁰² Builders A and B can use a language with only four words – "'block', 'pillar', 'slab' and 'beam'"; if A calls out one of these words, B brings the corresponding item. Wittgenstein accepts that this can count as a complete system of communication, but notes that "not everything that we call language is this system".¹⁰³ That is not to say that this system is not a useful one; indeed, Wittgenstein says that it might be thought of as "one of those games by which children learn their native language".¹⁰⁴ This is the context in which he introduces the much-used term "language-games": he says of the games by which children learn a language that he "will call these games 'language-games'" and that he will "sometimes speak of a primitive language as a language-game." However, in the same section he goes on to say that he will "also call the whole, consisting of language and the activities into which it is woven, a 'language-game'".¹⁰⁵

Of all the things which have been called 'language-games', both by Wittgenstein and by others, one of the most intriguing is the application of this term to religion – sometimes, as Kerr reports, with the implication that because words gain their meaning through the roles they play in the game, religious words have meaning to religious believers but those outside the

¹⁰¹ McGinn, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*: 34.

¹⁰² Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*: §2.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, §3.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, §7.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

specific religion cannot be expected to understand them.¹⁰⁶ Although it is common to speak as if there are firm and impermeable boundaries between a religious group, other religious communities, and secular society, our everyday experience tells us that this is obviously mistaken (and one part of that mistake will be considered in detail in chapter 6). However, it will remain important that the game being played, and hence the observable rules, may change between different contexts. The language-game approach to religion will also allow us to see 'how we are initiated into the use of the word 'God'— and other religious terms.

In §23 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein provides us with a very disparate list of "language-games". He says that he uses the "word 'language-game'" to "emphasize the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life." He then gives a long list which includes the following, and notes that there are many other examples as well:

Giving orders, and acting on them – Describing an object by its appearance, or by its measurements ... Reporting an event – Speculating about the event ... Making up a story; and reading one ... Cracking a joke ... Translating from one language into another – Requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying.¹⁰⁷

Having given this list, Wittgenstein says that "it is interesting to compare the diversity of the tools of language and of the ways they are used, the diversity of kinds of word and sentence, with what logicians have said about the structure of language."¹⁰⁸ The note which follows, that the logicians concerned should be taken to include the author of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, points us to the ways in which Wittgenstein is refuting his own former position and suggesting that logicians who follow that route say things about language which are too limited to reflect the real complexity of

¹⁰⁶ Fergus Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1997). 28. but see also Kai Nielsen, "Wittgensteinian Fideism," *Philosophy* 42, no. 161 (1967). The accessibility of religious language to believers only is particularly the position taken by Christian philosophers to whom Nielsen objects and can also lead into the charge of fideism, to be discussed in Chapter 3.

¹⁰⁷ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*: 23.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

language as it is actually used. This complexity and diversity is important to Wittgenstein, and the continual drive to observe real usage rather than postulate in the absence of facts about language reflects this.

Kerr provides a further list which relates specifically to language-games within which we might use the word 'God', and includes "such multifarious activities as blessing and cursing, celebrating and lamenting, repenting and forgiving, the cultivation of certain virtues and so on", noting that "there will be little place for the inferring of some invisible entity's presence" – which once again pulls us away from the traditionally philosophical view of God and towards the complexity of the word's real use.¹⁰⁹ This is the foundation of the need to examine genuine examples of religious language, as I will do in detail in chapters 4 and 7.

Returning to the issue of Wittgenstein's own use of 'language-game', I want to look for a moment at why he uses it sometimes to encompass "the whole". This is important because it clarifies that Wittgenstein's view of language encompasses not just words but practices. In his expansion of the slab/block language, the builders A and B add not only extra words (such as a numbering system), but also pointing gestures to go with the terms 'this' and 'there' and a series of colour samples which can be shown at certain times¹¹⁰. It must be remembered, though, that 'game' is only a metaphor – in his earlier work, Wittgenstein had favoured 'calculus' as an image for "the complicated game which we play with other words".¹¹¹ In the *Investigations*, he also uses the image of 'tools' quite heavily, as in §11 where he asks us to "think of the tools in a toolbox: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw" etc., and then notes that "the functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects".¹¹² Rhee also usefully reminds us that the

¹⁰⁹ Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein*: 155.

¹¹⁰ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*: §8.

¹¹¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, trans. Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974). 67; point about the change of favourite expression from Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1973). 162.

¹¹² Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*: 11.

analogy between languages and games can only be taken so far.¹¹³ Although in this thesis I will make much use of the term 'language-game', it is only an image; and as Wittgenstein uses it, the term includes much which is not always identified as part of 'language' – for example, the gestures are part of the slab/block language and things such as art, diagrams, typography, placing of objects such as furniture, and other patterns of behaviour might all be included depending on the context.¹¹⁴

Brian Clack helps to clarify the term 'language-game' further when he says that Wittgenstein's new "characterisation of language as a practice (or an activity), rather than as the 'phantasm' presented in the *Tractatus*, highlights what [he] came to see as its essentially *social* nature".¹¹⁵ Clack then discusses Wittgenstein's remarks in §23, where the term 'form of life' is introduced. Wittgenstein says that "The word 'language-*game*' is used here to emphasize the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or form of life".¹¹⁶ The phrase 'form of life' is itself, as Clack says, "the subject of some controversy", but it "suggests that language gains its significance only within something collective, like a society".¹¹⁷ This changes the focus of philosophical work: "Sociological considerations were entirely lacking from the framework of the *Tractatus*. In the *Investigations* such considerations assume a position of prominence".¹¹⁸ This is the refocusing to which Fogelin refers when he says that Wittgenstein is seeking "a

¹¹³ Rush Rhees, *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). 80. Rhees' argument in this book about discourse – especially that "the unity of language is found in its dialogical character" rather than simply as "a family of language-games" – is not unrelated to what I will argue about the significance of communication to the issue of what will count as a language.

¹¹⁴ He has this in common with many modern linguists who include body language and vocal nuance in 'language'.

¹¹⁵ Clack, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Religion*: 18.

¹¹⁶ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*: §23.

¹¹⁷ Clack bases this on remarks in an early draft of the *Investigations* and in the *Brown Book*, where Wittgenstein equates a language with a culture. Clack, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Religion*: 18 and note 20.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

reorientation in our sense of *importance*"; specifically, the "disparity between language as [previous thinkers] described it and the appearance of language as we all encounter it" has been ignored or downplayed but is now brought to the forefront.¹¹⁹ Ferré describes this as a change from 'verificational analysis', which "tends to conceive of language largely on the model of a useful *invention*", to 'functional analysis', which "tends to picture languages more as a natural growth or *organism*".¹²⁰ Here again there is a movement towards what might be called sociological considerations: the turn towards real examples and actual use. This is the central move which makes the direction of my project Wittgensteinian.

One of the significant aspects of this change is that when we adjust our priorities in this way, we see that words gain meaning when people use them, something which must always inherently involve specific contexts. There is no abstract space of definition in which words can continue to mean something when totally separated from their uses. With this understanding to hand, we can more easily see how words come to change their meanings – people, for whatever reason, begin to use a particular word differently, a change which is made clear by the linguistic and physical surroundings, the context, of the new usage. In this connection, it is worth noting that in German, Wittgenstein seems to have used two available words – *Gebrauch* and *Verwendung* – to distinguish between two forms of use, which work together to produce meaning: "use as fact", or previous and established usage, and "use as act", or the potential uses to which a word can be put when someone undertakes the act of using it.¹²¹ Not all translators have chosen, or perhaps been able, to make this distinction, and for this purpose it is sufficient to note that 'use' can include both these senses.

¹¹⁹ Fogelin, *Wittgenstein*: 98.

¹²⁰ F. Ferré, *Language, Logic and God* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode (Publishers) Ltd., 1962). 91.

¹²¹ Henry Le Roy Finch, *Wittgenstein - the Later Philosophy: An Exposition of the "Philosophical Investigations"* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1977). 27.

Does this perspective reduce philosophy to dictionary-making? Russell rejects this part of Wittgenstein's work entirely, writing that "if it is true, philosophy is, at best, a slight help to lexicographers".¹²² The point here is that if all philosophy is concerned with language, and words are only defined by the ways in which people use them, the philosopher will have nothing left to do except gather examples of language use – just as a lexicographer does. This is not the case at all. Dictionaries are useful tools, especially those which focus on the collection of historical examples and the many shifting meanings of words, and a philosopher might do well to consult one. However, a dictionary must track a huge number of words over the usage of vast crowds of speakers, and so they cannot follow every slight shift, every nuance of a word in a particular community or sub-culture. There is space here for someone, interested in both philosophy and sociology – someone whose stage is set by Wittgenstein's later philosophy, although Wittgenstein did not manage to do this work directly – and any such scholar will find much to do in examining such restricted contexts and the word-uses which arise within them. Furthermore, lexicographers concern themselves with questions which do not bother the philosopher, such as, 'when was this word first used in this sense?' and 'what part of speech does this word occupy?'¹²³ Similarly, the philosopher is empowered to ask questions for which the lexicographer has no time: questions which involve making judgements on value and coherence. These might include questions like 'what purpose does this usage serve within the community?', 'in what ways does this usage make sense – or not?', or 'how does this new use change the picture of the world created by the community's patterns of language, and is that for the better?' as well as more traditionally philosophical questions such as 'what assumptions are embedded in this claim?' and 'what chain of logic does this argument require?'¹²⁴ I would also

¹²² Bertrand Russell, *My Philosophical Development* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1959). 217.

¹²³ Finch, *Wittgenstein - the Later Philosophy: An Exposition of the "Philosophical Investigations"*: 21.

¹²⁴ Wittgenstein might not go so far as to ask this evaluative question – but philosophers more generally frequently do.

argue that it does not matter if there is some overlap, since disciplines are inter-related and the boundaries largely arbitrary anyway.

I have shown, then, that Wittgenstein himself used the term 'language-game' in a variety of ways, although always to emphasize the fact that language does not stand alone, but is deeply embedded in the surrounding context and especially the practices of the community who use that language in question. It is also worth clarifying here that the term 'game' is not a trivialising one in this context; some readers of Wittgensteinian work, especially on religion, take offence at having their practice called 'a game' because it seems to imply childishness and lack of seriousness.¹²⁵ The word 'game' is used because the analogy with the many things we call 'games' is useful – it suggests rule-guidedness, but also diversity, and the interaction of verbal and non-verbal practices. Of these, the presence of constitutive rules which makes certain moves acceptable, and others unacceptable, within the game – in language, the grammar – is probably the most important feature.¹²⁶ Perhaps those who worry about this would be reassured to know that it is not just religious forms of language which can be regarded as a language game; Finch reminds us that in order to make sense of "a bank draft, a police summons, and a candy wrapper" we must know what role/s each of these word-laden pieces of paper plays in a broader game.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Magee calls the term 'language-game' "something of a disaster" because it seems "somehow frivolous". Bryan Magee, *The Great Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). 330. This is also a mistake sometimes made by Quakers; for example, by David Boulton in a presentation given to the January 2014 conference 'Faith: what's God got to do with it?', organised by the Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations. Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations, "Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations Day Conference 2014," <http://www.quaker.org.uk/quaker-committee-christian-and-interfaith-relations-day-conference-2014>. Accessed 20th May 2014.

¹²⁶ Hans-Johann Glock, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, The Blackwell Philosophical Dictionaries (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996). 193.

¹²⁷ Finch, *Wittgenstein - the Later Philosophy: An Exposition of the "Philosophical Investigations"*: 26.

A language-game must take place within a context – a "form of life". As we have already noted, this is a contested term, with perhaps conflicting uses in the work of various Wittgensteinian scholars. Wittgenstein himself uses it just five times in the *Investigations*, leaving us with relatively little material from which to build an understanding of the term; Hans-Johann Glock refers to Wittgenstein's use of this term as "nonchalant".¹²⁸ That being so, some scholars prefer to take it to mean something quite large: all of humankind,¹²⁹ for example, since it can be argued that "there is really only *one* form of life for human beings, [and] that different forms of life are simply unintelligible to us".¹³⁰ Although this pattern of use does not quite fit with Wittgenstein's own use (which is, as noted, sometimes multiple), it may have advantages for the pluralist perspective on religions and has an intuitive appeal when we are looking at concepts for which we expect all human speakers to have words. It should also be noted that the static nature implied by the word 'form' is not necessarily the right connotation for this concept: Malcolm records Wittgenstein also using the phrase "stream of life", and perhaps this image of running water better captures the ongoing and changing nature of the life-context within which languages are used.¹³¹ Related expressions, such as "life as a weave" and "hurly-burly", emphasise interconnectedness between elements and complex ongoing movement, all features of life as we encounter it.¹³²

¹²⁸ Glock, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*: 124.

¹²⁹ Anat Biletzki and Anat Matar, "Ludwig Wittgenstein," <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/wittgenstein/>. Accessed 20th May 2014.

¹³⁰ Glock, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*: 126.

¹³¹ The full phrase is "an expression has meaning only in the stream of life". Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958). 93. Malcolm at the time of writing his memoir thought that the phrase was not recorded elsewhere in Wittgenstein's works, but it does appear in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982). S913., in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992). 30e. and in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967). §173.

¹³² Wittgenstein, *Zettel*: §567-8.

Other scholars have taken Wittgenstein's phrases in their own ways: ahead of my discussion of Lindbeck, it is worth noting that he uses the terms 'form of life' and 'language-game'. It seems, from his usage, that he thinks of a 'form of life' as a culture or collection of cultures:

... just as language (or "language-game", to use Wittgenstein's phrase) is correlated with a form of life, and just as a culture has both cognitive and behavioral dimensions, so it is also in the case of a religious tradition.¹³³

The first problem here is that a language-game is not usually what we would, in ordinary terms, call a language. The classic examples provided in *Philosophical Investigations* are much simpler than full human languages, being systems in which only orders, or yes/no questions, can be communicated.¹³⁴ The second is that, like many other readers of Wittgenstein, Lindbeck has understood a 'form of life' to be much larger than I have argued that Wittgenstein originally intended.

Kerr's discussion of this is clear and useful. He assesses Roger Trigg's consideration of whether whole religions, such a Christianity, or denominations, should be regarded as 'forms of life', and demonstrates that Wittgenstein's text does not imply anything on so large a scale.¹³⁵ He quotes in particular the slab/block language which Wittgenstein discusses, and an example of Malcolm's – namely, that a 'form of life' might be "the complex of gestures, facial expressions, words and activities that we call pitying and comforting an injured man".¹³⁶ He does note that Malcolm himself has taken the concept to be larger than Kerr thinks Wittgenstein intended, treating religion explicitly as a form of life, but argues that this is mistaken, because "it is impossible to apply the expression to any phenomenon on the scale of 'religion' – which must include innumerable language-laced activities".¹³⁷

¹³³ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (London: SPCK, 1984). 33.

¹³⁴ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*: 19.

¹³⁵ Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein*: 29.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

With this in hand, we are reminded to keep our language-games and forms of life small.

In the field of religion, what should be covered by the term 'form of life'? As discussed above, religions – Christianity, and even Quakerism – are clearly too large, although some scholars have used the term that way. Practices within them will be forms of life, though – some, such as 'praying', are on Wittgenstein's list of language-games.¹³⁸ In the context of Quakerism we might specify 'attending Meeting for Worship', and add other activities, such as 'holding a Meeting for Worship for Business', 'having a meeting of a Quaker committee', 'going to a Quaker study group', and 'chatting over the post-Meeting tea and biscuits'. I will show in chapter 4, the first set of worked examples, how these forms of life inform language use and are therefore useful levels at which to apply the tools of analysis.

Taken together, then, how do these ideas – the concept of 'a language-game' in which words, sentences, and actions are significant within the context of a particular 'form of life' – help us to understand what is happening when religious people speak and write? Firstly, they can move us away from an overly-simplistic and fact-seeking analysis of what it means to speak about religious matters, such as the existence of God. As we will see in chapter 3, religious philosopher-practitioners who work from a Wittgensteinian basis do not waste their time on unanswerable and often conceptually confused questions, such as the physical location or 'real existence' of a being called God. Instead, in this Wittgensteinian mode attention is turned to what is happening in the community when people speak of God's presence within a situation, or use other religious pictures like 'God is watching over us'.

Secondly, having let go of an expectation that a particular word must have a single meaning or 'essence', we can more fully appreciate the many ways in which words are used. Under a Wittgensteinian analysis, I go on to observe

¹³⁸ Of the others on Wittgenstein's §23 list, I think that 'reporting an event' and 'acting in a play' are the most like religious activities, although others – such as 'cracking a joke' – may also be undertaken in religious contexts, with or without explicitly religious linguistic content.

that people who are non-realists about external divinity but remain within religious traditions and those who are atheists and reject all religious traditions use the word 'God' in different ways and even to refer to different objects or express different concepts, without needing to try to adjudicate correct usage via an attempt to reach outside language to 'reality'. This will be a useful view if they are trying to speak to one another: we can say that they will need to clarify and perhaps wish to synchronise their usage of a word, while recognising other uses as valid within other contexts. Those other uses will hopefully be signalled by the differing contexts in which they occur – at the very least, a change of speaker is a change of at least part of the context, and alerts us to the potential for a change in use. The word can circulate between groups, having some level of mutual intelligibility but also technical or context-specific differences.

If we look at this from the perspective of rule-following, we could say that we sometimes switch between multiple sets of rules for a particular word – many words have one common use, but any specific term can have more than one. We use contextual information, about the speaker, the phrase, sentence, and paragraph, and actual or implied audience, to understand it.¹³⁹ In linguistic terms, this switching between sets of rules is one of the things which makes up the practices of 'codeswitching' (between languages) and 'style shifting' (between ways of speaking within a language, such as formal and casual).¹⁴⁰

Furthermore, with this picture of how language works already in hand, we can better understand the metaphorical uses to which some Wittgensteinian theologians have put the concept of 'language'. For example, George Lindbeck's "cultural-linguistic" way of looking at religion would make a very different point if he used a picture theory of language (it might default

¹³⁹ And jokes often work by confounding the expectations – a rule of joke-telling is that you are allowed to break other rules of speech.

¹⁴⁰ For more information on these, see Joan Swann, "Style shifting, codeswitching," in *English: history, diversity and change*, ed. David Graddol, Dick Leith, and Joan Swann (London: Routledge in association with The Open University, 1996).

to a cognitive-propositional view). I will consider these terms and this issue in more detail in chapter 3.

Private language problems

Wittgenstein denies the possibility of a private language. In each case which he considers, it turns out that "my language is not a 'private' one".¹⁴¹ This reveals an important feature of how language itself works – in particular, turning attention once again to the significance of language as communal – and has implications for the use of religious language, especially the creation of new religious terminology.

This claim has been the focus of much attention, and is addressed in, or the centre of, a significant percentage of the secondary literature on Wittgenstein. These works include a considerable amount of debate (as laid out very clearly in the collection of paired essays edited by O. R. Jones¹⁴²), many detailed and technical analyses of limited parts of the *Philosophical Investigations* (such as Mulhall's exploration¹⁴³) and the usual range of introductory texts, as well as a variety of other considerations of the issue. Kerr observes that "the bibliography on the private language argument spreads like bindweed",¹⁴⁴ and for this reason I am not going to attempt to survey it as a whole. Rather, I will mention here those texts which clarify why this argument is worth considering, and then turn to the argument itself, using in the process those scholars whose work contributes usefully to the points which I need to make.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*: §256.

¹⁴² O. R. Jones, ed. *The Private Language Argument*, *Controversies in Philosophy* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd, 1971).

¹⁴³ Stephen Mulhall, *Wittgenstein's private language : grammar, nonsense and imagination in Philosophical Investigations, 243-315* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007).

¹⁴⁴ Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein*: 90, footnote 12.

¹⁴⁵ Accepting that they may not be the most important scholars within Wittgenstein studies more generally.

The 'private language argument' is not a straightforward one; indeed, Pears says, "the search for a single argument may well be the result of an over-simplification".¹⁴⁶ Although it may sometimes be convenient to refer to 'the' private language argument as if there is only one, Wittgenstein's text does not actually support this. Multiple issues are interwoven throughout the relevant sections of the *Philosophical Investigations* – and, as Saul Kripke says, we need to cast our nets widely enough to catch all the relevant sections, rather than just those which are most obviously related to the issue of a private language.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, it may be too strong to say that Wittgenstein "presents an argument for a conclusion, or even that he presents a conclusion".¹⁴⁸ Rather, Wittgenstein "reminds us of things we normally say which seem to conflict with the things which we feel inclined to say occasionally in philosophical moments".¹⁴⁹

In order to understand why it is important from the Wittgensteinian perspective to deny the possibility of a private language, we must see why other philosophers thought that such a thing would be possible – indeed, that some of them took all language to be private in some sense. In his *Wittgenstein Dictionary*, Glock lays out this background very clearly:

The possibility of a private language is tacitly presupposed by the mainstream of modern philosophy from Descartes through classical British empiricism and Kantianism to contemporary cognitive representationalism. It is the result of two natural assumptions. Firstly, the meaning of words is given by what they stand for – this is part of the Augustinian picture of language. Secondly, in the case of psychological terms, what they stand for are phenomena in a mental theatre which is accessible only to the individual. Sensations,

¹⁴⁶ David Pears, *Paradox and Platitude in Wittgenstein's Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). 37.

¹⁴⁷ Saul A. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1982). 3.

¹⁴⁸ John Wisdom, "Wittgenstein on 'Private Language'," in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophy and Language*, ed. Alice Ambrose, and Lazerowitz, Morris (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1972), 26.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

experiences, thoughts are inalienable and epistemically private... .
 No one else can have my pain, or know what I have when I am in pain – this is the inner/outer picture of the mind. It follows immediately that no one else can know what I mean by 'pain'.
 Moreover, if ideas, impressions or intuitions provide not just the evidence for all our beliefs, but also the content of our words – a view shared by representationalists and idealists, rationalists, empiricists and Kantians – our whole language is private in this sense.¹⁵⁰

It is helpful to note that Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations* does not accept either of the assumptions which these views share. Key features of the Augustinian picture of language, and Wittgenstein's reasons for rejecting it, were discussed above, and Wittgenstein's alternative to the private theatre of the mind will be discussed below, with reference to the communal nature of the correct application of words.

The first problem in considering the debate about the possibility of a private language is to have a clear idea of what is being deemed to be logically impossible or unintelligible: many of the 'private' languages one might first think of are in fact sufficiently public that they do not provide true counterexamples. A truly private language must be private to only one person – codes, ciphers, jargons, and nearly extinct or dead natural languages do not count, because they have, have had, or could have more than one user, rendering them accessible to a small but relevant public. It must also be freshly created – I can write a diary in code, but if that code represents a pre-existing language in a new form, it does not count as truly private because I learnt the language from others (even if my code is unbreakable). However, we should not be surprised to run into trouble understanding what is denied, because the claim being made is that the very idea of a private language is unintelligible.

This particularly narrow use of the term 'private' helps to clarify why A. J. Ayer's first objection – "... it is obvious that there can be private languages.

¹⁵⁰ Glock, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*: 310.

There can be, because there are" – is misguided.¹⁵¹ It is true that the languages which Ayer cites exist (slangs, jargons, and encoded diaries, for example), but it is not the case that they are sufficiently private to concern us in the context of this argument. What, in this context, is intended by the concept of total privacy?

Wittgenstein uses an example in which a person records a repeating sensation by writing 'S' on a calendar on days when he experiences that sensation.¹⁵² This can be taken to be a problem about memory – does he really remember what the sensation he calls 'S' was like accurately enough to recognise it again? – or a problem about definition – without any outside way of distinguishing between using 'S' correctly and thinking that it is being used correctly, how can he know that it is always the same sensation? Indeed, Wittgenstein's own remarks go on to discuss the difficulty of giving oneself "a kind of ostensive definition" in such cases, and the fallibility of "commit[ting] it to memory". Those who believe that private language is possible might assert that our memories and definitions are good enough for the real world if not for the sceptic, pointing out that we can and do have practices of recording sensations.

In some ways, I think that all of these responses miss the most interesting force of this example, which is that this is really a problem about the communicative function of language. To illustrate this, we can take the example quite literally, and then test it in the world of public language. Imagine that the user of this truly private word – the recording of the symbol 'S' upon the experience of a certain sensation – takes his calendar to the doctor. Even if 'S' is his only private word, it won't help him to communicate, because when the doctor asks him what's wrong, he can only say, "I have a repeated sensation I call 'S'".¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ A. J. Ayer, "Could language be invented by a Robinson Crusoe?," in *The Private Language Argument*, ed. O. R. Jones (London: Macmillian and Co Ltd, 1971), 50.

¹⁵² Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*: §258ff.

¹⁵³ This explanation is very similar to the one given in Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein*: 87.

In fact, we have trouble imagining this scenario, because actual sensations – besides the fact that the term 'sensation' is already a term which has a sense in public discourse – occur in a part of the body, something which already has a public 'name', allowing that one can at minimum name concrete objects by the socially conventional technique of pointing at them; and they usually have a quality which we can describe, accepting that descriptions of sensations need be no more than desired responses – 'a sensation which makes me want to scratch' is usually called 'an itch'. But supplying these unmentioned extras to the example misleads us, because it is exactly these reaction-based and socially-determined providers of meaning which Wittgenstein's example excludes.

Here we must return to Ayer's further objections. Ayer argues that "for a person to use descriptive language meaningfully it is not necessary that any other person should understand".¹⁵⁴ I detect, though, a disagreement about what it will take for someone to speak meaningfully – Ayer, obviously, thinks that it is enough for the term 'S' to indicate a particular sensation to the single person who experiences, records, and reads records about that sensation. However, this is so far from the normal use of natural language, a primary purpose of which is communication between people, that it is not clear to me that it should be called 'language' – although it is undoubtedly a form of record-keeping, in which the main problems are about memory and consistency as mentioned above.¹⁵⁵

Should we call something a 'language' when it cannot be used for communication? Of the many ways in which we normally use the word 'language', all seem to imply communication, as one of the important if not

¹⁵⁴ Ayer, "Could language be invented by a Robinson Crusoe?," 60.

¹⁵⁵ We can make a kind of sense of communication with ourselves across time, but methods for doing so must also admit the possibility of communication between my past self and someone in the future not myself. That is to say, you can write a sensation-diary which you can read, but in order for you to be able to read it, there must be the possibility of some other person also reading it – it might be accidentally, but is not necessarily, totally private.

the only purpose – English is a language, Esperanto is a language, Tolkien's Elven is a fictional language used for communication among fictional people (and their dedicated fans), the language of flowers is a method of communicating via floristry, we use a programming language to communicate instructions to a computer, whale song may be a language especially if whales use it to communicate among themselves, and so forth.¹⁵⁶ That being so, it seems odd to call something a language if it cannot be used for communication. Wittgenstein made this point in his *Notes for the Philosophical Lecture*, where he says that it is indeed possible to have a private sewing machine, "but in order to be a private sewing machine, it must be an object that deserves the name 'sewing machine', not in virtue of its privacy, but in virtue of its similarity to other sewing machines, private or otherwise".¹⁵⁷

This is enough of an argument – it would be sufficient to say: language cannot really be private because language, to be language, needs to communicate somehow, and a private language inherently does not do that. It is simply too far from what we ordinarily call a language, and must be called something else. Therefore, in examining language we will turn away from private attempts and focus on the community. But it seems that Wittgenstein wishes to go a step beyond this: not only can a private language not become public, but, as Finch says, it "would not even be a language for the person who had it, but only empty sounds or meaningless marks".¹⁵⁸ In terms of communication, I might put it this way: a truly private 'language', because of the problems of definition and memory described above, would not even be able to communicate between myself now, making marks, and myself in two weeks' time, trying to read them.

¹⁵⁶ Even talk about the 'language of DNA' seems to support this, as the point being made is that it communicates information.

¹⁵⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Occasions, 1912-1951* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1993). 448.

¹⁵⁸ Finch, *Wittgenstein - the Later Philosophy: An Exposition of the "Philosophical Investigations"*: 129.

Finch formulates the significance of this by describing Wittgenstein as giving two aspects to the anti-private-language argument: firstly, that "we cannot imagine or invent an absolutely private language which would be able to function as a language", and secondly, that "no existing language or part of an existing language would be able to function if it *were* such a private language or based upon such a private language".¹⁵⁹ To understand why this is the case, we must also consider a deeply related theme which occurs in Wittgenstein's discussion: the issue of 'rule following'.

The problem of rule following is a sceptical problem about consistency in language, although it also has implications for other topics such as the philosophy of mathematics. Much material on the 'private language' issue focusses on the sections following §243 in the *Philosophical Investigations*, but Saul Kripke argues – successfully, in my opinion¹⁶⁰ – that to really understand it we must take a wider picture of the context within which Wittgenstein introduces it. Kripke's version (which makes no claims to be the version which Wittgenstein intended, or the view which Kripke personally endorses, only one possible view which seems to Kripke to be interesting and plausible) focusses on the sections preceding §243, on the issue of how we can follow a rule, and how we know whether or not we are doing so.¹⁶¹ For example, Kripke calls attention to §202, where, he says, Wittgenstein's "conclusion is already explicitly stated":

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Many scholars of Wittgenstein not only agree with Kripke that his presentation of Wittgenstein's argument is somewhat removed from Wittgenstein's actual argument, but also feel that Kripke's solution is inadequate. (For Kripke's perspective the relation of his argument to Wittgenstein's, see Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*: 5.) Here I argue only that a) Kripke is right to take the wider context of the argument into account, and b) his exposition of and solution to the problem is sufficient for my present purposes. For an alternative view on Kripke, see G. P. Baker, and Hacker, P. M. S., *Scepticism, Rules and Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984).

¹⁶¹ Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*.

Hence it is not possible to obey a rule privately: otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it.¹⁶²

Kripke gives a clear version of the problem, by using a mathematical example, though others are possible (and even given in Wittgenstein's text). The problem is: can one know, at any given time when completing an apparently simple piece of addition, whether one really used the function 'plus' as one would always have done? To dramatise this, Kripke introduces the alternative 'quus', which is symbolised by ' \oplus ' and defined as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} x \oplus y &= x + y \text{ if } x, y < 57 \\ &= 5 \text{ otherwise.} \end{aligned} \quad ^{163}$$

Imagine that I have never before added to a number greater than 57. I can have practised adding numbers below that quite considerably, and be confident when I add 68 and 57 that the answer should be 125: but then along comes a character whom Kripke calls 'the sceptic', who claims that I am now not only incorrect in this calculation, but am "misinterpreting my own previous usage" because I actually meant quus all along.¹⁶⁴ How can I know whether or not this is true?

As Kripke says, we cannot agree with the sceptic that we do not know: that would be "insane and intolerable".¹⁶⁵ In solving Kripke's puzzle, we will be led back to the impossibility of private languages, because the solution depends upon there being public criteria for following a rule. To follow this, it is useful to understand that despite the name, the 'private language argument' is not strictly about *private* language, but about all language, and how it can be possible – Kripke notes that "Wittgenstein's main problem is that it appears that he has shown *all* language, *all* concept formation, to be impossible, indeed unintelligible".¹⁶⁶ The rule-following considerations explicated by the plus/quus example appear to show that language is

¹⁶² Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*: 202.

¹⁶³ Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*: 9.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 60.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 62.

impossible because we do not, perhaps cannot, know what we mean when we speak. Because it gives this appearance, which is false, the (anti-)'private language argument' is required to show why the rule-following considerations do not lead to the result that we cannot know what we mean when we speak. Having clarified this, Kripke goes on to present a solution, although in a form not native to Wittgenstein's own work: following a rule, a key part of speaking in a regular way, can only be judged in community.¹⁶⁷ Thus, when we judge that someone does addition correctly, we judge that they use 'plus' in the same way that we ourselves – and others in our community – are inclined to use it.¹⁶⁸ The correct response to the generalising sceptic, the person who looks at the plus/quus scenario and decides that all language is impossible, is to say: language is possible within a community, because we can assess the linguistic competence of others alongside ourselves. Together, our patterns of use can add up to meaning which we cannot create alone.

Mental arithmetic is not the only example, and although Kripke focusses on it, it may not be the most helpful one. Another typical example is of pain and other sensations, to which the 'private language argument' can also be applied. It is useful to do so because these examples more closely resemble cases usually considered to be 'religious experience'. In the process of examining the 'private language argument' as it applies to sensations, it will be useful to address another thought-experiment found in the *Philosophical Investigations* and frequently cited as explaining something about this problem: the beetles-in-boxes scenario. Wittgenstein sets this thought-experiment up as follows:

Suppose that everyone had a box with something in it which we call a "beetle". No one can ever look in anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle. – Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly

¹⁶⁷ As discussed in *ibid.*, 69-71.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 90-91.

changing. – But what if these people's word "beetle" had a use nonetheless?¹⁶⁹

Finch describes this as the case where, in trying to "make a sign refer to an inner sensation as a private object", "we already have the word... and know how to use it and then try to understand its meaning as deriving from reference to a private object".¹⁷⁰ The example usually taken, including by Finch, is the word and concept 'pain'. However, it is also interesting to consider the thought-experiment in relation to the circumstances of the person who is seeking to describe and/or understand their religious experience, especially if their tradition has already supplied plenty of words for it: such a person knows that they have something in their box, but may be unsure whether to call it a beetle, or an ant, or a six-legged beast.

Wittgenstein says of this that "the thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all",¹⁷¹ because, as Finch puts it, "it wouldn't matter if the boxes were empty; nothing would be changed" – because we cannot access the contents of anyone else's box, only our own, "which is supposed to serve as [our] meaning for what the word *beetle* means to [us]".¹⁷² Helen Hervey provides a good discussion of the beetle-in-the-box image, in which she asks whether sensations are really "*in* us in the same way that beetles are in boxes".¹⁷³ She argues that the thought experiment goes astray because the beetle is not connected to or part of the box in the way that sensations are within us.¹⁷⁴ However, this objection does not succeed because the problem which is of interest for the purposes of this project does not lie in the

¹⁶⁹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*: §293.

¹⁷⁰ Finch, *Wittgenstein - the Later Philosophy: An Exposition of the "Philosophical Investigations"*: 131.

¹⁷¹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*: 293.

¹⁷² Finch, *Wittgenstein - the Later Philosophy: An Exposition of the "Philosophical Investigations"*: 132.

¹⁷³ Helen Hervey, "Private language and private sensations," in *The Private Language Argument*, ed. O. R. Jones (London: Macmillan and Co Ltd, 1971), 94.

¹⁷⁴ Hervey does not take this line, but it would also be possible to argue that the thought experiment achieves one of its goals precisely by showing the disanalogy between objects in boxes and sensations in the body.

connection between the beetle and myself, but in the attempt to compare my beetle with someone else's beetle, without either of us ever seeing the other's beetle.¹⁷⁵ Perhaps we could talk about hearts instead, since if we pretend for this thought-experiment that they are never seen or detected by other people, they could stand in for the beetles while becoming clearly physically attached to us. If my heart were private in this way, I might still want to talk about it – to speak of the beating organ in my rib cage, just as I spoke of the wriggling insect in this box, even though I can only access my own.

Kripke argues that Wittgenstein has us look for assertability conditions, under which we can make meaningful statements about such private things as sensations and mental arithmetic without assuming that this gives us 'access' to the things themselves – in such a way that it doesn't matter whether they exist in the form in which we imagine them. In his conclusion Kripke puts it this way: under the assertability conditions which Wittgenstein proposes, it does not follow that "the answer everyone gives to an addition problem is, by definition, the correct one, but rather the platitude that, if everyone agrees upon a certain answer, then no one will feel justified in calling the answer wrong".¹⁷⁶

Perhaps the first thing to note here is that a platitude is not automatically useless to us – especially if it is something which we are otherwise inclined to overlook. When we are considering a small community which takes pride in accepting free thinkers and a range of perspectives, the reminder that community agreement may be sufficient justification for making an otherwise problematic statement seems useful. The concept of justification as operating within the community context – and perhaps not portable

¹⁷⁵ The problem which is of interest to me is not necessarily Wittgenstein's main point; there is also an issue about different uses of the word 'in' – are the bugs *in* boxes the way that pains are *in* people? Are religious experiences *in* people at all? These are both excellent questions, but I am for this purpose more interested in the comparability of private things via language.

¹⁷⁶ Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*: 112.

outside it – will be an important one in my consideration of the religious language of a particular community.

The second is to consider how this awareness will shape our approach to religious language specifically. In order to do this, it is useful to look at two parts of religious language: language about religious experiences (which might be considered as a kind of private sensation like the ones discussed in the section on private language, above) and language about God, which also has to deal with problems about ineffability.

Generally, language about religious experiences should sit somewhere between two possible creative forces: the experience itself as private to the experiencer (if we accept that any such thing exists without or before language, which Quakers usually do – see discussion of the experience-first assumption in chapter 1), and the surrounding group of people, the culture or society to which the experiencer must communicate. If there is no such thing as pre-linguistic experience, then the 'experience' is drawn much closer to the surrounding culture which teaches the experiencer language in general and specifically about religious experience. We will see that some people (those whom George Lindbeck calls the 'experiential-expressivists', which might include many Quakers) want to hold experience both apart from language – so that many expressions can represent the same experience – and close to it – so that expressions of religious experience can be held to accurately communicate it. The ideas from Wittgenstein which I have discussed so far tend to push away from the former – the distance between 'experience' and language – and towards the latter – because language and experience are both so intricately bound up with culture and surrounding context.

There are many traditional theological responses to the problem of speaking about the ineffable, and it is probably not advantageous to rehearse them all here. However, it does need to be noted firstly that ineffability is not overcome by more detailed or richer descriptions – a vivid mystical poem is no closer to capturing the ineffable Divine than are the dry technical terms

of philosophy.¹⁷⁷ Secondly, the ineffability of God, which could be seen as a linguistic rule in which we are asked to speak about God in ways such that the inadequacy of our language is visible, known in theological terms as apophatic speech, does not prevent us from saying things about God – it merely confirms that whatever we say will not be sufficient to say everything about God, or accurate enough to tell the whole truth. As I argued in chapter 1, ineffability is closely linked to the other Quaker assumptions about religious experience and the ways in which we speak about it, and in chapters 3 and 4 the impact of the private language argument and other positions which run counter to the assumptions, especially the experience-first assumption, will be seen.

Irreplaceability

This section considers and develops another tool, focussed on the concept of irreplaceability. The ideas are drawn from some notes made on lectures given by Wittgenstein and a certain amount of preliminary work is needed to clarify and understand them. The discussion focuses on 'images', both visual images and the kind of pictures we create through certain uses of language. I use Cora Diamond's reading of the lecture notes and add some interpretations of my own in order to produce a useable tool, which amounts to an argument that some 'images' (visually or verbally created) are irreplaceable in the process of understanding and communicating religious concepts.

In considering the roles of language in a religious community, it is useful to begin by thinking about a small-scale example, such as the use of religious language in particular conversations. One example of this kind is found in Wittgenstein's *Lectures on Religious Belief*, where there is a hypothetical discussion about a statement concerning the Last Judgement and the range of positions in which we might find ourselves with regard to such a

¹⁷⁷ This point is closely related to many of those made by Denys Turner. See Denys Turner, *The darkness of God: negativity in Christian mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

statement. The text is not a clear one, being composed of lecture notes taken by students while Wittgenstein was speaking or shortly afterwards, but it nevertheless suggests a great number of interesting possibilities. For example, here is one of the remarks about the Last Judgement, in which Wittgenstein fails to be moved by the contention that the Last Judgement will happen:

Why shouldn't one form of life culminate in an utterance of belief in a Last Judgement? But I couldn't either say 'Yes' or 'No' to the statement that there will be such a thing. Nor 'Perhaps' nor 'I'm not sure'.

It is a statement which may not allow of any such answer.¹⁷⁸

Cora Diamond offers an analysis of these options, 'yes', 'no', 'perhaps', and the inability to answer, arguing that Wittgenstein and the 'ordinary' atheist are in different positions regarding the person who asserts that there will be a last judgement¹⁷⁹ – it is not simply a matter of disagreeing, or even disagreeing for different reasons. Diamond's analysis offers four options for reacting when someone says the last judgement will happen. You can have the same manner of handling propositions and agree or disagree with this claim: for example, if Smith and Jones both study the Bible and Smith becomes an exclusivist with regard to eschatological life while Jones becomes an inclusivist, they disagree about the nature of the last judgement, meaning different things by the term, but have the same foundations. You can be in need of teaching or an explanation – relevant Biblical quotations or a translation of key terms into another language – and then become

¹⁷⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Lectures on Religious Belief," in *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), 58.

¹⁷⁹ Cora Diamond, "Wittgenstein and Religious Belief: The Gulfs Between Us," in *Religion and Wittgenstein's Legacy*, ed. D.Z. Phillips, Ruhr, Mario von der (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 103. Not everyone makes this distinction: Clack seems to conflate Wittgenstein's own position with (an or the?) atheist position ("Atheism is simply then the absence of religious thoughts... It is not a contradiction of belief"). I consider that Diamond's decision to carefully distinguish them, giving the atheist space to actually contradict the believer while Wittgenstein is 'unmoved', is correct. Clack, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Religion*: 69.

capable of agreeing or disagreeing as outlined in the previous options. Alternatively, you can have a different manner of handling propositions and disagree because of that. This is the case of the atheist, who doesn't accept the existence of God, which is foundational to the idea of the last judgement; perhaps you can sometimes even agree despite that, if you arrive at the same conclusion by a different route. However, you can also not be able to agree or disagree because you can't – in Diamond's phrase – find it in yourself to move with the concept at all.¹⁸⁰ This lack of movement is not emotional (to move with a concept is not the same as to be moved by it), but rather intellectual and practical, a failure to find any use for or to have any affinity with a particular mode of thinking.

It is useful here to dismiss some other ways of thinking about this which would take us away from the core Wittgensteinian insights about how language works. Hilary Putnam argues that of three conventional ways of thinking about Wittgenstein's position, one is useless and the other two are wrong. He identifies "the Kuhnian idea of incommensurability", the idea of religious language as expressing emotions or attitudes, and the concept of "non-cognitive" language (contrasted with the "cognitive" language of science).¹⁸¹ Incommensurability, as defined by Putnam, is the idea that "two speakers aren't able to communicate *because* their words have different 'meanings'" (where meaning is defined only by use).¹⁸² Wittgenstein, however, dismisses this, saying that it is "not clear what the criterion of meaning the same is".¹⁸³ Similarly, Wittgenstein does not accept the idea that religious statements express attitudes in those cases where the statement cannot be replaced by "an explicit expression of the so-called attitude", and Putnam argues that this is because he is rejecting the move towards a metaphysical discussion (the difference between a 'statement of fact' and a 'non-literal statement' turning on whether there is a metaphysical 'fact' of the

¹⁸⁰ Diamond, "Wittgenstein and Religious Belief: The Gulfs Between Us," 105.

¹⁸¹ Hilary Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992). 147-48.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁸³ Wittgenstein, "Lectures on Religious Belief," 58.

matter).¹⁸⁴ Finally, talk about 'non-cognitive' language does not help us understand this at all; much of it sounds as if it has "forgotten what religious language sounds like".¹⁸⁵ Instead, Putnam says that Wittgenstein is saying that "religious discourse can be understood in any depth only by understanding the form of life to which it belongs".¹⁸⁶ This is the position to which I subscribe, and which informs the approach of this thesis to real examples of religious language and their community contexts – to be explored in detail in chapter 4.

Part of a religious form of life is the creation of religious pictures, both visual images (including those described rather than drawn) and metaphorical ones. Another way of considering the failure to move with a religious concept is to say that someone in that situation does not have the relevant religious picture. If you have a certain picture, religious or otherwise, of the way the world is, then it affects your actions, speech, and other beliefs. It is a significant part of your form of life. People in the first, second, and third positions considered above – who can react to the picture and choose whether or not to include it in their life – can imagine having the picture, and the effects on their life seem comprehensible. If, however, you can't even imagine what it would be to have that picture of the world, you cannot move with the concept at all. You cannot, furthermore, be sure which consequences to draw from it; when you speak of your friend's eye, you know you can speak of an eyebrow as well, but when the Eye of God is spoken about, the religious believer with the picture knows which consequences to draw (the eye of God looks, but talk of eyebrows would be out of place), but people who cannot move with the concept do not.¹⁸⁷ This is in keeping with Wittgenstein's emphasis on religious beliefs having an effect on the life of the believer; as Diamond says, he:

emphasizes in his account of the ramifications of talk about a Last Judgement connections with what the assertor *does*, and with which

¹⁸⁴ Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy*: 153.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 154. Putnam argues that in this Wittgenstein agrees with Kierkegaard.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 156.

he says about such things as forgoing pleasures; he does not emphasize, and (so far as the lecture notes are a reliable guide to what he said) indeed did not bring in at all the significance of the connections the assertor might make with talk of God's actions and promises.¹⁸⁸

From this we might conclude – as the idea of meaning as use within specific contexts had already hinted – that to understand a religious position, we must have or at least be able to imagine having the 'picture' concerned.

However, the idea of the religious claim as a picture is raised in another context later in the *Lectures on Religious Belief*, and it is used in a different way to that suggested above.¹⁸⁹ On the one hand, the 'religious pictures' discussed above are images of how the world is which comprise a significant part of the religious form of life; on the other hand, an actual image such as a painting might be a religious picture if it depicts a religious subject, and this understanding also interests Wittgenstein. In the course of the discussion in the *Lectures*, he touches on a series of points which will be useful for my project, not least the 'picture' metaphor itself. The comparison between religious concepts and pictures arises from cases where we access religious beliefs by looking at objects identified as 'pictures' in everyday language, such as Michelangelo's paintings of religious subjects.¹⁹⁰

Wittgenstein is talking about the ways in which we use pictures to identify things in everyday life, and our technique of comparison: "The word 'God' is amongst the earliest learnt—pictures and catechisms, etc. But not the same consequences as with pictures of aunts. I wasn't shown [that which the picture pictured]".¹⁹¹ Pictures of religious, rather than secular historical, subjects play quite a different role in our practice:

¹⁸⁸ Diamond, "Wittgenstein and Religious Belief: The Gulfs Between Us," 108.

¹⁸⁹ Wittgenstein, "Lectures on Religious Belief."

¹⁹⁰ I am considering the material in the order in which it appears in the lecture notes; it might be that this does not reflect the order of the underlying thought process.

¹⁹¹ Wittgenstein, "Lectures on Religious Belief," 59. I have kept this quotation as published, although it is very much in note form and has required an editorial addition (in square brackets).

It is quite clear that the role of pictures of Biblical subjects and role of the picture of God creating Adam are totally different ones. You might ask this question: “Did Michelangelo think that Noah in the ark looked like this, and that God creating Adam looked like this?” He wouldn’t have said that God or Adam looked as they look in this picture.¹⁹²

I find two things worth saying about Wittgenstein's view as represented in this passage. Firstly, that we do gain some understanding of religious concepts from paintings and catechisms. Although we cannot use our everyday method of comparison,¹⁹³ unlike when we are given a picture of an aunt or a tropical plant,¹⁹⁴ we do think that we can learn something about a religious tradition (and perhaps, but not necessarily, about God) from the visual or verbal pictures it produces. The criteria for the value of a religious picture are not discussed in this passage, and I would suggest that this is because any such criteria are generated from inside the religious tradition, rather than being the concern of the outsider. Wittgenstein does say that he assumes that Michelangelo is the best, presumably as an artist, but the comparison with the picture of the tropical plant shows that visual accuracy of representation is not a criterion on which we can judge images of God¹⁹⁵. He does not seem concerned with issues such as the aesthetic quality of the picture, and for this purpose that seems irrelevant – a picture of an aunt may be informative without being attractive, and this presumably applies also to God.¹⁹⁶ It is for the religious believer, perhaps the theologian, to judge

¹⁹² Ibid., 63.

¹⁹³ And we would be surprised if we could – for like Michelangelo, we don't think that God is "the man in that queer blanket". Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Another example that Wittgenstein uses for something we might not, but could have, seen directly. Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Except, perhaps, if we are representing a religious experience which we take to be of God – in this case the experiencer may compare the visual aspects of a religious experience with a physical image. There is still the further step to show that the experience was of God.

¹⁹⁶ Although it would be possible to argue that only beautiful pictures of God are truthful because beauty is among God's perfections, Christian traditions would struggle to accept this because images of Christ on the cross – which I take to be informative about Christian truth – sometimes need to be ugly in order to capture the truth of Christ's suffering.

whether an image gives information about God which represents the God they know – i.e., whether what they learn from this image is 'grammatically correct' in relation to what they have learnt from other images and ways of speaking.

Secondly, since the pictures produced by a religious tradition are not only paintings, but also other kinds of imagery, we can consider this usefulness in relation to figurative language. Considering 'pictures' to include verbal imagery,¹⁹⁷ taken together with the remarks about religious pictures above, adds up to a clearer understanding of metaphorical remarks like 'the eye of God is watching me'. The Michelangelo painting cannot be compared with that which it represents, unlike the photograph of a tropical plant, to see if the likeness is good;¹⁹⁸ rather, it must be assessed based on the effect that it has on the viewer. Similarly, the remark about the eye of God cannot be taken to be a picture of the world which corresponds with God's eye, but should be assessed on the role that it plays in the life of the believer. This directs us back towards specific contexts which we need to take into account when seeking the meaning of religious language: its role in the life of the people who use it.

The metaphor of religious expressions as pictures has some other interesting implications, however. For one thing, we do not expect to be able to – or indeed to need to – restate pictures in any different ways: there is no practice of translation in pictures.¹⁹⁹ We do have a practice of clarifying – of taking better passport photos, for example – but this seems more like rephrasing a sentence than translating into another language (I will be discussing this in more detail in chapter 4). Furthermore, if two people create pictures of the same thing, they will often include significant differences which give clues to their relationship to the object depicted – at

¹⁹⁷ Without wanting to make any claims about the psychology of using verbal images - that people who make and hear such remarks create pictures in their minds, for example.

¹⁹⁸ In the next *Lecture*, Wittgenstein makes several remarks about 'likeness' as the test of a picture. Wittgenstein, "Lectures on Religious Belief," 66.

¹⁹⁹ Perhaps in the grey area between pictures and words where many symbols exist, but not in the paintings or photographs of people and plants which are the source of this metaphor.

the most simple level, this may simply be perspective or angle, but it can be much richer and more complicated. Two artists, even trained and operating within the same tradition, may produce very different work – but it remains to be seen whether this metaphor will stand, as language and visual art are in many ways quite different.

This brings us back to the theme of the irreplaceability of some pictures or expressions.²⁰⁰ There are some times when you can replace a photograph of your aunt with a detailed description of her – it might be better for an oral history book, and just as good if you're reporting her missing. There are also times when you could replace the photograph with an impressionist painting – the painting would be good for your family history, but not likely to be useful to a police officer who is hunting for her; perhaps this is like replacing a word with another which has the same denotation but a different connotation (the morning star/Venus). But at other times a photograph or representational painting is the most useful, perhaps the only useful, tool: when you need to identify one tropical plant among many, for example, and you can compare shapes and colours visually which would be impossible to put into sufficiently detailed words.²⁰¹ If some religious expressions are like pictures in this way, then it seems right that phrases in our language, particularly phrases which involve religious imagery, may be impossible to restate in ways which do not contain that religious content, or indeed at all. That said, there could be many photographs or paintings of a tropical plant equally good for this task because very similar to one another in this regard; perhaps it is better to think of these as versions of a single image rather than many images – compare this to the way of describing matters such that this word 'word' and that word 'word' are one word rather than two.

Although religious speech can sometimes express emotions, 'God is watching over me' is not the same as 'I feel safe'. When language creates

²⁰⁰ And harkens back to Wittgenstein's remark that he would like to say that "a picture tells me itself". Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*: 523.

²⁰¹ Another example would be doing a jigsaw puzzle. The picture on the box lid may not be quite irreplaceable, but it is certainly more useful than even a very detailed description.

pictures, perhaps especially when those pictures are of religious subjects, it seems that those pictures may sometimes be irreplaceable.²⁰² This might be illustrated with reference to the translation of poetry, and other 'untranslatable' things: although it is sometimes possible to capture something of the same idea in another language, or to say something which can give another person a start at understanding the concept, direct translations are not possible. In the world of pictures, we might say that simply creating another picture of the same subject is not enough to convey the content of the original picture – I might paint a picture of a starry night sky, but it would not be a replacement for Van Gogh's *Starry Night*.

In one of the conversations from which I derive these ideas, Wittgenstein says to Smythies that "the whole *weight* may be in the picture"²⁰³ – but we need to know what we understand by the idea that a picture (here, a metaphor as much as a visual image) is essential to a way of speaking. Cora Diamond offers three possible interpretations, of which she rejects the first two and endorses the last.²⁰⁴ The first interpretation suggests that the specific and ordinary uses of the words involved in a way of speaking are essential to that way of speaking – so that, for example, we can understand someone who speaks of 'God watching us' if we know how the words 'God' and 'watching' are ordinarily used. However, it seems clear that these words do not, in this context, take their ordinary meanings and that we cannot read off the sense of such talk with the "eyes of logic", and so these commonplace pictures cannot be essential in this sense.²⁰⁵

Diamond also rejects a weak interpretation of the claim, in which we see "the anthropomorphic character of [someone's] conception of the Divine as essential to it in the sense that they cannot imagine anyone's having that conception without that picture".²⁰⁶ This is to say that although those within

²⁰² Diamond, "Wittgenstein and Religious Belief: The Gulfs Between Us," 123.

²⁰³ Wittgenstein, "Lectures on Religious Belief," 72.

²⁰⁴ Diamond, "Wittgenstein and Religious Belief: The Gulfs Between Us."

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

the practice cannot imagine anyone having the practice without the picture, the picture is not in fact essential to the practice.²⁰⁷ Diamond rejects this idea, which she attributes to Kemp-Smith, because it does not meet the requirement that it explain what Wittgenstein actually said. If we, from outside the practice, are willing to say that the picture is inessential, it would be very strange for us to also say that the whole weight is in the picture, or that the picture is irreplaceable.

Having dismissed both the above interpretations, Diamond seeks to provide a third interpretation which lies between them. She observes that "pictorial language may seem necessary in describing the use of pictorial language in the narrative of the doings of this God",²⁰⁸ but goes on to say that such circularity is not problematic. Indeed, uncovering it is useful, because it demonstrates that such language is necessary to discussions of these topics. This is pictorial language in general rather than a specific example – preliminary sketches or other work by the same artist may be a help to understanding a work of art in a way that an attempt to state its meaning verbally may not, perhaps cannot, and pictorial language might be helpfully expanded by other forms of pictorial language – but these helps to understanding are not full restatements of the original. In this way, a picture may be inescapable "in any description which she [the thinker] can acknowledge as describing *her* use of words, her life with those words" because it is "at the ground of her thought, that is, tied to her way of taking the game".²⁰⁹ If this is so, then particular ways of describing the Divine – intertwined as they are with theological positions and understandings – will not be easily interchanged. This can be seen in relation to the example discussed earlier, of belief in the last judgement. A belief in a theologically meaningful event such as the last judgement – an event in which the Divine has a particular role to play – is a picture of the way the world is or will be; this picture of the world and the ways of describing the Divine which it entails (God as Judge, perhaps) is so entangled with other aspects of a

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 122.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 127.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 128.

worldview, a religious belief, and probably patterns of action, that it cannot be exchanged for another without loss of some aspect of this understanding.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced and discussed three key Wittgensteinian concepts: the process of the formation of meaning through use, the impossibility of private language, and the irreplaceability of some words. This has built up a picture of how language works – of language as something which is necessarily communal at some level – and shown why it must be discussed in its real context rather than as an abstraction.

It follows from the idea that meaning is created when people use words in real contexts that in order to understand words, to comprehend their meanings, we must turn to real examples of their use. In particular, we must look at not only the use of words 'in the wild', but also take a full picture of the contexts in which they are used – the background and circumstances, the previous uses of a word and the nuances of the use in which we are interested. In the next chapter, I aim to do exactly this: take a series of examples of Quaker language use, and examine them in detail, exploring the context for any relevant material and considering also the history and other uses of the more intriguing words.

This process can alert us to many things which might otherwise go unnoticed. This will become clearer in chapter 4 when I put this method into practice, but on the abstract level, examples might include the ways in which words move between communities, trailing some but not all of their previous connotations, and the ways in which words change through time and use – phrases become abbreviated, words acquire new meanings in one sub-culture which then spread to others, and so forth.

Finally, I also want to note here some of the ways in which this Wittgensteinian understanding of the workings of language challenges the Quaker assumptions which I described in chapter 1. When a Quaker chooses

one word over another, or includes some items but not others in a list, that will tell us something about the language game within which they are operating, both in cultural aspects and their individual perspective on the situation. It may not, however, tell us what we at first think it might tell us about either their experiences (if they have language-independent experiences at all), or the content which religious experiences are held to have (that is, of the Divine, if experience can have language-independent content). In ordinary language, we do talk about our experiences and think that we can compare them by comparing what we say about them; but there are two things to say about this.

Firstly, we acknowledge that this breaks down in some places. When my brother, who is a little colour-blind, tells me over the phone about his new car, I might not recognise the colour of it from his description, and we do not think anything strange is happening if this turns out to be the case. If he tells me about the colour of the beetle in his box, or the Deity in his vision, I have no choice but to trust him since (unlike his car) I cannot go and look at those things for myself – but I also have a reasonable expectation that if I could by some miracle experience what he 'saw', it might appear differently to me. In religious experience, we are not usually talking about anything as simple as colour, but I think it is reasonable to import the idea that one person's description of an experience into language will not necessarily match another's.

Secondly, there are two different uses of the word 'experience' in play here, with quite different connotations. Sometimes, the word 'experience' is used to suggest 'raw experience', something pre-linguistic, pre-cultural, which is therefore taken to be a trustworthy source of information about the world. Sometimes, though, the word 'experience' is used to suggest the 'whole experience', the combined qualia, if I may be forgiven such an unWittgensteinian term, of being the people we are in the world, and this use must, for humans, include the experience of being a language-user and part of one or more cultures. This is tricky, because I admit to having slipped between the two uses. When I say, "if they have language-

independent experiences at all", I am suggesting the possibility that we might deny the possibility of 'raw experience' being truly pre-linguistic, but when I say, "we do talk about our experiences", I am thinking of the 'whole experience' (though practically we only have time and space to compare parts of it), the way it feels to be in the world as a language-using being.

Furthermore, if we accept that religious pictures, visual or verbal, carry with them significant content which is not easily replicated in other 'pictures' – hence, that they are not always or even usually replaceable – we will want to pay close attention to the specific words used, and reject the idea that one can simply be 'translated' into another. The burden of proof will fall onto the 'translator', to show that the words used are close enough in meaning to convey a usefully similar picture, and this is a problem to which I will return in chapter 4.

Chapter 3: The cultural-linguistic model of religion

The English have no respect for their language, and will not teach their children to speak it.²¹⁰

In light of Fergus Kerr's conclusion that the reception of Wittgenstein's work by recent theologians has been modest and mixed, not to mention frequently misinformed, the idea that this chapter will examine theological uses of Wittgenstein's work might be thought misguided.²¹¹ However, even Kerr would agree that there are theologians who have taken Wittgenstein's ideas seriously, often under the influence of other teachers (such as Paul Holmer, a philosopher and sometime theologian who taught both George Lindbeck and Stanley Hauerwas).

That being so, the purpose of this chapter is to see how Wittgensteinian tools have been applied to theological topics by other scholars, and what assets this previous exploration adds to our tool-box. The main scholar to be considered will be George Lindbeck: I examine his book, *The Nature of Doctrine*, in some detail, looking at its Wittgensteinian roots, and the ways in which Lindbeck develops those ideas.²¹² Lindbeck is the focus here not only because he is one of the first theologians to develop Wittgensteinian ideas in depth, and not only because his work has been enormously influential, but also because his work and the comments and debates which have followed on from it provide a series of considerations and tools which will prove useful to the project I am undertaking.

I then move on to consider the criticisms which Lindbeck provides of other positions we will encounter – these prove especially fruitful because Lindbeck's work together with comments from D. Z. Phillips effectively stages an intervention into positions common and rarely questioned in

²¹⁰ Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion* (London: Penguin Books, 1944). 5.

²¹¹ Fergus Kerr, "Reception of Wittgenstein's Philosophy by Theologians," in *Religion and Wittgenstein's Legacy*, ed. D. Z. Phillips and Mario von der Ruhr (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005), 269-70.

²¹² Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*.

Quakerism. Although some discussion has to be postponed until chapter 5 (when we turn to look at some defenders of pluralist positions which have some features in common with 'experiential-expressivist' positions), two debates do emerge as key to this area: the issue of truth claims within religions (when and whether religions make them and what can be said about them), and the question of the boundaries of communities or traditions.

At the end of this chapter, I consider Lindbeck's own position and some critiques of Lindbeck's work from Kwok Pui-Lan, D. Z. Phillips and Fergus Kerr, before finally summarising the aspects which may be useful for our project going forward. In particular, I identify the concept of the group of competent speakers or the 'fluent elite' and the metaphor 'Christianity is a language' as tools which will be applicable, while discarding the first-order/second-order distinction which does not relate well to Quaker speech.

Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*

In *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, George Lindbeck's purpose is to advance the case for adopting a postliberal, or cultural-linguistic, view of doctrine in particular and of religion more generally.²¹³ Whilst acknowledging that there will be those for whom this is inappropriate, he argues his case carefully and thoroughly, pointing out at each turn the flaws in the positions he has identified as alternative views: the preliberal cognitivism or propositionalism, in which doctrinal statements about belief are taken to be mostly or most importantly statements of metaphysical truth, and the modern or liberal experiential-expressivism, in which doctrinal statements are taken to be expressions, varying by context and culture, of widely accessible or even universal human experiences.²¹⁴ In the face of the problems created by these understandings, he intends to

²¹³ Ibid., 16.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 112.

move forward into a new view of religion.²¹⁵ Lindbeck's work has indeed encouraged many to move forward in this way, and the scholars who do so are known broadly as 'postliberal theologians'. They include Lindbeck's colleagues Hans Frei, David Kelsey, and Kathryn Tanner, among others.²¹⁶

A central contention of the cultural-linguistic view of religion is that languages are the most apt analogy for religions.²¹⁷ Specifically, religions are not just like languages, but accord with the Wittgensteinian view of languages. This has implications for the ways that we talk about them: for example, we see more clearly that the full practice of a religion cannot be learned from outside observation (as by listening to or reading translations from a foreign language), but only by practice and engagement, i.e. from inside the religion.²¹⁸ This sounds like it may lead to complete fideism,²¹⁹ but it does not automatically do so: just as there are no sharp boundaries between natural languages (a speaker of one can often pick out some of a related language), we are not surprised if we can make some, but not total, sense of one religion from within another, or from within an analogous language.²²⁰

The change which interests Lindbeck most, though, is the way that when we use the religion-as-language metaphor we are consequently enabled to see doctrines as second-order intra-systematic claims, analogous to claims about the grammar of a language, rather than as first-order claims about metaphysical realities, although he allows that doctrines may also represent

²¹⁵ And of doctrine. Lindbeck tends to slide between the two, and rather than fight to keep them distinct I am going to follow him, accept that what he says about doctrine can usefully and coherently be said about religion as a whole, and conflate them.

²¹⁶ Ronald T. Michener, *Postliberal Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013).

²¹⁷ The term implies that cultures may also be an analogy for religions, but Lindbeck does not explore this possibility in nearly as much detail.

²¹⁸ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*: 35.

²¹⁹ Nielsen, "Wittgensteinian Fideism."

²²⁰ I will return to the issue of boundaries between languages later in this chapter.

the metaphysical state of affairs.²²¹ He notes that the cultural-linguistic view of religion has often been used by scholars of comparative religion, but usually from an atheistic standpoint; those same scholars may have a religious belief, but not use their cultural-linguistic analysis of religion to support it (he singles out Peter Berger as an example of this).²²² The sociological roots of the cultural-linguistic perspective make it of particular interest to a project such as mine, which includes a strong empirical dimension – they provide a reason to think at the outset that this perspective may have something to contribute to my thesis. Further reasons will be found as we proceed.

Lindbeck notes in his first chapter that much of the work which has inspired him has been inspired in turn by Wittgenstein, saying that Wittgenstein's work "has served as a major stimulus to my thinking (even if in ways that those more knowledgeable in Wittgenstein might not approve)".²²³ Not everyone thinks that Lindbeck benefits from his use of Wittgenstein, such as it is; for example, C. C. Pecknold finds it necessary to supplement Lindbeck with Augustine and Charles Peirce in order to produce a satisfactory understanding of doctrine, free of the flaws which he thinks Lindbeck inherits from Wittgenstein.²²⁴ The parts of Wittgenstein's work which Lindbeck does use are mainly from the material covered in the first section of chapter 2, namely the ideas that meaning is created by using words in particular contexts, and the concept of a 'form of life' within which a specific use of language is meaningful.

I dealt extensively with Wittgenstein's uses of the terms 'form of life' and 'language game' in Chapter 2, so it will not be necessary to cover that

²²¹ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*: 80, 106.

²²² *Ibid.*, 20.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 24.

²²⁴ C.C. Pecknold, *Transforming Postliberal Theology: George Lindbeck, Pragmatism and Scripture* (London: T&T Clark Ltd., 2005). The flaw which Pecknold perceives in Lindbeck and Wittgenstein is their bias against metaphysics. I am not inclined to regard this as a flaw, and fortunately it is not relevant to this thesis.

ground again here, but only to note that Lindbeck uses these terms without anywhere clarifying his understanding of them. Observing the meaning from his use, though, I conclude that he thinks of a 'form of life' as a culture or collection of cultures:

... just as a language (or "language-game", to use Wittgenstein's phrase) is correlated with a form of life, and just as a culture has both cognitive and behavioral dimensions...²²⁵

As discussed in chapter 2, a language-game in Wittgenstein's use is not usually what we would, in ordinary terms, call a language. It is also clear in this passage that, like many other readers of Wittgenstein, Lindbeck has understood a 'form of life' to be much larger than it seems Wittgenstein intended in the *Philosophical Investigations*, treating it as the correlate of a whole natural language. However, given that Lindbeck acknowledges this disagreement, I am setting it aside in order to focus on the fruitful products of Lindbeck's engagement with Wittgenstein.

The key strength of Lindbeck's argument is the usefulness of the 'religion as language' analogy. Lindbeck argues for this throughout *The Nature of Doctrine*, beginning by noting the "scholarly ascendancy of cultural and linguistic approaches", and going on to make the specific suggestion that religion "can be viewed as a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought".²²⁶ In the rest of this paragraph, he makes a series of comments about the results of this view which are worth considering in detail. He contrasts it with the other views which he is rejecting, showing in the process that it can encompass some aspect of each them:

...[religion] is not primarily an array of beliefs about the true and the good (though it may involve these), or a symbolism expressive of basic attitudes, feelings, or sentiments (though these will be generated). Rather, it is similar to an idiom that makes possible the

²²⁵ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*: 33.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 25, 33. Lindbeck does not qualify this statement, and appears to mean that religion shapes the entirety of life and thought for everyone.

description of realities, the formulation of beliefs, and the experiences of inner attitudes, feelings, and sentiments.²²⁷

Significantly, we can see here that the cultural-linguistic view thinks of causation around religious experience as happening in the opposite direction to that supposed by the views which Lindbeck calls experiential-expressivist. Rather than many people having a single kind of experience which, due to cultural forces, they describe in different ways, the cultural forces which make description possible also make possible the experiences themselves, which are therefore naturally as different as the descriptions. Lindbeck states this result as follows:

Buddhist compassion, Christian love, and... French Revolutionary *fraternité* are not diverse modifications of a single fundamental human awareness, emotion, attitude, or sentiment, but are radically (i.e. from the root) distinct ways of experiencing and being oriented towards self, neighbor, and cosmos.²²⁸

He also points out that "the relation of religion and experience" is "not unilateral but dialectical".²²⁹ That is to say, it is not just the case that experiences produce religions, but he takes it to be possible that religions can produce experiences and, in the light of the emphasis placed upon religious experience by the experiential-expressivist position, it is important to emphasise that they can.²³⁰ The debate over the relation between religious belief and religious experience, conducted within the framework of the cultural-linguistic view, is impossible to settle because if I thought that I had agreed with its conclusion, I would merely have changed the rules of the language game in which I was engaged. In any case, the terms of the topic

²²⁷ Ibid., 33.

²²⁸ Ibid., 40. Perhaps it would be more Wittgensteinian of Lindbeck to acknowledge the possibility of similarities as well.

²²⁹ Ibid., 33.

²³⁰ It is also important to note that this emphasis within the experiential-expressivist position is one that Lindbeck has put there himself through his characterisation of it; 'experiential-expressivist' is not a label any group or thinker claims for themselves, and the position as found in Lindbeck's writing is not identical with that defended by any particular scholar – although it does have much in common with some which we will find among the Quakers and the liberal theologians with whom they in turn have much in common.

as laid out above – "the relation of religion and experience" – demand a separation between 'religion' (a category into which we put certain types of behaviour, language, and experience) and 'experience' per se, which there are good Wittgensteinian reasons for avoiding.

Lindbeck also emphasises the multiple dimensions within which religions, like cultures, function. I said above that he understands a language-game and a form of life to be equivalent to a language and a culture, which have "both cognitive and behavioral dimensions", and "so it is also in the case of a religious tradition".²³¹ He elaborates this by saying that a religion's "doctrines, cosmic stories or myths, and ethical directives are integrally related to the rituals it practices, the sentiments or experiences it evokes, the actions it recommends, and the institutional forms it develops".²³² In retaining Wittgenstein's use of the term 'form of life', with reference only to the immediate situation within which a remark is made or an exchange takes place, but striving to understand a remark or group of remarks as fully as possible, we should not lose sight of the broader context – including all the aspects which Lindbeck mentions here.²³³

The rest of Lindbeck's argument develops the themes of 'religion as language' and 'doctrine as grammar' in more detail. For example, he says that doctrines (whether official or operational, explicit or assumed) are to be taken as second-order claims within the system rather than as ontological claims.²³⁴ This leads to the observation that doctrines may be mistaken in the same range of ways as grammar books: they may be unaware of important exceptions to a rule, they may seek to force arbitrary preferences or alien structures onto a language, they may miss a deeper but relevant rule.²³⁵ We also have the notion of the fluent speaker who knows best: "The

²³¹ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*: 33.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid., 76, 80. It is also worth noting in this connection that Lindbeck distinguishes doctrine from theology, theology being related to doctrine but not communally normative.

²³⁵ Ibid., 81-2.

experts must on occasion bow to the superior wisdom of the competent speaker who simply knows that such and such is right or wrong even though it violates the rules they have formulated".²³⁶ Developed in relation to doctrine, this leads Lindbeck to the idea that doctrinal formulations should be tested by "competent practitioners of that religion".²³⁷

This creates the obvious challenge of identifying such people. Lindbeck poses the problem in relation to Christianity as follows:

Who are the competent practitioners? Who have the pious ears? Are they Arians or Athanasians, Catholics or Protestants, the masses of conventional churchgoers or an elite of saints and theologians? Competence in natural language is easy to identify. It is possessed by native speakers and a few non-native ones who can communicate effectively in a given tongue. The limits of the language are marked by the point at which variations in dialect become so great that communication is impossible apart from learning the idiom as foreign speech. Among Christians, however, there are many groups who seem to speak mutually unintelligible dialects. This has been true not only of marginal sects such as Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, or Christian Scientists but also for major groups such as Arians and Athanasians, Latins and Greeks, Catholics and Protestants. Which claimants to the authentic Christian tongue should be heeded?²³⁸

I think that Lindbeck overstates the simplicity of the natural language case here – there are pairs of languages which are called two tongues even though they are mutually comprehensible, such as Danish and Swedish, and sociolects of English which require special training without leaving the language, such as academic ways of speaking and writing. Even with native

²³⁶ Ibid., 82. Lindbeck's note at this point indicates that he derives the idea of "appealing to the 'intuitions' of those who are linguistically 'competent'" from Noam Chomsky, although in broad rather than technical terms. Ibid., footnote, 90.

²³⁷ Ibid., 99. There might be a comparison here with David Hume's conceptions of 'the wise' as opposed to 'the vulgar' (in 'On Standards of Taste'), but Lindbeck's 'competent practitioners' are judging the grammar or rules of the religion where Hume's 'wise' people are judging the aesthetics of an object or experience and may (or may not, Hume is less than totally clear in this somewhat rushed essay) use rules to help them do so. Hume/ Ted Gracyk: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/hume-aesthetics/>

²³⁸ Ibid.

languages, some speakers are more fluent, have wider vocabularies, or use more socially acceptable grammar than others. However, this does not take away from, but rather adds to, the difficulty of identifying the 'pious ears' who can test our doctrinal formulations for us.

Lindbeck's own answer, for a religion as a whole, is that we should seek those who are fully competent, for whom their religion has "become a native language, the primary medium in which they think, feel, act, and dream".²³⁹ He calls the demand for competence "the empirical equivalent of insisting on the Spirit as one of the tests of doctrine", and expects that if we seek these people in "the mainstream, rather than in isolated backwaters or ingrown sects", we will find that they have an "empirically recognizable" competence which tends to agree with others in the same position.²⁴⁰ This agreement, Lindbeck says, "may not improperly be called infallible", giving the example of a "virtually unanimous and enduring agreement among flexible and yet deeply pious Muslims throughout the world" which would be evidence that anything so agreed was "not in contradiction to the inner logic of Islam" – although he admits that "the practical difficulties of verifying the existence of such a consensus may be insuperable".²⁴¹

The practical difficulties of consulting them notwithstanding, this answer requires that such "flexible and yet deeply pious" people exist, and by the end of the book we are clear that Lindbeck is concerned that, within Christianity at least, this group may be disappearing – something of a problem for him, for obvious reasons; there is a sense that this may motivate his writing as well as his ecumenical work, since in doing and publishing Christian theology one presumably helps to foster a fluent Christian community. He says, for example, that "those who share in the intellectual

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 100. As I am not sure what it would be to dream in Quaker, or indeed Christian or Hindu, I take this remark to be relatively poetic, stressing mainly the completeness of a religious way of life (that it impacts all areas of life) and the idea of immersion accompanying fluency.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 100-01.

high culture of our day are rarely intensively socialised into coherent religious languages and communal forms of life".²⁴²

In seeking the 'fluent elite' of Quakerism, someone – a theological Henry Higgins – might say that such a group no longer exists, or is dwindling, not least because of the distance which Quakerism has travelled from its roots (as discussed in chapter 1). From Lindbeck's perspective, it seems likely that Quakerism has failed to remain distinctive, instead submitting to "the homogenizing tendencies associated with liberal experiential-expressivism".²⁴³ However, from a less pessimistic perspective, it is possible to see instead the 'competent practitioners' of Quakerism – schooled in the "communal forms of life" – picking up or creating a "coherent religious language" which reflects their collective understanding of truth (some of which may have been produced by the experiential-expressivist framework). It is also evident that Lindbeck sets a relatively high bar – one might feel at home in a language, speak it well, and know 'how to go on' with the language and related practices, without having reached the point of dreaming in it. We might also consider the difference between using formally correct language all the time, and knowing and recognising it in appropriate situations. In terms of actual Quaker competencies, some of the evidence presented in chapter 1 is indicative, and the issue will be explored further in chapter 4. For the time being, I merely suggest that Quakers may be an example of a dialect becoming a language – few Quakers now speak fluent Christian, but there is a 'Quaker language' in which one can be fluent.

Before moving on to consider Lindbeck's three views of doctrine, however, I need to say something about the place of 'doctrine', and the roles of 'first order' and 'second order' kinds of speech within this debate. Lindbeck regards doctrine as the second order speech of churches – the things they say about the things they say – and it is this which interests him. He does not turn his attention to the first order speech of churches – the things they say ordinarily or as part of their life. I take the first order part of language to

²⁴² Ibid., 124.

²⁴³ Ibid., 128.

be the mainstay of liturgy, as well as reports of religious experience, and the second order part to include most theological work, which I think follows Lindbeck's use. If applied directly to Quakerism, the content of both these categories looks rather slim: the first-order category looks set to contain mostly silence (which is important, but not under analysis in this thesis), and the second-order category a few notes about 'what we do in Meeting for Worship' and 'how Quakers talk'.

The body of material I have identified contains written thoughts of Quakers about their belief and worship – neither liturgy and unreflective reports, nor philosophically minded considerations of previous Quaker writings. This thoughtful material is first-order in the sense that it seems like ordinary speech taking place within the 'language' of Quakerism and without attempting to be either descriptive of all Quakers or prescriptive of doctrine; but it seems to be second-order in that it is reflective and looks back on worship from outside. Because I am working with examples which do not support the first-order/second-order distinction, I collapse it somewhat, taking some of Lindbeck's ideas about doctrine to be applicable to a wider category of religious speech, although at times we will need to briefly resurrect it in order to consider, for example, realist understandings of first-order Christian speech.²⁴⁴

Exploring the other positions 1: cognitive-propositionalist

Lindbeck does not develop the cognitivist or propositional model²⁴⁵ in great detail, but we do find in his text some pointers towards its strongholds. For example, he says that the cognitive-propositionalist model:

²⁴⁴ I note that, for other reasons, Phillips also finds Lindbeck's first-order/second-order distinction to be confused. D. Z. Phillips, *Faith After Foundationalism: Critiques and Alternatives* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1995). 216.

²⁴⁵ I have chosen to call the three ways of talking about or looking at religion 'positions', 'views' or 'models'; Lindbeck calls them 'theories' or 'models' and Phillips calls two of them 'confusions' and rejects the idea that the third should be a theory.

... was the approach of traditional orthodoxies (as well as many heterodoxies), but it also has certain affinities to the outlook on religion adopted by much modern Anglo-American philosophy with its preoccupation with the cognitive or informational meaningfulness of religious utterances.²⁴⁶

To some extent, the critiques of this position are embedded in the way in which Lindbeck describes it here, but these are worth unpacking at greater length: partly because to many people it seems like the obvious or common sense way of understanding doctrinal statements, and also because some related critiques underlie critiques which have been made of Wittgenstein directly. Furthermore, it is mistaken, but not always for the reasons that Lindbeck provides.

To open up the discussion of Lindbeck's arguments, I turn to D.Z. Phillips, a Wittgensteinian philosopher of religion who has worked on many related topics. In *Faith After Foundationalism*, he says that Lindbeck "rightly wants to oppose that strong tradition in which propositions about the existence of God are treated as the *presuppositions* of religion".²⁴⁷ Phillips characterises the results of such a position thus: "Two theologians advancing conflicting doctrines are understood to be like two men trying to describe an object in less than ideal conditions"; this is a position which always seems to rule out reconciliation without capitulation.²⁴⁸ However, Phillips points out that in Lindbeck's book there is no "actual philosophical elucidation of the ways in which we are tempted by these confused views of theology" and directs us towards an essay by Rush Rhees in which some of that exploration can be found.²⁴⁹

Rhees explores the ways in which we talk about God, and how we learn the word, looking for those places where our speech misleads us. In this extract from a letter, he writes:

²⁴⁶ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*: 16.

²⁴⁷ Phillips, *Faith After Foundationalism: Critiques and Alternatives*: 202.

²⁴⁸ Ibid. This analogy harks forward to the 'blind men and the elephant' story, often used to illustrate John Hick's pluralist position, which I will discuss in detail in chapter 5.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

If one lays emphasis, as you do, on the fact that 'God' is a substantive, and especially if one goes on, as I think you might, to say that it is a proper name, then the natural thing will be to assume that meaning the same by 'God' is something like meaning the same by 'the sun' or meaning the same by 'Churchill'. ... But nothing of that sort will do here. ... Supposing someone said, 'The word 'God' stands for a different object now'. What could that mean?²⁵⁰

He concludes that none of the usual things can be said in this case – we can talk about statements like "'the Queen' stands for a different person now", and we know which questions can usefully be asked if we doubt such a statement. But "*nothing* of that sort could be said in connexion with any question about the meaning of 'God'... and [this] is one reason why I do not think it is helpful just to say that the word is a substantive".²⁵¹ Although Rhees may have gone too far – if one is deriving 'the meaning of 'God' for this group' from that particular group's language and behaviour in relation to God, and that group changes their language and behaviour dramatically, one might want to say something like 'the meaning of 'God' for this group seems to have changed'. This is not the same as the method one uses for concrete objects – Rhees' objection – but perhaps it is acceptable in our ordinary way of speaking.

However, it is still difficult to know what questions to ask in order to ascertain this, especially if the group themselves assert that they are still speaking of the same God although in new ways. For example, if a feminist Christian creates new ways to speak of God, but claims to still be speaking of the Christian God, what questions does one ask to see whether this claim holds? 'Does the group accept the new way of speaking?' will not do, since it is almost certainly the case that some members of the group like it, some hate it, and some are indifferent to it, and 'Does the group still speak and act in the same way in relation to God?' is self-defeating, since the point is that new language has been produced. Ultimately, one will end up either

²⁵⁰ Phillips, *Rush Rhees on religion and philosophy*, 45. The letter was written to Peter Winch and dated 20th October 1954.

²⁵¹ Rush Rhees, "Religion and Language," in *Without Answers*, ed. Rush Rhees and D.Z. Phillips (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1969), 128.

drawing an arbitrary line on a spectrum of change, or referring to other markers about the boundaries of communities, such as presence or absence of a continuous tradition or the coherence between one utterance and another – continuity and coherence being related in that a continuous tradition of speech is likely to produce a series of largely similar and hence coherent remarks. These are not the things one has to do when asking questions like 'is the present Queen the same person as the Queen of 1899?'²⁵² As when Wittgenstein contrasted Michelangelo's painting of God with a picture of a tropical plant (discussed in chapter 2), we can see here that our checking procedures around ordinary concrete nouns are quite different from our checking procedures around the word 'God'.

Phillips points out that at times Lindbeck "seems to be endorsing the kind of analysis Rhee has provided", but that at other times "he seems to be still in the grip of the very confusion he is hoping to eradicate".²⁵³ Phillips explains that this is because, in trying to avoid the confusion, Lindbeck goes too far, "attacking the notion that theological statements have to do with an objective reality or with truth claims", when actually there is no need to abandon this idea, but only to avoid "construing talk of 'objective reality' and 'truth' in religion in a certain way, namely, in the way in which we construe them where talk of physical objects is concerned".²⁵⁴

The cognitivist theory is a mistaken account of religious belief – rather than, as Lindbeck sometimes describes it, "an optional way of talking about religion which one might choose to adopt", or which it might be possible to embrace if one is sufficiently deeply embedded in the life of a religious community.²⁵⁵ If Rhee and Phillips are right, the cognitivist view which

²⁵² I take it that in settling this sort of question one ordinarily refers to material such as history books, photographs, newspaper and eyewitness reports, or *in extremis* DNA and personality tests.

²⁵³ Phillips, *Faith After Foundationalism: Critiques and Alternatives*: 203.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 204; Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*: 21.

treats 'God' as a word for an object like other concrete objects is mistaken no matter where you stand in relation to a religious community.

Phillips and Rhees argue that this is wrong because it is founded on an error about the kind of thing which is happening when religious believers make claims about God. In other words, they take concrete objects as the paradigm and try to put 'God' into this model, but it will not work.²⁵⁶

Lindbeck may not wholeheartedly endorse this, and Hensley claims that Lindbeck accepts or at least leaves space for a quite different view, namely that believers' ordinary or first-order claims can be understood in a realist way,²⁵⁷ but from a Wittgensteinian perspective Rhees and Phillips are right, and that whether or not you are a believer it is possible to see that the rules of religious claim-making are different from the rules of making claims about empirically observable objects. These are different language-games and it is reasonable to expect their rules to be different.

It might also be said at this point that the analysis provided by Rhees opens up the possibility of a more nuanced version of the cognitive or propositional kind of position, which does not accept Lindbeck's claims about it, and could support, for example, the independent reality of God, without claiming that this independent reality is "like the independence of physical objects".²⁵⁸ Within a religious language-game, a word can be used differently to its ordinary use— a feature we regularly observe in other settings, and which we handle without difficulty using contextual cues (not imagining, for example, that a bishop in a chess set is the Bishop of a specific diocese). To spell out quite what the 'independence' of God might mean under the rules of a particular tradition is the task of the theologian working within that single tradition, and need not concern us here so long as

²⁵⁶ I cannot think of any class of non-physical objects which might form a paradigm into which we could fit God.

²⁵⁷ Jeffrey Hensley, "Are Postliberals Necessarily Antirealists? Reexamining the Metaphysics of Lindbeck's Postliberal Theology," in *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in Conversation*, ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996).

²⁵⁸ Phillips, *Faith After Foundationalism: Critiques and Alternatives*: 203.

the basic claim, that it is theoretically possible to do so, is granted. In this way, religious remarks can still have the possibility of propositional content, without our making the mistake of trying to test their content in the same way in which we test the objective content of claims about physical objects.

However, this move is not unlike one which Lindbeck himself makes and which Phillips criticises firmly. Lindbeck, having replaced talk of 'ontological truth' with his term 'intrasystemic truth', and failed in that process to fully explore what Phillips calls "the grammar of the 'independently real' in a religious context", then tries to create another logical space for ontological concepts, but as Phillips says:

No use of capitals in talking of the 'Most Important' and the 'Ultimately Real' can hide the fact that he is trying to place these concepts, whatever they are, in a logical space which transcends the language-games and forms of life in which concepts have their life. The notion of such a logical space is an illusion.²⁵⁹

Whatever we say, it is said within a language-game – even 'writing a theological book' cannot escape that – and the words we use have meaning because of the ways that we and others have used them in this and other contexts, throughout the many language-games in which we have learned and spoken the language. Even as we move smoothly from one context to another, from chess to the Church, each setting is a complete (although not self-sufficient) form of life in which our language-games are entirely entangled, and as linguistic beings we cannot move 'outside' those contexts. No transcendent logical space is available to us to make this move.

As a result of these considerations, I maintain that the cognitive-propositionalist view involves a misunderstanding about the relation between language and reality. Language – and not just religious language – must be considered in relation to its functions within the community which uses it, because these uses are entirely intertwined with it.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 206. The capitalised terms Phillips is citing are from Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*: 65.

2: Experiential-expressivist

Having considered the cognitive-propositionalist approach, I now move on to the second position which Lindbeck opposes, the one which he labels 'experiential-expressivist'. The core of this position is that it takes doctrines to be "noninformational and nondiscursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations", and generally also assumes that this inner experience is similar for everyone but expressed in different terms, or at least that it might be similar without any particular similarity appearing in the outward expressions of it.²⁶⁰ In this way, it stresses similarities, and not differences, between religions.²⁶¹ Lindbeck says that scholars such as Tillich who take this approach accept:

the general principle... that insofar as doctrines function as nondiscursive symbols, they are polyvalent in import and therefore subject to changes of meaning or even to a total loss of meaningfulness, to what Tillich calls their death.²⁶²

Phillips identifies two strands of objections to this model. Firstly, Lindbeck sometimes seems to prefer other theories "because of their greater economy, or because they correspond more closely to the facts".²⁶³ However, at other times Lindbeck regards it as incoherent, a critique with which Phillips is inclined to agree. In this section, I will discuss Lindbeck's other objections to the experiential-expressivist view, then the charge that it is incoherent, leaving the claims that another model is better to the section on the view which Lindbeck prefers, the cultural-linguistic view. The experiential-expressivist perspective which Lindbeck describes is in many ways close to the Quaker universalist perspective described in chapter 5. It embeds some of the same attitudes towards language and reaches similarly pluralist conclusions (which I will be revisiting in chapter 5).

²⁶⁰ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*: 16.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 17., with reference to Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951). 240.

²⁶³ Phillips, *Faith After Foundationalism: Critiques and Alternatives*: 207.

Lindbeck provides some other arguments for the weakness of the experiential-expressivist model, which I consider here in order to show why they are not convincing (before moving on to one which is convincing). For example, Lindbeck argues that the experiential-expressivist is wrong to call religions similar when they describe similar experiences. He returns to his analogy between religions and languages, saying that languages are not called similar because they "use overlapping sets of sounds or have common objects of reference".²⁶⁴ This might be the case for linguists who are concerned with the "grammatical patterns, the ways of referring, the semantic and syntactic structures"²⁶⁵ which he suggests as an alternative, but in ordinary terms I think we wish to say that 'using overlapping sets of sounds' is a point of similarity between languages. The issue is rather that it is not a very interesting one.²⁶⁶ However, the fact that human languages typically have (at least some) common objects of reference is an important similarity between them which makes translation possible. A lack of any common objects of reference – with an alien language, perhaps – might even make it impossible to conceptualise that as a language.

Furthermore, it is not inherently implausible that there could be common human experiences which come to be expressed in very different ways, especially when those experiences are more numinous and less urgent than, say, feeling pain: for example, the collection of experiences which might be called 'being in the presence of God'. Certainly, this style of thinking and talking about religion as a common human experience which underlies a multitude of religious expressions – a position which we might call

²⁶⁴ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*: 41.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁶⁶ One of the reasons why the observation of 'overlapping sets of sounds' is uninteresting is that some of the similarities are trivial. Some are significant – 'ἐκκλησία' is related to 'ecclesiology' – but many are irrelevant to the sense of the words. Boring similarities, though, are still similarities; and some sound-similarities will form useful categories for consideration, such as tonal languages.

universalist²⁶⁷ – is common and accepted among the Religious Society of Friends. Lindbeck accuses Lonergan of assuming without evidence that religious experience is the same underneath different expressions,²⁶⁸ and then presents as an alternative hypothesis, although without going into the evidence in detail, that religious experience is different when language for discussing it differs.²⁶⁹ His argument seems to be circular: he says that experiential-expressivist approaches are mistaken because religions are like languages, but then advances 'religious are like languages' as a better alternative to the experiential-expressivist position. However, these matters pale into insignificance when compared with the claim that the experiential-expressivist position is entirely incoherent.

Although Lindbeck does identify this problem, Phillips puts it best, and most starkly, when he says:

No intelligible account can be given of the notion of an experience which is not only supposed to be contingently related to the language in which it is expressed, but which is supposed to remain consistent in character while the linguistic expressions of it vary enormously. No content can be given to this notion of experience because it is confused in its conception.²⁷⁰

Stated in this way, it becomes clear that two claims, both equally important to the experiential-expressivist position, cannot be consistently held together: the experience and the language used to describe it are simultaneously supposed to be very closely related, in that the language expresses the experience accurately, and yet detached enough that the language can be wholly substituted, in that other, very different, language expresses the same experience just as well. The problem here is about the identity conditions for the experience: under what conditions are we

²⁶⁷ In the Quaker context, I persist with the Quaker usage of the terms 'universalist' and 'universalism', as discussed in chapter 1 and not to be confused with the other theological use of the term 'universalism' as described in Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* (London: SCM, 2010).

²⁶⁸ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*: 32.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁷⁰ Phillips, *Faith After Foundationalism: Critiques and Alternatives*: 207.

justified in saying that the two experiences are the same? The only access which we have to the experience of another person is through the language they use to describe it, which is supposed to be very closely related to it. This, incidentally, is what makes religious experiences, dreams, pain, and so forth, different in nature from an object which we can both see and touch, for example. When the experiential-expressivist argues that the experiences are the same despite the very different language used to describe them, and at the same time holds that the language used to describe them does give us good access to them, it is no longer clear on what basis this claim of identity is made.

Any defence of the experiential-expressivist position would either have to let go of the requirement that religious language adequately expresses religious experience (thus putting religious language back into the realm of something entirely created by communities), or the claim that religious experience is all of a single or similar character. It would be logically possible, perhaps for a universalist religious believer, to relinquish the first of these in order to keep the second – to say that religious experience is probably all similar, but that language does not adequately express it at all. Some Quakers are indeed doing this, although others seem to want to retain both parts. Lindbeck prefers to reject the second, arguing that it follows from the diversity of language that there is a diversity of experience.²⁷¹ This would be in keeping with the Wittgensteinian concept of irreplaceability which I discussed in chapter 2. Further along these lines, we can reject the terms of the first, the assumption that religious experience sits at a distance from the words and practices of the one who experiences it, in favour perhaps of an understanding in which experience is shaped by the language and concepts which are available to the experiencer, and from those premises necessarily reject the second as well.

A full evaluation of the experiential-expressivist position would require attention to why one might want to adopt it in the first place. This is not

²⁷¹ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*: 40.

covered by Lindbeck (who is setting up the position as a largely fictional one, ascribed to 'liberals', which he can oppose) or by Phillips (whose concern is with Lindbeck and Wittgenstein) or by other postliberal theologians (who accept that Lindbeck has argued against it sufficiently). There are some theologians who have argued for somewhat related positions, however. Some fall broadly under the pluralist perspective, and I will discuss John Hick and others in detail in chapter 5; but one or two have embraced expressivism particularly, without a focus on pluralism or adding the experiential aspect, and I will deal with them briefly here.²⁷² In an essay titled 'The Simple Believer' R.M. Hare considers his own views on religion and also those of another 'expressivist', R.B. Braithwaite, and I will take this opportunity to consider them together since they take very similar positions.²⁷³ In particular, these are positions which focus on the use of religious language to express moral convictions and not, unlike the position which Lindbeck describes and opposes, the use of religious language to describe religious experience.

Hare identifies his position as set in a context where discussions of religion are taking place between three main parties, whom he describes as follows:

The first party consists of the orthodox Christians; the second of the downright no-nonsense atheists. The third party is made up of those courageous people who, like Professors Braithwaite and [Paul] van Buren, want to be Christians and yet to hold a faith which is defensible against the attacks of the philosophically well-armed atheist.²⁷⁴

²⁷² One person who is not included here is Wittgenstein. Despite the claims of Drury, Banner, Cook, and others, I agree with Brian Clack that it is "a fundamental error to believe that the *Remarks on Frazer* [on which such arguments are based] constitute an expressive theory of religion". Clack's argument centres on the fact that an expressive view would straightforwardly contradict the irreplaceability of religious pictures which I discussed in chapter 2. Brian R. Clack, *Wittgenstein, Frazer and Religion* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 1999). 36.

²⁷³ Hare, *Essays on Religion and Education*.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

Hare is himself a member of the third party. He notes that people in his position are often told – from both the first and the second positions – that they are no longer genuinely Christian. Hare concedes this, saying that the labelling of a set of beliefs is less significant than their content.²⁷⁵ What content, then, does this position have? It does not involve the supernatural, but can accept an idea of transcendence – although Hare notes that this is, "as Wittgenstein might have said, idling – doing no work".²⁷⁶ The position may have specific moral content (based, presumably, on the teachings of Jesus, although Hare does not go into this in detail), but also has a meta-moral claim, namely that "it is possible to find moral 'policies' ... which are not pointless".²⁷⁷

Mostly, however, it has a subjective focus – like the experiential-expressivist position which Lindbeck describes, this form of expressivism regards religious language as expressing an attitude or state of mind in the believer rather than a state of affairs in the world outside the mind. For Hare, as for Braithwaite, the core content of a religion is actually focussed on morality and in particular that there are "non-futile moral policies" – that the possibility of realising one's moral ideals does exist.²⁷⁸

However, the key point to note here is that Hare's position – whether or not it is useful, justifiable, or tenable – bears almost no resemblance to the position which Lindbeck describes under the name of 'experiential-expressivist'. It may be a form of expressivist position, but it completely lacks the focus on experience which is vital to the position Lindbeck is interested in critiquing. Since the 'experiential-expressivist' position described by Lindbeck corresponds much more closely to the Quaker assumptions I described in chapter 1 than does the 'expressivist' position

²⁷⁵ He suggests at the end of the essay that whether you label Braithwaite, for example, as a Christian or as not Christian will depend on your own stance, it being to the advantage of both sides to claim him for their own. *Ibid.*, 35-6.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

described by Hare, I will set Hare's position aside and focus on Lindbeck's version in the remainder of this thesis.

The core of the experiential-expressivist approach as outlined by Lindbeck is the combination of attention to religious experience and willingness to see the 'same' experience expressed in multiple different ways. Religious language might also, as Hare argues, express moral opinions, or, as in the cognitive-propositionalist view, make truth claims about the world, but the experiential-expressivist position focuses on religious experience. Lindbeck, however, finds this inadequate and instead proposes his own preferred understanding of doctrine, the cultural-linguistic model.

3: Lindbeck's proposal, the cultural-linguistic

The cultural-linguistic theory of doctrine is the 'theory' which results from Lindbeck's interpretation (undertaken at one remove or more) of Wittgenstein's later thought.²⁷⁹ It takes the form of a proposal about how we should think of religion, namely, that a religion is like a language. Although some theologians have taken this up as a useful way of talking about religion,²⁸⁰ and I will do so later in this thesis, Phillips argues that it is confused. He says that although Lindbeck speaks "as though he had introduced us to a conception of truth... which has an application independently of religion and independent of any form of life we could specify" this is based on a misunderstanding of the concept of a form of life, because "it is only within such contexts that the question of what it means to ask whether a statement is true or false can arise".²⁸¹ Faced with the "ragged" picture of many "different religious traditions and emphases

²⁷⁹ Filtered through the work of Lonergan and also Holmer. Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1971); Paul L. Holmer, *The Grammar of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

²⁸⁰ See, among others: Stanley Hauerwas, *Learning to Speak Christian* (London: SCM, 2011). & Marcus J. Borg, *Speaking Christian: Recovering the Lost Meaning of Christian Words* (London: SPCK, 2011).

²⁸¹ Phillips, *Faith After Foundationalism: Critiques and Alternatives*: 214.

present to us within Christianity, not to mention different religions", Lindbeck is – Phillips says – right to note that many disagreements are grammatical but wrong to conclude that there is still a common Christian framework which can address these questions.²⁸²

Lindbeck is actually close to admitting this point when he writes about the ways in which many Christians today do not speak Christian fluently; but nevertheless he goes on to assume that a 'fluent elite' can be identified whose "agreement in doctrinal matters may not improperly be called infallible".²⁸³ Another argument against this point from Phillips would be to suggest that he has too liberal a view of the process of change in natural languages – there are cases in which, even if the majority accepts a new usage, it would have been more useful, in the sense that we preserve the ability to make a particular kind of distinction, to retain an older or more technical usage. It might be useful to save the term 'literally' for things which are in fact the case, for example, rather than applying it to metaphors which the speaker wishes to emphasise.

The main problem which Phillips identifies in Lindbeck's text is a tendency to slip from the idea that within a religious group, the competent speakers determine what is acceptable doctrine in the sense that it accords with previous rules and practices (even where these rules are implicit), and the idea that competent speakers within a religion can determine which doctrines are correct and therefore what is true. The issue about truth is part of Lindbeck's ongoing conceptual confusion, which I discussed in part 1 of this chapter. This 'confusion' which Phillips finds is what allows Jeffrey Hensley to slide in between parts of Lindbeck's text and produce a realist reading of the cultural-linguistic model.²⁸⁴ Most people, both realists (who accept the reality of God independent of the human mind) and anti-realists

²⁸² Ibid., 221.

²⁸³ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*: 100.

²⁸⁴ Hensley, "Are Postliberals Necessarily Antirealists? Reexamining the Metaphysics of Lindbeck's Postliberal Theology." C.C. Pecknold is doing something similar. Pecknold, *Transforming Postliberal Theology: George Lindbeck, Pragmatism and Scripture*.

(who do not), read Lindbeck as an anti-realist – and Hensley cites a number of them.²⁸⁵ He then proceeds to claim loose language in one place and careful phrasing in another, to give a reading of Lindbeck which allows Christians to make truth claims in first-order statements, only some religious remarks having been relegated to second-order or grammatical claims. I think that, even taking into account Hensley's use of Putnam's work to demonstrate that this is a possible position, this is to miss the point about religion as an idiom – all religious remarks, even those which are "catechetical or doxological",²⁸⁶ and regardless of the intentions of the speaker – are to be understood as having grammatical content. As Hensley says, Lindbeck's

...analysis gets complicated by the frequent simultaneous use of the same sentence as both a first-order truth claim and a second-order rule for forming appropriate Christian discourse.²⁸⁷

Hensley fights hard to maintain this distinction despite Lindbeck's ambiguities (because his claim of Lindbeck's metaphysical neutrality depends on it), and he is right to do so because Lindbeck requires the first-order/second-order distinction in order to answer Phillips' critique. The metaphysical claims, whatever they are, would be made in the first-order speech – as I said above, Quakers make very few of these, other churches more – and the doctrinal claims are second-order and hence, in Wittgenstein's sense, grammatical. The slide which Phillips detects between one and the other may be a confusion caused by the fact that some remarks, depending on their context, may be first-order, second-order, and even both at once. For example, 'Christ is Lord' is both a first-order claim about a state of affairs and a second-order claim about doctrine; any claim which contradicted this would be hard to reconcile into a Christian world-view and therefore likely to be deemed ungrammatical for use in Christian contexts.

²⁸⁵ For example, Donald Bloesch and Alister McGrath.

²⁸⁶ Hensley, "Are Postliberals Necessarily Antirealists? Reexamining the Metaphysics of Lindbeck's Postliberal Theology," 78.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

In a review of Phillips' book, Kathryn Tanner defends Lindbeck from the claim that he is an uncomplicated anti-realist, writing that, arguing that although Phillips characterises Lindbeck as " simply den[ying] that religious believers make truth claims", Lindbeck actually "says that doctrines should not be understood as truth claims but as rules for speech when they are performing a doctrinal function".²⁸⁸ She concludes:

When a text becomes this nonsensical and self-contradictory, shouldn't the interpreter start again?²⁸⁹

Overall, Tanner thinks that Lindbeck does leave room for realism – although I note that leaving room for is not at all the same as endorsing. Phillips regards this space left for realism as a flaw, and particularly as a diversion from the best, Wittgensteinian, line of thought, but Tanner sees no reason to agree that it is a problem. While it is true that Phillips might have done well to start again with Lindbeck's text, it also seems to be the case that Lindbeck's text is inexplicit and confusing on some of these points. As Hensley demonstrates, many readers assume that Lindbeck will follow Wittgenstein (or rather, the path they assume that Wittgenstein took) into anti-realism, and do not look for realism in his work.

Bruce Marshall, in exploring the metaphor of 'scripture absorbing the world', addresses the issue of whether this is a flight from the question of truth.²⁹⁰ He calls Lindbeck's characterisation of truth "modestly realist" (broadly in agreement with Tanner), and identifies two criteria for truth: categorical adequacy and intra-systemic coherence.²⁹¹ Marshall also considers objections to Lindbeck's scheme, all variations on the charge of fideism. He puts this charge in general terms as the suspicion that "the

²⁸⁸ Kathryn Tanner, "Review of Faith After Foundationalism by D. Z. Phillips," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59, no. 4 (1991): 858.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Bruce D. Marshall, "Absorbing the World: Christianity and the Universe of Truths," in *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*, ed. Bruce D. Marshall (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

²⁹¹ Ibid., 71.

project of absorbing the world into the biblical text... cannot possibly take external truth claims (especially apparently conflicting ones) with sufficient seriousness".²⁹² Those who worry that Lindbeck is insufficiently Wittgensteinian should find this reassuring, as fideism is a very Wittgensteinian thing of which to be accused.²⁹³ Furthermore, because of this more general problem of fideism, projects other than Lindbeck's can stand accused of these three kinds of fideism.

The first form of fideism which Marshall considers is isolationism. This is the accusation that:

The project of "absorbing the world" by interpreting and assessing alien truth claims in terms of internally Christian criteria, and maintaining that the project is justified when it succeeds by its own standards, seems to be wilful theological isolationism of the worst kind. It seems to imply a decision to rest content with the internal discourse of the Christian community and a correlative refusal to engage, much less take seriously, external and potentially threatening truth claims.²⁹⁴

Marshall argues that this objection misses the point of the 'absorb the world' metaphor, because any such absorption must involve "open-ended engagement with whatever truth claims are being made in the times and places in which the Christian community exists".²⁹⁵ This is not a project which "shuns the external and alien" but rather the opposite, one which "embodies an imperative... to internalize everything".²⁹⁶

The next objection takes up the hint given in the defence against the last one, and argues that the problem is not isolationism but imperialism, or in Marshall's words that the problem is:

²⁹² Ibid., 83.

²⁹³ Phillips, *Faith After Foundationalism: Critiques and Alternatives*: 236.

²⁹⁴ Marshall, "Absorbing the World: Christianity and the Universe of Truths," 84.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 85.

... not that [the postliberal account] ignores non-Christian truth claims, but rather that it consistently gives primacy to Christian standards in assessing those claims. Coherence with the scripturally and doctrinally normed web of Christian belief might be a partial test Christians would rightly want to employ in assessing truth claims, but, so the argument might go, primacy or at least parity must be granted to some external standards of truth; it is fideistic to subordinate all other standards of truth to Christian ones.²⁹⁷

However, it is not clear what to do about this, in the sense that it is not clear which, if any, other sets of criteria should be given primacy. In particular, to take "criteria which are themselves internal to some other comprehensive cultural-linguistic system or world-view, religious or otherwise" as primary would be to beg the question, since this would surely stand in the same danger of imperialism by, or fideism to, a different system.²⁹⁸ Striving for generality of criteria – either something external or internal to all – seems likely to fall into the trap of not treating each individual system "with real seriousness".²⁹⁹ The only real alternative for this view is to take a foundationalist perspective, arguing that all reasonable beliefs are based upon some which are primitive or foundational – those which are justified by "the world itself".³⁰⁰ This foundationalist perspective is the view taken by much of traditional Western philosophy, but (as can be seen from the title of Phillips' book, *Faith After Foundationalism*) it has, for various reasons, fallen out of favour among some philosophers and many theologians. Marshall suggests, for example, that one of the issues has been a growing realisation that we cannot really access 'objective' facts about the world in the way that the foundationalist assumes that we can, because we cannot get outside our own bodies, experience, and language to make those judgements.³⁰¹ If this is so (and it has been widely accepted in theology that it is), then it is "difficult to characterize plausibly" the criteria by which

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 85-6.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 86.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 87.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 88.

Christian beliefs should be judged without either side acting imperialistically.³⁰²

There is one final form which fideism could take, however. Marshall suggests that the "charge of imperialism could... be made in a different way", in which the problem would be seen to lie not in the refusal of the theological project to "be bound by shared criteria" but in the denial that there are any shared criteria.

If we insist on repairing to established internal criteria in conversation with those who make alien truth claims... we will inevitable fail to take those claims with sufficient seriousness. Pressed by alien claims which seem not to fit with our established web of Christian belief, we will be inclined simply to reject those claims and so bring the conversation to a premature close.³⁰³

This could be characterised as a form of imperialism which becomes isolationism on the eve of battle. We cannot hold to the strong sense of this position, which would demand that we be prepared to doubt all our beliefs at the outset of every conversation, but it can be put in a weaker way which is more plausible.³⁰⁴ This requires that Christians:

...be prepared for the possibility that encounters with alien belief systems may give them good reasons to give up or revise at least some of their beliefs, even if there is no external standard for deciding when this should happen or which beliefs should be changed.³⁰⁵

This openness to change, Marshall argues, can be taken alongside ascribing "justificatory primacy to the plain sense of Scripture" to "dispel this last whiff of fideism" from the Christian project of absorbing the world into the

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 89. Marshall cites Wittgenstein "to the effect that doubt is logically possible only against a background of beliefs held true".

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 90.

text.³⁰⁶ This defence of Lindbeck's position, and in particular Marshall's final move which emphasises the ongoing flexibility of Christian doctrine gives a fuller picture of the way that doctrines work as grammatical statements. It is a move which is very much in keeping with the cultural-linguistic model, in which grammatical changes are inevitable if unpredictable. In considering pluralism and multiple religious belonging in chapters 5 and 6 I will take into account the way that particular contextual pressures, sometimes external to a religious tradition, can support or encourage change; although I do not conduct a full historical analysis, certain trends and directions of change will be visible.

In a smaller but interesting point, Phillips asks whether the metaphor of religion as language could have been applied at the beginning of Christianity, when the Christians were only "a sect".³⁰⁷ He concludes – almost before he has stated the problem – that Christians would have been ruled to be out of line with the accepted doctrine and therefore mistaken. However, I think that this is a premature conclusion; Lindbeck can argue that the fluent group needs to be within a single religious tradition. The new religion, Christianity, may be small but it has an internal group of competent speakers – just as the larger Jewish and Pagan groups around them have their competent speakers. This solution brings new problems, of course, such as how we draw those boundaries (Phillips is correct if the new 'religion' is judged to be within the older religion), but those can be solved in turn. In any case, the line between a dialect and a different language is rarely sharp, so groups within groups do not automatically scupper the analogy between religion and language.

A bigger problem with this proposal is that it does, as indicated, rely on our ability to identify a group who are all speaking, or trying to speak, the same religion. In the modern Western situation, where many religions may be on

³⁰⁶ Ibid. He goes on to explore in some detail how Christians can revise their understanding of the plain sense of the text in order to "'adapt' plausible external beliefs" (97), but this does not seem so relevant here.

³⁰⁷ Phillips, *Faith After Foundationalism: Critiques and Alternatives*: 221.

offer to an individual and an increasing number of people have been members of more than one religious group (either serially or concurrently; I will return to the issue of multiple religious belonging in much greater depth in chapter 6), it will not be easy to establish this separation. It cannot, for one thing, be established by considering the language used, at least at a surface level, since the technical terms in a religious vocabulary may be drawn from ordinary language, or at least have a wide circulation in the language within which the religious idea is being expressed: not only the words used in metaphorical phrases ('bread of life') but also specific words ('angel', 'altar', and even 'God') are widely used in secular contexts.

However, in practice we find that groups do persist, both identifying themselves and being identified by outsiders, and the voluntary sharing of space and labels tells us much about them. Kathryn Tanner has also addressed this problem; we encountered her review of Phillips above, but I now turn to her wider project, which focuses on the cultural part of the cultural-linguistic model. She explores the idea of religions as analogous to cultures thoroughly in her book *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*. There, she describes some of the problematic assumptions found in Lindbeck's work, for example that "Christians have their own language, their own ways of doing, understanding, and feeling; people who are not Christian have some other," and that:

... one does not work from what one already knows in the process of becoming a Christian – say, by translating a new Christian language into the language one already uses,

and goes on to say that such a:

... description ... of the postliberal account of Christian identity is nonetheless a caricature in that followers of George Lindbeck gladly admit that a Christian way of life is influenced by outside cultures, mixed up with and modified by them.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁸ Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997). 104-5. Lindbeck himself would probably admit this too.

She argues, though, that this caricature "remains a good likeness... because postliberals interpret the mixed character of Christian discourse and the composite nature of a Christian outlook in ways that again strongly suggest the self-contained and self-originating character of Christian identity".³⁰⁹ Given the facts mentioned above, for example, about the sharing of vocabulary between Christian and secular speech, Tanner says that postliberals would argue that "vocabulary or conceptuality of doctrines may be so influenced [by outside forces] but not the basic rules by which they abide".³¹⁰

Rather than succumbing to the effects of outside forces, the basic rules of doctrines are governed, in the cultural-linguistic model, by the 'fluent elite' or community of competent speakers whom Lindbeck argues have the skills and should be given the authority to determine whether a new term or idea is grammatically acceptable, i.e. whether it continues to fulfil the 'basic rules' which make the religion what it is. If applied to Quakerism, then, this would mean that vocabulary – words and phrases – and also perhaps concepts could come in from other religious or secular traditions, but once in use within a Quaker language-game, they would need to be used in ways which continue to respect the underlying rules of that game. In chapter 4, I will be concerned with both the sources of particular uses of words and with the ways in which they are made to follow the implicit rules of Quaker speech.

Importance of the three models

The availability of these three models or modes of thinking, the cognitive-propositionalist, the experiential-expressivist and the cultural-linguistic, is important because if the cultural-linguistic view is correct and our socially prevailing ways of discussing religious experience shape those very

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 105.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

experiences, then people for whom the experiential-expressivist description of religion is culturally dominant will tend to have experiences which fit that model and appear to support the universalist theory. On this reading of the cultural-linguistic model, it absorbs both of the others into itself, making room for them as cultural-linguistic constructs of particular contexts. This can sometimes be seen in action, as people bring their understandings of the world to the situations in which they find themselves. I have in mind an occasion when a group of Quakers, of whom I was one, went to visit a mosque.³¹¹ Arriving at one of the times of Islamic prayer, we were invited to sit in silence at the west side of the room while our Muslim hosts prayed. Perhaps triggered to a worshipful mode of thought by the invitation to silence as well as by the worshippers we were watching, several Friends reported afterwards that they had felt a strong sense of '**gathering**' in the room and expressed an understanding that both groups had been, in some way, doing the same thing. This kind of experience is not uncommon among Friends (and, as John Woolman's much-quoted experience, discussed in chapter 1, suggests, has a long history), but the cultural-linguistic view challenges us to ask: is it created by a universalist theology which assumes that this is what is happening whether it can be sensed or not?

As we consider this question, it is worth noting that any answer will have a political dimension. Kwok Pui-Lan brings this out in her brief discussion of Lindbeck, when she says that "some of his rhetoric comes close to a defence of American foreign policy".³¹² In particular, the way in which Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic view of religion stresses the differences and not the similarities between groups "reinforces the myth of 'clash of civilisations' and fosters a narrowly constructed and tightly bound view of religious identity".³¹³ With this political slant in mind, we can see why the experiential-expressivist view has been associated with liberal thought more

³¹¹ Wednesday 29th July, 2009, a visit to Bradford from Yearly Meeting Gathering in York.

³¹² Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2005). 200.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

generally.³¹⁴ Of course, isolationism is also a possible outcome of the propositionalist view, in which doctrines are taken as statements about metaphysical reality, so that "if a doctrine is once true, it is always true, and if it is once false, it is always false" – indeed, it is a charge which Lindbeck himself levels at this view, and claims that his cultural-linguistic perspective can overcome this.³¹⁵

In contrast to the experiential-expressivist view which encompasses the possibility of similarity disguised by different language, Lindbeck's solution to the problem focuses on the way in which rules can be at odds with one another but correctly applied in different circumstances. His example to illustrate this is the pair of rules of the road, 'Drive on the right' and 'Drive on the left'. These rules are completely contrary, and yet also both correct (one in the US and one in the UK, among other places). Lindbeck says that along these lines, "oppositions between rules can in some cases be resolved, not by altering one or both of them, but by specifying when or where they apply".³¹⁶ I am not sure that this entirely answers the accusation, since religions are not countries (in fact, they seem to be making claims over the same 'spaces' in the lives of potential believers), and doctrines are not straightforwardly or only rules for behaviour. When do 'Christian rules' apply? Only in church? Only in the lives of Christians? Only to Christian beliefs or claims?

Lindbeck would further answer the charge of isolationism and increasing tension between religions by referring to his original aims in advocating the cultural-linguistic position, one of which is to make ecumenism (and perhaps also, by implication, interfaith work) easier, by providing a view of doctrine in which neither head-to-head clashes nor the too-easy assumption of sameness are allowed to derail the discussion. Within the religion as language metaphor, different religions, like different languages, simply have

³¹⁴ I do not know whether liberalism or experiential-expressivism occurred first among Quakers, but it is certainly the case that both are now common there.

³¹⁵ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*: 16.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

different grammars and patterns of expression; each one forms a context within which things can be right or wrong, but they cannot usefully be judged by the standards of another context. We cannot judge Islamic remarks by Christian standards any more than we can judge the grammar of an English sentence using Latin rules – despite the best efforts of certain grammarians.

In summary, I have argued in this chapter that Lindbeck's theory of doctrine offers some useful insights for understanding the Quaker community. Although his first-order/second-order distinction between categories of speech does not stand up to use within the Quaker context, the religion as language metaphor has potential to be useful and so does the concept of the 'fluent elite'. In the next chapter, I will apply these ideas, and those derived from Wittgenstein in the previous chapter, to three real examples of Quaker speech to show how they are helpful in advancing our understanding of the Quaker comments and also to consider whether they should be refined further in the light of such use.

Chapter 4: Worked Examples 1, or, Using the Tools

Let's get together and talk about our gods sometime/ you show me yours, I'll show you mine/ hey we're both consenting adults so any god is fine/ Christian, Buddhist, Hindu or Jew,/ Muslim or New Age soft shoe/ My God, my God, my God,/ Talking 'bout myself.³¹⁷

Taking the tools established in chapters 2 and 3 – our Wittgensteinian understanding of how meaning is created by the use of words and phrases in particular contexts, the necessity of community understanding and agreement in use of specific terms, and the irreplaceability of certain religious 'pictures' or ways of speaking, together with Lindbeck's concepts of religion-as-language and the 'fluent elite' – this chapter returns to some of the examples of Quaker multi-theology remarks which were initially described as a group in chapter 1. (Further examples will be considered, in the light of issues emerging from this discussion, in chapter 7.) In order to have a realistic picture of the ways in which language is used, we need to turn to real examples and consider them in some detail, striving to understand the context and connotations which they carry, the forms of life which inform them. Although this is a straightforward consequence of the Wittgensteinian view of language and philosophy, the project has not been carried out in this empirically grounded way before, and so this chapter is in effect an experiment to see whether the method works when used in this way. If it does, it should help us to uncover the grammar, or underlying rules, which the community is using when they speak in particular ways.

Through this method, this chapter will begin to explore the reasons why multi-theology remarks are popular and widespread within contemporary British Quakerism, leading into a consideration in the following chapters of some of the principles which underlie these ways of speaking. This chapter focusses on three examples, all from mainstream Quaker material which is recent – created and published between 1987 and 2009. The first is the work of a committee of Britain Yearly Meeting; the second was written for a

³¹⁷ 'My God', Doug Gwyn, *Songs of Faith and Frenzy*, (Pendle Hill: The Brothers Doug, 1999).

small magazine in the USA but has been anthologised by Britain Yearly Meeting itself; and the third is from a workshop participant, anonymised and included in an edited collection by The Kindlers.³¹⁸ These three examples provide something of a cross-section of the types of material produced fairly centrally by Quakers in Britain, and allows us to access to both works perhaps somewhat moderated by their formation within group structures, and a work which represents the diversity (and perhaps the extremes) of Quaker thought. From these pointers, I hope to be able to indicate some of the ways in which Quaker speech is affected by that of other speech-communities, and be ready to look in chapters 5 and 6 to some of the relevant outside influences.

At the end of the chapter, I consider these examples as a group, and look at how they are interwoven with the cultural context which produced them. As we saw in chapter 2, a language-game takes place within a form of life, and they shape each other. Not only will understanding the form of life help us to comprehend the language-game, but a close study of the rules of the language-game may illuminate some aspects of the form of life within which it is played. I also note here again the collapse of the first-order/second-order distinction which was drawn by some writing about postliberal theology. The examples we will consider are neither one nor the other, not "first-order statement[s] about objective facts... or subjective feelings" nor "second-order directives[s] guiding and informing" Quaker speech.³¹⁹

³¹⁸ Committee on Eldership and Oversight, *Quality and Depth of Worship and Ministry*; Rose Ketterer, "G-d/ess' web," *Friendly Woman* 1987; Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith and Practice; Journeying the Heartlands: exploring spiritual practices of Quaker worship*. (London: The Kindlers, 2009).

³¹⁹ James Fodor, "Postliberal Theology," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918*, ed. David F. Ford and Rachel Muers (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

Example 1: *Quality and Depth of Worship and Ministry*

Quality and Depth of Worship and Ministry is a pamphlet, volume 5 of the "Eldership and Oversight handbook series", published in 2001 by Quaker Books, who are based at **Friends House**, London. It is copyright the Committee on Eldership and Oversight, who compiled the text, drawing mainly, as their introduction tells us, on "a distillation of experience and reflection offered... by meetings around the country in the spring of 1998".³²⁰ This material was taken and "formed the basis of the gathering for those responsible for eldership and oversight at Yearly Meeting that year".³²¹ Friends would undoubtedly reject the term 'fluent elite' if used to describe the committee or those who contributed to the body of "experience and reflection";³²² however, the distillation process, and perhaps also the committee appointment process, offers something similar to the benefits of a 'fluent elite' as described by Lindbeck. In particular, it means that the text both draws on the actual speech of Friends today, and has been considered and accepted by a group who specifically intended to edit it.

The resulting text is brief (with a total of 44 pages), and composed mainly of questions. Everything in the main text ends with a question mark, except in chapter 1: Introduction, and the Resources section at the end. For example, chapter 14, 'Conclusion', consists of five questions, beginning with "Have you a growing awareness of your individual responsibility for sustaining the quality and depth of worship and ministry?"³²³ Although perhaps still unusual, this follows something of the form of the familiar Quaker *Advices and Queries*, and so is not a surprising format for a Quaker text of this kind.³²⁴ It is explained in the Introduction that the Committee writing it hopes that it will "bring into the open questions which we need to

³²⁰ Committee on Eldership and Oversight, *Quality and Depth of Worship and Ministry*: 1.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid., 36.

³²⁴ Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith and Practice*: 1.01. This section is also published as a separate pamphlet, called *Advices and Queries*.

address together"³²⁵ – there is no attempt to provide answers (except the kind which are hidden within the questions, of which there are plenty), but rather the aim is to raise issues which might otherwise not be discussed.

It is mainly intended for use by those who have been appointed by their Meetings to serve for a time as Elders and **Overseers**, but also for other Friends who are interested in the topic, and there is a suggestion at the end of the book that it might be used for study groups within Meetings. These particular forms of life produce a need for particular kinds of material: a Quaker study group, for example, wants questions about spiritual matters to consider but usually assumes that the participants will bring any relevant answers, so even if some answers are suggested they will remain open to discussion – not least because among Quakers there is generally an acceptance that participants may themselves have a range of different answers. It is also worth noting at this point that all of the intended audiences know something of Friends already, and are mostly committed Quakers. This is an internal text which can therefore rely on the shared assumptions of Friends, some of which I began to identify in chapter 1.

Particularly interesting in terms of Quaker religious language is chapter 2: Worship.³²⁶ It is split into two sections, 2a: "What is worship?" and 2b: "Preparation for meeting for worship". Each contains a list of questions, mostly short, but some with suggested answers – in 2b, the second question is "Do you prepare yourself specifically for meeting for worship?" and is followed by a list of possible kinds of preparation, grouped into six bullet points including "in regular times of quiet withdrawal", and "in music, poetry, painting, sculpture". The final one, obviously intended to keep the question relatively open, is "in other ways".³²⁷ This context helps us to understand the mode in which the first question in the booklet, at the beginning of 2a, is asked.

³²⁵ Committee on Eldership and Oversight, *Quality and Depth of Worship and Ministry*: 2.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, chapter 2.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

Page 3 of the booklet, immediately after the introduction, reads as follows:

2. Worship

2a. What is worship?

What do you call that which we are seeking to worship?

The ground of our being,
 the ultimate reality,
 the meaning,
 the father,
 the mother,
 the everlasting arms,
 the spirit,
 God...

In what ways does our communal worship nourish and strengthen you?

In what ways does it illuminate the true self in the depths of our being?

In what ways does it sustain our service to each other?

In what ways does the spirit of worship underpin all that you do?

In what ways do you enrich your spiritual life?

There is love at the heart of worship:

Is this your experience?

How do you share it?³²⁸

At the bottom of the page there is a small round picture, a detail from G. E. Butler's painting, 'For the faith of their fathers', showing a young woman holding a baby and with her arm around another child.³²⁹ It is not immediately clear why this particular image has been selected – unlike on p34, where it appears again under a set of questions headed "Supporting the provision for children and young people in meeting". Although the link to children is obvious, the link to worship is not, and it may have been an arbitrary choice for this page.

I want to focus, as I did when discussing this quotation before, on the first question, "What do you call that which we are seeking to worship?". The

³²⁸ Ibid., 3.

³²⁹ Painted in 1682, showing young people holding a Meeting for Worship when their parents were imprisoned. The whole image is reproduced in the front matter of the booklet, with the permission of the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.

comparison with the list of suggested answers provided on the next question suggests that this list of ways of naming God is intended as a scattering of prompts and reminders of the possibilities, rather than all to be accepted by one individual. The ellipsis at the end seems to be serving a similar function to the words "in other ways" – making it clear that the list is incomplete and that Friends are free to add to it as they wish. Because the eight items which are on the list are disparate, there is a high level of indeterminacy about what else might be appropriately added. However, the inclusion of exercises like this one in a variety of resources for use in groups – this book, the *Becoming Friends Companions Handbook* discussed in chapter 1, and other sources – suggests that if one does in fact ask Friends to do this, they will have personal favourites to add and will not be surprised by the suggestions that other Friends make. This widespread understanding that such exercises are possible seems to be evidence that there are some underlying rules, or at least guidelines, which Friends follow when they engage in this list-making language-game, even if they themselves would deny that. This lends support, too, to the more general idea that the language-game view of this activity, in which we would expect there to be such rules, is an appropriate way of looking at this situation.

The list itself bears closer examination. The terms as written have come from a wide range of backgrounds and have complex connotations: some seem to refer to theological work, some to traditional Christian language, and some are not traditional. Given the method described in the pamphlet's introduction, it seems most likely that all have been gathered from suggestions by Friends, though there is an editorial hand at work in their selection and arrangement.³³⁰ In some cases – especially the pairing of 'the father' and 'the mother' – the order of terms seems to be significant, while in other parts of the list there seems to be little logical connection between one item and the next. By turning our attention to the details of their previous uses, we can uncover more of what they have meant in various contexts –

³³⁰ It is a shame for this purpose that we cannot access the items which were rejected from this list.

with a special interest in those contexts with which Quakers are likely to be familiar, and hence with the places where they might have learned to use these phrases.

'The ground of our being' is a phrase most closely associated with the mystic Eckhart and the theologian Paul Tillich. Some Friends may have read these authors directly, but it is more likely that they have encountered them through other sources. For example, Tillich's work was used – or perhaps "bowdlerized"³³¹ – by John Robinson in *Honest to God*, a work which was widely read by liberal Christians, including Quakers.³³² It was discussed in *The Friend* at the time of its publication – in an editorial on April 5th, 1963, Bernard Hall Canter notes that quotes from Robinson's book have "a peculiarly Quaker ring",³³³ although Friends also had other issues on their minds at the time; later in the month, a correspondent compares Quaker struggles over *Towards a Quaker View of Sex*, a pamphlet dealing with homo- and heterosexuality, with Anglican struggles over *Honest to God*.³³⁴ Views and terms found in Robinson's book have filtered into Quaker writing, perhaps not surprisingly since it created much debate in the British national media and in some ways set the theological agenda for many people at the time. More recent developments in this very public strand of liberal theology – especially in the work of Don Cupitt and John Hick, or even more recently Karen Armstrong – have continued to be influenced by Robinson and the sources on which he drew, and will be discussed in detail in chapter 5. For my purpose here, it is sufficient to note that the term 'the ground of our being' is most likely to have reached a Quaker audience through the work of John Robinson or another associated theologian.

³³¹ Russell Re Manning, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), xv.

³³² John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (London: SCM, 1963).

³³³ Bernard Hall Canter, "A Second Look at "Honest to God"," *The Friend*, April 5th 1963, 387.

³³⁴ Richard H. White, "Quakers Becoming Conservative?," *The Friend*, April 26th 1963, 494; *Towards a Quaker View of Sex*, (London: Friends Home Service, 1963), <http://leavesofgrass.org/vos/frontcover.html>. (accessed 11th August 2014.)

'The ultimate reality' has been used to mean many things. It has been used in a couple of recent Quaker publications,³³⁵ but generally speaking, it is probably most associated with the philosophies of Eastern religions, especially Buddhism. In much teaching of Buddhism in the West, 'ultimate reality' is contrasted with 'everyday reality', with the latter considered to be an illusion.³³⁶ It is not immediately obvious how this would make it a suitable candidate for a list of things which we might be seeking to worship, although perhaps if 'worship' is seen as an attempt to 'get in touch with' something it would make more sense. That said, I also note that Christian theologians have used the phrase. Paul Tillich's book *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality* treats 'the search for ultimate reality' as a synonym for the philosophical project, which Tillich characterises as always in the end an ontological search.³³⁷ Having laid out reasons for thinking that Biblical religion and philosophy/ontology are incompatible, in the end he argues that we do in fact need both as part of our overall theological project, concluding in the end that God must be the ultimate reality. In this context, then, the use of 'ultimate reality' – like Tillich's phrase 'ground of being' – as a synonym for God is acceptable to the community. In another context, John Hick equates 'ultimate reality' with the Arabic term 'al-Haqq' – usually translated 'truth' or 'reality' and one of the names of God in the Qu'ran – to name that to which all religions respond, albeit in ways heavily conditioned by their surrounding cultures.³³⁸ Whether Hick's use of these terms as synonyms is justified is more debateable, but it is the case that he uses them in this way. With these previous uses in mind, it is clear that 'the ground of

³³⁵ For example, Margaret S Gibbins uses it in the piece which appears as Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith and Practice*: 21.15.

³³⁶ For example, in the book by a founder member of the Western Buddhist Order, Sangharakshita, *Wisdom Beyond Words: The Buddhist Vision of Ultimate Reality* (Birmingham: Windhorse Publications, 2000).

³³⁷ Paul Tillich, *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality* (London: James Nisbet & Co., Ltd., 1955).

³³⁸ John Hick, *A Interpretation of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). 11.

our being' and 'the ultimate reality' do form a kind of pair – both terms which could be found in the kind of liberal Christian theology which Quakers are most likely to read.³³⁹ They are also both relatively abstract and relatively new coinages. Together with the next term, 'the meaning', they might be seen as the 'philosophical' entries in this list.

'The meaning' is too vague a phrase to track down to particular sources in the way in which one might wish to in an exercise of this kind. When a Friend provides it as the answer to a question like 'What do you call that which we are seeking to worship?', it seems to me that they might actually be answering a question which is very similar and related but in theological terms significantly different. That question might be 'What do you call that which we are seeking in worship?' Many people do find meaning (for their lives, for events in the world, and so forth) arising from the practice of waiting worship, and in the situation of a workshop or discussion group there can be a blurring between that which is found in or through the worship, and that which is worshipped. In any case, the idea that religion or belief in God has to do with finding meaning in life is a familiar one, and at one time Wittgenstein went so far as to equate the two, saying, "To believe in God means to see that life has a meaning".³⁴⁰

'The father' is a familiar image for God in Christianity – "Our Father, who art in Heaven". Although it may be in use in other contexts as well, it is undoubtedly most familiar to British Quakers as a term arising from the Christian tradition. Far from making it a safe choice, however, this means that it is one of the most contested terms, as the next item in the list indicates. 'Father' has also sometimes been regarded as a name for God,

³³⁹ Which are, for example, sold in the Quaker bookshops at Friends House and Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, kept in the libraries of Quaker Meetings, and discussed if Quakers are asked about their theologies.

³⁴⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-1916*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961). 74e. See also Clack, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Religion*: 40-41. I note that this is much earlier in Wittgenstein's life than the philosophy I have been using so far in this thesis.

although it is arguable that it is actually either a title or a metaphorical description.³⁴¹ Without any other clues in this context, we cannot know which of these roles it takes in this Quaker language-game. In any case, it produces a certain picture of how God is, drawing in part on our experience of ordinary fathers;³⁴² to many Christians, this would be an irreplaceable picture, both because of its Biblical basis and because of the simplicity, power, and emotive connotations which it carries. Even to those who have left Christianity, terms learned in childhood often retain a certain power – even for those who disagree with them for political reasons. This would help to explain the inclusion of such a term in a list like this one, where it is powerful but optional, significant but in need of immediate balancing.

'The mother' is perhaps also an obvious image for a loving God; it has been used by various Christians, including John Paul II, although it is not nearly as widely used in liturgy as 'father'. Its inclusion suggests that the Friends who contributed to the booklet are aware of discomfort around the term 'father', which are often rooted in feminist thought, and the editorial decision to place it just after 'father' suggests a desire to balance the two terms – perhaps they often came up together in Friends' responses.

'The everlasting arms' is not as widely used a term for God – compared with 'father' – and many of the Friends who read this booklet will not recognise it as a Biblical quotation, although perhaps those who suggested it and included it in the list did recognise it as such. It is from Deuteronomy 33:27,

³⁴¹ In any specific case, I would want to settle this argument by looking at the specific context and use of the word; descriptions are used differently to titles (compare 'young Master Jones' with 'master of the house'). In this case, unfortunately, there are no useful clues.

³⁴² I note that Janet Martin Soskice has argued convincingly that the God the Father of traditional Christian thought is no ordinary father, since this God is not single-sexed and both begets and gives birth to the Son, who exists alongside God in a non-hierarchical relationship. Unfortunately, this work is not well known among Friends and seems unlikely to have influenced their choice of words. Janet Martin Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). chapter 4 and especially p82.

which in the King James Version reads: "The eternal God *is thy* refuge, and underneath *are* the everlasting arms".³⁴³ The phrase has been used before in Quaker contexts – it appears, for example, in John Barclay's 1835 *Memoirs of the Rise, Progress, and Persecutions of the people called Quakers in the North of Scotland*,³⁴⁴ and Martin Davie notes that reference to this metaphor made hymns like 'Safe in the Arms of Jesus' acceptable to Friends, if Joyce Neill's 1986 pamphlet *Credo* is to be believed.³⁴⁵

'The spirit', although somewhat Christian in reference, has here lost much of its traditional Christian connotation as it moves from 'the Holy Spirit' to 'the spirit' – the loss of the capital letter is in keeping with the other phrases in the list, and may be no more than stylistic, but also seems to change the connotations which a reader brings to the word. 'Spirit' is a term commonly used among Friends, occurring 23 times in *Quaker Faith and Practice* (compared with 55 for 'light' and 13 for 'Christ').³⁴⁶

Finally, the list closes with "God...". The ellipsis invites us to assume that the list could continue, but nevertheless this is a striking place for an apparently simple but much debated term.

Example 2: Rose Ketterer, quoted in *Quaker Faith and Practice*

³⁴³ I have chosen to quote the King James Version here as it is widely read and familiar. Other translations provide very similar renderings of this half-verse, almost all including the phrase "everlasting arms", so that it could have come from any of the most common translations.

³⁴⁴ John Barclay, *Memoirs of the Rise, Progress, and Persecutions of the people called Quakers in the North of Scotland* (Philadelphia: Nathan Kite, 1835). 154.

³⁴⁵ Joyce Neill, *Credo* (London: Quaker Home Service, 1986). 13; Davie, *British Quaker Theology Since 1895*: 236. How widely Neill's work was actually accepted by Friends is somewhat in doubt; Davie notes that she was seeking to "re-express traditional Christian ideas so as to make them acceptable to those who have rejected fundamentalism".

³⁴⁶ Figures produced by searching the online version at 18th October 2013. Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith and Practice*. <http://qfp.quakerweb.org.uk/qfpmain.html>.

The next example was originally written by an American Quaker, Rose Ketterer, in an article for a magazine called *Friendly woman*.³⁴⁷ This was "a quarterly journal focusing on Quaker women's concerns and experiences", containing "essays, fiction, poetry, commentary, and art".³⁴⁸ The way in which this extract has been accepted and republished by Britain Yearly Meeting both represents the depth of cross-Atlantic contact and allows us to assume that it represents the views of at least some British Quakers – views which it was felt right to represent in the very public and official context of Britain Yearly Meeting's Book of Discipline, currently called *Quaker Faith and Practice*. As we will see, however, it did not do so without a struggle, not least because it employs a way of speaking about the Divine which (although it echoes the kinds of concerns which produce remarks like the others discussed here, in chapter 1, and in chapter 7) was not familiar to the majority of Friends.

The quotation appears in chapter 26, "Reflections", in *Quaker Faith and Practice*. There are four sections in this chapter, "Experience of God", "Ways of seeking", "Perceptions of truth", and "The light that shines for all", and this quotation is found in the third of those, which runs from 26.30 to 26.41.³⁴⁹ Other quotations in this section reflect on the nature of God – for example, 26.31 contains Harvey Gillman's reflections on the existence of "a power which is divine, creative and loving, [which] we can often only describe ... with the images and symbols that rise from our particular experiences and those of our communities"³⁵⁰ and 26.33, by John Lampen, includes the claim that we do not always need the word 'God' to grasp the "connections" to which he takes it to refer, namely those between "the

³⁴⁷ Ketterer, "G-d/ess' web." Vol 8, #1. 11.

³⁴⁸ Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, "An Inventory of the Friendly Woman Records, 1987- [ongoing]," Swarthmore College, <http://www.swarthmore.edu/Library/friends/ead/4087frwo.xml>. Accessed 20th May 2014.

³⁴⁹ All items – most of which are quotations – in *Quaker Faith and Practice* are numbered according to their chapter and their place within it; it does not have page numbers throughout the main body of the text.

³⁵⁰ Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith and Practice*: 26.31.

marvels of the natural world, the moral law, the life of Jesus, the depths of the human personality, our intimations about time, death and eternity, our experience of human forgiveness and love, and the finest insights of the Christian tradition".³⁵¹ Within a community which accepted those ideas without trouble, the contents of 26.35 are perhaps not as surprising as they might otherwise be, although there is still much about the quotation to puzzle us.

I give it here in full, as it is given in *Quaker Faith and Practice*, followed by 26.36, which seeks to expand upon it, contextualise it, and explain it somewhat. It is unusual for extracts to be provided with this kind of expansion and explanation, and so the existence of this second passage is in itself noteworthy.

26.35 All my life I've heard, 'God is love', without understanding what was meant. Recently I've come to feel that in a very real way G-d/ess is the love that flows in and between and among us. The ebb and flow of my commitment to love, to peace, to harmony makes G-d/ess stronger or weaker in my heart.

Sometimes the web feels like G-d/ess' body, her vast cosmos, of which we are an inextricable part. The web is also the love that flows through creation, from G-d/ess, from us, from everywhere. The web is an affirmation and comfort, support and clear-naming. The web is harmony, proving to me by its fleeting, fragile appearances that peace can happen. Most of all, for me, the web is friendship.

That the web exists is my faith. Spinning at it, dancing along it and calling others into it are my ministry. Ripping it or withdrawing into isolation and despair are my sins. Articulating my faith is hard enough; living it is often beyond me. But we are all connected. Strength seeps in from everywhere and amazing things happen. The sense of participation and communion sweeps over me like ocean waves.

At the end of the article from which this extract is taken, the writer explained her use of 'G-d/ess':

I've yet to find a term that describes how I feel about the divine. 'The Spirit' comes close, and so, sometimes, does 'Goddess'. 'G-d/ess'

³⁵¹ Ibid., 26.33.

attempts to convey the difficulty of naming the divine. The dash is an old Jewish practice meant to show the impossibility of confining the divine in a word. The single 'd' and feminine suffix are to show that I don't experience the goddess as different from or inferior to what folks generally refer to as God.

Rose Ketterer, 1987

26.36 As the Yearly Meeting in 1994 struggled to find unity on whether 26.35 should have a place in our book of discipline, Jo Farrow wrote:

In the seventeenth century the first generation of Friends shocked many of their Christian neighbours. In trying to express their experiences of God – within them, as spirit, inward light, seed, inward teacher – they used words and phrases which sounded strange and audacious to their contemporaries. They spoke of their experiences of being drawn into community with one another using metaphors and analogies which were both new and old at the same time. 'The kingdom of God did gather us all in a net...' wrote Francis Howgill, trying to express the sense of relief and excitement which was theirs when they discovered one another and became aware of how deeply they had been drawn together as they struggled to articulate their experiences of the Spirit. In much the same way many women today are discovering a need to express their spirituality in ways which seem as strange to some Friends as the expressions of early Quaker spirituality did to those who first heard them. Rose Ketterer is a member of Haddonfield Friends Meeting, New Jersey. She writes of her attempts to reclaim a more womanly understanding of the divine.

For our purpose, perhaps the most interesting section of this is the final paragraph of Rose Ketterer's piece, where she lists several terms and describes them as more or less closely reflecting how she feels about "the divine" – which is itself taken as a neutral, although not preferred, term, alongside 'Spirit', 'Goddess', and her own coinage, 'G-d/ess'. We see here that language is personally important to her: she wants to describe how she feels about the divine, drawing out again the theme of emotional connection which we saw emerging in chapter 1. We can also see that she is aware of the ways in which her linguistic choices might be received by the community, especially that she wants to be clear that the feminine names she uses are for something not "different from or inferior to what folks generally refer to as God".

In creating her own term, Ketterer draws on two main sources beyond her own creativity: a Jewish tradition, and the Goddess worship movement. By the time when Ketterer wrote this, the latter had been active for some time (Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance*, a foundational text, was first published in 1979³⁵²), and so it is no surprise that this line of thought was reaching Quaker women. The new formation, 'G-d/ess', draws in meaning from these sources as well as gaining it in the course of Ketterer's own use and explanation. A handful of other writers have hit on similar terms (such as 'G*ddess' and 'God/ess') in their explorations but there does not seem to be any consistent pattern of the use of this term.³⁵³

Several interesting observations appear here when we consider this example in light of the material from the previous two chapters.

One is that the nature of the term itself is interesting. It is a hybrid term, drawing as I have just described from at least two traditions. It is also an unpronounceable term, having something in common with formations such as 's/he' – written, they make clear the writer's desire to be inclusive of two genders, but when such texts are read aloud they can create a lack of fluency because there is no single agreed method of sounding them. This tells us something significant about the language-game which Rose Ketterer is playing:³⁵⁴ it is a written one. I suspect that she shares this with another theological writer with whom her use of language has much in common, Mary Daly. I have in mind works of Daly's such as the *Wickedary*, in which Daly creates words and plays with words in a similar way.³⁵⁵

³⁵² Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance : a rebirth of the ancient religion of the great goddess* 20th anniversary ed. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1999).

³⁵³ Among many others, J. J. McKenzie uses 'God/ess'; Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza sometime uses 'G*ddess' – see footnote 359. J. J. McKenzie, *A Gender Neutral God/ess: Be Inclusive but Make No Images was the Religious Change* (J. J. McKenzie, 2012).

³⁵⁴ This terminology seems more apt than usual, since she does indeed treat language playfully in this extract.

³⁵⁵ Mary Daly and Jane Caputi, *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1987).

An interesting point of comparison between this example and the last is that, where the list we examined above implies the replaceability of the words – as if each could be equally 'translated' by the next and only personal preference separated them – Rose Ketterer seems to be trying to capture something in a single irreplaceable word. However, on a close reading of what she says I am not convinced that 'G-d/ess' is that word: "I've yet to find a term that describes how I feel about the divine. 'The Spirit' comes close, and so, sometimes, does 'Goddess'."³⁵⁶ There is a tiny proto-list here (the divine, Spirit, Goddess; later in that paragraph, God), and the solution she was using at the time of writing, G-d/ess, captured more her struggles with language than her feeling about "the divine". It does, though, point us to some of the features of the Divine which she wishes to make prominent: that it is both feminine and masculine (or, perhaps, beyond gender or of no binary gender), for example, and that traditional language will not suffice to express it.

Furthermore, although the explanatory passage by Jo Farrow addresses the discomfort which Friends may feel with "words and phrases which sounded strange and audacious", and attempts to overcome that discomfort by drawing a link between the writing of Rose Ketterer and the writings of early Friends (which were creative but rooted in Biblical sources), it does not address the sources of that discomfort, other than that these words may seem strange. Unfamiliarity is taken to be the only objection, or at least, the only one which needs addressing in this formal context. This leaves the potential theological objections, of which there are several to be found in wider literature about feminist language for God (and which might have been found in relation to other aspects of this usage) rather out in the cold.

In the situation of seeking to introduce a new use of language to a community – which this piece does, although the new word is patched together from old terms – one important task is to give examples and

³⁵⁶ Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith and Practice*: 26.35.

explanations such that the reader learns not only the new word, but also how to carry on with it, how to use it in the future. Since this word is not pronounceable and I have not found it in use in any other Quaker literature, perhaps the attempt has failed; on the other hand, since feminist concerns often are represented or alluded to (among other places, in the previous example I discussed the inclusion of 'mother' as an example of this gendered awareness and in chapter 7 one of my examples includes the term 'God-the-Goddess'), and Rose Ketterer's piece has been republished in *Quaker Faith and Practice*, perhaps some of the ideas embodied by it have been taken into the mainstream.

It may also be fruitful to compare Ketterer's 'G-d/ess' with the 'S' of Wittgenstein's sensation-diary thought experiment – to use Wittgenstein's example as an "object of comparison" to shed light on Ketterer's usage.³⁵⁷ I discussed 'S' in chapter 2, in the context of the private language debate, and concluded that, alone, 'S' – the invented term for the repeated but otherwise unidentified sensation – cannot communicate meaningfully. Like 'G-d/ess', 'S' is not intended to be spoken aloud, nor is it replaceable or a familiar usage (indeed, the point is that it is a new and supposedly private term). Like 'S', 'G-d/ess' is an invented term. Like 'S', 'G-d/ess' is intended to capture and record in language an aspect of an individual's experience – one a sensation, one a feeling about the Divine. It is tempting to say that the latter is more complex than the former, or perhaps has more content, but I do not see that this is obviously so – sensations may be rich and layered, and a 'feeling about' something may be straightforward or simple.

The key difference between Ketterer's coinage and Wittgenstein's imaginary symbol is that Ketterer's does communicate: partly because it begins to gather meaning through the process of her own use, which is published and embedded in a natural language (whereas the sensation diary is only for one reader and contains only 'S'), but also because it carries forward meanings from the previous uses of the terms 'God', 'G-d', and 'Goddess' (and,

³⁵⁷ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*: §258.

arguably, the 'ess' suffix in general).³⁵⁸ Although it deliberately disrupts and challenges conventional uses of those terms, it also points back to them: it would make much less, if any, sense if you had never encountered those words before. Ketterer could have chosen any other word or symbol ("in a very real way S is the love that flows in and between and among us"), but in choosing to combine in a new way words or parts of words which were already rich with connotations, she invites her readers to read them afresh.

Reading this example back towards the issue of private language, we could see it as another argument against the very possibility. If private language would work in this situation, Ketterer could have invented something – used 'S', for example – and there would be no need to struggle to find the right word. The fact that she does engage in that struggle suggests that there is something valuable about it, in particular that she finds a need to locate her experience within a wider social and historical context. In using familiar or semi-familiar terms and techniques – 'God', 'Goddess', the omission of a vowel, and in offering other terms in a miniature list – Ketterer links her new term to others, as in the list familiar terms are placed alongside less familiar ones, and this enables members of the community to locate the newer ones in relation to older ones. In this case, Jo Farrow's extra explanation, which links Ketterer's practice of linguistic inventiveness with historical Quaker examples of the same practice, also serves this purpose of locating the move within the community's existing rules. In this way, terms from outside the community's existing vocabulary (either previously non-existent, or previously used only by others) can be taken into the community's language-game. In chapters 5 and 6 I will be looking in more detail at the underlying assumptions and practices which enable this to happen.

³⁵⁸ For example, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza uses 'G*d' (for the Christian and Jewish deity, and sometimes 'G*ddess' for the deity/ies of pagan religions); given the other concerns of her work – such as opposition to anti-Semitism – this practice seems likely to be linked to an awareness of the practice of some Jewish writers also mentioned by Ketterer.

Example 3: *Journeying the Heartlands*

Journeying the Heartlands: exploring spiritual practices of Quaker worship is a pamphlet published in 2009 and edited by Elizabeth Brown and Alec Davison.³⁵⁹ Brown and Davison are founding members of the project of North West London Area Meeting, The Kindlers, described in the preface as "a new-born, informal Quaker group".³⁶⁰ The group aims to engage with the first of the seven priorities laid out in Britain Yearly Meeting's 2009-2014 five-year plan, "strengthening the spiritual roots in our meetings and ourselves".³⁶¹ It is a response to the question, as it is put in the preface of *Journeying the Heartlands*: "how can the worshipping life of the Society be renewed within a religious faith that eschews leadership and gurus, has no paid ministry and can claim little contemporary inspiring spiritual literature?"³⁶²

Their answer is that, "it can only come from the grass-roots, for there is no top-down. The person in the pew is as good as it gets".³⁶³ Working from that basis, The Kindlers ran a series of workshops, and gathered the responses given by participants. They print them (probably a selection of them) as the body of the pamphlet, divided into nine sections which describe Meeting for Worship and then explore "the narrative of the spiritual practices that make up the unity of that worship experience".³⁶⁴ The section which interests me

³⁵⁹ *Journeying the Heartlands: exploring spiritual practices of Quaker worship*.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁶¹ Meeting for Sufferings, "A Framework for Action, 2009-2014," ed. Britain Yearly Meeting (London: Recording Clerk's Office, 2008), 8.

³⁶² *Journeying the Heartlands: exploring spiritual practices of Quaker worship*, 3. I note that the issue is apparently that contemporary Quaker spiritual literature is uninspiring, since there is no shortage of it.

³⁶³ *Ibid.* The term 'pew' seems somewhat out of place in a Quaker publication, since Quakers sit on benches or chairs rather than in pews, but this is an exact quote. In a publication aimed at those familiar enough with Quakerism to notice this, it is probably a joke.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

here is entitled 'Entering Light'. The introduction to this section makes various remarks about the image of light, linking it to birth, creativity, and the story of creation in Genesis. The editors also make some remarks about Quaker uses of the term 'light', noting that within Quakerism, "Light is seen as the presence of God in our midst, hence Quakers speak of 'waiting in the Light' for guidance, as giving clarity of insight, or 'holding someone in the Light' when praying for them".³⁶⁵ They quote John's Gospel (1:9), and Jim Pym, a Quaker-Buddhist author, who is also quoted on the next page by a contributor (and will be discussed in more detail in chapter 7, where one of my examples is from his work).

In the final paragraph of the introduction to the section entitled 'Entering Light', however, the editors go on to say: "Light is a universal symbol for the Divine in all world religions. ... Sometimes the Light is personified, as with Christ the Light of the World, or the Buddha of Infinite Light in the Buddhist tradition".³⁶⁶ There is, unfortunately, no indication here of the grounds or other sources on which they base the claim that Light is a "universal symbol", let alone that in "all world religions" it stands for "the Divine". The general tone of the remark is universalist, in the Quaker sense of that term as discussed in chapter 1, and perhaps there is some conceptual slippage between a 'universal symbol' and a 'universal experience' or 'universal access'.

The preceding remark about 'Light' does help to explain why the editors chose to open the chapter with a series of remarks from workshop participants grouped under the editorial heading 'JESUS: Light of the world', followed by some headed 'CHRIST: the god-form in all'. These two lists take up page 26; the other parts of the section are headed 'WAITING IN THE LIGHT: until the way opens', 'MEDITATION: steadying the mind', and 'MYSTICAL CONTEMPLATION: Light as transforming', and these complete the chapter.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 25.

³⁶⁶ Ibid. 'Buddha of Infinite Light' is a translation of the Sanskrit name 'Amitābha'.

The eight remarks from participants under the heading 'JESUS: Light of the world' point to a human Jesus who was "a teacher", "the greatest prophet", "an example"; one says that he was "that of God manifest in human form", but this is the closest they come to claiming a Divine nature for him.³⁶⁷ This is important because it helps to put into perspective the four comments in the next part, under the title 'CHRIST'. The subtitle for this part, 'the god-form in all', clearly uses a phrase from the first participant comment, which I give here in full:

I understand that Christ, Krishna, Buddha are examples of 'god-forms' in all people's consciousness, from time's beginning.³⁶⁸

I note that these two remarks seem to make subtly different claims – one that Christ is *the* god-form present in all people, and the other that *Christ, Krishna, and Buddha* are among a selection of god-forms present in all people. I do not argue, however, that this difference is intentional, especially given the clearly intentional borrowing from one to another and the idiosyncratic grammar of the latter. Although the term 'god-form' does occur in some other literature – in the Western Mystery Tradition, for example – the use is quite different and, although it remains possible that the participant picked it up from another source, it seems more likely that this is an independent coinage.

The participant quotation given above is followed by one from a participant who quotes Jim Pym, including Pym's characteristic capitalisation of anything to be construed as a name of the Divine:

I note that Jim Pym writes:

The Light is also the Guide when it assumes a personal aspect for us. It is the Inner Teacher or Christ in us. The Light enables us to see the Way (another synonym for Christ) and follow the Way which is the right one for us in harmony with God's will.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 26.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

This quotation is from *Listening to the Light: how to bring Quaker simplicity and integrity into our lives*, with slight changes to punctuation.³⁷⁰ It may assist in understanding it to know that Pym says in his introduction to *Listening to the Light*: "...words are capitalised when they are synonyms for God, for Quaker tradition uses a number of synonyms for God. To these, I have added one or two of my own".³⁷¹ I will return to Pym in chapter 7; here, it is sufficient to say that he is incorporating into this remark the 'experiential-expressivist' thought that all these various terms – Light, Guide, Inner Teacher, Christ, Way, God – become synonymous because they are based on common experiences of the same Divine.

The process by which these remarks have arrived in this setting – especially the last one, published in a book and selected by first a workshop participant and then the editors – points to a certain level of communal acceptance of the kinds of ideas represented. Not all Quakers would assent to them, and they would not all be accepted by the Yearly Meeting, but we can safely think of them as acceptable views to hold within the modern British Quaker community. This may not be the kind of 'fluent elite' which Lindbeck envisaged, but it is a group of people who speak Quaker fluently enough to have some sense of which does and does not 'fit' in a book of this sort. If it is also the case that the first and second remarks (the editorial comment in which, via the Light, Christ and Buddha are equated, and the participant comment which lists 'Christ, Krishna, Buddha' as synonyms) are the product of fluent Quaker speech – which, since they have been produced by the editors or included in this anthology, I take it that they are – I need to ask how the terms 'Krishna' and 'Buddha' came to be present within Quaker discourse.

³⁷⁰ Jim Pym, *Listening To The Light: how to bring Quaker simplicity & intergrity into our lives* (London: Rider, 1999). 47.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

One of the answers will obviously be that people like Jim Pym, who practise dual belonging, have helped to import them. In chapter 6, I will consider the practice of dual or multiple religious belonging (including the particular popularity of Buddhism as a partner in this process) and how this practice affects the movement of words between religious communities. In this chapter, however, I want to turn instead to another set of processes, the ways in which languages borrow and share words, and how those are mirrored (or not) by the ways in which religious and cultural groups borrow one another's words and phrases within a single natural language.

In considering Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic understanding of doctrines in chapter 3, we saw that a smaller group within a wider society can nevertheless have a distinctive linguistic pattern, a dialect or sociolect, and fluent speakers can be experts in this (Geordie, early Christianity) as well as competent speakers of the wider language (English, first-century Judaism). It was also mentioned that a wide range of words can be shared between a dialect and a wider language without this compromising the integrity of either the dialect or the language. In this case, I suggest that as well as entering Quaker speech directly from those who use both Quaker and another religion, some may have travelled via the wider culture.

As in so many places, there is no clear boundary here: 'Krishna' as a word for 'God' might have entered the vocabularies of Quakers through the writings of Gandhi, who was (as I noted in chapter 1) widely read and cited by Quaker universalists. I take it that Gandhi speaks from within a Hindu context (from within 'Hinduism' to the extent that this remains a useful label for a collection of the religious traditions of India), but some of his writings are clearly influenced by his Western education and encounters with Western texts and ideas,³⁷² are aimed at a Western audience, and are read and quoted by many in the secular/post-Christian sphere. This is not simply, therefore, a transfer of a term from one religion to another, although this may be one of the effects of the process.

³⁷² Including some which had in turn been influenced by texts emerging from India.

Similarly, a number of originally Buddhist terms and ideas have entered the wider circle of Western spiritual seekers, a movement we might broadly call 'New Age'.³⁷³ This group, seeking inspiration but wary of organised religion, has taken material from a wide range of sources – including ancient European, Eastern, and worldwide indigenous religions – to form a mix-and-match collection of beliefs and practices. The present state of the group is hard to quantify, but it is probably fair to say that it attracts a diverse selection of people, some of whom move on to other, perhaps more structured, practices. Many are likely to encounter Buddhist or Buddhist-influenced forms of meditation. Some become Quakers during or as a result of their seeking, or were Quakers anyway. The idea of the 'Buddha of Infinite Light', for example, could be encountered in this kind of context, as well as in forms more directly descended from Amitābha's home contexts in the 'Pure Land' schools of Buddhism.

Setting aside the issue of the origins of the language for a moment, another way to view these examples would be to consider them as creating 'pictures' – images of the way the world is, specific to the religious viewpoint from which they emerge. A proposition like 'Christ is a god-form present in all people's consciousness' creates a picture of the world likely to affect one's actions, as did the examples which Wittgenstein suggested (as discussed in chapter 2). If you already have this kind of picture, and are then confronted with the fact of religious plurality, going in search of 'the other names of Christ' in other religious traditions would not be unreasonable. It might be imperialist, but empires can be founded on clear if morally questionable logic. It is not then hard to incorporate these names into your picture, seeing that other people are using them: 'Christ, Krishna, [and/or] Buddha are god-

³⁷³ Nevill Drury describes the 'New Age' as a movement which "argues for a spirituality without borders or confining dogmas, and for a tolerance in religious belief which does not exclude through doctrinal difference", and notes that it "builds on the idea... that there is a universal wisdom tradition uniting the spiritual teachings of both East and West". Nevill Drury, *The New Age: Searching for the Spiritual Self* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 2004). 8.

forms present in all people's consciousness' is then a possible picture. The example does not give us any reason to think that it was constructed in this order or in this way, but the history of Quakerism as part of the Western world, and its interactions with other religions, lead me to argue that something like this is the way it happened.

The real question, however, is whether the picture 'Christ is a god-form present in all people's consciousness' and the picture 'Krishna is a god-form present in all people's consciousness' are different, or significantly different enough to warrant their clear separation. Drawing on what I have said before about the irreplaceability of pictures, I would argue that they are different enough that they should not be swapped one for another without further significant evidence of their interchangeability. Although they might lead to some similar behaviours, such as treating all people as if they have 'that of God within them' (an example of the kind of Quaker idea that the workshop participant could have had in mind), they would lead to attention to different sets of teachings, for example. We would expect this to make a more general difference as well. In chapter 5, I will consider arguments from a universalist or pluralist perspective in favour of treating such terms as interchangeable, and address the idea that different religions all have the same moral effects.

Conclusion

Taken together, what do these examples tell us about Quaker practices and the language Quakers use? Firstly, it is of interest that I was able to find examples like these in corporately produced literature – material which draws on quotations, submissions, workshops and committees or multiple editors. Although there is modern Quaker literature produced by individuals (the quoted material draws on this, and we saw a selection in chapter 1; more will be discussed in chapter 7), the jointly produced work not only suggests the acceptability of the ways of speaking which it records, but also

sheds light on the corporate processes which produce it. We see, for example, the importance of workshops as practice which enables the exploration of issues of interest or concern, and as a way of finding material which has both the touch of an individual and is appreciated by the group. From this material, editors, whether individually or as a committee or Meeting, can then select that which emphasises the diversity or the unity of the group – or both, as seems to be the case in these examples.

About the ways of speaking themselves, as modelled in this collection of examples, I would say that they demonstrate the ways in which 'the language 'Quaker'' has been able to include new words. They also tell us something about how the uses of those words have changed in the process: Christ, Krishna, and Buddha are brought into a new relation (of exact similarity if not identity) which would not be accepted by many Christians, Hindus, or Buddhists.³⁷⁴ The rules which guide these uses start to become visible – one needs more than three examples to be sure 'how to go on', but taking these together with others we saw in chapter 1, it is possible to generalise about some of them. To go on in the same way, you should accept (a claim something like) that all religions are equal and have basically the same message.³⁷⁵ You should use words which are comfortable and acceptable to you, but also try to include words used by others whom you perceive to be in your community (whether or not those words are new to you). You should try and express your understanding of the 'Truth', which is based on your religious experience, as well as possible, while accepting and where necessary noting that others may express that same Truth in very different ways. These rules embed some claims – not only that all religions are equal, which I will discuss in chapter 5, but also the experience-first

³⁷⁴ There are some non-Quakers who might accept something similar – including some 'New Age' believers and other pluralists, some of whom are discussed in chapter 5.

³⁷⁵ Some caveats about what is to count as a religion may be needed, but 'all religions except ethically disreputable ones' rather begs the question about their ethical messages – an issue to which I will return in chapter 7. In practice, it is probably something like 'all living religions of substantial size about which I, the speaker, know a moderate amount'.

assumption which I identified in chapter 1 and other elements of the experiential-expressivist positions which I described in chapter 2.

Further to rules of these remarks, we have uncovered more details about the motivations for making them. In the second example, we saw that discomfort with particular language was a worry, both in Rose Ketterer's hints that 'God' as ordinarily used did not capture her feelings about the Divine, and in Jo Farrow's explicit discussion of the fact that unfamiliar language may make Friends uncomfortable. In the first example, we can see that there is a deliberate attempt to include, and even welcome, diversity – a consideration which may also be a factor underlying the choice to include the second piece in *Quaker Faith and Practice*, and the editorial decisions around the third set of remarks. Both desire for diversity, and desire to create comfort or discomfort in the listener, are questionable motives for the selection of religious language in a community which also prizes a commitment to Truth, although they may be in some ways good reasons.

In the final example, reasons for the selection are harder to discern, although they probably include the two just mentioned. However, I think the introduction also points us to a deeper reason: all of these pieces wish to express as fully as possible, and encourage us to find for ourselves, the truth of the matter discussed – even though several views would hold that truth to be ineffable. In using many words, the authors point out the inadequacy of each of them, in some ways reinforcing the idea of ineffability while apparently also affirming its opposite.

Finally, a few things should be said about the light which this analysis of real examples has shed on the tools which I explicated in the previous two chapters. The view of language as inherently social has been thoroughly supported, although we have needed a nuanced view of the ways in which languages change and develop; and it still seems that a private language is impossible – the creation of new terms relies on the processes of public use and reuse. The model of religion as being like a language in analytically important ways has been supported. It has proved enormously useful in

application to specific examples, illuminating aspects of them which were otherwise unobserved. It works together with the Wittgensteinian view of how language works to highlight points about religion which are not otherwise visible.

The idea that some religious ways of speaking are irreplaceable has been challenged, too, by the multiple ways of speaking present in the list-format remarks; it can be retained with the addition of a caveat that the irreplaceability is operative at the level of the individual rather than the community. Any one speaker has their own way of speaking, which cannot be replaced or 'translated' into another phrase, but another speaker might choose to use another phrase and believe that they 'meant the same thing'. The place of irreplaceability in this is strengthened by the observation that the two phrases often do not mean exactly the same thing to listeners, carrying as they always will different connotations. Finally, the concept of the 'fluent elite' has proved useful, although identifying this group continues to require care.

The tools from Wittgenstein and Lindbeck which I identified in the previous two chapters, then, have all been able to do useful work when brought into dialogue with real examples of Quaker religious language. However, there are further aspects of the Quaker pattern of belief which, while clearly bearing on the assumptions which underlie the examples I have considered, have not been fully explained by the tools in use so far. In order to explore these in more detail, I turn in the next two chapters to other explorations of these patterns – particularly, of the claims of other pluralists and observations of other people practising multiple religious belonging – in order to return with more tools in hand to some further examples (in chapter 7).

Chapter 5: Pluralisms

I have begun to show that Quaker multi-theology remarks are not made randomly – there is an underlying process, of thought and assumptions, which informs them. Nor are they simple or unified – one speaker may have many motivations for their choice of words, and even within the relatively small world of British Quakerism different speakers will have a variety of motivations. One of these sets of motivations can be called the pluralist model of religions, a model in which all religions are taken to contain at least some truth.³⁷⁶ This chapter, interested mainly in those pluralisms which are close to those found in the Quaker literature and in academic writers who are known to and read by Quakers, focuses on kinds of pluralism which Rose Drew labels 'monocentric pluralism'.³⁷⁷ Pluralism of this kind seems to underlie many of the examples of Quaker multi-theology remarks, and forms a significant part of the background which supports multiple religious belonging, another key factor in the formation of Quaker multi-theology remarks (I will be discussing this in more detail in chapters 6 and 7). Monocentric pluralisms understand there to be one ultimate reality to which all religions are, in their different ways, responding,³⁷⁸ as opposed to a polycentric pluralism which would argue that two religious traditions are responding to two different realities.³⁷⁹ I shall not be discussing attempts at polycentric pluralism, such as that appearing in some work by Roger Corless, or pluralism arising from process theology, such as that of John Cobb.

³⁷⁶ This is pluralism about truth, not salvation, although the latter does figure somewhat in Hick's argument.

³⁷⁷ Rose Drew, *Buddhist and Christian? An exploration of dual belonging* (Oxford: Routledge, 2011).

³⁷⁸ This is a small-r 'reality' which may or may not be simply the material world – this chapter includes discussion of Don Cupitt's non-realism about God.

³⁷⁹ If this summary seems to be of a position which is incoherent or at least extremely difficult to hold in conjunction with the belief that all religions are equally valid, that is because Drew reaches exactly that conclusion about it.

The aim of this chapter is to clarify the pluralist positions which Quakers might take, to look at critiques of them and possible defences. In order to do this, I consider the positions of two notable theologians – John Hick, a Protestant theologian and philosopher who became a Quaker near the end of his life, and Don Cupitt, an Anglican theologian – alongside a consideration of the pluralist claims of the Quaker Universalist Group. In passing, I also look briefly at Karen Armstrong's work, as she is a pluralist whose popular writing on religion is well-known among Quakers at present. Both John Hick and Don Cupitt have been fairly widely read³⁸⁰ among those members of the British public who are interested in religion, including by Quakers. In both cases, it is easy to prove that there has been a direct influence of these writings on the Quaker community.

Having outlined these three related positions, I move on firstly to look at ways in which they can be critiqued, and then to consider possible defences of broadly pluralist positions. I conclude that Quakers can find good reasons to take this kind of position and that it can be theologically defended. In doing so, I argue not only that Quakers do, as it happens, have pluralist assumptions which help to make sense of multi-theology remarks, but also that it is possible to make these assumptions explicit in a way which makes it clear that they are both coherent and plausible. This chapter does not attempt the next step – to show that this position is correct – but it does aim to show why the position is regarded as reasonable and acceptable within the British Quaker community. It would still be possible to provide an alternative reading of the remarks – perhaps an inclusivist one, in which one name is best but others contain a partial revelation – and some Quakers might favour this. However, the pluralist approach is numerically strong among Friends, has a considerable explanatory power when applied to multi-theology remarks (as I will show in chapter 7, my second set of worked examples) and has been discussed in theologically nuanced ways which help to clarify the position.

³⁸⁰ And in Cupitt's case, watched, since some of his best known output has been television programmes.

Part 1: Three Pluralisms

1A: Hick (and Armstrong)

John Hick (1922-2012) took a long spiritual journey to reach the pluralist position with which this section is concerned. In childhood he encountered various religious groups, including Methodism, Quakerism,³⁸¹ and Spiritualism, before becoming a Presbyterian while at university. At that time he decided to train for the Christian ministry, as a Presbyterian, a position he retained for most of the rest of his life, although later he would explore other religions, including Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism.³⁸² In the last years of his life, he became a Quaker.³⁸³ The bulk of his most creative theological work was done within the vibrant interfaith context of the city of Birmingham.³⁸⁴ While working there, he developed a version of the pluralist theology of religions which is close to, and perhaps informs, much Quaker universalist thought. Although some Quakers assent to Hick's position, that assent is often incomplete, both for individuals and for a group such as the Quaker Universalists. In this section I suggest a variety of reasons for Quakers to reject, as well as be sympathetic towards, Hick's work, in order to clarify how much Quaker universalism and Hickian pluralism have in common and where their differences lie.

Although Hick worked on many other problems in the philosophy of

³⁸¹ He was educated for a while at the Quaker boys' school in York, Bootham, which was obvious felt to have had some influence on him; when he became a conscientious objector during World War II, his father, Mark, with whom he had already fallen out, wrote to him to say that "I also suspect – but I may be wrong – that your mind was deliberately poisoned by some vile creature at York". John Hick, *John Hick: An Autobiography* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002). 40.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 34 and throughout.

³⁸³ Amir Dastmalchian, "'Profound Delight in Being': Remembering John Hick " http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/atheologies/6041/_profound_delight_in_being_remembering_john_hick/. (Accessed 30th April 2013.)

³⁸⁴ Hick, *John Hick: An Autobiography*: chapter 14, 'Multi-faith work in Birmingham'.

religion, such as the problem of evil, religious experience, and fresh understandings of the incarnation, it is his work on pluralism which is of interest here. Specifically, Hick's form of pluralism seems to lead naturally to some multi-theology remarks, as we can see in Hick's own writing. Arguing for what has been called monocentric pluralism, namely the position that all religions³⁸⁵ are in touch with the same core even when they express it very differently, he compares religions in ways which stress their similarities – "Buddhology and christology developed in comparable ways"³⁸⁶ – and using terminology from other traditions, saying, for example, that his phrase 'The Real' corresponds with the Arabic 'al-Haqq'.³⁸⁷ Looking at religious traditions as a group, he argues that the same God is at work in all of them:

... should *our* revelation of the Logos, namely in the life of Jesus, be made available to all mankind? Yes, of course; and so also should other particular revelations of the Logos at work in human life – in the Hebrew prophets, in the Buddha, in the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gīta*, in the *Koran*, and so on.³⁸⁸

Although worded with more care than some of the Quaker examples, it is not hard to see that there is some continuity between this sort of claim and the lists of terms which I discussed in chapters 1 and 4. Hick was clearly aware of some of the philosophical problems which this kind of position poses. In *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, he asks:

What is this divine Reality to which all the great traditions are said to be oriented? Can we really equate the personal Yahweh with the

³⁸⁵ Or at least all major world religions, or everything which deserves to be called a religion. Hick prefers, quoting Wittgenstein, to consider religion as a "family-resemblance concept", with the concept of "ultimate concern" as a pointer for where to begin looking and some room for doubt at the edges, so that 'is x a religion?' need not have a single straightforward answer. I will note later in this chapter, however, that there are some religious traditions which he appears not to have considered in the formulation of his theories. Hick, *A Interpretation of Religion*: 3-4.

³⁸⁶ John Hick, ed. *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1977), 169.

³⁸⁷ Hick, *A Interpretation of Religion*: 11.

³⁸⁸ Hick, *The Myth of God Incarnate*, 181.

non-personal Brahman, Shiva with the Tao, the Holy Trinity with the Buddhist Trikāya, and all with one another? Indeed, do not the Eastern and Western faiths deal incommensurably with different problems?³⁸⁹

However, he goes on to argue that we can construct a pluralist position which respects the differences between traditions but which also holds that all religions are reactions to the same Real – a Real which has both personal and non-personal aspects (he lists Hindu, Taoist, Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist versions of this distinction, without going into any of the ways in which they might disagree).³⁹⁰ This enables him to claim that God, the personal Real, is one being, named differently in the various religions:

To take the concept of God first [before the Absolute, the impersonal Real], this becomes concrete as the range of specific deities to which the history of religion bears witness. Thus the Real as personal is known in the Christian tradition as God the Father; in Judaism as Adonai; in Islam as Allah, the Qur'ānic Revealer; in the Indian traditions as Shiva, or Vishnu, or Paramātmā, and under the many other lesser images of deity which in different regions of India concretise different aspects of the divine nature.³⁹¹

His description of the impersonal Real uses Hindu, Taoist, and Buddhist terminology in much the same way. These examples would be significant anyway, as multi-theology remarks which appear outside the Quaker world, but they are particularly interesting because Hick offers an explicit argument with which to support them and engages with possible criticisms – attempting to show that these religions, indeed all religions, have enough in common that they can be said to be reactions to a single Reality.

What, then, is Hick's pluralist position exactly? As aspects of it changed through his career, and were repeatedly restated in slightly different forms, this can be somewhat difficult to pin-point, but an overview can be given which will enable us to compare readily with the Quaker universalist

³⁸⁹ John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1985).

39.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

position and to consider some of the critiques of it. A useful summary comes from Paul Hedges, who links Hick's pluralism to his biography:

Through a series of stages, Hick expanded his vision from seeing truth centred in Christianity alone, to being located in a common experience of God and then, recognising the non-theistic nature of some religious traditions, to what he terms the Real.³⁹²

This is an experientially centred view of religions, based on our empirical (but mainly external) evidence about them: their "common ethical values, their capacity for producing 'saints'... as well as the deep conviction, devotion and piety that each produces in its followers".³⁹³ It is located against Hick's background of interfaith work, especially in Birmingham, and his explorations of other religions, often based mainly on their texts. Many Quakers will relate to this – a personal history of 'seeking' or exploration through many spiritual paths and involvement in ecumenical and interfaith projects are both common among Friends, and those who have not had these experiences personally will usually be aware of some in their local Meeting who have. There is a tendency therefore for Quakers to be willing to agree with these empirical claims, especially in a context where they seek to see the best in other people and other religions.³⁹⁴

Hick goes on to argue that in order to make sense of the religious diversity of the world, we need to accept that "we can rejoice in God's revelation to us through Jesus, without having to assert that God has not revealed himself

³⁹² Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions*: 114.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁴ Seeing the best in individual people is usually held to be best practice, supported by the doctrine of 'that of God in everyone'. Negative opinions of other religions, if held, are very rarely expressed. Some Friends have negative feelings towards parts of Christianity, usually based on bitter personal experience, but care is often exercised even in conversation not to generalise this to all of Christianity. I have heard Quakers express negative views about Islam or the Qur'an, but these have always in my experience been countered immediately, and Friends with a strong interest in Islam, especially Sufism, take a full part in the life of some Meetings. Finally, one of my examples in chapter 7 rejects Aztec and Mayan religion and this seems to meet with no objection.

and drawn people into a new and better life anywhere else than in Jesus".³⁹⁵ In order to get to this point, Hick considers the importance of salvation, which he calls "the central business of religion",³⁹⁶ suggesting that all religions are aiming at salvation and dismissing the idea of implicit or anonymous Christian faith – he says that these notions from Karl Rahner cannot "stand as more than interim measures" (presumably, interim points on the path to pluralism).³⁹⁷ Although he develops and nuances this idea in his more academically oriented writing, he retains a focus on salvation and a dissatisfaction with inclusivist theologies.

Hick's Christian-pluralist position draws on his previous philosophical work to some extent, using his idea of eschatological verification to argue that although his claims, like those of any religion, cannot be verified now, we will be able to obtain verification in the future, after death.³⁹⁸ This position arises in response to earlier philosophical challenges, especially verificationist or logical positivist claims that religious language can have no meaning because it cannot be verified – by embracing a different account of how meaning is generated, we have already dealt with this problem, and do not need to address Hick's solution in detail. It is worth noting in passing, though, that Hick's description of the afterlife, including a paraeschatological period, involves taking the specific claims of various religions mythologically, and synthesises them into a meta-explanation about life after death.³⁹⁹ We will see later that this is part of a problematic pattern in Hick's treatment of other religions.

In one essay, Hick also talks about Wittgenstein's concept of seeing-as (with reference to the duck-rabbit picture), and suggests that religious experiences may be of experiencing-as: you experience the Real, that is, in the way that

³⁹⁵ John Hick, "Christ in a Universe of Faiths," (Quaker Universalist Group, 1982), 5.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁹⁸ Hick, *A Interpretation of Religion*: 179.

³⁹⁹ David Cheetham, *John Hick: a critical introduction and reflection* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003). 139.

your society and religion expect you to, or through the lens of the narratives which you have available (and which you consider to be most important).⁴⁰⁰

This is strongly reminiscent of the position which Lindbeck called 'experiential-expressivist' (although Lindbeck's version of it is perhaps less realist than Hick's form of pluralism) and which I identified in chapter 3 as closely related to some key assumptions made by Quakers. Such a position does not have to call into question the givenness of the Real – there is something there to perceive, just as in the duck-rabbit picture there is a drawing, and the doubt arises around what that line-drawing represents. In relation to experience of the Real, Hick describes this ambiguity as producing a hierarchy of interpretations, of – for example – the life of Jesus:

At the most basic level there was an awareness of the physical existence of Jesus as a living organism. Superimposed upon this there was, at the human and social level of awareness, Jesus's life as a human being interacting with others in the Palestinian society of his day. And superimposed upon this there was, for the specifically Christian mode of experiencing-as, Jesus as the Christ.⁴⁰¹

He goes on to say that the third, Christian, level of interpretation is ambiguous – Jesus as Christ could be experienced "in a number of different ways, as the Messiah, as a prophet, as a rabbi, and so on".⁴⁰² Hick considers this kind of ambiguity to be "characteristic of religious meaning" and adds that the whole world is religiously ambiguous in this sense.⁴⁰³ The term he uses for this process, 'superimposition', suggests that rather than there being some kind of interaction between the experiencer and that which is experienced, an image is in some way projected by the experiencer onto an objective reality. Although this fits well into the understanding of religious experience as linguistically and culturally shaped – the projection, even if from an individual, would be strongly affected by such forces – this is

⁴⁰⁰ John Hick, "Seeing-as and Religious Experience," in *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1985).

⁴⁰¹ Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*: 24-5.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 25. The inclusion of Messiah as an alternative way of viewing Christ seems odd, but perhaps serves the purpose of emphasising or clarifying this role.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*

perhaps not what Hick would want to imply. Rather, in his writing as a whole, he seems to mean that these levels of interpretation simply exist simultaneously.

The possibility, of multiple true or partially true ways of experiencing the world⁴⁰⁴ existing at once, is encapsulated in a story which Hick has sometimes retold concerning the blind men and the elephant. In this tale, a group of blind men are brought to touch an elephant, and asked to describe what they discover.⁴⁰⁵ One finds the tail and describes an elephant as like a rope, another feels a leg and compares it to a tree, and the third touches the elephant's side and says that elephants are like walls. In the pluralist understanding of this parable, all the religious traditions are both partially right but still blind to whole, like the men in the story.

However, Gavin D'Costa reminds us that there is more to the original.⁴⁰⁶ In particular, in some versions there is a Prince – sighted, knowing, able to summon blind men to his palace – who sets up this scenario and is able to synthesise the impressions of the blind men, together with his own, into an accurate idea of an elephant. In Hick's retelling of the story, this character has disappeared, perhaps to become the narrator, and by taking him out of view Hick also hides his potential bias.

The pluralist, D'Costa suggests, is like the Prince: not accepting that their own view is as limited as that of any of the other religious traditions, they claim to be able to collate the information provided by the religions into a true picture. In his article on the subject, he puts his objection in Wittgensteinian terms: he discusses the concept of the 'form of life' (which I considered in detail in chapter 2) and reminds us that a detailed understanding of how a particular term is used will be required before we

⁴⁰⁴ Hick does acknowledge that talk about the correctness of certain ways of experiencing something, in the "sense of being appropriate to its actual character", is "perhaps un-Wittgensteinian", but he does not allow this to prevent him from such remarks. *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴⁰⁶ Gavin D'Costa, lecture given at the University of Leeds, February 22nd 2012.

can judge how it relates to other terms. D'Costa uses Hick's comparison of '*karma*', a Hindu concept, and 'justice', a Christian one, and points out a variety of ways in which the two terms cannot simply be equated – noting along the way that the term '*karma*' is itself used in different ways by different Hindu groups.⁴⁰⁷ He argues that "blind-men-elephant theorists", although they "cannot become anthropologists or philologists overnight", need to pay much more "careful attention to the work of such specialists", in order to ground their "global explanatory theories" and "avoid the dangerous spectre of abstraction".⁴⁰⁸ Instead, as he and I have both argued on Wittgensteinian grounds, there needs to be detailed attention to the specific contexts in which words are used, or we are in danger of assuming that two terms relate to the same thing – a rope is not always an elephant's tail, even if an elephant's tail feels like a rope – when they are not the same at all. This detailed consideration of context is exactly the kind of process which I undertook in relation to my examples in chapter 4, and it is a significant objection to the practice of making multi-theology remarks.

There are three potential problems here for pluralists. One is that Hick and other pluralists of this kind presume to know more about religion than non-pluralists – this is an attitude common among philosophers of many kinds, but still indicative of an arrogance which we might find troubling, especially in conjunction with the second potential problem. This second problem is that Hick's descriptions of religions do not reflect fairly or fully the positions those traditions actually take – inherently, the pluralist position treats non-pluralist religious traditions as only having part of the truth, where many of those religions themselves would claim to have access to the whole truth. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to maintain a pluralist position while accepting the full and often exclusive claims of other traditions, and this gives non-pluralists a real concern that their opinions have either not been heard or have been ignored by pluralists. Finally, as

⁴⁰⁷ Gavin D'Costa, "Elephants, Ropes and a Christian Theology of Religions," *Theology* 88, no. 724 (1985): 262.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

D'Costa says, there is the possibility that "a rope will be mistaken for an elephant – or *karma* for justice".⁴⁰⁹ To decide whether this is the case in individual examples is beyond the scope of this chapter but it is a significant objection to which pluralists do not pay enough attention.

Someone else who embraces this kind of pluralism, and who might be vulnerable to this kind of critique, is Karen Armstrong, a popular theological writer and broadcaster who describes herself as a "freelance monotheist".⁴¹⁰ She has a tendency to say things which sound significantly like the Quaker multi-theology remarks we have been discussing – and which reflect a pluralist approach to religion similar to Hick's. For example, in *The Case for God* she says that the first core principle of the story of religion is about "the nature of the ultimate reality, later called God, Nirvana, Brahman or Dao",⁴¹¹ which implies that these four names in some sense refer to the same thing; later in the same book, she also says – more carefully but with the same spirit of equality between religious viewpoints – that "there are important differences between Brahman, Nirvana, God and Dao, but that does not mean that one is 'right' and the others 'wrong'. On this matter, nobody can have the last word".⁴¹² Armstrong's work has been popular generally, and Quakers have been among her readers.⁴¹³ In reading Armstrong's work carefully, it becomes clear that Armstrong is a pluralist, not far removed from Hick's position although her emphasis is on experience rather than the Real – in many ways, a step closer to Quaker

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 263.

⁴¹⁰ "The Freelance Monotheist: An Interview With Karen Armstrong," *tricycle* 2003.

⁴¹¹ Karen Armstrong, *The Case for God: What Religion Really Means*, Kindle ed. (London: Vintage Books, 2009). location 379.

⁴¹² Ibid., location 5998.

⁴¹³ This can be evidenced in various ways although the actual impact of such books is difficult to measure. For example, in 2011, Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre ran a weekend course centred on *The Case for God*, and her work has been cited on the letters page of *The Friend* (in discussions about the religious nature of the Society of Friends and the issue of nontheism – for these, see Paul Kingston, "Seekers of Truth," *The Friend*, 10th June 2011. and Alison Leonard, "Theism or Nontheism," *The Friend*, 8th July 2011.)

universalism. When she lays out her position, she is relatively careful, but this kind of thought obviously grounds her multi-theology remarks:

The consistency with which the various religions have stressed the importance of these qualities [of compassion and "a receptive, listening attitude"] indicates that they are somehow built into the way men and women experience their world. . . . That is not to say, of course, that all faiths are the same. Each tradition formulates the Sacred differently, and this will certainly affect the way people experience it. There are important differences between Brahman, Nirvana, God and Dao, but that does not mean that one is 'right' and the others 'wrong'. On this matter, nobody can have the last word. All faith systems have been at pains to show that the ultimate cannot be adequately expressed in any theoretical system, however august, because it lies beyond the reach of words and concepts.⁴¹⁴

Whatever we make of that final claim about 'all faith systems', we can see that in Armstrong's understanding, religions all have something in common. She does not spell out a belief in something like Hick's 'Real', and she has not advanced an explicitly non-realist position (like Cupitt's, which takes a different view on whether anything can be "beyond the reach of words and concepts"). It would in some ways be natural to read terms like 'the Sacred' and 'the ultimate' as referring to a reality, although the idea that some qualities, taken to be indicative of "the Sacred" are "built into the way [people] experience the world" might suggest that there is a non-realist perspective present here as well.

If Quakers who make multi-theology remarks are indeed in tune with Armstrong's thinking, they may be both aware of the differences between the terms they list, and see themselves as unable to make judgements between them, as Armstrong refuses to do (rather than actually equating them, as D'Costa accuses Hick of doing). If nobody is to have the last word, but you still want to say something, everyone must be allowed their own word each time, and this naturally produces the kind of lists we have seen in the Quaker literature. These seem inclusive, and may also be supported by the committee methods which produce some examples. However (especially

⁴¹⁴ Armstrong, *The Case for God: What Religion Really Means*: location 5998.

but not only when there is a single author) this is a somewhat self-defeating strategy, since the author or editor of the list gives themselves, in a sense, the last word. The very act of creating the list with the narrative claim that it implies does itself make a theological statement – one which can come over more strongly than the claims implied by any specific term within the list. To put it another way, the list-format remark with its series of apparently equivalent words is the part which leaves the lasting impression – an impression of inclusiveness, but perhaps also vagueness, and a pluralistic acceptance of truth from many sources.

1B: Cupitt

Don Cupitt had been somewhat in the public eye since his participation in John Hick's *The Myth of God Incarnate* anthology in 1977, but really came to fame with his 1980 book *Taking Leave of God*, in which he laid out the motivations for and the basis of a non-realist approach to Christian faith.⁴¹⁵ Later, he made several series of television programmes, of which the most widely remembered is the *Sea of Faith* series (1984).⁴¹⁶ In these shows, and the accompanying book, Cupitt explored the current territory of religious belief in the West – focusing on Christian belief and the types of agnosticism and atheism which appear alongside or in response to it – and he made a range of thinkers, including Darwin, Freud, Jung, and Wittgenstein, more accessible to the public. In the conclusion of the book he explains his non-realist position, reached as a result of this exploration:

Does this [the foregoing argument and/or the thrust of the book] amount to saying that God is simply a humanly constructed ideal, such that when there are no human beings any longer there will be no God any longer? This question is improper, because it is framed from the obsolete realist point of view. The suggestion that the idea of God is man-made would only seem startling if we could point by contrast to something that has *not* been made by humans. But since

⁴¹⁵ Don Cupitt, *Taking Leave of God* (London: SCM Press, 1980).

⁴¹⁶ The others were called *Open to Question* (1973), and *Who was Jesus?* (1977).

our language shapes every topic raised in it, we cannot. In an innocuous sense, all our normative ideas have been posited by ourselves, including the truths of logic and mathematics as well as all our ideals and values. How else could we have acquired them? Thus God is humanly-made only in the non-startling sense that everything is. That is modern anthropocentrism. But even on my account God is as real for us as anything else can be, and more primally authoritative than anything else is.⁴¹⁷

This draws on the work of many scholars, but for the purposes of this thesis I will look just at how it uses Wittgenstein. Cupitt says of Wittgenstein that "he did not quite succeed in bringing about the full synthesis of faith and modernity",⁴¹⁸ because his "ideas about religion were too conservative and nostalgic".⁴¹⁹ Cupitt, then, wants to go beyond Wittgenstein, but also takes some ideas, especially from Wittgenstein's later work, as valuable. He reads Wittgenstein's work on language as non-realist, saying that for the mature Wittgenstein:

Language comes first, for it prescribes the shape of the various 'realities' amongst which we move, and not the other way round. Reality does not determine language: language determines reality.⁴²⁰

This is not, as discussed in chapter 3, an assessment of Wittgenstein with which all scholars would agree, but it is a possible reading of the material and it suits Cupitt's purposes very well. In particular, a view in which there is no pre-linguistic experience, taken together with an assumption that many languages therefore create many realities, supports his non-realism. Delivered in this aphoristic style, it prompts thought – although does not necessarily stand up to detailed examination or awkward questions about whether this remark about language is to be understood in or outside language itself, or whether this way of speaking about language is in itself another language-game (which might not be comprehensible, let alone true,

⁴¹⁷ Don Cupitt, *Sea of Faith*, 3rd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2003). 277. The first edition was 1984, the second 1994.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 237. I note that, unlike Cupitt, Wittgenstein shows no sign of trying to achieve a "full synthesis of faith and modernity".

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, 228.

within the structures of other language games). It should also be said that the talk about things made by humans is somewhat misleading; ordinary language makes a distinction between things named and categorised by humans (mountains versus hills), things created through human manipulation (blankets, tables), and things which exist only through human thought and behavioural patterns (like democracy). We say, for example, that a mountain is real, but if a geographer comes and tells us that it is in fact a hill, being slightly too short for a mountain, we accept this, knowing that the measuring and definition is the work of experts and the definition is man-made in a sense, unlike the geographical feature itself. We accept the technicality even if we keep calling it 'that mountain' among ourselves; two different uses of the term 'mountain' can be operative in different parts of the language. Mountains, though, are not man-made, simply defined by us; in the case of a blanket, there is both the act of defining a piece of cloth as such (which generally accompanies a form of life, using a blanket as such by, for example, putting it on a bed) and the act of weaving the cloth in the first place. Pacifism is an idea, and as such is more like 'the idea of God', but it would seem very strange or even ungrammatical to call pacifism man-made – although it can hardly be 'natural' either, because we do not generally apply the distinction in this way. Indeed, I think that this would be 'ungrammatical' to say 'pacifism is man-made' in the sense in which Wittgenstein tells us that it is 'ungrammatical' to say 'I know that I am in pain'. Amid these many senses of the term 'man-made' it is not clear to what extent and in what way "the idea of God is man-made" (or whether, in Wittgensteinian terms, it is worth saying at all).

Cupitt accepts that this position will lead many, "not yet moved over to the new point of view" to call Wittgenstein "an 'atheist'", something which is also often said about Cupitt, but Cupitt argues that Wittgenstein actually "does carry a great deal of what is most precious in religious belief through with him into his new outlook".⁴²¹ Cupitt in another book uses the human genome as a comparison: "realists," he says, "think we have *decoded* the

⁴²¹ Ibid., 232-3.

genome, but we haven't: we've *encoded* it, expressing it as a chain of signs".⁴²²

Don Cupitt himself traces reaction to his work – before the founding of the 'Sea of Faith' network, which followed the TV series – in a way which captures something significant about both general and Quaker responses. *Taking Leave of God* was condemned by the Church Times and the Archbishop of Canterbury, and "the entire ecclesiastical and academic establishment had now been told what to think, and they duly thought it".⁴²³ Cupitt goes on to say that:

There were only two exceptions to this sheeplike conformity: John Robinson and a number of people who had been his fellow-travellers in the sixties gave me encouragement, and the book was immediately and warmly welcomed by many Quakers. Cambridge gossip had it that I'd become a Buddhist, but Quakers assured me that I'd been a Quaker for years.⁴²⁴

Many years after the publication of *Taking Leave of God*, in March 1997 Cupitt gave the opening lecture at the annual conference of the Quaker Universalist Group, and "was amused to find that at least one fifth of those present were members of both" QUG and the Sea of Faith network.⁴²⁵

⁴²² Don Cupitt, *Reforming Christianity* (California: Polebridge Press, 2001). 110. It should be said that in order to do this we needed to assume that there was something there to decode, and that realists do not need to think that our encoding of the genome represents it entirely fully or accurately.

⁴²³ Don Cupitt, "Friends, Faith and Humanism," Sea of Faith network, <http://www.sofn.org.uk/reviews/quakhum.html>. Accessed 21st May 2014.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Ibid. This was probably a rather self-selecting group, as those members of QUG who were also part of the Sea of Faith network were much more likely to turn up to an annual conference featuring Don Cupitt as keynote speaker, compared to those with no interest in the Sea of Faith/Cupittian perspective. However, the Nontheist Friends also admit a considerable overlap with the Sea of Faith Network, listing it in the back of *Godless for God's Sake* as a way of contacting nontheists. David Boulton, ed. *Godless for God's Sake: Nontheism in Contemporary Quakerism* (Dent, Cumbria: Dales Historical Monographs, 2006), 143.

Further evidence of the close link between Cupitt's work and the thought of some Quakers can be seen by looking at the work of David Boulton, a prominent, outspoken, and consequently influential non-theist Quaker and founder of the Nontheist Friends Network, whose position is very similar to Cupitt's non-realism. The Sea of Faith network's website includes a review by Boulton of Cupitt's book *Mysticism After Modernity*, in which he says that it is "lucid and a delight to read", and a review, already quoted above, by Cupitt of Boulton's book *The Faith of a Quaker Humanist* in which he praises Boulton for "(in my view, rightly) reject[ing] semi-realist ideas about the spirit, the spiritual dimension, spirituality and the like".⁴²⁶ In *The Faith of a Quaker Humanist* Boulton describes a non-theist or non-realist faith not at all dissimilar to Cupitt's, saying for example:

If it is insisted that [in Meeting for Worship] I worship *something*, I worship God, understanding God as the symbol and imagined personification of mercy, pity, peace and love – the values which, though they can hardly be anything other than wholly human in origin and expression, I choose to treat as if they were absolute and transcendental.⁴²⁷

To be fair, any Cambridge gossip which suggested that Cupitt was a Buddhist was not entirely unfounded, either, as Cupitt does draw heavily on Buddhism and, much later, went on to describe his ideal religion as that of a "Christian Buddhist".⁴²⁸ We will be returning to the issue of combining religions in a single life, or one individual belonging to multiple religions, in the next chapter.

⁴²⁶ Don Cupitt, *Mysticism After Modernity* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1998); David Boulton, *The Faith of a Quaker Humanist* (Torquay, Devon: Quaker Universalist Group, 1997). Cupitt, "Friends, Faith and Humanism". and David Boulton, "What on Earth is Mysticism?," Sea of Faith network. Accessed 21st May 2014.

⁴²⁷ Boulton, *The Faith of a Quaker Humanist*: 14. Boulton has at other times expressed his position as one in which God is a symbol rather than an entity and has said that 'God language' is poetry and not prose. Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations, "Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations Day Conference 2014".

⁴²⁸ Cupitt, *Taking Leave of God*: 83; Robinson, *Honest to God*.

Taking Leave of God is in many ways a natural follow-on from John Robinson's *Honest to God*,⁴²⁹ and in the early chapters Cupitt refers repeatedly to Robinson's work. They have much in common, rejecting the metaphysical claims of religion but also rejecting the conclusion that they are therefore atheists. Rather, they want to retain some things from religion. For example, Cupitt says that:

... even if Robinson's religion is very different from the theism of earlier times, it may still be better to have some religion on Robinson's terms than to have no religion at all.⁴³⁰

Although he himself is proposing to "have some religion" on a model very different to previous theisms, it has to be said that Cupitt does not, at this point, make the total absence of religion sound like a complete disaster. He is writing, too, for much the same audience as Robinson: in the opening paragraphs of his first chapter, Cupitt specifically addresses himself to people who like religion but can't stomach many of the claims it has traditionally made, who say about "traditional religious belief" that "I can't live with it and I can't live without it".⁴³¹ He is mounting a public defence of something previously thought to be "too paradoxical, too whimsical to be publically defended", namely the act of being simultaneously "quietly agnostic or sceptical about Christian supernatural *doctrines*, while nevertheless continuing to practise the Christian *religion* to strikingly good effect".⁴³²

Other terms Cupitt uses to describe the position he is advancing include 'expressivist' and 'demythologising'. These help us to link his ideas to those of other thinkers discussed previously. Although Cupitt is not quite arguing

⁴²⁹ Which had created public debate in Britain and internationally when it was published 17 years earlier. Robinson, *Honest to God*.

⁴³⁰ Cupitt, *Taking Leave of God*: 37.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 1. Cupitt and Robinson are far from the other people to have identified this audience; compare, for example, R. M. Hare writing for those "who want to be Christians and yet to hold a faith which is defensible against the attacks of the philosophically well-armed atheist". Hare, *Essays on Religion and Education*: 2.

⁴³² Cupitt, *Taking Leave of God*: xii.

for the 'experiential-expressivist' position to which George Lindbeck contrasted his 'cultural-linguistic' perspective, for example, or for the position which Hare ends up constructing under the name 'expressivism' (discussed in chapter 3), it is easy to see that such a position could be constructed by combining the work of Hick and Cupitt – we can see that in some areas they already have much in common. Specifically, Hick would contribute the experiential element, while Cupitt is expressivist about religion.⁴³³

Hick has also used the idea of demythologising religious belief.⁴³⁴ In Cupitt's case, it is taken further than Hick is prepared to go, because Cupitt does not stop short with 'the Real' still in place but goes on to argue for a fully "non-factual" account of religion⁴³⁵. I note that Cupitt is not arguing that we should abandon God, but rather that, seeing that we have made God, we can recreate God in new ways. Cupitt's demythologised religion is non-realist (which is in itself a metaphysical position), and takes all religious language to be merely expressive of emotion or attitude – whether it knows it or not. To define this view, he contrasts it with realism before going on to describe it:

Realism is a doctrine about the *meaning* of talk about God, which is why it is held by sceptics. If you are to count as a believer in God, say the sceptics, then that is what you have to believe. Sceptics are fond of laying down the law in this way.

The other group, the expressivists, hold that the God of realism does not in fact exist but is an illusion created by a misunderstanding of the nature of religious language. They hold that

⁴³³ His expressivism is quite similar to the morality-focussed expressivism of Hare and Braithwaite, discussed in chapter 3, although he leans more heavily on non-realism than does Hare.

⁴³⁴ Oddly, Hick does not use a great deal of the work of Rudolf Bultmann, who has been a key influence on the demythologising trend in Christianity.

⁴³⁵ Cupitt, *Taking Leave of God*: 45. Some of the moves which Cupitt makes to support this – claims about the history of history, such as "In ancient Palestine, there was no scientific, objectified history or factuality. There was only mythological history, history as a community's sense of itself" – are similar to those we will see Karen Armstrong making in the next section.

religious language is basically expressive in force, not descriptive. God's reality is not a matter of facts and evidence, but of the unconditional authority of religious categories in a person's life.⁴³⁶

(Or perhaps in the life of a community.) This position has a distinct appeal for those who are, like Cupitt and many Quakers, in the position of wishing to maintain a religious practice but struggling with the realist interpretation of religious talk. It should be noted that, although some scholars have read Lindbeck as leaving room for realism,⁴³⁷ the cultural-linguistic view can also come across as a position with very similar negative claims, in which we judge religious language by a kind of grammatical correctness, rather than what the realist would recognise as 'factual' correctness. Although both Cupitt and Lindbeck use Wittgenstein in differing ways, in this thesis I take no position on which of these is a 'correct' interpretation of Wittgenstein – if indeed there is any single 'correct' position. Rather, I find both positions useful for understanding the Quaker position. Cupitt comes close to the Quaker assumptions which I described in chapter 1, and hence provides a helpful contribution to understanding that position – especially when used with Hick as well – while Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model contains more clues about how multi-theology remarks work in their community context. Thus, Lindbeck provides tools which help to build an insightful analysis of Quaker religious language use, while Cupitt, by offering a theory based on related premises, sheds light on the Quaker usage and the assumptions which underlie it.

1C: Quaker Universalists

Having discussed the positions of two individual theologians who take pluralist positions, I now turn to a Quaker group to try and uncover the details of one position found within the community. There is a strong streak of pluralism about truth in much modern British Quaker writing. This has

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 56.

⁴³⁷ See chapter 3 for a fuller discussion of this.

been visible in the material quoted in chapters 1 and 4, and will become even more obvious in chapter 7. Quakers tend to describe their pluralist position as 'universalist', and that term will be used in this chapter to refer to Quaker pluralism.⁴³⁸

As an organisation, QUG are a **Listed Informal Group**, attached to, but outside the structures of, Britain Yearly Meeting.⁴³⁹ They came into existence in 1978, arising "from John Linton's experiences in India of meetings where Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians worshipped together in Quaker silence",⁴⁴⁰ shortly before the formation of their American counterpart organisation, the Quaker Universalist Fellowship.⁴⁴¹ Ralph Hetherington describes the aims of QUG, and seeks to dispel some myths about them, in the introduction to *Universal Quakerism*:

There continues to be some misunderstanding as to what universalist Quakers are saying and a widespread fear that they are trying 'to change the Society'. It is hoped that this section will do something to dispel this fear and to show that a universalist view is, in fact, an essential ingredient in Quakerism. Thus no change in the nature of the Society of Friends is being advocated, but rather a clearer understanding of the implications of the mystical basis of Quakerism.⁴⁴²

⁴³⁸ Quaker universalism about truth should also be distinguished from the general Christian use of 'universalism' to mean belief in universal salvation.

⁴³⁹ "Listed Informal Groups | Quakers in Britain,"

<http://www.quaker.org.uk/listedinformalgroups>. Accessed 12th May 2014.

⁴⁴⁰ QUG, "Quaker Universalist Group : Home Page," <http://www.qug.org.uk/>. Accessed 12th May 2014. Linton's links with India were complex; he first went there while in the army, but later worked there as a journalist, a researcher, an Oxfam volunteer, and an international Quaker representative. See Eleanor Nesbitt, "John Linton obituary," Guardian News and Media Ltd., <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jun/17/john-linton-obituary>. (accessed 12th May 2014) and Britain Yearly Meeting, "Epistles and Testimonies," (London: Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, 2011), 56.

⁴⁴¹ Rhoda R. Gilman, "25 Years of Quaker Universalism | Quaker Universalist Fellowship," <http://quakeruniversalist.wordpress.com/2011/03/01/25-years-of-quaker-universalism/>. Accessed 12th May 2014.

⁴⁴² Ralph Hetherington, *Universal Quakerism* (Quaker Universalist Group, 1983). 1.

The phrase 'mystical basis of Quakerism' points us back to the work of Rufus Jones and others, discussed in chapter 1.

QUG's aims are further explored in QUG's publications, and I want to look here especially at the pamphlet series, which has enabled a range of authors to discuss in more detail their Quaker Universalist positions. In terms of language, the pamphlets display the three Quaker assumptions – experience-first, unity-of-religious-experience, and ineffability – quite clearly, and they are revealing in terms of theology and non-Quaker influences. Two examples will be sufficient to display the assumptions about language discussed above, and to tell us something about the other traditions of religious thought with which QUG members are engaging. (I will be returning to the topic of Quaker universalism in chapter 6, where it is set in the context of other forms of pluralism about truth.)

Firstly, John Linton's seminal 1977 piece, *Quakerism as Forerunner* is an obvious starting point since it is also the historical origin of the QUG as an organisation, and a useful one as it lays out clearly the basis on which QUG began.⁴⁴³ This was originally a talk – the talk which led to the founding of QUG, and which QUG published as their first pamphlet. On the website where they re-published it in 2004 they call it "the talk which led directly to the formation of the Quaker Universalist Group."⁴⁴⁴ Linton was not a scholar of religion, but his experience of living and working in India and holding Meeting for Worship in multi-theology groups there was taken to be valuable by the Quakers who heard him talk about it. In the pamphlet, Linton is dismissive about language in ways which clearly display the experience-first assumption – for example, he responds to a suggested Christian argument that Jesus was not just a prophet, and that Christians therefore disagree with Muslims, thus: "Son of God or Prophet, what

⁴⁴³ John Linton, *Quakerism as Forerunner*, (Quaker Universalist Group, 2004), <http://qug.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/LINTON.doc>.

⁴⁴⁴ QUG, "Quaker Universalist Group : e-Publications," http://qug.org.uk/?page_id=193. Accessed 12th May 2014.

difference does it make: it is just a matter of words"⁴⁴⁵ – and steers close to the pluralist position of John Hick (which will be discussed in detail in chapter 5).⁴⁴⁶ He also takes a lead from certain formulations of Hindu thought, saying that: "Quakerism should abandon its claim to be part of the Christian church, and move towards a universalist position. It should take the line of Hinduism that Truth can be approached from many quarters."⁴⁴⁷ This conception of the nature of Truth, often supported with a quotation from Gandhi, is found in several of the QUG pamphlets and seems to enable support for multi-theology remarks. It is in some ways a correlate of the experience-first assumption, in as much as both positions claim that there is a fact of the matter, a Truth or at least a direct experience of the Truth, which can be accessed by individuals but is not fully representable in words.

Secondly, it is useful to be aware that some Quaker Universalist writers nurtured an aspiration that Quakerism should be welcoming to people with a range of theological positions some decades before it appeared in the 1994 Book of Discipline. This is not merely the on-the-ground observation that Meetings are welcoming the unchurched and former or present members of non-Christian religious communities, but an active desire that the Society of Friends adapt, affected by changes in wider society, to better provide "a home for sincere seekers who come to us by different paths".⁴⁴⁸ Jan Arriens' 1990 pamphlet, *The Place of Jesus in Quaker Universalism*, ends with a consideration of "The way ahead", looking to the future of the Society of Friends, having earlier expressed a belief that many of the people who are seeking spiritual solace in paths such as Zen, Transcendental Meditation, Hare Krishna, Psychosynthesis, Insight Seminars, and other (assumed to be)

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Hick, "Christ in a Universe of Faiths." was published as QUG's third pamphlet.

⁴⁴⁷ Linton, *Quakerism as Forerunner*. 3. Accessed 12th May 2014.

⁴⁴⁸ Jan Arriens, *The Place of Jesus in Quaker Universalism* (Quaker Universalist Group, 1997). 20. 'Different', I take it, to the traditional paths to Quaker membership: from the cradle, or as an adult conviction who was previously a member of another Christian church.

similar sources would also "feel at home in a Quaker meeting".⁴⁴⁹ This seems to be typical of Quaker approaches to people on other religious or spiritual paths – it is rooted in Rufus Jones' re-envisioning of Quakerism as "not a denomination or a sect... [but] a spiritual movement".⁴⁵⁰ In both these ways, then, QUG publications have continued the trend begun early in the 20th century and which is visible in more recent, late 20th and early 21st century, Quaker publications.

In the rest of this chapter I am going to talk about Quaker universalism as if it is singular and monolithic. Although Quakers as a group take a wide range of views and even though amongst those who self-identify as Quaker universalists there is a spectrum of opinion on all of the topics which I am about to discuss, I find sufficient similarity between a range of authors to discuss them coherently together – and insufficient detail and depth of development in any particular author to be able to satisfactorily discuss them separately. It is not feasible to represent all of these complex perspectives: even if they had all been published or I could interview every individual, it would not be possible to reflect all the nuances in a single document. Instead, I am going to try and piece together a picture of the Quaker universalist position from a variety of sources, choosing to quote people who are known as leading lights of the Quaker universalist movement and publications which were written and are widely read by Quaker universalists. I talk about 'the' Quaker universalist position, which is no more than a rough average taken between the many Quaker universalist positions, many or most of which have never been articulated in writing or at all. The writings which I use here are mainly from the 1990s, a time when the Quaker Universalist Group was quite visible among Quakers in Britain.

To look at the Quaker universalist position in more detail, then, I will revisit some ground first visited in chapter 1, beginning with the first four items in John Lampen's list of twelve "suggestions for finding the words we need":

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁵⁰ Punshon, *Portrait In Grey: A short history of the Quakers*: 229.

1. There is something more in reality than whatever we can perceive with our senses and measure or hold in our minds.
2. This "something more" is not merely the object of belief; it is experienced by the individual as a presence — and an absence. Some of us experience it as an encounter with something personal. It is not simply an individual experience since we can also meet it as a group.
3. We believe that all people have the potential for this experience.
4. This is the experience which has been given such names as "God", "The Light", "The Tao", "The Inward Christ", "The Spirit", and "that of God in everyone". It is not the naming which is important but the experience.⁴⁵¹

Previously, I discussed the assumptions about language implicit in Lampen's items 5 and 6 as well, and the multi-theology remark in item 4; here, I want to focus on the logic of these first four items, and see how they create a pluralist position. Like Hick's pluralism, Lampen begins with an observation; but unlike Hick's pluralism,⁴⁵² the observation is not of the fruits of other religions in people, especially 'saints', but rather of what might be called 'religious experience' – an experience of direct contact with 'something more'. This observation on its own does not create pluralism; religious experience of this kind, for both individuals and groups, can easily be taken alongside a discounting of 'religious experience' from other people or groups. Point 3, however, is well on the way to producing pluralism. If "all people have the potential for this experience" then we need to take everyone's reports of religious experience seriously, even if they are apparently different. In point 4, Lampen confirms this. His multi-theology remark makes the claim that there is only one kind of religious experience, and that throughout history and around the world it has been given a range of different names. To be precise, the names he lists are not for the experience itself, but the thing which people take themselves to be in contact with during such experiences – what he earlier called the "something more" – but his meaning is clear enough, as is his dismissal of any idea that the different names we give to the "something more" are significant. We

⁴⁵¹ Lampen, "Quaker Experience and Language," 6.

⁴⁵² Or at least his published pluralism; as he became a Quaker in later life, there is nothing to say that he would disagree with this position.

saw these themes emerging in other Quaker writing in chapter 1, as the key assumptions of the primacy of experience and the inadequacy of language. Here I want to develop the idea that Quaker universalism is a distinctive kind of pluralism, which has much in common with the pluralism of Hick, and something in common with Cupitt's pluralism, but also some unique features.

The main distinctive feature of Quaker universalism compared with other possible forms of universalism (such as the pluralism of John Hick) is that it puts experience first, or in other words, it takes direct experience as central – as the Quaker Universalist Group puts it, they believe that "spiritual awareness is accessible to everyone of any religion or none".⁴⁵³ They see this as the core of Quakerism. Ralph Hetherington quotes William Penn's 1669 book *The Christian Quaker* to argue that Penn's belief in "Gentile Divinity" (glossed as 'heathen spirituality') is what we would now call universalism. Hetherington goes on to frame this in the pluralist or multi-theology terms with which we have become familiar, and link it to the Gospel of John, always a Quaker favourite:

[Penn] asserted that the inward Light of Christ was present in all men and women everywhere. It was this light that led to spiritual insight, redemption and salvation. If this is so, it would be hard to argue that this light is not equivalent to the Buddha Nature of Buddhism, the Brahman of Hinduism, and the Tao of Taoism. Moreover, it is directly in line with the teaching of the Fourth Gospel which refers to the 'true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world'.⁴⁵⁴

This quotation grounds the Quaker universalist view deeply in the Christian background from which Quakerism arose (it is hardly surprising that Penn is in line with the Fourth Gospel, since that was his source for this idea), but also makes the claim that equivalent ideas can be found in other religions –

⁴⁵³ The phrase 'or none' appears to have been a recent addition when David Boulton quoted this phrase in 1997. Boulton, *The Faith of a Quaker Humanist*: 18.

⁴⁵⁴ Ralph Hetherington, *Quakerism, Universalism and Spirituality* (London: Quaker Universalist Group, 1995). 11.

although it is worth asking why Hetherington would find it "hard to argue" that the Light is not equivalent to the other concepts he lists. Following my previous line of argument – derived from Wittgenstein but also very similar to that used by D'Costa in the piece quoted in the discussion of Hick above – it is in fact relatively easy to argue that the Light is not equivalent to the Buddha Nature. The two phrases have different origins, different uses, relate to different forms of life, and only the pluralist assumption that all religions contain some truth could encourage us to treat them as the same. In this piece, though, Hetherington also hints at the role of "spiritual insight, redemption and salvation", suggesting a kinship with Hick's fruits-of-religion model of pluralism. It is plausible to think that he is at least somewhat attracted to both positions and I would not say that they were necessarily incompatible.

Although the Friends involved would rightly deny that their universalist position was a Quaker doctrine (because nothing can have the status of a doctrine within Quakerism), it can nevertheless be thought of as taking the kind of second-order role which Lindbeck, as discussed in chapter 3, ascribes to doctrines – in other words, it tells you what kinds of things can correctly be said within the language-game at hand.⁴⁵⁵ Later in the pamphlet, Hetherington argues that this inward Light can be – indeed, should be, if we are reading George Fox correctly⁴⁵⁶ – understood as equivalent to 'that of God in everyone' or 'that of God in all consciences'.⁴⁵⁷ Whatever the understanding of 'God' at work here, and it does sometimes seem that there is truth in Alistair Heron's charge that 'that of God' has

⁴⁵⁵ It does not fit Lindbeck's definition of this second-order position very neatly because these 'doctrinal' claims are generally implicit and not discussed as such. Rather, they are taken as self-evident by most writers, and even those who disagree often struggle to articulate them.

⁴⁵⁶ That is, according to the rules of the Quaker language-game as Hetherington understands them.

⁴⁵⁷ Hetherington, *Quakerism, Universalism and Spirituality*: 24. He uses Joseph Pickvance's work on Fox's journal to support this argument.

become no more than a "vague catchphrase",⁴⁵⁸ the mechanism for universalism has become clear. All religions (not even all major or world religions, but all religious traditions and movements) are likely to contain some measure of truth if they reflect the genuine spiritual experience of the participants, since that experience has been brought to them by the same inward Light which guided Quakers historically and which can guide people today – including, but not only, Quakers.

The belief in the universal potential for spiritual experience, and for unmediated access to the Divine, marks Quaker universalism out as different from Hick's pluralism insofar as Hick accepts the Kantian proposal that we cannot have any such access to the Real. Since Hick also argues that all religions are responses, in various forms, to the Real, it is not quite clear how such responses come about unless they are all happening entirely in the absence of contact or evidence. Although Hick does sometimes speak of experiencing the Real, this is through the "schematizing" of "basic concepts" into "more concrete forms" – in particular, personal and non-personal forms.⁴⁵⁹ The claim of universal potential for spiritual experience may also present some conflicts with the Cupittian or non-realist approach to pluralism, since many Quakers would hold that there is indeed something to access – although as we saw above, non-theist Friends such as David Boulton appear to be solving this problem to their own satisfaction. For the purposes of this chapter, it is most important to take from my discussion of Hick the idea that pluralism may be grounded in either the fruits of the religious life (as Hick does) or in direct access to the Divine (as most Quakers do) or in both (as some Quakers seem to); from my discussion of Cupitt the idea that non-realism and pluralism are compatible and that the Quaker community can and does contain both; and finally from my discussion of Quaker universalism the understanding that pluralist ideas

⁴⁵⁸ Alistair Heron, *Caring, Conviction, Commitment: Dilemmas of Quaker membership today* (London and Birmingham: Quaker Home Service and Woodbrooke College, 1992). 62.

⁴⁵⁹ John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2005). 141.

work well with other Quaker assumptions and underlie the practice of making multi-theology and list-format remarks.

Having laid out three possible pluralist positions in some detail and considered the similarities and differences between them – and noted the possibility of multiple overlaps and permutations of the positions described – I now move on to look at them from a more critical angle, discussing some possible critiques of pluralism (which mostly apply to all three, although I will clarify those cases where one form is capable of a stronger response than others). This exercise has two purposes: examining critiques helps to explain the positions themselves more fully, and considering possible critiques which could be brought against Quaker universalists helps to clarify that although these comments make sense within the community, they are not always going to be readily accepted outside that context.

Part 2: Critiques of pluralism(s)

The main lines of critique of pluralism in the theological and philosophical literature are that the theory is implausible or not as universal as it claims to be – in particular, some religions seem to be excluded from it – and I will consider this first. However, some other more minor critiques are still important, being enough to render the theory problematic even if it is found to be initially plausible, and I go on to consider some of these. Sinkinson, for example, has argued that not only does Hick's pluralism not allow for the possibility of revelation – generally important to a religious movement which accepts a form of continuing revelation – but also suffers from a flaw which it deplores in other theologies of religion, namely arrogance and intolerance.⁴⁶⁰

The core claims of pluralist positions run deeply counter to the theologies

⁴⁶⁰ Chris Sinkinson, *The Universe of Faiths: A Critical Study of John Hick's Religious Pluralism* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001).

and intuitions of many non-pluralists. Obviously, someone who believes that their religious tradition contains the unique truth and that this truth is not present in other religions is likely to find pluralism unappealing, and to seek to defend their exclusivist position from charges such as arrogance and not taking other religions seriously (either by denying that this is true, or especially for the latter argument, by biting the bullet and arguing that taking untrue religions seriously would be a mistake). Similarly, both Cupitt's non-realist form of pluralism and Hick's demythologised pluralism seem to offend against the strong claims of believers who hold realist positions. Even for those who do not hold such positions, the claim that all the world religions are accessing the same source – in the Quaker universalist understanding, the same Divine – may seem implausible in the face of irreconcilable differences between the world religions. Attempts such as those by Hick and Armstrong to argue that all the religions teach the same guidelines really, perhaps at a deeper level than the superficial claims which seem to be in direct and obvious conflict, or that the parts which are in apparent conflict are less important (because, for example, they concern metaphysics rather than morals), tend to fall somewhat flat not least because we may not agree that the conflicting claims can be de-emphasised in these ways. They may also be falsely assuming that all the moral teachings of different religions are equivalent – in Hick's case, on the basis that the moral effects of the different religions are sufficiently similar as to be regarded as equivalent.

There are also counter-examples to specific parts of Hick's claim which seem to make it less universal. For example, much of Hick's hypothesis is based on his study of sacred texts from the 'world religions', and this excludes the many religious traditions which have no text, or which do not have a single sacred text, although the possibility remains open that this non-textual work could be completed by another writer. Furthermore, Hick's notion that all religions aim at some kind of salvation or at least personal transformation seems to be dubious in light of those which have no such idea. In his 2012 PhD thesis, Wai Yip Wong argues that Chinese folk religion provides a counter-example to many of Hick's claims. In particular,

his study of Chinese Folk Religion shows that the 'Golden Rule', held up by Hick as the key ethical teaching which all religions have in common, is in fact contradictory to the central theme of Chinese Folk Religion.⁴⁶¹ This observation suggests that, although Hick is striving to be neutral towards all religions, he is in fact biased by his own confessional position. In trying to maintain that position, then, Hick or his follower faces a dilemma:

If he tries to argue that what this religion teaches is indeed mistaken because it is inconsistent with the core teaching of other religions, such an approach would be identical to that of the exclusivists whom he strongly opposes; and if he suggests that this religion is syncretistic, superstitious, non-salvific and thus unreliable, we have seen that such classical viewpoints are unfair (i.e., non-pluralist) because the said religiosities only imply differences, not inferiority – the pursuit of earthly fortunes at the present, for example, can be seen as a different yet equally legitimate conception of salvation.⁴⁶²

Wong ultimately argues, however, that the benefits of Hick's neutral position can be maintained by accepting multiple criteria for valid religions. This involves rejecting some of Hick's claims about what constitutes an 'authentic religion' in favour of a less simplistic and more accurate view of the religions which actually exist in the world – Hick did not take Chinese Folk Religions into account in his original pluralist perspective, but they, and other neglected traditions, can be incorporated into a version which allows religions to speak for themselves rather than relying on texts.⁴⁶³ There may be an ongoing concern about whether a particular version of pluralism has incorporated all of, or enough of, the world's many religious traditions, but it seems theoretically possible to continue such an expansion until it meets the required standard.

Keith Ward's extensive response to Don Cupitt's *Taking Leave of God*, called *Holding Fast to God*, focusses on the issues around non-realism, but also discusses Cupitt's pluralism – drawing out, though without referring

⁴⁶¹ Wong Wai Yip, "Reconstructing John Hick's theory of religious pluralism: a Chinese folk religion's perspective" (University of Birmingham, 2012).

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 383.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, 388, 90.

directly to, its similarities with Hick's pluralism⁴⁶⁴. Like D'Costa, he critiques the use of "the old story of the men feeling different parts of an elephant, which is usually trotted out at this point", saying that it "rarely leads people to draw the obvious conclusion, which is that it really *is* an elephant, after all".⁴⁶⁵ Ward also objects to having his words, the words of a practising Christian, reinterpreted – something akin to what D'Costa critiqued as 'mythologising' in Hick's work.⁴⁶⁶ Ward says that Cupitt:

... may very well invent for himself, autonomously, an ideal way of life, and get on with it. He may, if he wishes, tell himself false stories about non-existent gods to help him follow his ideal (though that sort of help seems rather dubious). What he cannot do is tell people like me what I *really* mean when I speak of God. Words mean what fully educated, competent language-speakers intend them to mean. I intend the word 'God' to refer to the perfect creator of the universe, and the dictionary assures me, if in doubt, that it does mean just that.⁴⁶⁷

Ward provides no references to tell us whose thought in philosophy of language he might be drawing upon when he makes such claims, but on the face of it they sound plausible, and it is worth pausing to see how this differs from the Wittgensteinian view of language which I considered in chapters 2 and 3. The key word in the paragraph is 'intend'. Despite the references to education, competence, and the dictionary (which could be a tool of community-created meaning), Ward implies that meaning is something issuing from the mind of the speaker and checked by the

⁴⁶⁴ Keith Ward, *Holding Fast to God: A Reply to Don Cupitt* (London: SPCK, 1982).

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁴⁶⁶ The uses of 'mythologising' and 'demythologising' in this chapter are somewhat inconsistent, with both of them used of much the same process. Cupitt, who dislikes supernatural elements, thinks that Christianity would be improved by demythologising it, letting go of claims like 'Jesus was born of a virgin' or at least treating them in a non-realist way – whereas Hick, who can cope with some supernatural elements but wants to weaken them in order to share them around more evenly, wants to move claims like 'Jesus was born of a virgin' from the world of fact to the world of myth. Hick's mythologising looks very much like Cupitt's demythologising from D'Costa's perspective, which holds that some of this supernatural stuff is quite important.

⁴⁶⁷ Ward, *Holding Fast to God: A Reply to Don Cupitt*: 155-6.

dictionary in cases of doubt, rather than by the use of the word in particular contexts by a community of speakers. He also confuses sense and reference – 'God' could mean what he intends it to mean without referring to that to which he intends it to refer (if, for example, that referent does not exist). This serves to confuse his following point. He says that since he does intend to refer to an existent being:

... if C[upitt] insists on using the word 'God' expressively and non-referringly, he is involved in a factual dispute with me and all my fellow-believers. We say that there is a God, and he says there is not (or that we could not refer to one, if there was). It is not just that we are using words in different ways (though we are). We are disagreeing about the facts, about the nature of the world.⁴⁶⁸

Unfortunately, Ward has left the key point here in parentheses. In *Taking Leave of God*, Cupitt does indeed argue that the concept of God, like all other concepts, exists within our language system and that we cannot access God aside from this human linguistic perspective.⁴⁶⁹ Because of this, he is not disagreeing with Ward and others about the nature of the world, but about what we can know about the nature of the world – about epistemology, rather than about 'facts'. Cupitt actually thinks that this issue, about whether God 'really exists' or not, is irrelevant, something he would say that he has in common with Kant. Cupitt says that the "crucial point" about the question "does God exist outside faith's relation to God, or is the concept of God just a convenient heuristic fiction that regulates the religious life?" is that "it is of no religious interest":

There cannot be any religious interest in any supposed extra-religious reality of God, and I have argued all along that the religious requirement's authority is autonomous and does not depend on any external imponent.⁴⁷⁰

From Cupitt's perspective, then, the objections made by Ward and others are missing the point. 'God' is "an incorporating or unifying symbol connoting

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 156.

⁴⁶⁹ Cupitt, *Taking Leave of God*.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 96.

the whole of what we are up against in the spiritual life", useful enough that we should keep the term, but not something around which we should try to build a metaphysics.⁴⁷¹ There is something distinctly postmodern about this detached or even ironic kind of position.

Without wishing to digress into a detailed discussion of Kant here, it is worth noting that while Cupitt takes Kant's phenomenal/noumenal distinction to say that God's 'real existence' is irrelevant, and that there is no reality 'out there' for God to exist in, Hick would argue that Kant says that there is a reality in which God could exist.⁴⁷² As we have seen with the many uses of Wittgenstein discussed in this thesis, the work of a single philosopher can often be interpreted to support more than one position. Both Cupitt and Hick – and, less directly, the Quaker universalists – are drawing on the same tradition of European thought but are employing it in different ways.

Even if we accept that Hick's pluralism is plausible, there are further reasons why we might find it objectionable. For one thing, if our reason for rejecting exclusivist and even inclusivist Christian claims about salvation is that we find the Christian claim to know best to be arrogant and support imperialist behaviour of which we disapprove – and this is one of Hick's reasons for developing another way of thinking about non-Christians – it is disturbing to find that the pluralist proposal, which claims to replace and improve upon those positions, has much the same effect.⁴⁷³ This, restated, is precisely what Sinkinson argues: that followed through, Hick's proposals lead to the very intolerance that he condemned in others. This is because the assumptions for which Hick critiques inclusivism and exclusivism, "about others regarding the validity of their beliefs", he also "cannot avoid making".⁴⁷⁴ Sinkinson

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 97.

⁴⁷² Hick, *A Interpretation of Religion*: 240-2; Cupitt, *Sea of Faith*: 84.

⁴⁷³ Sinkinson concedes that "the pluralist emphasis on tolerance may appear attractive in comparison with even a brief survey of church history". Sinkinson, *The Universe of Faiths: A Critical Study of John Hick's Religious Pluralism*: 171.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 169.

says that:

... the philosophy of language embedded in the pluralist hypothesis demands a constant reinterpretation of the claims religious people make. The pluralist interprets the doctrines of all traditions as, substantially, mythological. The only religious claims that escape the mythological treatment are those that the pluralist herself makes.⁴⁷⁵

D'Costa and others have made the same point, arguing that Hick's position "has the effect of claiming that there are no true religions, for all misunderstand themselves until they embrace the pluralist hypothesis".⁴⁷⁶ This can be traced to the influence of Enlightenment thought on Hick's work: Hick mirrors the Enlightenment pattern which, by "granting a type of equality to all religions" ends up "denying public truth to any and all of them".⁴⁷⁷

After this clarification, which problems remain? Pluralism may well be in conflict with prior commitments, including some commonly held by religious believers, and this remains an issue to be addressed in the next section. The claim that pluralism has missed out some religious traditions is true historically, but does not stand as a persistent problem because it can be rectified with further work. Arguments that pluralism misrepresents religious truth-claims tend to miss the point, especially of non-realist pluralisms, because they have missed the lack of metaphysics which comes with that kind of position. A related claim, that pluralism(s) exhibit an attitude of arrogance and knowing best about other people's religions, remains problematic, and might be particularly troubling to Quakers given the Quaker emphasis on primacy of personal experience. I consider this reason for opposing pluralism in more detail in the next part.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Limited, 2000). 46.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 2.

Part 3: Responses

In this part of the chapter, I aim to give some pluralist responses to the two substantive points from the last part; I have set aside those which were adequately responded to above. The purpose of this section is not to validate pluralism entirely, but to show how it can be coherent enough for individuals to accept within the context of a community where most if not all others also accept it. In chapter 7, I will go on to show how these assumptions – already hinted at in chapter 1 – form an important part of the background which makes the Quaker list-format and multi-theology remarks intelligible.

In response to non-pluralists who find pluralism implausible based on their intuition or previous commitments, pluralists are free to point out that pluralism is in line with their own intuitions and previous commitments. Maybe the pluralist is right. Indirect evidence can be produced on both sides, and both sides can claim some direct evidence (from revelation, for example) which would simply be dismissed by the other.⁴⁷⁸ Pluralists can accept that Hick's work was incomplete, and look to adapt their position to incorporate other religions with which Hick was not familiar into their theory – for example, a move like the Quaker one, which puts the emphasis on the universality of human experience of the Something Else and not on the universality of any particular form of morality, might be able to encompass Chinese traditional religion, and perhaps others which Hick omitted, alongside the 'world religions'. Indeed, this move can be taken as shifting the focus from the tradition, something which functions at the community level, and towards the individual, so that even individuals who do not belong to a religious tradition, or who belong to a tradition whose teachings Friends would find objectionable, can be acknowledged to have some access to 'the Real'. Furthermore, the emphasis on the 'inner Light'

⁴⁷⁸ Hick's main proposed source of direct evidence, experience after death (or perhaps at the end of the world), is not very useful – those who have any possible such experiences are not likely to share them with us, and those who have not are generally not in a hurry to obtain them (and would not be able to share them if they did).

found in modern British Quakerism would tend to complement the trend towards focusing on the individual.

The concept of 'something else' becomes increasingly thin as this line of argument is followed, and there may come a point at which it is no longer a useful concept. However, within a specific form of life even the vaguest concept may continue to be used if it happens to fill a need: in a situation like the 'beetle-in-a-box' scenario discussed in chapter 2, the term 'beetle' might be effectively very vague, covering anything unseen in a person's box, but still useful as the word applied to things in boxes. Similarly, Quakers obviously continue to need to refer to 'that which we worship in Meeting for Worship', and while list-format remarks meet some of this requirement, terms like 'something else' and 'the Real' may have a role to play in generalising over the contents of that list. It is clearly the case that these terms tell us little or nothing about the beliefs Quakers hold about that to which they thus refer; however, this only reflects a pre-existing reluctance to make any such beliefs an irreplaceable part of Quakerism.

Although it might seem that pluralism plays into a secularising tendency which rejects the real and public truth of specific religions, it can also be argued that it allows religious traditions to be accorded more truth in multi-faith contexts than is permitted by other perspectives – religious exclusivism or inclusivism and secular reductionism all tend to deny truth value to religions generally or from all religions but one. Pluralism can allow individuals to continue to use their religious concepts and language, in public, as an important part of their thought – so long as they also accept the pluralist doctrine that religions other than their own also contain truth. If we accept that Hick's pluralist position is, as Geoff Teece says, a "religious but not confessional interpretation" of religion, then we might consider it a non-secular but otherwise neutral way of bringing religion into the public sphere.⁴⁷⁹ If we do not accept that, then there is still the possibility that

⁴⁷⁹ Geoff Teece, "John Hick's Interpretation of Religion: an Unexplored Resource for Religious Educators," in *Religious Pluralism and the Modern World: an Ongoing*

Hick's pluralism, although confessional in a way, can bring people together across lines formed by religious and denominational affiliation. Even if this does not work in the wider public sphere, I would argue that it is one of the processes which is taking place within Quaker spaces – and which underpins the ways that Quakers are at present inclined to speak about God.

Another reason to look at pluralism in this way would be that it respects other religions precisely because it does not require conversion away from them. It does, however, offer perspectives and in particular claims about the truth-status of other religions which are foreign to many traditions, and so might be thought of as a kind of add-on to one's existing beliefs: Hick is a Christian and also a pluralist, rather than a Christian (pluralist type).⁴⁸⁰ Similarly, Cupitt is a Christian (of a non-realist type) and also a pluralist, since that position arises from his other beliefs. Pluralists might, then, be creating a new multi-theology religious tradition – or they might look at Quakerism and feel that they have already found one.

For Quakers, who find themselves in a community which already contains a wide variety of theological viewpoints, pluralism is both plausible, in that these Friends may have different theologies but also seem to have much in common including a shared practice of worship, and desirable, because it provides a theological explanation for the diversity and the unity of the community. Meeting, in the context of interfaith work generally, people who are interested in interfaith work and learning about other religions – typically, who are themselves predisposed towards inclusivist or pluralist perspectives – would often serve to reinforce rather than undermine a Quaker pluralism, and the strength of universalism as a position in Britain Yearly Meeting today seems to support the idea that many Quakers do

Engagement with John Hick, ed. Sharada Sugirtharajah (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 255.

⁴⁸⁰ Depending on the orthodox beliefs of the religion, this add-on might fit more naturally onto some religions than others, and indeed could be argued to be native to some and hence not an addition. In chapter 6 I consider the possibility that this is true of Buddhism, at least in many of its formations in the West.

accept basic tenets of pluralism. Although there may still be work to be done on the philosophical implications and sociological scope of this kind of pluralism about religious beliefs, in the context of the Quaker community it can be seen to be make a great deal of sense as a working position.

Conclusion

Quakers have good reasons to accept a form of pluralism as a way of looking at what is happening within their community. Quaker universalism, the form of pluralism which is most widely accepted among Friends, incorporates other core Quaker ideas such as equality of access to the Divine.⁴⁸¹ Discussions about which beliefs can be accepted as 'authentic' religions and debates about which theological positions can be accepted within the Quaker community will need to continue, but the combination of a pluralist approach to religions with the Quaker method of valuing personal experience and also testing it against communal experience will provide some guidelines under which these conversations can be conducted. The widespread acceptance of pluralism already goes some way towards explaining the widespread use of multi-theology remarks, and we have seen that non-Quaker pluralists are also quite inclined to make them.

In the following chapter, I discuss in detail a practice which in some sense embodies the pluralist perspective – and which is usually accompanied by it – namely, multiple religious belonging. In engaging in multiple religious belonging, individuals often find support for their own pluralist perspectives and offer support for a pluralist view even in those who do not engage in multiple religious belonging directly, and they also work on and often enable the construction of a series of equivalencies or translations between

⁴⁸¹ This chapter has not dealt fully with the working through of this position by Quaker non-theist universalists, although I have implied that non-theism, since it is closely related to Cupitt's non-realism, also leads fairly naturally to a pluralist position. Quaker non-theist universalists can also say something like: all people have equal access to that which is good within humanity, a good which is sometimes personified as God.

one religion and another. Taken together, the pluralist assumptions alongside the practice of multiple religious belonging contribute to the context in which the Quaker list-format and multi-theology remarks make sense, and which I will consider again in detail in chapter 7, my second set of worked examples.

Chapter 6: Multiple Religious Belonging

A rabbi losing members of his congregation to the Meeting house next door is said to have complained: some of my best Jews are Friends!⁴⁸²

Having looked at the historical development of pluralism and its interactions with Quakerism, in this chapter I turn to consider the phenomenon of multiple religious belonging, both within Quakerism, where hyphenated identities (such as Quaker-Buddhist, Quaker-Pagan, and Quaker-Anglican) are not uncommon, and in the scholarly discourse about religion, where some dual identities (especially Christian-Buddhist) have received some attention.⁴⁸³ Looking at the approaches which are taken to the topic of multiple religious belonging, and the aspects of the practice of dual belonging which are found to be positive or problematic, I aim to dig deeper into the issue of how we should understand dual or multiple religious belonging and to consider how it fits with the models of religion discussed earlier in this thesis – in particular, the pluralist model will be found to underlie much existing thought on multiple religious belonging, and the cultural-linguistic model is also relevant. Ultimately, I argue that multiple religious belonging is a coherent course for a significant number of people in today's world, and that multi-theology remarks will be more readily comprehensible in a context which includes multiple religious belonging as well as pluralism.

This chapter, then, undertakes the following tasks. In the first section, I show that multiple religious belonging is already happening (a relatively easy job), and then in the second review the literature on the subject, before,

⁴⁸² Traditional joke. This telling can be found in Harvey Gillman, "Quakers and Jews," *The Friend*, 25th November 2009.

⁴⁸³ I continue to use the phrase 'multiple/dual religious belonging' because it is most widely used in the literature; the term 'mixed-faith', although most often applied to couples or marriages, has also sometimes been applied to individuals (e.g. by Andrew Kam-Tuck Yip, Michael Keenan, and Sarah-Jane Page, "Religion, Youth and Sexuality: Selected Key Findings from a Multi-faith Exploration," (Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 2011).).

in the third section, considering one of the major issues arising, namely the question of the criteria for multiple religious belonging. I then go on to argue in the fourth and largest section that although multiple religious belonging can be problematic at times, it can be a reasonable and positive choice, for ordinary people and not just for an elite who are peculiarly well-placed for it. In the process, I seek to relate the insights produced from the fact of multiple religious belonging to models of religion previously considered, especially religion as language. In the two final sections I consider the effects of multiple religious belonging on patterns of speech and show how widespread multiple religious belonging provides a welcoming background for multi-theology remarks, even for speakers not themselves actively practising more than one religious tradition. The chapter has a strong descriptive element but also makes normative claims about the possible positive value of multiple religious belonging as a form of interaction between communities.

The existence of multiple religious belonging

That at least some people claim to belong in some sense to more than one religious tradition is not hard to establish. Gideon Goosen's 2007 paper found thirty-three in Sydney, Australia, in a short time by word-of-mouth, and many writers include in their considerations of the topic an anecdote about someone or a list of names of people who are in this position.⁴⁸⁴ It is

⁴⁸⁴ For example, Phan lists Henri Le Saux (also known as Swami Abhishiktananda), Hugo M. Enomiya-Lassalle, Thomas Merton, Bede Griffiths, Raimundo Panikkar, Michael Rodrigo, and Aloysius Pieris, giving a brief gloss of the Christian and Eastern positions which they combine, and the list given early on in Goosen's book gives Bhawani Charen Banerji, Henri le Saux, Jules Monchanin, Bede Griffiths, Hugo M. Enomiya-Lassalle, Aloysius Pieris, William Johnston, Father Oshida, Michael Rodrigo, Raimundo Panikkar, Roger Corless, and Robert Magliola. This amount of overlap is typical, and perhaps speaks to the relatively limited size of the available literature. Peter C. Phan, "Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church," *Theological Studies* 64(2003): 507-8. and Gideon Goosen, *Hyphenated Christians: Towards a Better Understanding of Dual Religious Belonging* (Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2011). 22.

difficult to provide any statistical idea of how many people in a given place find themselves in the position of practising some kind of multiple belonging, not least because most surveys and censuses do not recognise the possibility and only record individuals under one religion. Furthermore, it is not always clear in what sense people belong – of Goosen's thirty-three participants, only four gave hyphenated identities, and the rest were influenced by more than one tradition but now clear about which provided their 'home'.⁴⁸⁵ This means that he counts, for example, someone who grew up in a Roman Catholic family but is now a Zen Buddhist as being 'both Christian and Buddhist' in some sense, although they may never have identified as both at once.⁴⁸⁶ Similarly, Rose Drew's 2011 book, *Buddhist and Christian? An exploration of dual belonging*, draws on in-depth interviews with and the published writings of six participants, all of whom she identifies as having dual Buddhist and Christian belongings – although it should be noted that not all of them would use this terminology, and by the end of the book, she has begun to argue that not all of these six people are equally fully members of both religious traditions.⁴⁸⁷ Other examples, including cases of more than two religious identities claimed at once, occur in passing; for example, Meredith McGuire mentions a woman who "considers herself a 'spiritual but not religious' Jew-Buddhist-Wiccan", noting that in practice this seems to mean "that she does not try to observe many traditional Jewish religious practices at home or synagogue, but she draws on meaningful parts of her Jewish upbringing for her personal spiritual life" – it is not clear in McGuire's account of this case how the other aspects of her identity factor in.⁴⁸⁸

Other, less academic, texts on dual or multiple religious belonging suggest that it is, if not common, then at least recurrent: *The Jew in the Lotus*

⁴⁸⁵ Gideon Goosen, "An Empirical Study of Dual Religious Belonging," *Journal of Empirical Theology* 20(2007).

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁷ Drew, *Buddhist and Christian? An exploration of dual belonging*.

⁴⁸⁸ Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press via Amazon Kindle, 2008). location 1410.

focusses on dialogue between representatives of several Jewish communities and the Dalai Lama, but also discusses belonging to both Judaism and Buddhism.⁴⁸⁹ An essay in the third-wave Jewish feminist anthology *Yentl's Revenge*, 'Challah for the Queen of Heaven', describes the author's spiritual journey and her attempts to belong to both Wicca and Judaism (which were, at the time when she was writing, partially successful but not without discomfort).⁴⁹⁰ Online, discussion can be found of most possible combinations: many people are discussing their experience of combining Buddhism with Judaism, Buddhism with Christianity, Christianity with Neo-Paganism, Christianity with Hinduism, and so forth. Some combinations – Christianity or Judaism combined with an Eastern religion or a New Religious Movement – seem most common, and are more likely to be spoken about in terms of dual belonging (as opposed to, say, conversion).

While I am establishing that multiple religious belonging exists in the West, it might also be worth saying a few things about its origins.⁴⁹¹ Carlson notes that at the 1993 and 1999 International Parliaments of the World's Religions, "many participants needed hyphens or dashes to list their religious affiliations when they registered".⁴⁹² There is some evidence – Carlson's observation and other anecdotes, as well as Rose Drew's in-depth study of six participants who engaged in Buddhist-Christian dual belonging – to suggest that dual or multiple belonging often begins with or is

⁴⁸⁹ Rodger Kamenetz, *The Jew in the Lotus: A Poet's Re-Discovery of Jewish Identity in Buddhist India* (HarperOne, 1995).

⁴⁹⁰ Ryiah Lilith, "Challah for the Queen of Heaven," in *Yentl's Revenge: The Next Wave of Jewish Feminism*, ed. Danya Ruttenberg (New York: Seal Press, 2001).

⁴⁹¹ In Asian countries, patterns are quite different, but British Quakers are in a distinctly Western setting and so I focus on this context, even though several noted Western practitioners of dual belonging have begun when they travelled to Eastern places, especially India. See papers on Japan and Sri Lanka in Catherine Cornille, ed. *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010).

⁴⁹² Jeffrey Carlson, "Responses," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 23(2003): 77.

associated with processes of interreligious dialogue.⁴⁹³ Some people might be children of interfaith couples, in which case their dual religious belonging – if they are raised in both their parents' traditions – would be interlocked with their parents' navigation of any interreligious difficulties.⁴⁹⁴ Most, however, are raised in one tradition and then begin to engage in another, which they encounter through reading, personal contact, or travel (or a mixture of them). When people are seeking contact without conversion, which is a common feature of the explorations of those who end up belonging to multiple religious traditions,⁴⁹⁵ interfaith dialogue settings have obvious attractions.

Literature on multiple religious belonging

The academic work on multiple religious belonging in Western contexts is to be found in a relatively small number of places, has a distinct focus on Buddhist-Christian dual belonging at the expense of other interactions, and, taken as a whole, does not differentiate clearly between normative and descriptive claims. The main academic sources are: a considerable number of articles in the journal *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, an edited collection by Catherine Cornille called *Many Mansions?*, a book by Gideon Goosen called *Hyphenated Christians*, and a book by Rose Drew called *Buddhist*

⁴⁹³ Drew, *Buddhist and Christian? An exploration of dual belonging*; Jeffrey Carlson, "Pretending to be Buddhist and Christian: Thich Nhat Hanh and the Two Truths of Religious Identity," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 20(2000).

⁴⁹⁴ For more discussion of this situation see Susan Katz Miller, *Being Both: Embracing Two Religions in One Interfaith Family* (Beacon Press, 2013).

⁴⁹⁵ It is presumably possible to convert from one tradition to another, and then add a third tradition as described here, or to convert and then return to a previous tradition and thereby end up with a dual belonging, but I have not found anyone describing this process in the literature. Exactly what constitutes 'conversion' will vary between religions, since – as discussed below – they have different criteria for belonging.

and Christian?.⁴⁹⁶ A few articles have appeared in other places, and Susan Katz Millar has written a book which focuses on raising children in Jewish-Christian families,⁴⁹⁷ but overall this is a small literature.

There are also a number of practitioner sources, which overlap or interact with the academic material to some extent; for example, Roger Corless has described his personal practice in articles for *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, and Jeffrey Carlson has responded academically to Thich Nhat Hanh's practitioner-centric philosophy.⁴⁹⁸ Rose Drew's thoughtful and detailed discussions take advantage of this overlap and the number of practitioners of dual belonging who have published on the topic, and takes as her interviewees people who are willing to be publically identified so that she can incorporate their previously written and published views alongside their interview responses. Although she only has six case studies, a significant amount of progress is made through her careful discussions of them. Autobiographical material from practitioners also allows us to extend the range of dual-belongings included, from a clear focus on Christianity-and-Buddhism to include, for example, Judaism-and-Buddhism, Judaism-and-Paganism and Christianity-and-Paganism.⁴⁹⁹ These autobiographical sources are useful contributions to the overall picture of multiple religious belonging, even when what they reveal is primarily confusion, but they do not always provide either the overview or the analysis which this chapter requires.

Besides Drew's, the other book-length study of multiple religious belonging

⁴⁹⁶ Cornille, *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*; Drew, *Buddhist and Christian? An exploration of dual belonging*; Goosen, *Hyphenated Christians: Towards a Better Understanding of Dual Religious Belonging*.

⁴⁹⁷ Miller, *Being Both: Embracing Two Religions in One Interfaith Family*.

⁴⁹⁸ In, for example, Roger Corless, "A Form for Buddhist-Christian Coinherence Meditation," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 14(1994); Carlson, "Pretending to be Buddhist and Christian: Thich Nhat Hanh and the Two Truths of Religious Identity."

⁴⁹⁹ For examples of these, see Kamenetz, *The Jew in the Lotus: A Poet's Re-Discovery of Jewish Identity in Buddhist India.*, Lilith, "Challah for the Queen of Heaven.", and Adelina St Clair, *The Path of a Christian Witch* (Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2010).

is Gideon Goosen's *Hyphenated Christians: Towards a Better Understanding of Dual Religious Belonging*.⁵⁰⁰ Again, the key focus is on Christians, although there is a wider range of religions paired with Christianity – Goosen includes Hinduism and other religions as well as Buddhism which other literature leads us to expect. Goosen's book follows on from his previous empirical study of 'dual religious belonging',⁵⁰¹ and considers a wide range of circumstances under which a practitioner of Christianity might incorporate ideas or practices from other religions into their personal religious life. Some of these are relatively minor and would not necessarily be considered 'dual religious belonging' by others. Overall, Goosen's book is useful for my work but somewhat lacking in analysis; as John D'Arcy May says in a review, it uses "straightforward didactic prose and clear explanations of terms [which] should be accessible to Christians with or without a theological background".⁵⁰² The downside of this is that it does not dig as deeply into the issues it raises as might be desirable.

The other book which focuses on multiple religious belonging is the collection edited by Catherine Cornille, *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*.⁵⁰³ Pre-dating Drew's and Goosen's books (the first edition was published in 2002), Cornille's anthology considers the topic in a world-wide perspective, with essays focussing on – for example – Japan, Sri Lanka, and Christian identity. Cornille's introduction to the book and her 2003 article "Double Religious Belonging: Aspects and Questions" both illustrate an attitude which has clear doubts about the practicality and usefulness of multiple religious belonging.⁵⁰⁴ In particular, as I will discuss

⁵⁰⁰ Goosen, *Hyphenated Christians: Towards a Better Understanding of Dual Religious Belonging*.

⁵⁰¹ Goosen, "An Empirical Study of Dual Religious Belonging."

⁵⁰² John D'Arcy May, "Reviewed work(s): Hyphenated Christians: Towards a Better Understanding of Dual Religious Belonging by Gideon Goosen; Buddhist and Christian? an Exploration of Dual Belonging by Rose Drew," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 32(2012): 153.

⁵⁰³ Cornille, *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*; Catherine Cornille, "Double Religious Belonging: Aspects and Questions," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 23(2003).

in the next section, Cornille has a very high standard for belonging which makes multiple belonging seem especially difficult. Many of the contributors to her book do not share this view – for example, the standards of Christian belonging described in Raimon Panikkar's essay "On Christian Identity" are quite different from Cornille's.⁵⁰⁵

Outside the journal *Buddhist-Christian Studies* and the aforementioned three books, discussion of multiple religious belonging is rare, and mainly sociological – for example, Klaus Huber's article "Questions of Identity among 'Buddhist Quakers'" focusses on survey results.⁵⁰⁶ However, Peter C. Phan has addressed some of the theological issues in his 2003 article,⁵⁰⁷ and I will be discussing his contribution in more detail below, and Tilley and Albarran's essay "Multiple Religious Belonging: Can a Christian Belong to Other Traditions Too?" also addresses some of the theoretical issues.⁵⁰⁸ Very little of the material focuses on British contexts – Huber does, but Drew, Phan, and Tilley and Albarran are working primarily within an American context, and Goosen's empirical work was done in Australia – however, at present the situations of the traditions involved (mainly Christianity and Buddhism) seem to be sufficiently similar across the British, American, and Australian contexts that the key points will stand.

The literature has yet to address thoroughly a number of issues relating to multiple religious belonging, especially those concerning the specific differences between various combinations of religions, issues about the nature of membership in a particular tradition, and whether at a theoretical

⁵⁰⁵ Raimon Panikkar, "On Christian Identity: Who is a Christian?," in *Many Mansions?: Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2002).

⁵⁰⁶ Huber, "Questions of Identity Among 'Buddhist Quakers'."

⁵⁰⁷ Phan, "Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church."

⁵⁰⁸ Terrence W. Tilley and Louis T. Albarran, "Multiple Religious Belonging: Can a Christian Belong to Other Traditions Too?," in *Religious Diversity and the American Experience: A Theological Approach*, ed. Terrence W. Tilley (New York: Continuum, 2007).

level multiple religious belonging should be regarded as a positive development. In relation to the latter, there is a clear struggle in the literature between those who regard syncretism (itself a much contested term) as dangerous or at least unwanted, and those who see it as useful or at least inevitable. Although I cannot address all of these in this chapter, I consider some of the factors relevant to debates about whether an individual 'really' belongs to a religion, and also those which affect our perspective on the desirability of multiple religious belonging.

Criteria for belonging

I have established that multiple religious belonging does exist, and described previous work on the subject. The literature so far raises, but has yet to answer, a more detailed question about multiple religious belonging, however, which could be put as: under what conditions should we say that someone is actually practising multiple religious belonging? It is noticeable that those who think that true dual religious belonging is very rare or even impossible tend to have a very high standard for belonging, and of those, Catherine Cornille's is probably the hardest standard to achieve: she demands a "complete surrender" to a particular tradition and argues that one cannot surrender completely to more than one religion.⁵⁰⁹ If you accept this as the standard of religious belonging, then Cornille may well be right; certainly, her picture of what one "might rightly" call "an experience of double religious belonging", in which one takes two different traditions as normative over different areas of life, so that Buddhism may "be believed to

⁵⁰⁹ Cornille, "Double Religious Belonging: Aspects and Questions," 48. I note that, in the context of this article, she is only considering the possibility of being both Christian and Buddhist – this is something we will see in much of the literature. Tilley and Albarran suggest that Eastern religions such as Buddhism "which can be embraced, in some of its forms, with minimal or no 'doctrinal' commitments that conflict with the expectations that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam place on their adherents" are correspondingly more attractive to Westerners from those Abrahamic backgrounds. Tilley and Albarran, "Multiple Religious Belonging: Can a Christian Belong to Other Traditions Too?," 162.

be true and normative in certain fundamental questions and Christianity in others" seems like a plausible form of syncretism.⁵¹⁰ However, I also suspect that her model of complete surrender to a religious tradition would be distasteful to many modern religious people – those whom Don Cupitt mentioned, for example, who value and wish to retain the individual freedom they have gained.⁵¹¹ Submitting "to the absolute authority of a Buddhist teacher on some issues and to a Christian teacher on others"⁵¹² hardly seems like a step forward if you do not wish to submit to the absolute authority of a human teacher at all, even if you get to choose the issues. Nor is it a widely-recognised Christian standard of belonging; churches do not, and have never, generally requested surrender to the absolute authority of an individual Christian teacher, and so it seems to be a strange choice for a criterion of belonging in the first place. Because of this, I find it unlikely that many practitioners of multiple religious belonging would be upset by their failure to reach Cornille's standard.

Furthermore, it is not entirely clear what would be involved in this surrender. Elsewhere Cornille mentions "unswerving and single-minded commitment to"⁵¹³ one's own tradition and says that:

Religious belonging implies more than a subjective sense of sympathy or endorsement of a selective number of beliefs and practices. It involves the recognition of one's religious identity by the tradition itself and the disposition to submit to the conditions of membership as delineated by that tradition.⁵¹⁴

The issue of reciprocal recognition of religious identity is an important one, to which I will be returning later in this chapter. The other criterion given here, submission to the conditions of membership given by a religious tradition, is perhaps intended to come close to the 'full surrender' model

⁵¹⁰ Cornille, "Double Religious Belonging: Aspects and Questions," 46. Unlike Cornille, I do not think that syncretism is necessarily bad.

⁵¹¹ Cupitt, *Taking Leave of God*: 3.

⁵¹² Cornille, "Double Religious Belonging: Aspects and Questions," 46.

⁵¹³ Cornille, *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, 3.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

described earlier, but actually confuses the issue. Any particular tradition may have very demanding or very light conditions of membership, and may focus on different aspects of belonging – attendance, specific practices, financial contributions, belief, a particular ritual – and accepting authority, central to the 'full surrender' might not feature at all. Furthermore, there are examples where there is disagreement within a religion about what the conditions of membership should be.⁵¹⁵ In such cases, are some people members of one part of a religious tradition but not the whole religion? To whose authority should they – and we as observers – submit on this question? In such cases, there seems to be an important and continuing space for individual self-definition, which is in turn likely to be based on a "sense of sympathy" and "endorsement of ... beliefs and practices";⁵¹⁶ that the endorsement will be more or less selective is de-emphasised when we have noted that most religious practitioners are selective to some degree, not managing to attend every event or agree in equal measure with all claims (this is a point to which I will return when considering Carlson's perspectives on the nature of religious identity in the next section).

Indeed, many people who belong to only one religious tradition will not give it the authority in their lives which the term 'full surrender' suggests as an ideal. As Rose Drew says in discussing the authenticity of the Christian identity of a Roman Catholic- Buddhist dual believer:

Were one to insist that honouring the objective dimension of Roman Catholic identity demands that one's theology be precisely aligned with the Vatican's in every regard, one might well find oneself hard put to find any authentic Roman Catholics among ordinary believers.⁵¹⁷

A somewhat lower standard for true religious belonging would therefore be reasonable. By accepting that it is enough for someone to be fulfilling general criteria for multiple religious belonging – such as participating in

⁵¹⁵ Which is most and probably all of the major world religions, among others.

⁵¹⁶ Cornille, *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, 4.

⁵¹⁷ Drew, *Buddhist and Christian? An exploration of dual belonging*: 224.

more than one community, working with more than one theology, engaging in more than one form of religious practice, or any combination thereof – some other writers on dual or multiple belonging have found ways to consider those who regard themselves as practising more than one religion as actually doing so. Many acknowledge that there are different levels or ways of belonging to more than one religious tradition. Robert Schreiter has usefully suggested that people might engage in sequential, dialogical, or simultaneous belonging.⁵¹⁸ The first will involve moving from one tradition to another, and will qualify as dual belonging if the person keeps some aspects of their previous belief. The second will involve dual belonging and a kind of conversation between the two traditions, and the third brings the two (or, one supposes, potentially more) traditions onto an equal footing, as when someone who has belonged sequentially to more than one religion turns back to an older one and makes it important in their life without downgrading the role of the newer religion. This threefold typology of belonging offers a recognition of the complexity of the situations in which people find themselves, and clarifies some of the different conditions which have been labelled 'multiple religious belonging'. There may be other kinds of multiple religious belonging – where one part of the belonging is not recognised by the person who belongs, for example – and these would demand an extension of the typology. I do not undertake this here because it adds little to my present argument, but would consider it a worthwhile project for future study.

Overall, Quakers are likely to accept a form of belonging somewhat short of 'full surrender'. Membership in Britain Yearly Meeting is mostly focused on attendance and participation, with desire to belong and harmony of belief taking significant but secondary roles, and dual belonging is formally accepted in some cases.⁵¹⁹ Although aware of different conditions in other religious traditions, there is probably a desire to take this on trust – to

⁵¹⁸ In an unpublished paper quoted by Carlson, Carlson, "Responses," 77-8.

⁵¹⁹ For technical details relating to membership, see Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith and Practice*: chapter 11. For dual belonging, see 10.30 and 10.31, both of which relate to dual membership with other Christian churches.

believe that those who say they are Buddhists are Buddhists in some sense, for example – and all three of Schreier's kinds of multiple religious belonging are found among Quakers. I draw from this consideration of the criteria for multiple religious belonging the conclusion that not only is it possible but that it should not be regarded as extraordinarily difficult or restricted only to people in highly unusual circumstances. On the contrary, it can be reached by several routes and there is no theoretical reason to be surprised if it is relatively common.

Desirability of multiple religious belonging

What are people doing when they understand themselves as actively and presently belonging to more than one religious tradition? One common image offered in the literature is of 'pick and mix' or 'supermarket' religion;⁵²⁰ Peter Phan talks about "multiple belonging" as:

a contemporary, postmodern form of syncretism in which a person looks upon various religions as a supermarket from which, like a consumer, one selects at one's discretion and pleasure whatever myth and doctrine, ethical practice and ritual, and meditation and healing technique that best suit the temperament and needs of one's body and mind, without regard to their truth values and mutual compatibilities.⁵²¹

In this image, people – presented with the many religious options available in today's world – select those bits which appeal to them and create an individual kind of syncretistic religion. Phan would regard this syncretism as a negative, despite the neutral way in which some sociologists and

⁵²⁰ For an interesting reflection on the prevalence of food metaphors in this type of critique, see John M. Hull, *Mishmash: Religious Education in Multi-Cultural Britain, A Study in Metaphor*, Birmingham Papers in Religious Education (Birmingham and Derby: the Birmingham University School of Education and the Christian Education Movement, 1991).

⁵²¹ Phan, "Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church," 497.

Buddhists use this term. There is no doubt that some people do treat religion in this way. Perhaps the classic example is of the 'eclectic neo-pagan', who takes bits of this and that, usually beginning with a form of Wicca but often including material from Native American, Hindu, Buddhist (especially from Tibetan and Zen Buddhism), Taoist, Egyptian, and Celtic sources.⁵²² It can be misguided, in the sense that it may neglect key parts of one of the traditions involved or require the denial of a central claim, there is the possibility of harm to cultures whose language or practice is appropriated, and it can be threatening to mainstream traditions who think of themselves as having clear-cut boundaries.⁵²³

It also, as Phan argues in the quotation above, does not always pay attention to truthfulness, where this seems to be understood as attention to a single truth, or to coherence. Ironically, we sometimes find something of the kind advocated, even by the same people who condemn it in one form: when Peter Phan praises those who "out of love and loyalty" to the church "undertook interreligious sharing in order to enrich the Church with the spiritual resources of other religions",⁵²⁴ there is a temptation to compare such behaviour to buccaneering, piracy undertaken out of loyalty to the crown. Perhaps by the term 'sharing' he means to indicate that this enrichment works in both directions – he writes from a Christian standpoint for good reason, but it makes it more difficult to judge whether the exchange is mutual.

Another aspect of this critique is the idea that in a process of selecting bits from multiple traditions, one may choose only those parts which are

⁵²² For a wide-ranging discussion of issues of borrowing and cultural appropriation in neo-paganism, see Lupa, ed. *Talking about the Elephant* (Megalithica Books, 2008).

⁵²³ Some of the latter may well be a factor in, for example, Cornille's responses to the possibility, as outlined in the section on literature.

⁵²⁴ Phan, "Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church," 509. He does draw a distinction between the good kind of dual belonging and the bad kind, but beside the fact that the good sort is hard work and not consumerist, it is not entirely clear how we should delineate that distinction.

charming or appealing to the individual, and thereby miss core teachings or perhaps fail to grapple with the challenging parts of a religious teaching, no more than a "merely convenient and easy eclecticism".⁵²⁵ However, Jeffrey Carlson defends the practice from this charge, arguing that any one tradition is "itself the product of a process of selective reconstruction", in which individuals have already "selectively appropriated aspects of a vast array of practices and beliefs that have been identified by those who came before as 'Christian' or 'Buddhist'".⁵²⁶ Carlson speaks here of individuals, but there is also a similar and related process by which a community undertakes much the same process – a church community will have a communal or delegated process by which it chooses which elements to offer in a service, for example, and indeed chooses which services to offer and when, since the single religion 'Christianity' can be presented in a variety of forms.

At the most basic level, it is clearly true that an individual chooses how to interact with a tradition – which worship or meditation sessions to attend, which branch of a tradition to align oneself with, which books or webpages to read, and which if any practices to take on in private or when away from other members of the tradition. Even in religious communities where there is allegedly a high level of agreement on belief, perhaps because it is said to be 'all in the book' or because a single authority cannot be ignored, we find that individuals actually dissent even when they are committed to living with parts which they dislike. Similarly, some groups within a religion may have more trouble with particular tenets; Drew discusses the way in which some of her participants 'hold back' from belief in particular claims, such the Buddhist ideas of karma and rebirth. She acknowledges that some of her participants find their hesitation over such matters reason to question, as Cornille would, their full commitment to the tradition, but goes on to note that there may be other factors involved. She says that one participant, Sallie King, attributes her "lack of positive acceptance of rebirth" less to her dual belonging (King does not accept the "traditional Christian position" either) and more to her status as a Western Buddhist, saying that American

⁵²⁵ Carlson, "Responses," 78.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

Buddhists "don't... intuitively have the assumptions about... living a series of lives" which might come more readily to someone brought up in another culture.⁵²⁷ She also notes that even if King belonged to only one of these two traditions, she might "anyway reserve judgement about whether there is one life or many" because "in the light of her present experience" it is not possible to be sure about this.⁵²⁸ Both the cultural and the epistemic considerations might, for various reasons, arise for someone practising within a single religion, and so these are not problems specific to dual belonging.

Discussions of these matters, including my foregoing paragraph, tend to frame the issue as one of adding or subtracting bits of a religion, as if people were putting items into a shopping basket or mixing bowl – and I return to consider this metaphor below. It is useful, however, to also think of this in other terms. For example, an individual might be seen as re-telling a story with their own interpretations, selections, organisation, and priorities. Alternatively, it would be possible to describe a person (or group) as improvising a performance, using some pre-learned elements, some created spontaneously, and perhaps also some learnt or copied from other members of the cast. These models continue to centre the individual and their agency in religious participation, but reframe their relationship to the community or communities with which they are in dialogue.

Others have defended the 'supermarket' model for other reasons. Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist master who founded the Community of Interbeing while living in exile in France, writes that "fruit salad can be delicious!"⁵²⁹ His variant of the metaphor is from a conference speech given by an Indian Christian, who had spoken about the dangers of making a fruit

⁵²⁷ Drew, *Buddhist and Christian? An exploration of dual belonging*: 153-4.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 154. I note that King's Christian tradition is a branch of American Quakerism – she is identified as a Quaker and although her tradition within Quakerism is not named specifically, Drew's profile of her describes it as having "no formal ministers" and tending to "focus more on the third person of the Trinity". Ibid., 33-34.

⁵²⁹ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (London: Rider Books, 1995). 1.

salad, rather than merely "hear[ing] about the beauties of several traditions".⁵³⁰ Nhat Hanh is keen to stress that he is willing to engage fully in more than one religious tradition – for him, Zen Buddhism and Christianity – and illustrates this by describing the experience of taking communion. He does note that Buddhists "were shocked to hear I had participated in the Eucharist, and many Christians seemed truly horrified".⁵³¹ Nhat Hanh finds this at best puzzling, because:

To me, religious life is life. I do not see any reason to spend one's whole life tasting just one kind of fruit. We human beings can be nourished by the best values of many traditions.⁵³²

In this metaphor, the mutuality of exchange seems much more explicit, and this is matched by Thich Nhat Hanh's teaching life, in which he is keen to share the wisdom and practices of Zen Buddhism with those of all religions and none. Two things might helpfully be noted about this: firstly, that the roots of this attitude might be found in the location of Buddhism in Asia, where a kind of 'multiple religious belonging' has been normal for centuries;⁵³³ and secondly, that the openness of some teachers of Buddhism in particular to multiple religious belonging might explain why it is such a popular candidate for combination with Christianity or Judaism.⁵³⁴

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

⁵³¹ Ibid., 2.

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ The term was probably coined to describe the "Japanese traditional religious scene". See Jan Van Bragt, "Multiple Religious Belonging of the Japanese People," in *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 7. It is not clear that 'belonging' is construed in the same way in, for example, the Japanese context, but this does not seem to affect the value of the term for the analysis of Western contexts.

⁵³⁴ This claim is by observation of the literature rather than statistical evidence. When Goosen asked his thirty-three participants which combinations they thought possible, they were likely to say that Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism could be mixed, but that Islam was not "a possible partner". One respondent, "a recent recruit to Buddhism from a Christian background" rejected the idea of Buddhism as a partner in dual religious practice, although others were willing to permit any combination. Goosen, "An Empirical Study of

Not all Buddhists are so convinced that this is a good idea, however. The Dalai Lama has criticised people who try to be "half-and-half", Christian and Buddhist, saying that we should not "try to put a yak's head on a sheep's body".⁵³⁵ In particular, in a conference about Buddhist views on the Gospels, the Dalai Lama:

... gently and quietly reassured his listeners that the last thing he had come to do was "sow seeds of doubt" among Christians about their own faith. Again and again, he counselled people to deepen their understanding and appreciation of their own traditions, pointing out that human sensibilities and cultures are too varied to justify a single "way" to the Truth. He gently, but firmly and repeatedly, resisted suggestions that Buddhism and Christianity are different languages for the same essential beliefs.⁵³⁶

The use of the term 'Truth' – capital T, a single concept without a "single 'way'" – could imply a kind of pluralism, which goes somewhat against the other claims made in this passage. However, this could be a transcription or translation error, since this is not the voice of the Dalai Lama himself; there is a distinct tension between this use and the final sentence, which can perhaps be best reconciled by assuming that the Dalai Lama considers there to be a real and ongoing difference between the content of Christian and Buddhist teachings, even if both might in one way or another enable people to reach "the Truth" – perhaps seen as lacking this kind of content, a pre- or non-linguistic experience rather than an intellectual understanding.

The illustrations from Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama are sufficient, though, to demonstrate that Buddhists are hardly of a single mind on this topic. Thich Nhat Hanh's 'fruit salad' metaphor makes it clear that he is in

Dual Religious Belonging," 168-9. It should also be noted that not all branches of Buddhism are in agreement about this, and that the Dalai Lama has spoken against dual religious belonging.

⁵³⁵ His Holiness the Dalai Lama, *The Good Heart: His Holiness the Dalai Lama explores the heart of Christianity - and of humanity*, trans. Geshe Thupten Jinpa (London: Rider Books, 1996). xii.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

favour of dual belonging in some cases, and this is strengthened by another of his teachings, namely that Buddhism and Christianity are already mixed.⁵³⁷

Just as a flower is made only of non-flower elements, Buddhism is made only of non-Buddhist elements, including Christian ones, and Christianity is made of non-Christian elements, including Buddhist ones.⁵³⁸

This claim requires some unpacking and a broader view of Nhat Hanh's teaching is useful before we can understand what is being said. He does not, I think, mean that there are separate 'Christian' elements which form parts of Buddhism, but is trying to get, through paradox, at a difficult concept, namely that all 'religions' or 'traditions' interpenetrate to some extent, or in the terminology of 'interbeing', they 'inter-are'. The reference to the flower at the beginning of the quotation points to a broader teaching about the nature of physical life which Nhat Hanh has given in several places. One formulation concerns a flower which, as we look at it more closely, turns out to be made of many things which are not, themselves, the flower – the "non-flower elements" (each 'element', in turn, has no essence, being made up of other 'elements').⁵³⁹ Carlson's paper draws inspiration from a related teaching in which Nhat Hanh describes an autumn leaf, resting on the floor of the woodland, as 'pretending' to be dead; in actuality, all the parts of a leaf (which were 'non-leaf elements' anyway) will go on to be parts of other leaves, other trees, other beings.⁵⁴⁰ Because traditions like Buddhism and Christianity are not physical entities such as flowers or leaves, the analogy can be hard to see, but in other ways the core of the teaching is easier to grasp in relation to a religion: as we look more closely at a religion, we find that it is made of many elements none of which are either inherently part of

⁵³⁷ He is writing specifically about Buddhism and Christianity in this piece, but I think he would say the same of any other religious traditions.

⁵³⁸ Thich Nhat Hahn, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (London: Random House, 1996). 11.

⁵³⁹ Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*: 11.

⁵⁴⁰ Carlson, "Pretending to be Buddhist and Christian: Thich Nhat Hanh and the Two Truths of Religious Identity."

that religion (they could be found in another religion), and which do not singly encapsulate the whole religion. Nhat Hanh's ease with syncretism and movement of ideas, practices, and practitioners between religions seems to stem from this perspective on the illusory nature of boundaries.

To return to the Dalai Lama's imagery, Nhat Hanh would say that yaks already contain non-yak elements, including sheep elements, and vice versa. Carlson picks up this idea and uses it to challenge some notions of different types of double or multiple religious belonging which assume that we begin with "unmixed, pure traditions, prior to any sequential, dialogical, or simultaneous doubling up of them", arguing that this is not possible because "unmixed traditions are not to be found. Traditioning is indeed the verb in which we live, move, and have our becoming".⁵⁴¹ This is especially visible in the religion as language metaphor:⁵⁴² natural languages exist in families with more or less in common, borrow words from other languages when it suits them to do so, and adjust those words as necessary, as when, for example, speakers of English Anglicise the pronunciation of a previously foreign word. It is also relatively common for individuals to speak, and often be fluent in, more than one natural language.

We can see from the foregoing material that multiple religious belonging is already happening in many contexts, and that its existence is not a great surprise within the general view of religion suggested in this thesis. Another reasonable question, which is addressed several times in the literature, is: should limits be placed upon it?

For Carlson, definitely not. He argues that all religions are formed from syncretism at some point, in a way which implies that to reject this obvious truth is to be in denial about the nature of religions. He deals first with the term 'syncretism' and its connotations, then moves on to talk about the

⁵⁴¹ Carlson, "Responses," 79.

⁵⁴² Other metaphors are available. I discuss some in the conclusion of the thesis once the strengths and weakness of this one have become clear.

nature of religious identity; this quotation is from his introduction to the relevant section of his paper, and summarises his argument:

While for most social scientists, syncretism is a relatively neutral term, for most theologians this "religious mixing" is seen as a threat to the "purity" of orthodoxy. I would argue that all religion is, ultimately, syncretism. To have a religious identity is, inevitably, to be a "syncretic self", the product of a process of selective appropriation, internalising elements drawn from vastly varied pools of possibility. We are this amalgam, this ever-changing assemblage of diverse elements, brought together out of freedom and amid a certain destiny, an array of cultural-linguistic influencing factors we cannot control completely.⁵⁴³

At this juncture, it should be asked whether, if everything is already a form of syncretism, the term syncretism loses sense because there is no stable tradition with which or from which to syncretise anything. This returns to my interpretation of Nhat Hanh's point above, in which I suggested that the theory of interbeing gives a worldview in which boundaries – even between 'flower' and 'not-flower' – are in some sense illusions, perhaps because they are humanly created in the first instance. From this perspective, it is no surprise that the boundaries between religions cannot be maintained. Although the descriptive claim that syncretism is everywhere does not automatically lead to the normative claim that syncretism is good, a normative claim does seem to underlie Carlson's article: because syncretism is so pervasive, it is useless to fight it and we should therefore accept it if not celebrate it.⁵⁴⁴ This might be one reason why Carlson, heavily influenced by Nhat Hanh, moves towards terminology of appropriation, a relation which can stand between individuals and loose groups as well as self-defined traditions or religions. Generally speaking, I am inclined to agree with this perspective, while still finding 'syncretism' a useful term in the context of the mixing of religions where one or more of the religions involved does not have this worldview, especially if there is an attempt to maintain a boundary between 'orthodox' and 'heterodox' forms.

⁵⁴³ Carlson, "Pretending to be Buddhist and Christian: Thich Nhat Hanh and the Two Truths of Religious Identity," 118-19.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., 124.

It seems possible to work too hard to avoiding mixing traditions – in Drew's discussion of Roger Corless's life, work, and dual belonging, it becomes clear that his attempts to maintain a distance between his Christianity and his Buddhism have neither entirely worked nor been helpful to his peace of mind or spiritual growth.⁵⁴⁵ In her initial profile of Corless, she describes his undertaking of Buddhist, Christian, and a mixed practice:

As well as his Tibetan practices and his Christian prayer and meditation, Corless devised a special 'Buddhist-Christian Coinherence Meditation' to acknowledge both traditions as "two Absolute Systems coinhering on the same planet (in humanity as a whole) and in your own consciousness", which he practised in various forms over many years.⁵⁴⁶

Coinherence, though, is not for Corless a form of integration; rather, Corless has a "fear of integration and an unwillingness to relativise the traditions with relation to a single ultimate reality" because he is convinced that "when he practised as a Buddhist he must be exclusively Buddhist, and must assume Christianity to be inferior", and vice versa when practising as a Christian.⁵⁴⁷

The conviction that Christianity and Buddhism must be kept separate in the ways just described seems to have arisen from the incompatibility of Christian and Buddhist teachings. Drew does not state this outright, but it seems likely that the metaphysical implications of the two systems are clear to Corless and he could not accept both at once, while also being "equally convinced" by both sets of teachings.⁵⁴⁸ Corless was unable to resolve this conflict by philosophy or psychotherapy, but found a solution to his

⁵⁴⁵ For example, it has not been an easy distinction to maintain, and he was not able to find a spiritual director equally comfortable with both traditions to whom he could turn for help. Drew, *Buddhist and Christian? An exploration of dual belonging*: 201.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid. The citation from Corless is from Corless, "A Form for Buddhist-Christian Coinherence Meditation."

⁵⁴⁷ Drew, *Buddhist and Christian? An exploration of dual belonging*: 193.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 22.

existential dilemma in de-emphasising "an 'I' that must... [do] the choosing".⁵⁴⁹ Although this is formed from a worry like Cornille's, that "attempting to be both Buddhist and Christian entails a less than complete commitment to either of them", Drew argues that it also works to undermine the traditions, because the practitioner is considering "each to be inferior to the other half of the time".⁵⁵⁰ In practice, Corless does not manage to keep his Christianity and his Buddhism separate; having read his work and interviewed him, Drew says that "Despite his attempts to 'quarantine' his Buddhist practice from his Christian practice and vice versa, evidence of mutual influence and cross-fertilisation can easily be found" in Corless's life as in the lives of her other participants, most of whom were more open to the possibility.⁵⁵¹

Among the several approaches to multiple religious belonging which are to be found in the literature, some seem to have concerns in common with George Lindbeck, whose views on doctrine and the nature of religion I explored in chapter 3. For example, Peter Phan, generally supportive of multiple religious belonging as a practice,⁵⁵² has concerns about those who should undertake it. Having described some people who have succeeded in practising what he considers to be an acceptable form of multiple religious belonging – he dwells on their depth and breadth of knowledge, long experience, academic achievements, and devotion to masters trained in the 'second tradition' – he goes on to say:

While it has been made more acceptable by recent theologies of religions [pluralisms], its practice by people, especially the young,

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 193.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., 194. His attempts at 'quarantine' include, for example, having separate spaces for each practice and seeking to be wholly in the mindset of one religion while engaging in its practices.

⁵⁵² He says that it "it not unlike martyrdom... it is not something one looks for or demands at will. Rather it is a gift to be received in fear and trembling and in gratitude and joy." Phan, "Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church," 519.

who do not possess the necessary qualifications that were present, to an eminent degree, in those pioneers, can easily lead to the 'nebulous esoteric mysticism' and 'Nietzschean neo-paganism' that we have been warned against [in *Dominus Iesus*].⁵⁵³

This seems reminiscent of Lindbeck's concern about whether practitioners are truly fluent in their religious tradition, not least because to maintain Phan's model of good multiple religious belonging we would need also to preserve a core of 'masters', a 'fluent elite' who are trained very thoroughly in their tradition and able to teach it to others with confidence. It could also be argued that if a tradition preserves a pure elite, it is 'safe' and need not worry about others being syncretistic; but if Nhat Hanh and Carlson are right to think that all traditions are already engaged in a form of syncretism, then that elite may not be so pure and is certainly not as far removed in form from the non-elite syncretists. It is not clear from Phan's writing whether he thinks that members of this fluent elite could also be knowledgeable about other religious traditions, but it is clear that he thinks that without sufficient training in each religion, people can go astray – and so because of the time and effort required to achieve this level, multiple religious belonging should remain a rarity.

However, to return to the language metaphor, we can accept that it is difficult to become fully fluent in multiple languages, and still encourage people to try. Terrance Tilley and Louis Albarran use this metaphor to confirm their observation of the existence of multiple religious belonging, saying that "Just as one may know two languages fluently, so one may come to know and accept two (or more) faith traditions".⁵⁵⁴ In languages, we do not think that there is much if any harm in someone knowing a very small amount – it is not generally considered dangerous to have a few words of Spanish and be able to order a drink in German as well as speaking English

⁵⁵³ Ibid., 514.

⁵⁵⁴ Tilley and Albarran, "Multiple Religious Belonging: Can a Christian Belong to Other Traditions Too?," 166.

as a first language.⁵⁵⁵ And yet, in the religion-as-language metaphor, this would be analogous to the kind of situation which people are keen to avoid with regards to religion. Sometimes this is due to exceptionally high standards for belonging, as we saw with Cornille above.

It should also be said, though, that it is possible to have a standard of dual belonging which is too low, and that this also leads to problems. In his book *Hyphenated Christians*, Goosen suggests that adopting a single word, practice, or symbol⁵⁵⁶ from another religion might be enough for a kind of dual belonging, a kind which does not violate the precepts of the person's first religion. He focuses on the idea that if a practice works for an individual, if it makes someone feel closer to God or the transcendent, that person might as well use it. For example, he describes the gestures used in Islamic prayer and then says:

If Christians find this symbolic act more meaningful than what they normally do, why could they not use it in prayer? If it leads them to God in prayer, why not? To some extent they are 'belonging' to Islam but without adopting any incompatible act.⁵⁵⁷

The scare quotes suggest that Goosen agrees with me that this is not a full dual belonging, and other scholars take the same line. Thinking about the American context, Tilley and Albarran mention interreligious dialogue and the availability of information about other religions as important factors in the increase of multiple religious belonging – although they also note that there will be much borrowing which is not true belonging:

Reading Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance on a Sunday

⁵⁵⁵ Although at some times people have considered particular forms of bilingualism a threat to social order or 'civilisation' – Native American, Australian, Welsh, and Irish people have all been required to speak English instead of their native languages because of such concerns.

⁵⁵⁶ He uses a broad definition of 'symbol' which includes things which I would have called metaphors.

⁵⁵⁷ Goosen, *Hyphenated Christians: Towards a Better Understanding of Dual Religious Belonging*: 112.

afternoon, having attended a Catholic mass that morning, or engaging in Zen meditation or yoga during a Christian retreat does not constitute multiple religious belonging.⁵⁵⁸

The way in which Goosen talks about using small parts of other religions in the context of one's main practice also points to a problem with this approach – not only that it advocates a kind of 'supermarket religious practice', although it does approach that model, but also that, even though Goosen says that this use will be "respectful",⁵⁵⁹ it does not follow a model of sharing or reciprocal borrowing. His concern – given that his book is about Christians – is whether other religious practices can be borrowed without contravening Christian teaching, but more widely I have concerns about whether such borrowing is fair. For example, Goosen suggests that Christians might use the holy syllable 'OM', "a most sacred [sound] used at the beginning of Hindu prayers".⁵⁶⁰ He does not mention whether Hindus approve of this or not; probably some wouldn't mind and some would have objections, but it would be interesting to know what forms their arguments took. Some might, for example, find it offensive, especially if the Christians concerned did not understand how and why the sound is regarded as sacred within Hinduism.⁵⁶¹ If the practice became widespread, some might feel that their religious practice had been taken away from them and perhaps weakened or cheapened by the Christian use. Awareness of the relationship between Christianity and Hinduism in the post-colonial context – a relationship marked by historical imbalances of power and the presence of an exoticising and often spiritually hungry Orientalism – also complicates this, giving further motivation to objections to the decontextualized or careless use of Hindu practices, words, and artefacts in Christian, especially Western Christian, settings.

⁵⁵⁸ Tilley and Albarran, "Multiple Religious Belonging: Can a Christian Belong to Other Traditions Too?," 161.

⁵⁵⁹ Goosen, *Hyphenated Christians: Towards a Better Understanding of Dual Religious Belonging*: 111.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁶¹ This should not be taken to imply that Hindus agree about how or why 'OM' is sacred.

Goosen might simply not know what would be said in this specific case, but an analogy with other cases of cultural or religious appropriation suggests some of the points which the discussion would be likely to include.⁵⁶² One of the most significant points which has occurred in other related conversations, both academic and less formal, involves a concern about maintaining the dignity and integrity of a tradition when words and practices from it are routinely used without much if any understanding by members of another culture – especially if that culture is, in the context, a dominant or hegemonic one.⁵⁶³ The appropriation of language and practice has been an acute problem for and articulated by many Native Americans; for example, in 1993 the Lakota Summit V issued a declaration of war, saying that:

...for too long we have suffered the unspeakable indignity of having our most precious Lakota ceremonies and spiritual practices desecrated, mocked and abused by non-Indian "wannabes," hucksters, cultists, commercial profiteers and self-styled "New Age shamans" and their followers.⁵⁶⁴

Hinduism has sometimes been treated in a similar way, as when images of Kali or Ganesh are used as decoration without respect for their origins or meaning to believers (being printed on tins of mints, t-shirts, or toilet seats, for example), although the largest debate about appropriation from Hinduism is about the use and teaching of yoga as non-religious.⁵⁶⁵ With these cases in mind, it is clear that Christians using 'OM' at the beginning of prayers are also appropriating something which is not theirs to use and

⁵⁶² For more about some specific cases of religious appropriation, see Rhiannon Grant, "Feminists Borrowing Language and Practice from Other Religious Traditions: Some Ethical Implications," *Feminist Theology* 20, no. 2 (2012).

⁵⁶³ Much work on cultural appropriation has happened within contexts of recent or post colonisation by white Europeans; it is in many ways a post-colonial issue although it can take place within other dynamics as well.

⁵⁶⁴ Wilmer Stampede Mesteth, Darrell Standing Elk, and Phyllis Swift Hawk, "Declaration of War Against Exploiters of Lakota Spirituality," website of Rev. Raymond A. Bucko, S.J., <http://puffin.creighton.edu/lakota/war.html>. Accessed 23rd April 2014.

⁵⁶⁵ See the Hindu American Foundation's campaign 'Take Yoga Back' for more details: Hindu American Foundation, "Take Yoga Back," <http://hafsite.org/media/pr/takeyogaback>. Accessed 23rd April 2014.

thereby engaging in a practice which, especially because they are likely to misunderstand the importance of the syllable when it has been transported into this new context, is likely to be offensive to Hindus and members of other religions – such as Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism – which use it regularly.

Sometimes objections to multiple religious belonging are focussed on a worry about people taking a consumerist attitude to religion – Drew's participants often "explicitly criticised 'supermarket' spirituality or New Age religiosity, and the superficiality they perceived in it".⁵⁶⁶ Drew goes on to say that one element of this critique is "an objection to the exercise of personal choice", which is "clearly evident if one commits oneself to beliefs and practices beyond those prescribed by one's home tradition".⁵⁶⁷ She does not find this convincing, however, since (in line with Carlson's observation quoted earlier) it is "erroneous to assume that those who are *only* Buddhist or *only* Christian do not also exercise personal choice"; King, one of Drew's participants, points out – rightly, in Drew's opinion – that "the fact of diversity both within religious traditions and among them makes choice inevitable, even if one does not choose consciously".⁵⁶⁸ Issues of superficiality, lack of time, and coherence are not faced solely by dual believers, either, although they may need to work harder on balancing their commitments especially in relation to the latter problem. However, as more dual belonging pioneers, especially those like Drew's participants whom she characterises as "highly reflective individuals with backgrounds in academic theology and religious studies", undertake the work of establishing coherence and the points of incompatibility between sets of beliefs, this burden is likely to be lessened.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁶ Drew, *Buddhist and Christian? An exploration of dual belonging*: 218.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., 219. As I noted earlier, 'choice' may not be the most useful framing for this debate, although it is the only one commonly used in the literature.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

Another issue in the 'pick and mix' or 'supermarket' objection might relate to these images of food, in which one is buying, consuming and being nourished by religious ideas or practices, but not belonging to a religious community. There might be discomfort with the idea that one is paying for religion or spirituality, or assuming that one is entitled to it and taking without even paying, and also with the disconnect or alienation that it implies. This, again, is not an issue restricted to contexts of multiple religious belonging – treating religion as an object for consumption is problematic in single-tradition settings as well. However, it is so frequently associated with multiple belonging that it is worth addressing here, and it is the case that multiple belonging can include a consumerist attitude to religion. It is also true that the supermarket seems a long way from a shared meal. Of course, actually at a community meal such as a 'bring and share', one exercises a considerable amount of personal choice – in what to bring, what to eat and what to leave (just like on the pick and mix counter), and even where to sit – but the metaphors suggest not just the choice but the lack of context. Supermarket food is wrapped and removed from its origins, whereas at a shared lunch Mary's casserole is accompanied by Mary's dish and usually Mary herself. John Hull also suggests that people talking about mixing of religions (in his case study, in the context of changes to the British national curriculum for religious education) are invoking disgust by making comparisons to disgusting food combinations – the pick and mix image may in part be linked to this, although it is not as direct as some of his examples, such as one where the proposal to teach six world religions equally is called "a mess of secular pottage".⁵⁷⁰ These comparisons are themselves culturally shaped but very widespread within the culture and deeply affecting the emotions of those involved.⁵⁷¹

Sometimes, however, worries about dual belonging are based in concerns about the incompatibility of religions, and this is a place in which the metaphor of religions as language comes under strain. Being able to order a

⁵⁷⁰ Hull, *Mishmash: Religious Education in Multi-Cultural Britain, A Study in Metaphor*: 9.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, passim.

drink in German does not prevent me from being able to do so in English, but holding that it is "non-dual realisation of emptiness which liberates people" does seem to prevent me from simultaneously holding that it is God's grace which provides redemption.⁵⁷² Obviously, there are many debates here – within Christianity and Buddhism as well as between them, and about the nature of reality as well as what people should do for the best – but many of them seem to involve the Christian-Buddhist dual-belonger in trying to hold two opposing positions at once. Throughout her book, Drew discusses examples of these, and finds that in every case at least some of her participants have managed to reconcile the two positions. It is not clear whether this is a testament to the compatibility of Buddhism and Christianity or to the ingenuity of people who find themselves trying to practice both, but the reader is left with the impression that all such difficulties can be surmounted eventually.⁵⁷³ Not being able to foresee what all the possible difficulties would be, it is difficult to know whether this is the case; it does seem to be the case that for all difficulties discovered so far in the practice of dual Christian-Buddhist belonging, at least some practitioners are able to solve or dissolve any given one.

If the process of negotiation between positions is ongoing, we might think that dual religious belonging has an important place in today's world – for example, we might see it as a very deep form of interreligious dialogue, perhaps the more likely to succeed because those involved support or affirm both traditions involved in a very personal way. The two traditions might also benefit from learning from one another; in Drew's book, some of her participants argue that Buddhism might do well to learn from Protestant approaches to hierarchy and authority within the community, and that Christians can learn much from Buddhism about meditation techniques.⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷² Drew, *Buddhist and Christian? An exploration of dual belonging*: 122.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

⁵⁷⁴ King, Drew's Quaker-Buddhist participant, points out that many American Conservative Friends are already using methods learnt from Buddhist sources in Quaker contexts, such as focussing on the breath as part of the centring down process in Meeting for Worship, and this seems likely to hold true for British Quakers. *Ibid.*, 174.

Furthermore, accepting that some individuals, including some within the Quaker community, are successfully practising multiple belonging will begin to not only explain the existence of Quaker multi-theology remarks but also to suggest that they can make sense in their context.

Effects of multiple religious belonging on religious language use

Only a few authors in the relatively small literature on multiple religious belonging have touched on the issue of the uses of religious language, and although they will be mentioned in this section I am mainly concerned to look back to chapters 2 and 3 to see how the view of religious language outlined there will respond to the existence of multiple religious belonging.

I said in chapter 2 that it is plausible to think that the meanings of words are created by the ways in which people use them within specific contexts, and hence that religious language gains meaning from the religious contexts in which people use it (as well as, for those words which have secular uses too, from those contexts). Initially, this raised a caution about patterns of use which involve taking religious language from one specific context – a word which has a technical meaning within Buddhism, for example – into another setting. Similarly, the important role played in preserving and correcting a faith tradition by people who are fully fluent in it, as discussed in chapter 3, gives a reason to want some people to maintain a very high level of facility with one tradition; and although this may not be incompatible with knowing something of some other religions, the time and effort required is likely to be difficult to maintain under conditions of dual belonging. Furthermore, for some religious groups in which an exclusivist theology is an important part of their doctrine, dual belonging of any kind may be incompatible with the high level of (a kind of) knowledge and involvement required for entry into the 'fluent elite'.

It should be noted, though, that not all religions do make this demand, and that some authorities within those traditions can practice dual belonging – if we accept that to be a Zen Master is to be part of the fluent elite within Zen, which does not seem an unreasonable proposal, then Thich Nhat Hanh's dual Buddhist-Christian belonging shows that it is possible. Not all Christians would judge him to be fully fluent in Christianity, though, and to argue that he is more fluent than an ordinary Christian believer would be difficult and might require a (clearly problematic) assumption that his expertise in Zen Buddhism in some way carries over to other religious traditions.⁵⁷⁵ Although it is relatively easy to point to some people who are certainly part of the fluent elite within a tradition, it is much harder to draw a lower boundary on the category, as it shades gradually into ordinary fluency. Fluency, similarly, shades gradually into disfluency and lack of knowledge; one learns a language or a religion by small steps and there is no single moment at which one becomes fluent.

It is important to remember, though, that the kind of fluency under discussion here is about knowing-how as much as or more than it is about knowing-that. Contrary to Phan's implication, holding a doctorate in a religion is not the highest form of fluency. He is right to say that competency in "the classical languages of these religions" (the religion towards which one is moving) and familiarity "with their sacred texts" are useful and important respectively, but they are not necessarily the most important way of knowing a religion. Because in practice, interfaith groups often find that sharing practices is as important as, if not more important than, sharing apparently straightforward claims about beliefs and theology, I tend to agree with the pioneers he mentions that "interreligious sharing" must, or at least should, be "predominately in the areas of ethical and

⁵⁷⁵ Or to make a pluralist metaphysical claim about the power of Buddhist insight or enlightenment to provide insight also into Christianity. This seems to me to be a misguided move, however, and given Nhat Hanh's general views on metaphysics, I don't think he would approve of it either.

monastic practices and prayer and even mysticism".⁵⁷⁶ Furthermore, those traditions within the world religions which have most in common often seem to be the 'mystical' or 'contemplative' aspects – it may be that silent practices or repetitive chanting are less disturbed by theological differences and so the more easily shared.⁵⁷⁷ Even outside these parts of the religion, though, practices of prayer and community behaviour are a significant background without which a theology cannot be fully appreciated. Knowing how to behave, how and when to pray or meditate, and what actions are in line with the ethical code of your religion are all important aspects of religious fluency, which can be overlooked if we are too focused on academically visible knowledge. This does not change much in the context of multiple religious belonging, but it does again provide a reminder that such fluency, 'bilingual' or not, should be within reach of ordinary believers.

It is also worth considering here the claims about religious experience which are made – or, in fact, mostly not made – by this understanding of multiple religious belonging. Although the Quaker Universalists whom I discussed in chapter 5 do make claims to the effect that all religious experience is of one kind though described in different ways, most of the practitioners of dual or multiple belonging who are discussed in the literature do not seem to be making this claim. They talk mostly about practices, and when they do mention religious experience, it often seems to be specific to the setting in which it occurred – so that Reuben L. F. Habito, although also a Roman Catholic, seems to describe his experience of *kensho* (initial insight into the Buddha Nature in oneself) in the terms of the Zen Buddhism which

⁵⁷⁶ His pioneers happen to have been working with two religions which both had strong monastic traditions; I would not have chosen that word. Phan, "Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church," 511.

⁵⁷⁷ I say that this 'often seems' to be the case, and I find it intuitively plausible and true of the examples with which I am familiar (e.g. Buddhism and Quakerism are comparatively open to multiple religious belonging; those who engage a form of Islam in dual belonging are usually involved in Sufism rather than other schools of Islamic thought), but evidence for such claims is difficult to produce.

provided the context for it.⁵⁷⁸ In the light of Lindbeck's view, discussed in chapter 3, that it is religious language which makes certain religious experiences possible rather than religious experiences which demand language in which to describe them, this is what we would expect to see in people taking up multiple religious belonging: as someone learns a new religion, new religious experiences become possible for them which could not have taken that form previously.

The idea of the irreplaceability of certain religious 'pictures' and ways of speaking also seems to make sense within the context of multiple religious belonging. At times people talk in a way which seems to directly contradict the idea of irreplaceability, and yet on digging deeper we find that there is an agreement at the base of it. For example, Goosen talks at length about people using symbols (which he understands in a broad sense to include language, practices, and artefacts) from other religions to help them connect with the divine:

... in regard to other faiths, a ritual, a picture, a drawing, a statue, a place, can all be religious symbols if they make present something of the transcendent for a person. ... symbols can be taken from religion A or B and used by someone who is an adherent of religion C.⁵⁷⁹

Although the use of an item from religion A by someone who is an adherent of religion C does not necessarily mean that the item has 'moved into' religion C, this description of the process makes the process seem unproblematic, which is unlikely to be the case. I do not know what the underlying assumptions are here, and they will in any case vary depending on which religions are being borrowed from and by whom. Two possible cases are that some people might be working within a pluralist understanding, in which there is only one "transcendent" which might be made present for an individual by any of a variety of means, while someone else might say that, for example, Christ revealed in all religions can be

⁵⁷⁸ Drew, *Buddhist and Christian? An exploration of dual belonging*: 26.

⁵⁷⁹ Goosen, *Hyphenated Christians: Towards a Better Understanding of Dual Religious Belonging*: 98.

experienced through a picture of Krishna, or that Christ is a guru or avatar while Vishnu remains supreme. Either of these can take place without any kind of dual belonging. However, those who continue to practise two religions over a considerable period of time, like most of Drew's participants, do not think that they are replacing one picture with another but rather adding to their collection of many irreplaceable pictures. Returning to the quote from Goosen above, it can also be read in this way: the adherent of religion C wishes to add to their practice a symbol or 'picture' from religion A, and in doing so they may take on more or less of religion A along with that symbol. Depending on how much of that second religion they take on, they may find that they are practising a form of dual belonging.

This raises once again the issue of what it takes to belong to a religious tradition. Religious belonging is sometimes described as if it were only an issue of self-identification, something which people determine for themselves. There are Christian communities which accept this and no more, taking personal faith in Jesus to be the only entry criterion. Even when it is not regarded as only a matter for self-identification, belonging can be reduced to belief only. A person is a Christian, according to this model, if they believe the correct series of propositions, and if they do not hold those beliefs they are not a Christian even if they go to church sometimes and try to help the poor. Alternatively, belonging can be reduced to practices which are done alone – so that praying to Jesus and reading the Bible, without any involvement in a church, would qualify someone as a Christian. At other times, however, it seems that a community involvement is required; for example, the ritual of baptism is often seen as the marker of 'becoming a Christian', and in general it requires someone else to perform it, thereby establishing a small but necessary community. Furthermore, if the analogy between religion and Wittgensteinianly-understood language holds, it would be reasonable to expect – based on the interpretation of the 'private language argument' which I provided in chapter 2 – that parts of religion which seem to be private (such as writing, praying, or 'believing' while alone) are modelled on and cannot exist apart from their communal forms. It might be

possible to practise alone, or to maintain a personal faith in Jesus in the absence of a Christian community, but these things have to be learned from a community in the first place, even if this community is of a minimal size (one other person, even one encountered remotely, as through a book). This suggests that belonging to a religion is also in that sense a public matter, something in which at least one sub-section of the community is involved, however individual it seems to be.

Overall, there seems to be no reason to conclude that multiple religious belonging automatically decreases (or increases) fluency in any of the specific religions involved or their language. Instead, I have returned in this section to the idea that religion, like language, needs to be understood as communal and considered within the relevant community context. Only with the aid of this contextual information – the way other people speak, behave, and believe – will it make sense to ask whether someone is speaking, behaving, or believing grammatically, in the correct way for that language or religion.

Does multiple religious belonging help a community make multi-theology remarks?

Accepting that it is possible to belong to two or more religious traditions at the same time – to be fluent in multiple religious languages – suggests that some people are in a position to use language from more than one religious tradition in a single remark. This is the core of the multi-theology remark, and there seems to be no reason to think that multiple religious believers are wrong to bring their traditions together in this way. Indeed, trying to have multiple religious belonging but keep the religions apart is likely to lead to personal and philosophical struggles. Therefore, if people who belong to both Buddhist and Christian traditions, and are working within a monocentric pluralist framework, choose to speak about Buddha and Christ as equals, or even as incarnations or representations of the same reality, this could be both coherent with their belief system and need not involve an

ethically dubious appropriation – if you genuinely belong to a tradition, it cannot be theft to use the words and tools which that tradition provides.⁵⁸⁰

For many of the Quaker examples which I have considered in this thesis, it will be difficult to determine whether or not the speaker has full membership in both or all the traditions whose words they use. Especially for those who are anonymous, a principle of charity seems best – the Kindlers' workshop participant who talked about "Krishna, Christ, Buddha" may be a Hindu-Christian-Buddhist, since I have argued in this chapter that such things are possible. However, I want to address another possibility here: that such speakers are not themselves in full membership of all these traditions, but that there is a sufficiently high level of dual belonging in the Quaker community as a whole that some common words have become part of the Quaker way of speaking, not entirely divorced from their original contexts but exploring, as it were, pastures new.

Because the Religious Society of Friends emerges from a Christian background and is historically Christian, Christian-Quakers are not generally thought of as having a dual belonging;⁵⁸¹ the language and culture of Christianity is there for Friends to draw upon and use (or not) as they will. As discussed above, some religious traditions seem to lend themselves to dual belonging, and Quakers who also identify as Buddhist or who have explored Buddhism are easy to find.⁵⁸² Some have been accepted by a Buddhist community, although the presence or absence of this relationship is not always recorded in the literature. Friends who have explored Neo-Paganism or Goddess worship are not so numerous, but do exist: the QuakerPagans (worldwide) email list has 124 members – including some

⁵⁸⁰ There can still be a debate about genuine belonging, of course, but as I argued above, at least some practitioners in at least some dual belonging combinations are succeeding in being full members of more than one tradition. Opinions are likely to differ about the level of real dual belonging in particular cases but the point for the purposes of this chapter is that under most reasonable criteria it is theoretically possible.

⁵⁸¹ Although Friends do recognise dual belonging with another Christian denomination.

⁵⁸² Huber, "Questions of Identity Among 'Buddhist Quakers'."

who are not fully members of both traditions, but excluding dual believers who have not found or choose not to join an email list for whatever reason.⁵⁸³

Numbers for dual or multiple belonging are hard to generate, as discussed above, especially because of the vague boundaries of the category and the tendency, of some religions more than others, to have ethnic and cultural aspects as well as points of strictly religious practice and belief. For example, Friends who have come from a Jewish background, having been born to Jewish parents and/or raised Jewish, may well still feel that they are Jewish, without necessarily continuing to participate in the Jewish community and practices.⁵⁸⁴ It is not clear to me, and it may not be clear to them, whether this qualifies as dual belonging or not; indeed, it may not matter what we call it so long as we can see it clearly.⁵⁸⁵ It does, however, seem clear that whatever the case with this specific example, any attempt to generalise from this answer to other cases will need to be provided with a stronger justification than is made by the conventional practice of treating Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, and other 'religions' as similar phenomena falling under a single umbrella.

That said, although the confusion is especially clear in the case of Judaism, similar circumstances may be present in the case of other traditions – for example, a Quaker with a Roman Catholic upbringing and family may still experience themselves as having a Catholic aspect to their identity even if their personal involvement in Catholicism is now minimal. Fortunately, my account of multiple belonging can tolerate such grey areas, because there is

⁵⁸³ QuakerPagans, "Quaker Pagans: member list," Yahoo (automatically generated), <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/QuakerPagans/members/all>. Accessed 23rd April 2014. For more detailed information on four Quakers who are also neo-Pagans, see Giselle Vincett, "Quagans in Contemporary British Quakerism," *Quaker Studies* 13, no. 2 (2009).

⁵⁸⁴ For one example, see Harvey Gillman, *A Minority of One: a journey with Friends* (London: Quaker Home Service, 1988).

⁵⁸⁵ "Say what you please, so long as it does not prevent you from seeing how things are." Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*: §79.

no need for a sharp line between success and failure, or multiple and single belongers – a person's status as, and ways of, belonging or not belonging are likely to change throughout their lifetime, and may also shift with changes in the tradition(s) to which they are closest. In some traditions, there will be formal and less formal ways of belonging, for example, so that 'belonging' will not be a single simple category.

The real question is about what effect widespread dual or multiple belonging has on a religious community such as the Religious Society of Friends. There is no doubt that Friends learn from each other, usually but not always through relatively informal or participatory methods, and it seems probable that one of the things transmitted between Friends is choice of language. I showed in chapter 1 that many Quakers are inclined to talk about 'translating' between language from different religious traditions, and this metaphor presupposes a working knowledge in these multiple religious languages. I have shown in this chapter that dual or multiple religious belonging would provide that fluency to some individuals, and those writers who use traditional language (for Quakers, this is frequently Christian language) or the language with which they are most comfortable and decline to provide translations, but rather invite the reader to translate if it seems necessary or useful, are fitting neatly into this way of thinking about the problem.

In short, the practice of multiple religious belonging, even if it remains a minority practice within a particular community, works to normalise the use of multi-theology remarks. The presence of some individuals who can, do, and wish to move smoothly and regularly between religious languages not only enables them to make remarks which draw on their multi-theology perspectives, but awareness of their existence and hearing their practices of speech enables and encourages others to do likewise. Over time, multiple individuals with multiple affiliations import a wide range of theological terminology from a diversity of sources, as found in the examples in chapter 4 (and to be seen again in the next chapter).

That being so, understanding the practice of multiple religious belonging, and the pluralist perspective which, although separable, is often found alongside it, helps us to make more sense of Quaker multi-theology remarks by giving us a richer picture of the Quaker forms of life within which they are made. If anything, British Quakerism as practised today seems to support multiple religious belonging – it is not only open to the possibility, but the presence of others who practise multiple religious belonging and the incorporation of their preferred terminology into the communal way of speaking is actively supportive of it. Thus, a two-way process of encouragement can be seen: multiple religious belonging practised by Quakers encourages the making of multi-theology remarks, and as multi-theology remarks become common in the community the practice of multiple religious belonging – already obviously attractive to some who are in or wish to join the community – is supported by their widespread acceptance.

Chapter 7: Further worked examples

In this chapter, I will examine three further examples of Quaker talk about God, contextualising them in detail and considering how they are illuminated by our understandings of pluralism and multiple religious belonging, as well as the Wittgensteinian and Lindbeckian ideas which informed the analysis of examples in chapter 4. In this process, I draw together the threads which have run throughout this thesis and show how examples can be read in these broader social, theological, and philosophical contexts. The examples are diverse, and differ somewhat from those given in chapter 4; in particular, these three are very clearly individuals speaking for themselves, without or with less of the formal corporate acceptance which characterised the examples in chapter 4. Although these examples may not be fully representative of the Quaker literature as a whole, they typify a strand within it.

The first is from a book by Jim Pym, who practises dual belonging in the Quaker and Buddhist communities and has published books on both religions.⁵⁸⁶ *The Pure Principle: Quakers and other faith traditions* deals specifically with the issue of religious traditions other than Quakerism, and engages directly with issues around pluralism, arising from conflicts between worldviews, and multiple religious belonging (chapter titles include 'Mutual Irradiation', 'What of God?' and 'Quakers and Buddhism').⁵⁸⁷ His ways of speaking about a Pure Principle are illuminated by our insights into pluralism/universalism from chapter 5, and are clearly informed by his life as a dual practitioner, which allows us to bring in perspectives gained in

⁵⁸⁶ Pym, *Listening To The Light: how to bring Quaker simplicity & integrity into our lives*; Jim Pym, *You Don't Have To Sit On The Floor: Bringing the insights and tools of Buddhism into everyday life* (London: Rider, 2001).

⁵⁸⁷ Jim Pym, *The Pure Principle: Quakers and other faith traditions* (York: The Ebor Press, 2000). Pym seems happy to regard Quakerism as largely non-Christian, although acknowledging its Christian roots, and is positive about the way that Quakers treat their relationships with other Christian bodies "in much the same way as our relationships with other faiths". 73.

chapter 6; in turn, a more detailed consideration of a real example will shed light on these theoretical perspectives.

The second is from an edited collection produced from work done as part of the Quaker Quest project – not dissimilar to the context of one example in chapter 4, which was from *Journeying the Heartlands*, an edited anthology produced through the Kindlers. This collection, *New Light*, contains longer extracts, each produced by an individual Friend in a format based on the practice of giving presentations at Quaker Quest (enquirers or outreach) events, but as in the Kindlers collection they are all anonymous.⁵⁸⁸ Although it has been produced by a communal method, the anthology does not give any kind of community stamp or agreement to particular pieces within it. Despite this, the extract I have chosen for analysis offers significant clues about those religions and religious terms which Quakers can accept, and also – which is rare in the literature – about those which the Friend writing specifically cannot accept. In chapter 5, we saw pluralism trying to spread its net as widely as possible, and in this extract we will see some snags in which it may become entangled.

Finally, the third extract is from the afterword in Alistair McIntosh's book *Soil and Soul*.⁵⁸⁹ As a whole, the book tells the story of his involvement as a Quaker and an expert on environmental sciences in campaigns to protect the Hebrides from various forms of outside control, especially where they would be environmentally detrimental. As part of this work, he calls on the religious expertise of non-Quakers, including a Protestant minister and a Native American spokesperson, and he handles their distinctive views carefully, aware of the ways in which he has many commonalities with them but also many differences from them. In the afterword, he offers a classic multi-theology remark which may not reflect the care he took with other religious beliefs earlier in the book. I will use this final example to reflect on

⁵⁸⁸ Jennifer Kavanagh, ed. *New Light: 12 Quaker Voices* (Ropley, Hants.: O Books, 2008).

⁵⁸⁹ Alastair McIntosh, *Soil and Soul: People Versus Corporate Power* (London: Aurum Press Ltd, 2001).

how he, as a Quaker who does not identify as occupying a position of multiple religious belonging, is able to make such a remark in the context of a generally respectful pluralism. I find that his comment is typical of many made by Quakers, having many of the same features as other examples discussed in this thesis, and can therefore stand as a case study which allows a consideration of the whole trend.

Example 1: *The Pure Principle*

The Pure Principle to which Jim Pym's title refers is, he says in the first chapter, "not unique to Friends". He has drawn the name from John Woolman's affirmation that "there is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages has had different names; it is however pure and proceeds from God".⁵⁹⁰ Woolman's remark can be read as supporting the Quaker universalism which we examined in chapter 5, and indeed Pym – who might identify himself as a universalist – goes on to echo very closely Ralph Hetherington's list of names as quoted in chapter 5:⁵⁹¹

Christians call [the Pure Principle] "The Mind that was in Christ Jesus", or "The Cosmic Christ". In Buddhism, it is the "Unborn Buddha Mind" or our "Original Face". In Hinduism, it is the *Atman*, in the sense of the Self that is One with God. In China, it was known as the Tao, while the other monotheistic religions speak of "the Soul" or "the Spirit" or use phrases similar to the Quaker term "That of God".⁵⁹²

Most of these names and phrases are familiar from previous lists which we have discussed in the course of this thesis, and so I am not going to examine

⁵⁹⁰ John Woolman, "Considerations on the keeping of Negroes: recommended to the professors of Christianity of every denomination," Tract Association of Friends, <https://archive.org/details/considerationson00wool>. Accessed 30th April 2014.

⁵⁹¹ Hetherington, *Quakerism, Universalism and Spirituality*: 11.

⁵⁹² Pym, *The Pure Principle: Quakers and other faith traditions*: 11. I note that where Hetherington says Brahman, Pym says Atman, and wonder whether this means that understandings of Hindu belief and terminology are different or lacking.

each one individually in this case.⁵⁹³ However, there are some distinct features about Pym's list which are worth considering in detail. Firstly, the choice to name Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and China,⁵⁹⁴ but to generalise over all "the other monotheistic religions" is interesting: I presume that Islam and Judaism at least are intended to be included in this group, and that despite the sentence structure Christianity is the previously-mentioned monotheistic tradition to which these are 'other'. It is not clear whether Pym's generalisation is true – the Hebrew Bible makes use of 'Spirit', but it is not obvious that this is a synonym for 'Soul' (indeed, there are reasons to think that it is not), and nor is 'Spirit' such a common term in Islam. Furthermore, in many contexts there would be a clear distinction made between the soul or person's spirit, which is part of the individual human, often understood to persist after bodily death, and the Holy Spirit, which is in some way divine or from God (for Christians, one of the persons of the Trinity; for Muslims, the angel Gabriel). This observation seems to trouble Pym's treatment of the terms as synonyms, and points back towards the idea, discussed in chapter 5, that combinations like this are artificial ones which seek to impose a pluralist world view onto other religions. In the conclusion to this chapter, I will be returning to this and asking whether this seeming failure to find actual synonyms is an inevitable part of (this kind of) pluralist position, or whether it is restricted to this remark.

The second feature might seem obvious but, in the context of the discussion of synonymity, is vital: the paragraph begins with a claim that this thing, the Pure Principle, is called one thing by Christians, but in other religions it is

⁵⁹³ It is worth noting that although many Christians would not use the phrase 'the Cosmic Christ', it has been used by some theologians who have been widely read by Quakers, most notably Matthew Fox who appears in a variety of Quaker sources – Jo Farrow and Alex Wildwood, *Universe as Revelation: An ecomystical theology for Friends* (London: Pronoun Press, 2013)., for example.

⁵⁹⁴ The term 'China' seems an odd one out in this list: perhaps Pym is using it to mean 'Chinese religions', or as a nod to the geographically descriptive origins of the term 'Hindu', or because to say that in Taoism there is something known as the Tao seems less than useful.

something else. A usual reading in English would provide the elided 'known as', so that the single item is called different things by different people, while remaining the same thing; it would be awkward although just about possible to read Pym's paragraph as saying that this thing, which is called the Pure Principle by some, is in some material way different in other religious contexts. It seems clear that, whether this reading is correct or not, it is Pym's assumption that the terms listed are synonymous, alternative names for a single 'Pure Principle'. There is some slippage here, too, between the naming of the Pure Principle which, Woolman says, "proceeds from God" – is from God rather than is God – and the naming of God Godself. Quakers often seem to use 'the Spirit' to name God, and other forms of Christianity name the Holy Spirit as one of the three Persons of whom all three are God. In other settings and indeed in some Christian traditions, however, 'spirit', like 'soul', can be used to indicate something which is part of the human even if it also has a non-material dimension. The references to the 'Unborn Buddha Mind', 'Atman', and 'Tao' do not seem to settle this argument; a considerable number of uses of these terms are possible across their historic, current, and many geographical contexts.

Interestingly, although this passage conflates 'Soul' and 'That of God', in chapter 8 of *The Pure Principle*, on 'Quakers and Buddhism', Pym does note that some people draw this distinction: Buddhism is appealing to Quakers because, like Quakerism, it "does not talk about the Soul (another subject [Quakers] find difficult) (*this from people who see "That of God" as different from the classic conception of the Soul*)" (his emphasis).⁵⁹⁵ Whether Pym's claim about Buddhism is true is debatable: it may well be the case that modern Buddhism as taught in the West, where British Quakers are more likely to encounter it, does not dwell on or speak about the soul often; historically, many Buddhist texts have talked a good deal about the soul in the process of denying that various components of human beings are in fact *the* soul; and most Buddhists would not affirm the existence of a permanent human soul. It is also not clear that Quakerism

⁵⁹⁵ Pym, *The Pure Principle: Quakers and other faith traditions*: 77.

'does not talk about the Soul' – some Quakers, such as Joycelin Dawes, have made extensive and non-traditional use of the concept of soul.⁵⁹⁶ Pym, in contrast, seems content with the conflation of 'Soul' and 'That of God'.

Another point which needs to be made here concerns Jim Pym himself. In my framing of the key question earlier in this section I used the phrase 'other religions' to refer to religions other than Quakerism onto which a pluralist world-view might be imposed. However, in at least one case, Pym could reasonably respond that he is not imposing a world-view onto another religion, because he is not working from an outside perspective. In fact, Pym was a Buddhist before he became a Quaker. In a brief article called *Buddha and God* he begins by reviewing his personal religious history:

Having been a Buddhist for some 40 years, and having come to Buddhism after rejecting Christianity, I eventually returned to Christianity (without leaving Buddhism) having found Sangha within a group that is essentially Christian, but which is open enough to accept a person like myself. This is the Religious Society of Friends, otherwise known as the Quakers.⁵⁹⁷

This story has many of the elements common in the narratives of dual belonging which were discussed in chapter 6 – in particular, Rose Drew's case studies identify people who move between Buddhism and Christianity and end up finding themselves members of both religions. In the context of the list which includes many other religions besides Buddhism, it is an open question whether this dual belonging status maintained by Pym makes any tangible difference to the way in which his remark is assessed, whether by a Quaker audience who tend to value experience anyway, or a philosophically-attuned audience who consider the writer's experience a relevant part of the context for Wittgensteinian reasons. In some situations –

⁵⁹⁶ Joycelin Dawes, "Choosing Life: Embracing Spirituality in the 21st Century," (Quaker Universalist Group, 2008).

⁵⁹⁷ Jim Pym, "Buddha and God," *The Buddhist Christian Vedanta Network Newsletter*(2007), <http://c-c-n.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/April-2007-Newsletter1.pdf>. Accessed 23rd May 2014. A Sangha, in the usual Western Buddhist use, is a community of practice.

his chapter on Quakers and Buddhism, for example – it does seem relevant; when he writes about Buddhism or Quakerism, it seems important to take his personal experience into account when assessing the claims that he makes. This point applies not just to the case of discussions of direct experience (when he says, "In my life I can honestly say that I have experienced the truth in the teachings of both the Buddha and Jesus",⁵⁹⁸ I take this – as I would with any other author – as a description of experience and feel no need to challenge it at that level even if I want to ask questions about the metaphysical ideas which are embedded in it⁵⁹⁹), but also affects the way that we read claims about the religions. For example, he says that:

In Buddhism, the teacher is often seen as requiring a degree of respect and obedience which involves the suspension of the disciple's reason and even conscience... This is not something that Quakers can easily accept, and, to be fair, neither can all Buddhists.⁶⁰⁰

The latter part of this remark especially seems – to judge from the rest of the paragraph and the chapter as a whole – to be based on his personal experience of a range of Buddhist groups. Although it would be easy enough to verify from written sources, in this case it is based on Pym's extensive experience which includes his dual membership. Within the Quaker context in which experience is given a particular weight, and the Wittgensteinian mode in which the experience of the author is a feature of the context of the remark, it is an important feature of his writing.

It is worth giving some further attention to Pym's chapter on 'Quakers and Buddhism' in the light of the potential role for dual or multiple belonging which I outlined in chapter 6 – and because this in turn can shed light on the persistence, also noted in chapter 6, of Buddhism and Quakerism or Christianity as a pair of religious traditions which are frequently combined

⁵⁹⁸ Pym, *The Pure Principle: Quakers and other faith traditions*: 80.

⁵⁹⁹ And which remain embedded in it even if the teachings which Pym refers to are, say, ethical rather than metaphysical.

⁶⁰⁰ Pym, *The Pure Principle: Quakers and other faith traditions*: 81.

in the dual-belonging mode. He provides, for example, a list of the features of Buddhism which Friends have found attractive – he calls it "a fairly comprehensive list, though not an exhaustive one" and notes that it "applies not only to Quakers, but to many other Christians as well".⁶⁰¹ It was produced informally, without a survey, on the basis of the things Friends said to him when he began to talk about Buddhism with them. I give it in full here with Friends' comments in square brackets and Pym's in italics, as he chose to print it:

- Buddhism is essentially experiential [and so is Quakerism]
- It does not ask us to believe those things which we find impossible to believe [and neither does Quakerism]
- It does not talk about God [and I find talk of God difficult]
- It does not talk about the Soul [another subject that I find difficult] (*this from people who see 'That of God' as different from the classic conception of the Soul*)
- It has practical techniques of meditation (*probably the most popular reason*)
- It does not matter that I continue to be a Quaker (*this would not be true of all Buddhist groups*)
- It is non-violent like Quakerism (*mostly true, but not in all cases*)
- It is closer to science
- It has a different view of 'sin' from the classic Christian one
- It is more tolerant in matters of sexuality and sexual orientation
- It does not have 'eternal hell' (*Buddhism does have hells which are every bit as horrible as the Christian ones, but they are not eternal*)⁶⁰²

We can see that Quakers in Pym's experience, as we might expect, tend to generalise about Buddhism and base their generalisations on the way in which Buddhism has historically been presented in the UK. Pym has noted several places where their conceptions might not be accurate, and it would be possible to add such caveats to other items in this list – to comment on some of the Buddhist traditions with more restrictive views of sexuality, for example, to question whether it is really 'closer to science' (than what?) and to ask whether the things many Buddhists believe are really that easy for

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., 78, 77.

⁶⁰² Ibid., 77-8.

Quakers to accept. Often there is an emphasis on points of commonality, such as the focus on experience and the practice of non-violence; Pym does not add 'sitting in silence' to this list although it is clear from his autobiographical account of his coming to Quakerism that this was a significant point of commonality which facilitated his entry into the Quaker community from the Buddhist one.⁶⁰³ Where the attractions are points of difference, they are often from traditional Christianity rather than from Quakerism – which is already open-minded on matters of sexuality and, as just noted, does not emphasise eternal hell – although there is talk of God relatively often. The fact that some Friends find the lack of such talk an appealing feature of Buddhism points us once again to the discomfort some Friends feel with God-talk which, as discussed in chapter 4, can drive a movement towards making list-form remarks which seek to include a multitude of theologies, with Buddhism frequently included.

The other positive attraction which is listed here – and which Pym notes is probably the most popular – is the presence in Buddhism of "practical techniques of meditation". If this is intended to draw a contrast with Quakerism, implying that Quakerism does not include practical techniques, this points to a failure of teaching among Friends. It is clear from the work of, for example, Rex Ambler, that historically Friends have a significant tradition of step-by-step methods, and perhaps his recent work on making these available to modern Friends in an accessible form is also a response to identifying this lack of teaching.⁶⁰⁴ The other possibility is that Friends, already equipped with practical techniques for use in waiting worship, also wish to develop skills of meditation – although other evidence seems to suggest that many Friends find techniques from Buddhist sources, such as

⁶⁰³ Ibid., 16. In short, the story is that his Buddhist meditation group had folded and someone advised him that the Quakers could provide an hour's silence on a Sunday morning. He attended a Meeting for Worship which happened to be entirely silent for quite some time, and says that "it was quite a shock when someone first stood and spoke in ministry".

⁶⁰⁴ See for example Ambler, *The Quaker Way: a rediscovery*.

focussing on the breath, useful in the context of Meeting for Worship.⁶⁰⁵ In any particular case where meditation is mentioned, it is not necessarily clear whether the method has been learned from Buddhist sources. The breath is, after all, a universal human experience, and explicit discussions of the practice of focusing on it are now common enough among Friends that it could easily be picked up by a new attender at Quaker Meeting from another Quaker. Although some methods such as the silent repetition of a mantra are discussed in places, references to other Buddhist forms of meditation are relatively rare in the Quaker literature – less common than, for example, references to Buddhist philosophical concepts such as the Inner Buddha Nature. Sometimes, however, someone does acknowledge that they have learnt a technique directly from Buddhism. In the introduction to *You Don't Have to Sit on the Floor*, Pym's book on Buddhism, he writes that:

In *Listening to the Light* I sought to give readers a taste of Quaker spirituality, and suggest things that they could practise within their own lives. I was not trying to convert anyone to Quakerism. This book has similar aims. ... Buddhist practice can co-exist with much of Christianity, for example, and actually does so in many ways today. I personally know of many Christian priests and laity who practise meditation of various kinds which they have taken from Buddhist sources. This does not mean they have become Buddhists.⁶⁰⁶

(Although he goes on to mention that some have, and does not tell us what he takes to be the boundary on 'becoming Buddhist'.) Here we see the idea that people can learn something from Buddhism, something – probably about meditation, focussed on techniques rather than metaphysics – which is useful in their lives and which does not entail conversion to another religion. There is, then, both a feeling that Buddhism is particularly compatible with Quakerism, and a recognition that it has particular things to teach which can be useful to Friends. Given the evidence discussed in chapter 6, it may well

⁶⁰⁵ King, one of Drew's case studies, mentions it; see also Pym's chapter 5. Drew, *Buddhist and Christian? An exploration of dual belonging*; Pym, *The Pure Principle: Quakers and other faith traditions*.

⁶⁰⁶ Pym, *You Don't Have To Sit On The Floor: Bringing the insights and tools of Buddhism into everyday life*: 16.

be the case that Quakerism and Buddhism are an easier pair of religions in which to practise dual belonging than some other, hypothetically possible, pairings.

Pym also devotes some, smaller, amounts of space to considering other pairings, however. In his chapter 7, 'Coming Together', he looks at Quaker relations with the Hindu traditions of Ramakrishna and Gandhi (taken separately), Sufism (but not Islam as a whole), Judaism, "Sikhs, Jains, Zoroastrians and Baha'is" (all at once), Taoism, other Christian traditions, and New Religious Movements. In each case he looks for what Quakerism may have in common with the other tradition, and in every case he chooses he succeeds in finding something – even where this requires a restriction to a particular tradition within a religion, as with Sufism within Islam and the Namdharis within Sikhism.⁶⁰⁷ Although he does not articulate it explicitly here, being more concerned with the historical facts of Quaker interactions with each tradition, the underlying determination to find something in common between Quakerism and as many other traditions as possible points back to a belief in the universal accessibility of the 'pure principle' and the idea that people seeking the truth will have something to learn from all of the many ways in which that pure principle has been expressed. In other words, Pym's approach already embeds universalist ideas and does not look for or discuss evidence which might trouble this. A very rare Quaker author who does consider the issue of what should be rejected from a universalist approach is one of the anonymous writers discussed in the next section.

Example 2: *New Light*

I use many names for the Divine, sometimes lingering with one sacred name, but wary of becoming territorial, my god shrinking to mere possession. ...

My experience is that God is beyond all our imagining, bigger than any one name we humans use. Dios, Gott, El, Yahweh, Allah, Ahura Mazda – I could never learn enough languages to pronounce all the

⁶⁰⁷ Pym, *The Pure Principle: Quakers and other faith traditions*: chapter 7.

names of God; I cannot in this life explore all these understandings.⁶⁰⁸

This paragraph was written by an anonymous Friend (henceforth known here as the author of passage 11) initially for the Quaker Quest booklet *Twelve Quakers and God* and republished in the edited volume *New Light: 12 Quaker Voices*. Quaker Quest is a recently developed and quite specific template for running public meetings with the aim of engaging those who are interested in Quakerism but perhaps know little about them; an evening session includes presentations on a topic, such as God, Jesus, evil, or social action, from three Friends who will usually demonstrate thereby some of the internal diversity within the Society, a short Meeting for Worship, small group discussions, opportunities to ask questions, and time to socialise. The authors of the *Twelve Quakers* pamphlets were all active as presenters in early Quaker Quest events, mainly in London, and according to the preface to *New Light*, they "agreed that no one should see anyone else's contribution until all twelve were complete, and all pieces remain anonymous".⁶⁰⁹ The resulting pieces, as we would expect, show something of the theological diversity which is present among Friends. We are told that the Friends did not read one another's piece before all were finished, but not anything about how the Friends who wrote them were selected – except that they were all active in the work of Quaker Quest at the time. There seems to be, then, no particular editorial process, and Jennifer Kavanagh's work in producing the anthology seems to have focussed on technical aspects rather than content.

Before I return to the first section quoted in more detail, it is worth noting some of the clues to Quaker attitudes which can be found in other passages in this part of the book (all by different authors, although anonymous).

Passage 7, for example, says that:

⁶⁰⁸ An anonymous Friend writing in Kavanagh, *New Light: 12 Quaker Voices*, 24. (Passage 11 in chapter 1.)

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, vii.

Quakers use many words for God – Spirit, the Divine, etc. – perhaps because they have associated the word with some, now unacceptable, picture of a vengeful old man in the sky. I have always used God because that is the word with which I am most comfortable. It represents for me in its many translations the way humans have sought to give a name to explain the spiritual and the moral. So I shall use God, and I hope it will not be a barrier for you.⁶¹⁰

The Friend writing this does not find this choice a barrier to exploring Hindu concepts or finding "deep unity in our encounter with God" with a Muslim friend.⁶¹¹ The fact that the Friend felt the need to say this, however, points to an awareness of widespread discomfort with the word – perhaps, as this Friend speculates, because of the association of the word 'God' with a particular, quite limited and among other things patriarchal, picture of what God is. This is reminiscent of the motives behind some of the examples I discussed in chapter 4, but it also throws interesting light on the way in which the 'unwritten rules' of discourse about God are treated by Quakers: sometimes a potential rule, obeyed by many in the community and for reasons which are visible to others, does not suit a particular Friend or does not seem applicable in a particular instance, and in that case they feel free to break it – but often they do not simply ignore it, feeling the need to explain why they are not following the guideline. In a sense, this makes the existence of the guideline even clearer – although I note that although this Friend feels that the word 'God' is unacceptable to many, it is actually one of the more common terms in the lists I have found, although 'Spirit' is also extremely common. It is not clear, then, that 'avoid the word 'God'' is in fact a guideline in the Quaker community – a large number of Quaker publications, including and perhaps even especially official documents, continue to use the word frequently – but there is enough discomfort around it that speakers in less formal contexts do feel the need to explain or justify their use of it.⁶¹²

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., 17.

⁶¹² Official documents – *Quaker Faith and Practices*, Yearly Meeting minutes and epistles, etc. – continue to use the word 'God' frequently and freely, but some individual Friends do

Many of the twelve writers focus on experience of God rather than belief in God, and conceptualise God as energy or a force rather than in anthropomorphic terms – in keeping with the rejection of the picture of the "vengeful old man in the sky" which the author of passage 7 mentions, even if they have not in fact rejected the word 'God'. Most acknowledge that there is a variety of religious experience, and for example the author of passage 5 writes that:

Another metaphor for God [besides "God as energy, force, direction"] is a ball of many mirrored facets. We all see a part of it, and what we see reflects back to us a unique perspective, which is a true reflection yet only part of the whole. In this way, I can accept that others will have a different view of God, different words for God, different experiences of God, and yet all these are but glimpses of fragments of the same thing, which is greater than anything we can comprehend.⁶¹³

The image of God as "a ball of many mirrored facets" is a clear expression of pluralism, and in particular stands in close relation to the 'blind men and the elephant' story which I discussed in relation to the work of John Hick (and the objections of Gavin D'Costa). It seeks, like that parable, to explain how different people can have very different experiences which they describe in different ways, and yet be in fact having and describing experiences produced by the same underlying reality (the disco ball, the elephant). The image of the mirrored ball, however, has the potential to add an extra layer of complexity to this, a layer which I think brings the pluralist position into closer alignment with the cultural-linguistic position I discussed in chapter 3: the many facets of God not only show us something of God,⁶¹⁴ but also the reflections can be seen to contain – to reflect –

struggle with the practice. Perhaps many Friends navigate their discomfort by applying a 'translation' or substitution procedure when reading.

⁶¹³ Kavanagh, *New Light: 12 Quaker Voices*, 12.

⁶¹⁴ The metaphor breaks down a little here, since in fact all the light from a mirror is reflected, whereas I suspect even this author thinks that some of the Light of God is truly emanating from God.

something of ourselves. Our personalities, backgrounds, and previous experiences will affect the things we see in the divine disco ball.

'Talking about God' might be thought of as a language-game or set of language-games, as described in chapter 2, and these authors are playing it by the distinctive Quaker rules. In American football you can do things which would never be allowed in association football, and similarly in Quaker God-talk you can say things which would sound strange, if not simply wrong, in another context. The list of names presented in the quotation at the beginning of this part of the chapter – "Dios, Gott, El, Yahweh, Allah, Ahura Mazda" – is curious for philosophers of religious language in a couple of ways. Firstly, it does come closer than many other examples given in this thesis to being a list of translations of the word God, including as it does Spanish, German, Hebrew, Arabic, and Avestan. The first five seem to be words which could reasonably be used by Christians or other Abrahamic monotheists. One, 'Yahweh', has a particular role in Judaism (although not, it is important to note, generally used and certainly not read aloud in the form given here) but is also used in various ways by Christians (and 'El' is also from Hebrew). Two, 'Dios' and 'Gott', are from European languages where the majority of the speakers will be Christian, but there seems to be no theological issue with Jews or Muslims using those words for God – in fact, these words are more like genuine translations than many other terms which are offered as such. Another, 'Allah', is especially associated with Islam although it is also used by Arabic-speaking Christians.⁶¹⁵ In this sense, the Old Iranian/Zoroastrian name Ahura Mazda seems to be the odd one out in this list, and because the author of the passage does not give us any clue about how they came by it, it is difficult to know in what context it should be taken – except the general Quaker setting in which deity names or descriptions from a wide variety of sources are cheerfully and sometimes uncritically absorbed under the assumption

⁶¹⁵ Although not always without controversy; in Malaysia a court has enacted a ban on the use of 'Allah' by non-Muslims. BBC, "Malaysia court rules non-Muslims cannot use 'Allah'," BBC News, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-24516181>. (accessed 12th August 2014.)

that all, or almost all, such names reflect real religious experience of a single Divine.

In chapter 1, we saw some of the underlying assumptions about language which inform the ways in which Quakers talk about their own patterns of speech about God, and in this passage we can see them in action. Of the two main assumptions I identified there, the experience-first assumption – the idea that experience is primary over words – is not a main theme in this passage, although it is visible when the author says that, "I want to express my awe before the greatness of God, but have not – yet – found the vocabulary".⁶¹⁶ The other key assumption, the unity of religious experience, is found here as an implied claim – when the author treats a string of names as all naming the same thing, a move which would not be permitted in many religious language-games outside the British Quaker context – but is also challenged with the idea that "some gods are not-God". The author of passage 11 writes that, "I cannot accept the Maya and Aztec god, who demanded human sacrifice... I have difficulty even learning from this view of God".⁶¹⁷ The experience-first assumption, then, is tempering the universalist view here, so that the author of this passage can say, "The God I find to be real and whom I worship is just, loving, ethical, and much, much more, but not capricious or cruel".⁶¹⁸ Despite the intervention of an ethical criterion which in most cases seems absent or unspoken, the author retains here an underlying confidence that we have what might be called an "agreement in judgement" about the Divine.⁶¹⁹ We might get into debates about borderline cases (such as: is the Aztec god really God?⁶²⁰ is that a chair or a stool?) but there is sufficient community agreement on the rules

⁶¹⁶ Kavanagh, *New Light: 12 Quaker Voices*, 24.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁹ Norman Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, ed. Peter Winch (London: Routledge, 1993). 63., quoted from Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*: 242.

⁶²⁰ Or: are the Aztec gods really God? The Friend writing in *New Light* uses the singular but historically the Aztecs had many deities many of which were not worshipped with human sacrifice.

for the use of the terms, a kind of rule-following stability as discussed in chapter 2, that after the thoughts about the limitations of the universalist view outlined in chapter 6, the author of this passage can still conclude: "This has turned into a love song to the One Who is my Life and my End (God is clearly Capital Letters too!)".⁶²¹ In the setting of twelve collected passages from a group of authors, it is clear that there is an assumption that they can and will speak about the same thing even if they name and describe it differently.

The challenge posed by the Mayan and Aztec gods evidently does not put the author off universalism as a whole, perhaps because such universalism is grounded in a cultural context which accepts that personal experiences – or, in this case, lack of experience – are the foundations of the perspective. The author of this passage cannot learn from the Aztec and Mayan gods, and this is taken as enough basis on which to reject them in favour of those portrayals of the Divine from which the author does gain something positive. This returns to the issue of the relationship between experience and the interpretation of it through religious viewpoints, which we saw in chapter 3 is a more complex relation than sometimes supposed. In the Quaker setting, which provides forms of life such as the Meeting for Worship as a background, the universalist interpretation is widely supported by apparent experience, especially of people with quite different theologies worshipping successfully together, and so this interpretation is strongly appealing to many Friends even in the face of some conflicts around the issues of naming.

The passage does acknowledge exactly these conflicts in the form of considerable differences in emotion towards different terminologies. The author says that "Light is probably the word I use most of all", citing the early Quaker use of it, and picks out favourite images from the Bible: "I do like God as mother hen..., God as artisan, delighting in Wisdom (who is

⁶²¹ Kavanagh, *New Light: 12 Quaker Voices*, 25.

also God, and female)".⁶²² On the other hand, some words do not appeal at all: "Some cannot bear God as father or mother, for only cruelty and betrayal come to mind; perhaps those who have suffered need Friend, Comforter, Healer, Ground of Being, or Truth to me feel cold and abstract, yet feel warm to others – how wonderfully odd!"⁶²³ This final comment, "how wonderfully odd!", points to another significant feature of Quaker multi-theology remarks; there is a distinct sense that diversity (within certain boundaries) is to be celebrated. Other people's preferences may seem odd, but this strangeness is wonderful, part of the splendour that is God (remember the mirror ball) rather than a negative.

Example 3: *Soil and Soul*

Unlike the books from which my other examples have been drawn, Alastair McIntosh's *Soil and Soul: People Versus Corporate Power* is not primarily a book about religion. It is a book about the environment, ecology, and the economy, which focuses on the stories of two Hebridean islands: Eigg, whose inhabitants became the first in Scotland to be lairds of the estate in which they lived, and Harris, where the community found themselves fighting back against a superquarry, the proposed removal of an entire mountain. Within these stories, however, religion becomes a recurring theme. Alistair McIntosh is a Quaker, and in the course of his work he seeks partnerships with people from other religious backgrounds: notably, Donald Macleod, a Calvinist theologian, and Sulian Stone Eagle Herney, a leader among the Mi'kmaq people of Canada. McIntosh repeatedly returns to theological themes, talking, for example, about the appeal of religion for activists in a way which clearly reveals his pluralist presuppositions as well as his own Christian background:

⁶²² Ibid., 24.

⁶²³ Ibid. The punctuation of this sentence may have been misprinted slightly, as it would make more sense with a full stop somewhere in the list – perhaps between Healer and Ground of Being.

... an understanding of the cross is essential to the work of liberation. Similar understandings of divine suffering are found in other faiths, even if reactionary Christians would rather fit their God to the Bible than the Bible to God. These [points about the power of the cross, such as "that nonviolence can cut sharper than the sword"] are truths common to the human condition because they are foundations of human psychology. It is not that the activist necessarily wants to be a Christian or a Buddhist or a Wiccan or a Baha'i or however it is that God reaches out to their particular cultural and historical context.* Rather, it is that if your courage is really tested, if you are really exercised... then you will unavoidably find spirituality speaking to you. Authentic spirituality offers the activist a very deep and practical strength. The point is that this strength, this courage, comes not from the ego but from that of God (or the Goddess) within.⁶²⁴

His endnote, marked here as *, responds to the kind of objections which McIntosh envisages might be made to this passage. It says that:

The reactionary fundamentalist Christian who objects to this syncretism must demonstrate in what ways we are not entitled to see, for example, Christ as Buddha nature and Buddha nature as Christ. That is to say, before condemning syncretism he or she must show that it is not possible for the Holy Spirit to have been operative in other cultures at other times in history, and for there to be many 'masks of God'.⁶²⁵

This shifting of the burden of proof from the pluralist to someone trying to take a more exclusivist position is not a move which we have seen before – rather, pluralists such as John Hick have tried to provide reasons to actively adopt such a position – but it is not an unexpected move and at the same time it reveals the extent to which such pluralist positions have become accepted among Quakers and other liberal Christians. The way in which McIntosh phrases his response also serves to 'other' people who might object to pluralism, or what he calls syncretism: the term 'reactionary fundamentalist Christians' uses words with negative connotations to define

⁶²⁴ McIntosh, *Soil and Soul: People Versus Corporate Power*: 220. The 'liberation' to which he refers here is both soteriological and political; for McIntosh, the theological and the political are intricately intertwined anyway.

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*, 301.

'that other kind of Christian, not like me'. This might be regarded as a kind of ironic exclusivism.

The broader pluralist perspective in McIntosh's passage is founded on the idea that the activist may not want to be 'religious' at all, but finds themselves drawn to a religious tradition – specifically, to whichever religious tradition is used by God as a channel to their particular historical and social circumstances – as a result of their activist work. It could mean that one chooses to be Christian over other religions when several are available, or it could mean that needing religion and finding only Christianity, one is a Christian by default. In this view, religious affiliation is not a choice as such, nor is it simply an accident of birth (compare some of the claims made by Hick and discussed in chapter 5), but it is something given to an individual by a God who can appear in many guises and go by many names. Although generally McIntosh is careful with the religious positions of others and does not try to subsume them under the general banner of pluralism, pluralism does form part of his own personal background. He is willing to use the religious language of others to emphasise his urgency or message, as when he says to Stone Eagle, "The eagle is my totem too. And I tell you... The eagles request that you come and help us".⁶²⁶ It works; Stone Eagle does indeed decide to support the campaign to save the mountain on Harris from the superquarry.

McIntosh is also, though, willing to draw contrasts between his position and that of others: in an initial meeting with Donald Macleod, McIntosh admits to being "a wild character" but adds, "I have to confess that my own version is more of a pagan-leaning Quaker variety than a Calvinist one".⁶²⁷ Later in the conversation as reported, they draw out both the similarities and differences between their respective positions – their co-operation forms something of a contrast with McIntosh's dismissal of 'reactionary fundamentalist Christians' quoted above; perhaps here, as in so many cases,

⁶²⁶ Ibid., 198.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., 199.

there is something of a bias towards those with whom one agrees politically if not theologically. If Macleod rejected the pluralism assumptions which McIntosh accepts – and he very probably would – he would presumably be the bad kind of Christian; and yet he is a useful ally in a particular cause, and McIntosh is, like any pragmatic activist, willing to work with people in those circumstances. It does not mean that he (or Macleod) is required to let go of any assumptions.

At the very end of the book McIntosh says something which fits very neatly into the pattern of Quaker multi-theology list-form remarks with which I have been concerned throughout this thesis. Discussing the "community of the soul", he says that:

Whatever our religion or lack of one, we need spaces where we can take rest, compose and compost our inner stuff, and become more deeply present to the aliveness of life... We need to remember that when we let loose our wildness in creativity, it is God-the-Goddess – or call it Christ, or Allah or Krishna or the Tao – that pours forth.⁶²⁸

This is the final quotation which I am going to discuss, chosen because it incorporates so many of the significant strands of thought considered in this thesis. Although McIntosh does not specifically claim a dual belonging, it is clear that his Quaker theology has been heavily influenced by Neo-Pagan theologies (themselves in turn part of a broadly feminist movement in religion) – revealed in this quotation by his creation and use of the phrase "God-the-Goddess"; to McIntosh, the God of whom Quakers speak and the Goddess of whom Pagans speak are seen to be one and the same. His position of having sympathies if not whole feet in two camps is held more comfortably against a background of pluralist assumptions, especially that the names by which other people know the Divine are all in the end naming one thing – we can "call it" Christ, Allah, or something else, rather than

⁶²⁸ Ibid., 284.

either experiencing the one thing differently or having some completely different thing "pour[] forth" through us.⁶²⁹

One way to consider the pluralist position is as a kind of 'translation' between religions which are each like languages. As we saw in Chapter 2, this metaphor is not without flaws, but it does provide some structures through which we can view the kinds of comment which I have been discussing. In particular, the idea that those who are deeply grounded in a religion can acquire an internal and intuitive sense of the grammar of that religion, just as native speakers of a language have a sense of the things which can and cannot be called grammatical within that language, gives us a way to discuss the general acceptability of such comments among Friends. Although not every Quaker would say something like this, and not all Friends would feel comfortable with similar remarks, in the course of this thesis we have seen these comments coming from such a range of experienced Friends – sometimes, especially in the examples in Chapter 4, in collectively sanctioned contexts, and in all these examples in contexts designed for publication – that it is safe to say that those who are fluent in Quakerism accept these ways of speaking as grammatically correct within the religion-as-language-game. The underlying principles which inform Quaker grammar – pluralism in particular – have already been discussed.

Finally, I turn back to the actual contents of McIntosh's remark. I am not at all confident that many Christians, Muslims, followers of Krishna, and Taoists are likely to concur with it, unless they also happen to have an underlying understanding of religion which includes the basic presumptions of pluralism, which can co-exist with any of these religious traditions but is not generally included as an integral part of them. As I described in chapter 1, the meanings of words are shaped by the aggregate effects of their many

⁶²⁹ Incidentally, the idea that activism is rooted in religion has been expressed in Quaker contexts before, even with a list-format remark: see Jo Vellacott's 1982 comment which is quoted in *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 20:05. "The people whom I know who live a truly nonviolent life are in touch with the source of power, call it what you will; the Light, the seed, God, the holy spirit."

uses in particular contexts over time; in such cases, if we simply took the words in their original uses – Krishna as used in the Indian context, for example, and Tao in the Chinese context, or even their use in European settings heavily informed by these traditions, such as the use of the name Krishna by ISKCON⁶³⁰ – and tried to describe them, we would find that they have quite different uses. For example, Krishna is an individual, both the incarnation of Vishnu in a human form, and also the ultimate form of the Godhead,⁶³¹ while the Tao is a more abstract principle, translated into English in a variety of ways but usually indicating 'way' or 'path'; although individuals might have, say, mystical experiences of either of them, we would reasonably expect those experiences to be quite different in content. However, it is not the case that these terms have come straight from their original traditions into this remark, even if McIntosh has encountered some of their original uses through reading or other research. Rather, it seems that they have become part of a general pluralist tradition in which such words are acceptably included in lists of this kind – without necessarily being the words which the individuals speaking would ever choose to use in their personal religious lives. The list of words stands as a symbol of the inclusive intent of the statement.

Overview of examples

Looking over the three examples in this chapter and the others discussed or mentioned in this thesis, it is often hard to say that the terms included in the lists are really used synonymously. Indeed, there is often a sense that one or more items are there to prove or demonstrate the diversity which the speaker is willing to include – there are items which we do not find in these lists, but there is also a genuine diversity of items which are included. Often, there

⁶³⁰ The International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

⁶³¹ Edwin F. Bryant and Maria L. Ekstrand, *The Hare Krishna Movement: The Postcharismatic Fate of a Religious Transplant* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2004). 17.

seems to be an 'odd one out' which cannot be found in other lists. In the three examples given here, these would be: 'the Tao', given last in example 3 at the end of a list which seems to move from the speaker's preferred term through ones presumed more familiar to the audience to those with more distant geographical origins even if they in fact appear more often in Quaker literature; 'Ahura Mazda', as discussed in the section on example 2; and, oddly, probably the term 'Cosmic Christ' in example 1, which although in use in some Christian and even other Quaker material is a rare term in the list-form remarks which usually favour single words over phrases. It seems possible that, as well as using the list format to include the diversity of Quaker theology – still important, especially when there is a sense in which the speaker is representing other Friends or wishes to be confident that all Friends reading the remark will feel included by it – there could be two other dimensions to the remarks: to support the inadequacy of language claim which is a correlate of the experience-first assumption, and to show a kind of theological daring or risk-taking behaviour.

The three examples support the idea that the Divine is unnameable by a paradoxical method, over-naming in order to demonstrate that even all the acceptable namings are inadequate. This is different from the refusal to use certain names, as discussed in relation to the author of example 2 who was willing to disclose some specific theologies which they found impossible to reconcile with their impression of God; many other authors whom I have considered in the course of this thesis find some such images equally difficult – although some may not be so conscious of it – but they are very rarely discussed, indeed I have only found the one example discussed here. Other authors prefer to focus on the positive, supporting their pluralist position only with those parts of other religious traditions which they find conducive to their own way of thinking. This is not a new point about pluralism, and as we saw in chapter 5, looking at religions which have been left out – as John Hick ignored some significant Chinese traditions – can provide devastating counter-evidence to the claims which pluralists are inclined to make. Here, the underlying pluralist claim is actually about the incompleteness of any single religious viewpoint, which might be put as

follows: we must use a variety of names, from a range of theologies, because no one religious tradition can (rather than, historically, does) contain the whole Truth.

What is the purpose of the theological risk-taking? As hinted above, it seems to have acceptable boundaries; the lists often contain items drawn from religions not well-understood among Friends and with which dual belonging is difficult and rare,⁶³² and yet there are items from some other traditions – the presence of Taoism and the absence of Chinese Folk Religion suggests that ignorance is not the only factor at work. Two aspects seem possible, although all these are implicit and hence hard to demonstrate conclusively from texts. Firstly, the inclusion of something which is 'far out' may make some Friends who are accustomed to, and/or fearful of, receiving unwelcome looks or comments if they discuss their theologies openly in Meetings, feel safer in the hands of the author. This seems especially likely to be a concern in a text like the Pym book which provides my first example in this chapter, where the named author is dealing with religious matters and interreligious relations as the central topic. Secondly, such an inclusion may be another way to support, albeit in a more roundabout way, the pluralist claims: in pushing the boat out, authors may be trying to suggest that their pluralism is completely open, without boundaries (although, as I just said, this does not in fact appear to be the case). By including 'exotic' items – and perhaps this factor is especially strong for terms drawn from Eastern religions – the author may be saying 'look how many religions I can include, how many I have knowledge of' (enough knowledge to choose a more or less appropriate sounding term, in any case). It is also possible that the underlying claim is somewhat weaker – not 'there is no boundary to my pluralism', but 'the boundary is fuzzy, and to find it I have to push it, knowing that some of my audience will find that uncomfortable'. There could also be less honourable reasons for seeking to evoke discomfort in the audience but these are not named in the texts.

⁶³² Muslim Quakers do exist – I know of perhaps five cases – but are much less common than Buddhist Quakers, and yet 'Allah' actually occurs as often as 'Buddha' in the lists; to the best of my knowledge, there are no Zoroastrian Quakers, although I would be happy to be proven wrong.

Another, potentially conflicting, desire present in the texts is a wish to avoid causing discomfort. The second example given in this chapter, in which the author engages more than most with possible names for God which do create discomfort for the author, hints at an ethical consideration which may be informing the choices made by others – Aztec gods, for example, are not in fact named in this positive, inclusive, list-format remark in any of the examples I have found in the Quaker literature. It could be that a principle something like John Hick's 'fruits of religion' principle – discussed in chapter 5 – is in fact in operation in the selection of terms for inclusion in a list. Other factors, such as familiarity, are also at work, and these can intersect in various ways. In the examples given in this thesis, 'Allah' is used as often as 'Buddha', and so although people practising both Buddhism and Quakerism are much more common than those practising Islam and Quakerism,⁶³³ multiple belonging is not the only factor at work – a desire to be seen to be inclusive, and the prominence of Islam in British national discourse in the early 21st century, might also be at work. In other cases one choice might seem more obvious – 'Krishna' occurs several times in the remarks quoted, while, for example, 'Kali', does not. Such a choice is likely to result both from factors of familiarity – the accessibility of texts relating to Krishna and the influence of Gandhi on publicising this part of Hinduism especially among pacifists would be among the explanatory factors here – and similarity, since even someone not seeking an exact synonym would be likely to perceive a continuity – of gender, for one thing – in the list 'Jesus, Buddha, Krishna' and a more distinct odd one out in the list 'Jesus, Buddha, Kali', but there may also be ethical (and other) considerations at work.

Taken together, the various pressures – pluralism, inclusion and the desire to display it, and ethical concerns – combine to make the list-format remark seem like an obvious choice if not the only possible solution. However, other factors which are also at work – ignorance, discomfort, desire to take risks, and the imperialist or dogmatic potential of pluralism – conspire to

⁶³³ Or Arabic-speaking Christianity, etc.

complicate considerably the task of making sense of such remarks. These factors seem to be so widespread that even if they are not inherent in the situation, they are a normal part of the situation as it exists.

Conclusions

This thesis has laid out for consideration a number of questions around the Quaker practice of making multi-theology remarks, and built up a collection of tools which help to answer some of them. In this final chapter, I review those questions and their potential answers, and consider how much progress has been made on each of them. I will also spend some time looking at the implications of this thesis for the wider bodies of scholarship to which it relates – both in terms of Quaker studies and philosophy.

Quaker questions

At the start of my discussion, in the final section of chapter 1, I asked three main questions about multi-theology remarks:

- What are the unwritten guidelines for this language usage, for the multi-theology and list-format remarks made by British Quakers in the literature I have examined? Or, to put it another way, in what ways do Friends generate that community sense of correct language use which enables them to see that terms such as 'light' and 'seed' belong on a list of synonyms for 'that which we encounter in Meeting for Worship' but would make them laugh at 'potato'?
- What are the criteria on which these forms of Quaker language, especially the multi-theology remarks, might be judged and how does this depend on the position of the person judging? How do ethical, pragmatic, coherence, and truth considerations figure in the construction of these criteria?
- Do any of the remarks under consideration make truth claims? If so, what claims do they make and do they succeed on their own terms?

To these I would add a question which has emerged from the first one in the course of my explorations, especially in the work on pluralism and multiple religious belonging in chapters 5 and 6, namely:

- What sources and practices give Friends confidence in using language which is not traditionally Quaker in contexts which are distinctly Quaker?

Quaker Question 1

- What are the unwritten guidelines for this language usage, for the multi-theology and list-format remarks made by British Quakers in the literature I have examined?

In seeking to answer the first question, I have turned to philosophical understandings of language and religion, especially to Wittgenstein's idea that our words are given meaning by the ways we use them in particular contexts, and to Lindbeck's idea that religions have a kind of grammar which allows the fluent 'speaker' of that religion to detect acceptable and unacceptable ways of proceeding (including ways of speaking), even if she or he cannot always describe the grammatical rules which apply. With that in mind, I would make the following points in answer to the question.

Firstly, the unwritten guidelines which Quakers use when speaking are just that – unwritten and probably also unspoken. They seem to arise out of other Quaker concerns. For example, Friends sometimes use specific and sometimes newly created language in order to try to speak as truthfully as possible, reflecting a traditional Quaker concern with truth and truth-telling – a concern which overrides other issues such as familiarity of words and social expectations.

Quakers also frequently reflect a general Quaker understanding that language is secondary and relatively unimportant when compared with (what they assume to be) direct experience. Such an understanding is somewhat complicated by the clear presence of an opposite understanding, that words matter deeply both to the speaker, who is trying to communicate clearly and honestly, and to the listener, who may be much moved by them either positively or negatively. Friends strive to speak in ways which will

produce positive responses, even when this requires some casting around for the correct range of vocabulary.

If I were attempting to write these unwritten guidelines – a potentially useful attempt even if, like an archaeological dig, it runs the risk of destroying what it hopes to study⁶³⁴ – I would include these suggestions:

- use words which create for you emotional resonances similar to those created by experiences you associate with that which you are trying to describe,
- be mindful of the range of connotations those words might have for others,
- offer others the opportunity to seek words which create for them the emotional resonances they perceive you to be experiencing, even if your words do not create that for them directly and their words do not bring those emotions to you.

I think this latter guideline is, or is akin to, the thought which lies at the heart of Quaker talk about 'translating' God-language. Translation is in some ways an inadequate metaphor for this process, although it does also capture something about the nature of the problem – especially if we are thinking of a dynamic rather than word-for-word style of translation. Within the broader framework of the religion-as-language metaphor it could be misleading because it suggests that Friends may be moving between discrete religions in their translating. Friends also frequently seem to move only between terms which are both traditional within Quakerism, such as 'God' and 'the Light'.

⁶³⁴ This would be the case anyway, since writing what is unwritten may change the understanding we have of it or the approach we take to it, but is an especially clear danger when one is working with Friends, who are generally opposed to creeds and forms of words and seem to manifest contrariness at a rate higher than average in the population. It is not my intention to have Friends change their behaviour as a result of reading my written version of the unwritten rules, but I acknowledge that this is a possible effect.

Two of the three guidelines suggested above are very focussed on the needs of the audience. There might also be a further pair of guidelines which relate to the needs of the speaker directly, something like:

- use words which you can speak honestly, which seem to you to most closely fit your experience, and
- do not say that which you do not believe.

These may at times come into conflict with the previous set; it may be that Friends who report anecdotally that they feel they cannot speak about theological matters in Meeting are often caught between these two impulses. If you know that many in your Meeting find Christ-language difficult, but also know that you cannot share your spiritual truths without talking about Christ, it may seem better not to speak about such things at all. Although these further guidelines can be evidenced from the literature – in chapter 4, I looked at Rose Ketterer's attempt to use those words which most closely fit her experience, and non-theist Quaker literature offers example of Friends who refrain from using words, especially 'God' – the struggle is not very much discussed in writing, or indeed in public, in Quaker circles.⁶³⁵ There could also be a link to general guidelines about speech operating in British English, which point to considerations about politeness, turn-taking, and appropriate topics and lengths for contributions, among other things. Overall, there is a need to balance the requirements of the speaker with those of the audience, and Quaker authors are clearly seeking to be inclusive of a range of theological perspectives while accurately representing their own – which may not itself be fully summarised and expressed by a single word or even a few words. Such requirements push Friends towards list-format remarks – which give the message 'I like the word x but accept that y and z are acceptable as well' – some of which are then multi-theological given that Friends have access to terms from other religious traditions.

⁶³⁵ Probably for reasons to do with conflict avoidance among Friends. For more on this subject, see Susan Robson, *Living with Conflict: a Challenge to a Peace Church* (Scarecrow Press, 2013).

Looking kindly upon the practice of offering lists of terms, we might compare the exercise to buying sweets for all your friends: Al doesn't like chocolate, but Bobbie only eats chocolate, and Chris prefers Jelly Babies... one rapidly ends up with a shopping basket full of different kinds, and even then there is a danger that someone feels left out (especially when you are handing out sweets to people you have never met). This is the attraction of the token or 'please translate' strategy: I use the word 'God', or hand out Mars Bars, with a disclaimer that anyone who doesn't like it, or who has an allergy to it, can trade it in for something else.

Over time, a body of acceptable answers has been developed, which includes some words brought in from other religious traditions as well as a range of traditional Christian and specifically Quaker terminology. There is no sharp dividing line between acceptable and unacceptable words; I joked earlier that 'potato' is unacceptable, but perhaps it could become acceptable if used in some metaphorical ways. A piece of ministry at Yearly Meeting 2013 compared worshippers to water-beetles in a surprising way, with the bubble of air collected and carried by the beetle representing the Light encountered in Meeting for Worship and carried out into the world, so such innovation is clearly possible.

Similarly, many Quakers can manage a little 'God the Father' in some contexts – singing the words of John Greenleaf Whittier in community settings would be a common example – but would find that it contributed to their discomfort in other Christian settings. Others are comfortable with traditionally Christian language in traditionally Christian contexts such as liturgy, but would not want to use that language in Meeting for Worship. Even within Quaker contexts (words written by a Quaker, like Whittier, quoted or sung by Quakers), there may be a tendency for modern Quakers to regard it as 'borrowed' language. Some words are under debate; some Sufi or Sufi-influenced Friends are strongly inclined to use the word Allah while other Quakers are equally strongly against it, a matter which is clearly influenced by the current perceptions of Islam among the demographics from which British Quakers most often come: white, middle-class, middle-

aged or older, and left-leaning (*Guardian* reading). Changes over time, not fully tracked in this thesis but visible both directly and as comments about change found in the primary literature suggest that this trend is an ongoing process, in keeping with the gradual process of change found in natural language anyway.

Quaker Question 2

- What are the criteria on which these forms of Quaker language, especially the multi-theology remarks, might be judged and how does this depend on the position of the person judging? How do ethical, pragmatic, coherence, and truth considerations figure in the construction of these criteria?

In asking this question, we move a step beyond description, although I do not intend to make a normative claim about what Quakers should or should not say – not least because I have argued throughout this thesis that the relevant judgements will be highly contextual. We might also want to ask, for that reason, who is usefully able to judge these remarks – in the end, the only judgements which change practice will come from inside the community. However, because some key points about the remarks need to be heard from perspectives outside the speakers' community, judgements from outside may also be made and expressed even if they do not have any direct influence on the community's practices – this will happen when Quakers engage in outreach work, for example, or otherwise come to the attention of non-Quakers.

A pragmatic criterion which has emerged in the course of this thesis relates to fear of offending others. Within a community which is in some ways small and very close, but which also contains considerable theological variety (enough that I needed to invent the term 'theological' in order to capture it) and which thinks of itself as, and wishes to be seen as, a

community which promotes peace and does not engage in conflict,⁶³⁶ the fear of upsetting or offending other members of the community is strong. It is not entirely an unfounded fear – cases of Friends upset by the religious language favoured by other Friends are not uncommon, although specific examples are usually not discussed in the literature (probably to protect the identities of the Friends involved). It can sometimes be seen in action in Quaker business meetings, however; for example, the wording and especially the inclusion of the word 'God' in the 2013 Britain Yearly Meeting epistle was questioned, with some speakers preferring to omit the word or to try and make it ambiguous. One suggestion was that the phrase "through God's eyes" should be printed as "through Gods eyes", thereby leaving it open to interpretation as a plural (gods), possessive (God's), or plural possessive (gods'); the Yearly Meeting did not accept this suggestion.

It is not clear, however, whether offence is more often caused by the action of a particular Friend in using a word or whether Friends are actually upset by being reminded of the other contexts in which a word is used – or a little of both. In cases known to me personally, it seems that the latter is at least a strong element of the problem – for example, someone who has come to Quakerism in later life having been badly hurt by a(nother) Christian church in their youth might find words like 'Lord' and 'Father' difficult, but this is not the fault of a Friend who chooses to use them. The body of literature as it stands is not capable of providing much evidence for or against this theory, which fits well with other arguments I have made in this thesis about the ways in which language carries connotations between contexts, but it seems plausible and would bear further investigation.

I have argued in this thesis that multi-theology remarks are essentially coherent within the pluralist worldview which many British Quakers accept. I have not had the space to consider whether, historically speaking, this is a 'traditional' Quaker view, but within the methodology of this thesis this is

⁶³⁶ Not that these two things are actually the same – only that Quakers and their onlookers, real or imagined, tend to treat them as related.

not a big question. It would be interesting to know for how long this has been a widespread view, but the chronological development of the position does not affect my argument here, which is concerned with the details and uses of a now-widespread perspective.

There are of course still Quakers who do not support the pluralist/universalist perspective. Because the Religious Society of Friends is so theologically diverse, there are likely to be representatives of a wide range of other viewpoints, but these perspectives are not clearly represented in the literature. However, I think that the way in which Quakers react to the possibility of diversity is instructive: generally speaking, there is an attempt (as we have seen in the literature quoted in chapter 1) to accept diverse views and incorporate them within the overall perspective of the Society. This reaction seems to me to be a pluralist one, even when it is applied to distinctly anti-pluralist positions. Pluralism is, then, embodied by the common way of working within the Society, even as its philosophical tenets are rejected by some of those whom it seeks to include.

Quaker pluralism is not, however, necessarily the monocentric pluralism which most of Rose Drew's participants espoused. It is compatible with a non-theist position both in that not believing in any deity can be encompassed within the pluralist view as a legitimate path, and in that non-theists can hold pluralist views themselves. Not all of them will, and the Quaker non-theist literature is presently relatively small (in part because of its relative youth), but it would be consistent with other Quaker perspectives and with the behaviour of Quaker non-theists to hold that many traditions contain an element of truth, and that non-theism can be seen as another tradition to which the same applies. Such a perspective on non-theism is supported by the views about Buddhism as an agnostic or atheist religion which are common among Quakers and especially Quaker universalists.

Whether the pluralist view is metaphysically correct falls outside the scope of this thesis. It is enough for the purpose of this thesis that it is constructed and accepted within the Quaker community, and used fairly consistently. In

the relevant context, it attains a relatively high degree of coherence and can, as I have just described, be used to manage or deflect potential conflict within the community. It can also be seen to affect the ways in which religious language is approached – the consistent belief that a single reality underlies the many and varied religious expressions in the world supports the practice of listing possible terms and including words and phrases from other religious traditions.

Quaker Question 3

- Do any of the remarks under consideration make truth claims? If so, what claims do they make and do they succeed on their own terms?

This question is difficult to address aside from particular remarks, some of which I discussed at length in chapters 4 and 7. However, I conclude that many of the specific Quaker multi-theology remarks considered in the course of this thesis do indeed make truth claims. Besides the apparent claims about the interchangeability of names for God, the remarks also imply claims about the epistemic equality of religious paths and the power that specific names can hold for people – which in itself is in tension with the surface claim of interchangeability, although perhaps both can be held if the preference for certain names over others operates only at the individual and not at the community level. I have shown that many Quakers view language as an inferior means of communicating directly-experienced truth or reality, especially where that experience is of the divine.⁶³⁷

Although the Quaker view does not account for the extent to which language constructs the possible experiences, holding it at the community level does help Quakers to set aside some potential problems in the community caused by individual preferences for very different language. Friends are free to assume that a Quaker speaker is trying to communicate through a flawed medium the truth they have experienced, and that if only

⁶³⁷ The superior means, presumably, being to share this direct experience and communicate with and through it rather than through language as such.

they can understand the language correctly they would agree with the other Friend. This again helps to maintain the general assumption of pluralism among Quakers, especially the idea that all religious experiences are of the same divine which is then named and described in many ways, and deflects – less charitably, we might say ignores – potential conflict around the issue of theology. In a context which contains these elements, in particular pluralism about truth and a lowered emphasis on specific language, multi-theology remarks are able to maintain a coherence which would not be possible in other settings.

Quaker Question 4

- What sources and practices give Friends confidence in using language which is not traditionally Quaker in contexts which are distinctly Quaker?

This question emerged in the course of my research, especially as I read more widely in Quaker literature and considered it in relation to the broader theological problems of pluralism and multiple belonging. Quakers in Britain generally are drawn from a well-educated and well-read demographic. They reflect social trends, such as a decreasing familiarity with the Bible, but have a tendency towards curiosity about other, non-Christian, religions. Their curiosity is reflected in their prominence in interfaith work, and also partly created by the number of 'seekers' who enter the community having been engaged with one or more other religious traditions previously. There are also internal trends, such as the creation and fluctuating membership of groups such as the Quaker Universalist Group and the increasing theological diversity of 20th and early 21st century British (liberal) Quakerism. As discussed in chapter 6, many of these seekers retain some slight or strong connection with their previous tradition, and some become dual-belongers: Quaker-Anglicans, Quaker-Buddhists, Quaker-Pagans, Quaker-Sufis, and so forth. This situation means that a significant proportion of the community has previously used or currently use a non-Quaker pattern of religious speech. It also helps to sensitise members of the

community to speech patterns – both those who move and encounter a new language and those who hear newcomers speaking in ways different from the Quaker norm are alerted to the fact of difference.

The literature does not reveal many clear trends about shared sources for information on other religious traditions. Although some notable Quaker dual-belongers have written about their standpoints (Jim Pym's book about Quakerism and Buddhism, for example), Friends appear to be drawing on a wide variety of sources – many different strands of Buddhism, for example.⁶³⁸ No single influential book or individual can be found at the root of the move towards multi-theology language, or even at the root of the use of a particular term within Quakerism. Their confidence with using the terms, in as much as it exists, seems to derive from individual experiences with other religions, whether those are the experiences of the Friend writing or of others in the community. Within the list-format remark, Friends may be incorporating and encouraging others to use terms with which original and new speakers are not personally confident.

Reflections on the philosophical and theological tools used

In the course of this thesis, I have drawn heavily on the work of some key scholars, particularly Wittgenstein and Lindbeck, who have informed my understandings of language and religion. The tools I have found in their work and used in this thesis have not been used on real-life examples in their community context, and more specifically never with multi-theology remarks, and so it is profitable to review how well they have worked for the purpose.

The Wittgensteinian idea that words and phrases are given their meanings by being used in specific contexts has served this thesis well. Although not

⁶³⁸ Pym, *You Don't Have To Sit On The Floor: Bringing the insights and tools of Buddhism into everyday life*.

all of the people discussed in the thesis, Quaker authors especially, have agreed with this understanding of how language works, I have shown that there are cases where the previous uses of a particular word, as encountered by an individual, affect their reaction to its further uses very deeply. In the case of words used for the divine, some of which are used quite widely (in a range of Quaker, other religious, and non-religious settings) and many of which are often encountered in emotionally laden contexts (including, significantly, worship services, especially those held for seasonal celebrations or rites of passage), these connotations or layers of meaning are easily acquired and can be something of a minefield for those who wish to use such words but are trying to avoid upsetting people. It is this minefield into which Quakers are stepping so gingerly when they offer a range of alternative terms or suggest that people 'translate' into their preferred terminology. The existence of a collection of meanings accrued through use, not just for an individual but for enough individuals that they are now part of the community's understanding of the words involved, provides positive evidence in favour of the idea that language acquires meaning through its uses in specific contexts.

In this model, the persistent use of a term by a community in a particular context will enable that community to build up a group connotation – an extra layer of meaning above that given by the use of the word in various other contexts. As new members join the community, they will need to encounter the group's use and develop the relevant connotation, or perhaps I could say understand through experience this layer of meaning, in order to appreciate the way in which the community has a different understanding of the word to others which might be found elsewhere. In the Quaker case, perhaps reticence about using words which have strong personal and emotional resonances can hinder this process, and the attempt to provide all members of the community with the intended connotations can lead to the production of a list-format remark.

The idea that language cannot be private, that it is necessarily and not merely contingently used for communication, has not been so useful,

although it has recurred at some points in the thesis. It stands more directly in opposition to the viewpoint which I identified in chapter 1 as a widely held Quaker perspective on the way language works than does the idea of meaning through use. On the model in which one first has an experience and then names it, it seems that one could keep that name to oneself. However, whether this is the case depends on the previous experience of the individual: someone previously immersed in language, who has an experience and names it, is in a very different position from someone who, without previous exposure to language, is seeking to name everything. The former is an addition to a previously public language, while the second is an attempt to create a private language – in fact, anything so created would be meaningless unless in some way publically accessible.

The model of experience which is then named by an individual has been shown to be inadequate as a picture of how language acquires meaning because it does not take account of the community and communicative aspects of language. On the one hand, it is an attractive one and seems to many to be intuitive. However, it does not address the extent to which experiences are changed or made possible by naming or describing them, which is a very important consideration in relation to religious experience. If applying the linguistic categories (of any natural language) to experience is in some sense a part of that experience, something which happens before and during an experience as well as afterwards, then the linguistic categories which we have available for religious experience will inevitably shape the experience itself as well as our understandings of it. If we accept what I have argued (in chapter 2) to be the implications of Wittgenstein's private language considerations, namely that we must learn language in community, even our religious experiences are to that extent shaped by our surroundings and relationships, as is, inevitably, the way in which we talk about them.

This is both uncomfortable for Quakers – in that they prefer to think of themselves as having direct access to the divine unmediated by human forces (with the implicit claims about culture and language which this view supplies) – but also taken for granted by many, in that they accept without

hesitation that, for example, George Fox used Christian language to describe his experiences because that was the language of the time and society in which he lived. The latter point is sometimes used to justify the use of non-Christian language today, on the grounds that we no longer live in a generally Christian society, or to reassure Friends who wish to use non-Christian language that Fox's uses are not necessary for Quakers. The argument is something like: of course Fox used Biblical language, since that is what he had available, but today we can – perhaps we need to, or even should – draw on many other resources, not just because they are new but because they are better for the job. This is sometimes expressed as a desire to be inclusive or reach more people, especially to communicate with members of other religions or those who are put off by the use of traditional Christian language. It is also possible, and some of the examples I have discussed suggest this, that for some speakers multi-theology language is better because it is more accurate or more fully represents their experience. For example, people practising multiple religious belonging may well need to use language from both/all their religious traditions in order to describe their experiences.

Neither extreme account satisfactorily explains the actual situation. An account, perhaps inspired by Wittgensteinian considerations but which goes beyond the Wittgensteinian position, which takes language to be entirely primary and experience almost non-existent becomes behaviourism, (roughly speaking) a view in which the markers of experience are taken to be so much outward rather than inward that people can judge the experiences of others but not their own. The flaws such a view have been memorably summed up in the old joke about two behaviourists in bed: "It was good for you, how was it for me?"

To apply this to religious experience – to feeling overwhelming joy, for example – seems to miss something about the individual, personal, and ultimately private part of that emotion, even if it is also expressed and public in some ways. Although Wittgensteinian views have sometimes been taken to point in the direction of this kind of flawed account, it would be

mistaken to attribute a behaviourist view of this kind to Wittgenstein himself; it is the concept of an 'inner process', and not the inner process itself, which stands in need of outward criteria.⁶³⁹ Some kinds of experiences can only be had by language-users⁶⁴⁰ and in order for us to think or speak about inner processes we must have established criteria which can be understood collectively, or we will not be able to assess whether the words 'inner process' are being used meaningfully – but the concept of an inner process is not required in order to undergo an inner process.

On the other hand, an account which denies the effect of public language on our interior lives also misses something about the connected and communal nature of our conceptions and perceptions. Someone can feel pain and keep it secret, but their experience of that pain as well as the way they express it when they do so will be shaped by what their community has told them about pain and which ways of expressing pain are usual in that community.⁶⁴¹ A full account of the relationship between 'language' and 'experience' would need to deal with both of these aspects in a nuanced way, and the tools which have been available to this thesis have not always achieved this.

In the course of the thesis I have also given arguments for and against the idea that some language is irreplaceable. I have moved away from talking about the 'pictures' which religious language creates, preferring to talk about the associations and connotations of language. This has helped me to capture the emotional dimension of language, since it has become apparent that for many Quakers, word choices are about feelings as well as states of affairs. I should note that this is not the same claim as the 'expressivist' claim that religious language only expresses emotions (and other related states such as desires and wishes), since that implies that such language can

⁶³⁹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*: §580.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, §649.

⁶⁴¹ And, perhaps, on what kind of pain is involved and the conceptual dimension which it acquires within a certain community.

be rephrased into explicitly emotional rather than religious terms, the thought being that the emotional content was present but disguised. As discussed in chapter 3, some expressivists such as Hare actually focus more on morality than emotion, but this is even more clearly a rephrasing into non-religious language. The emotion-expressivist position could be put in such a way that in fact it entails irreplaceability in at least some cases, as when a poem captures emotion which cannot be conveyed in prose, for example.

However, irreplaceability has mostly been seen in action at the individual level – relating to the emotional connotations which a word has for a particular person, created by their particular history – rather than at the level of community. Can we also say that some words are irreplaceable for British Quakers as a group? It certainly seems possible that there are some ways of expressing the key insights of Quakerism which cannot be discarded without also losing something of importance about those insights. I would suggest, for example, that the phrase 'that of God in everyone', a quote from Fox which is very well-known and well-used among Friends, might be irreplaceable in this way.⁶⁴² It captures a key theological claim made by Quakers, which underpins other claims we have seen in the course of this thesis – in particular, the claim that everyone is equal before and equal in access to 'God', howsoever understood.⁶⁴³ The incorporation of the term 'God' in this phrase and others which are similarly valued by Quakers also suggests that the term 'God' may not be replaceable, even if some Quakers wish to supplement it. Perhaps this idea is supported by the use of 'God' by non-theist Friends, as in the title of their anthology *Godless for God's Sake*,⁶⁴⁴ although it should be noted that some Friends do continue to prefer

⁶⁴² This claim refers to the modern use only; the phrase is commonly used alone and removed from its original context.

⁶⁴³ This sentence attempts to describe the implications of the phrase 'that of God in everyone'; it would not adequately replace the phrase for rhetorical, historical, and linguistic reasons as well as the obvious reason that it does not and cannot encompass all of the connotations the phrase has acquired through decades of use.

⁶⁴⁴ Boulton, *Godless for God's Sake: Nontheism in Contemporary Quakerism*.

other words. Some prefer to add an 'o', for example, and talk about 'that of good in everyone', even though this substitution process is not always successful – it is hard to ascribe personal attributes to 'good', for example. Bearing in mind the latter point, my contention is that to stop using the word 'God' would entail a loss of meaning.

In chapter 3, I discussed the work of George Lindbeck and identified two concepts which, emerging from his work and refined in discussion with other thinkers, were likely to be useful to the thesis: the metaphor of religion as language and the idea, easily expressed within that metaphor, of fluent speakers of a particular religion. I have used the metaphor in a variety of ways, accepting that it usefully extends Wittgenstein's view of 'theology as grammar', and that the concept of fluency and even of a fluent elite is a fruitful way of considering a religious community. It highlights the way in which religious communities foster a learning process and that there will always be an informal hierarchy of those more or less familiar with the ways in which things are done, as well as leaving room open for the kinds of dual belonging which I discussed in chapter 6.

In wide reading of literature about Wittgenstein and Lindbeck, I did not find examples of their work being applied to a specific community in quite the way in which I have applied it to the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain today. It is useful, in the wider context of this scholarship, to have tested some of these ideas, and to see that they do form helpful tools for analysis of particular communities. I have, of course, chosen from the beginning those tools most likely to be useful to me and to relate most closely to the issues I have encountered in Quaker literature; for another community, another toolkit might be required. Some of the tools which I have used are, however, central to the bodies of work of the thinkers involved – for example, the metaphor of religion as language is key to Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*,⁶⁴⁵ and so my use of it and the ways in

⁶⁴⁵ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*.

which I have adapted it does have implications for the study of Lindbeck's work as a whole.

One key problem with applying Lindbeck's notion of a fluent elite to an explicitly non-hierarchical community⁶⁴⁶ is that of the distinctions thereby created. It is obvious that a living language must have a certain number of fluent speakers in order to maintain a community,⁶⁴⁷ and some languages have a clear elite control – French, for example – but others, like English, are more or less chaotic and multifarious. In this regard, the analogy between Christianity as a whole and English seems stronger than other languages, although perhaps French or another language would be a more apt comparison for some traditions within Christianity, such as the Roman Catholic Church. That said, there is still an issue around the drawing of boundaries between the fluent and not fluent, the elite and not elite, with regard to their quality of speaking or practice. Lindbeck's boundary is only implied in any case, and there are several which, in other Christian communities, could be taken as lower bounds of fluency. The teaching given before Confirmation, in Confirmation Classes, might for example be taken to be a basic level of fluency. However, when Lindbeck seems to be speaking of experts who spend their time working on the language professionally, the priesthood seems to be what he has in mind – perhaps he thinks of theological work by lay people as informing the priesthood. In any case, I would, with Lindbeck, see fluency as a learned skill.

⁶⁴⁶ As opposed to an implicitly non-hierarchical community, such as modern Paganism – in which many people have or attempt to create hierarchies, with varying degrees of success and which in any case tend to cancel one another out or simply create noise around the issue, and in which varying levels of fluency are in any case clear and not obviously related to any particular hierarchical structure. Applying the work of Wittgenstein and Lindbeck to neo-Paganism would be another challenge entirely although possibly a worthwhile one.

⁶⁴⁷ Languages do 'die' and become resurrected in various ways – church Latin, modern Hebrew, Cornish spoken today – and perhaps this also would be an area of the metaphor properly explored by a consideration of modern Paganism.

Quakers might be read as making a radical claim about fluency when they talk about the priesthood of all believers – this could be understood as a claim that all those who come to be convinced Quakers, to worship regularly after the manner of Friends, have an equal fluency in the language of Quakerism. This is not quite right, though, because as I said above fluency must be learned. Rather, the equality claim is that all Quakers have equal access to that which is spoken about in the language of Quakerism – some will be more fluent than others in spoken language or other forms of expression, but all are to determine for themselves which ways of speaking they personally will use. The community does accept that people need a chance to develop familiarity and fluency with the community's ways of speaking when they enter it.

Sometimes it is forgotten that this might require explicit teaching as well as the absorbing of ideas and practices by observation and mimicry, but the idea that it is a process is well-established even as Friends shy away from creating a hierarchy based on it. The only difference which Quakers do formally acknowledge is that between attenders – those who are regularly at a Meeting for Worship – and members, those who have made a formal commitment to the community. It might be said that membership, especially when sought by the traditional method, in which two visitors appointed by the Area Meeting spend time with the applicant and produce a report about the applicant's experience of Quakerism and reasons for applying, constitutes a kind of measure of fluency. We would not expect Area Meetings to admit into membership anyone not familiar with the basic and common Quaker practices – but it should also be said that they do frequently admit into membership people not familiar with much Quaker history, many Quaker ways of speaking and practising, or the national and international Quaker communities. For some, membership can be about connection to a particular Local or Area Meeting and does not in that respect constitute a measure of fluency.

In my sample of literature, I think it can be taken that all the writers are fluent in 'Quaker'; those who are not are unlikely to be writing. Those

published by collective Quaker endeavours, such as bodies like the Kindlers, the central committees, and the Yearly Meeting itself, might reasonably be thought of as part of the fluent elite, because they are not only being published but being published as teaching tools of a kind. They will not represent the whole, since fluency and the fluent elite need not be represented in writing let alone in publication, but they serve as a sample of this kind of speech.⁶⁴⁸ By writing and publishing, they distribute their ways of speaking about matters such as theology to a wide range of Friends, and also preserve them for future generations.

There is also the authority-giving effect of communal writing. Whereas an individual who writes may be part of the fluent elite but only represents their own speech patterns, a document edited by a more or less officially sanctioned committee reflects the agreed usage of a group. If that group is representative of the wider community, and/or well aware of the patterns of use prevalent within the wider community, they will more fully represent those patterns. In the evidence presented in this thesis, it has indeed seemed that official and committee written documents do indeed contain examples typical of those also found in literature produced by individuals, named or anonymous, and so I conclude that the communally produced documents are reflecting a wide pattern of use. The inclusion of anonymous authors in the sample of individuals, although somewhat offset by editing processes, is perhaps important as, knowing that no name will be attached to the piece, authors are presumably freer to offer their personal uses even if those would not be sanctioned by the community.

Lindbeck's metaphor of religion as language has been central to this project, but at this stage it is also worth considering how the project might have been different had it taken another metaphor as central. I was led into the religion-as-language metaphor because I was already interested in language and the role of language in religion – to put it another way, in the non-

⁶⁴⁸ In particular, a joint publication must undergo a more or less rigorous process of shared discernment.

metaphorical relation between religion and language. Lindbeck also suggests the metaphor of religion-as-culture, which also prompts us to ask questions about the relation between religion and culture outside the metaphor. This is less clear cut, since although we can recognise ways in which cultures are not tied to religion – for example, Tibetan and Thai cultures could both be called Buddhist, but there are many ways in which they are not alike, so religion does not account for an entire culture – we also see that religion is deeply embedded in cultures. It would be impossible to remove Buddhism from Thai culture and expect the culture to remain the same. This is complicated by the fact that because culture and history – especially in the case of religion, the moment and method by which it arrived in a culture – have modifying effects on the religion itself as well as on the culture, so that the Buddhism we find in Tibet is of a different kind from that which we find in Thailand, and would be even if it been the same Buddhism at the time of its arrival in each place. Even in sub-cultures, this remains true – the modern-day goth subculture has inherited Christian symbolism from the vampire myths and novels on which it draws, and would look different if it did not have that background. There is always a tendency to interlock discussion of religion-as-metaphorically-x and the relation-of-x-and-religion, and this is increased considerably when we cannot reliably tell the difference between x and religion in the first place: where does the metaphor begin? It may be useful to think of it as also an analogy, grounded in a real relation between the things compared.

That being so, it might be constructive to consider other things which religion might be said to be. For example, we might consider the metaphors of religion as property, which is used in talk about 'borrowing' or 'stealing' of religious practices, or of religion as territory, which some have used to reframe the discussion of borrowing as one of 'visiting', 'dwelling', or 'touring'. In chapter 6, we saw some people using a metaphor of religion as food or more generally nourishment – and favouring this strongly over other possible images, some of which, like nationality or family, might emphasise the way in which one belongs to a religion rather than consuming it. Theology, taken as a discipline within religion, may lend itself to other

metaphors, such as mapping – related to 'religion as territory' – or gardening, which (depending whether one thinks first of the vegetable or flower garden) might relate to 'religion as nourishment' or suggest an image of religion as a beautiful – but perhaps delicate or thorny – flower which needs careful tending. Obviously, all these metaphors and more have the potential to be as rich and complex as the metaphor of religion as language, and require explorations which are excluded from this thesis and may be undertaken by other researchers.

The thesis considered as part of Quaker Studies

The diverse field of Quaker Studies has featured in this thesis mainly as historically and sociologically contextualising material, and direct implications of this work for historians and sociologists are limited except in so far as I have aimed to capture something about the state and development of Quakerism through an analysis of the language which Quakers use. However, it is also the case that considerations of Quaker uses of language, whether specifically theological language or language which is unique to Quakers because their usages arise from their other religious commitments, have been somewhat thin on the ground and limited to mainly historical settings. Among those which do exist, Richard Bauman's *Let Your Words be Few* comes closest to a Wittgensteinian perspective, although mainly influenced by modern work in linguistics, but is focussed on the first generation of Friends, whereas I have chosen to examine today's Quakers.⁶⁴⁹

I have also chosen to work mainly from an insider perspective. Although I have drawn extensively on material from outside the Quaker tradition within which I was raised and still practise, the method which I have chosen favours the insider perspective – as discussed in the introduction – and I

⁶⁴⁹ It also reveals that early Friends tended towards distinctly unWittgensteinian arguments. Richard Bauman, *Let Your Words Be Few: Symbolism of Speaking and Silence among Seventeenth-Century Quakers* (Arizona: Wheatmark, 2009).

have embraced this. This does not and has not prevented me from making critical points at times; indeed, I suspect that I have been more critical of Quakerism than an outsider might be because I hold it in high esteem and want it to attain high standards of coherence and lucidity.

Although this thesis has been written mainly for academics who may, but often will not, be Quakers, I hope that it also has some things to say which will be of use to Quakers. One of these might be the attempt at a clear-sighted – not objective, but wide-reaching, historically informed and carefully contextualised – assessment of some of the current forms of Quaker religious language. Only once we know, or have noticed, what we are actually saying can we consider whether those ways of speaking best convey our truth/Truth/truths. Other parts of this thesis which might prove useful include the attention to detail which is enabled by working at such length and at this academic level, and the drawing in of material from outside the Quaker world. As I noted in chapter 1, other Quakers have attempted to use Wittgenstein's ideas and apply them to Quakerism, but none have had the time and space to devote to it which is afforded by an entire thesis. My outworking of them may not take the project in the direction which these other Friends would have chosen, but I think it has validated them in thinking that the core project is a useful one.

Perhaps more useful still are the ways in which this thesis has challenged accepted Quaker views of language and widespread Quaker ways of speaking. In particular, I have challenged the assumptions which many Quakers make about the ways in which language relates to experience and the interchangeability of particular terms. Although I have shown overall that multi-theology list-format remarks do make sense within the British Quaker context, some of the issues raised in this thesis point towards a need for a reconsideration among Friends of the significance of language to individuals and the community. Some of these matters are already being raised, because they appear in interfaith and ecumenical work when Quakers speak to non-Quakers about the Divine, or because other topics currently being discussed by the Quaker community, such as theism and non-theism

or universalist/pluralist and Christocentric perspectives, bring us back to the issue of the language we use.

Glossary of British Quaker Terms

Advices and Queries

The first chapter of *Quaker Faith and Practice*, providing guidance and helpful thoughts, published as a separate pamphlet as well. Frequently used during worship, read silently and aloud, and referred to by other documents.

Area Meeting (formerly Monthly Meeting)

A Meeting for Worship for Business held regularly and including representatives and other interested members from the Local Meetings in the geographical area it covers. The term can be used both for the occasion of the meeting itself and for the group of people who are members of it. It is responsible, among other things, for maintaining buildings, appointing Elders and Overseers, admitting people in membership, and sending one or more representatives to Meeting for Sufferings.

Attender

Someone who attends Meeting for Worship and perhaps participates in the community in a number of other ways, but is not presently in membership.

Britain Yearly Meeting (formerly London Yearly Meeting)

The national annual Meeting for Worship for Business of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, and the organisation to which Area Meetings belong. It employs some staff members to provide administrative support and carry out the wishes of the Yearly Meeting, appoints Meeting for Sufferings to oversee work done and issues arising while the Yearly Meeting is not in session, approves any changes to *Quaker Faith and Practice*, and in session, will consider a range of spiritual and practice business. Note that 'Britain' here refers to England, Scotland, and Wales; Ireland Yearly Meeting is a separate entity which includes meetings in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Business Meeting, business method

See Meeting for Worship for Business.

Cradle Quaker

Someone born into a Quaker family and raised in contact with a Quaker community.

Children's Meeting

A session for children, from birth until such age as they choose to leave or join the main Meeting for Worship. As at a Sunday school, there is often some teaching or a game or activity, although there is much variation, use of discretion, and tailoring to the needs of the children present; usually the children join the main Meeting for Worship for a short period – between five and fifteen minutes – either at the beginning or at the end.

Elder

A member appointed to attend to the spiritual health of a Quaker community. In fact any Friend can act in this role, but in many meetings it is found helpful to appoint some Friends specifically – for limited terms, usually no more than two consecutive periods of three years each – to pay attention to the issues such the quality of worship and ministry, the discipline of the Meeting for Worship for Business, and the spiritual nurture of individuals. Sometimes this role is combined with that of an overseer.

Friend

A Quaker – from the formal name, Religious Society of Friends. The term Friends (sometimes spelt F/friends or f/Friends) indicates the personal friends of the speaker, where some but not all of them are also Friends (Quakers).

Friends House

The building, opposite Euston station in London, which is owned by Britain Yearly Meeting and used for central work, such as the holding of Yearly Meeting and other central committees and as office space. It includes a bookshop, café, and worship space collectively known as the Quaker

Centre, a library, a restaurant, and meetings rooms of all sizes which are let out when not needed for Quaker purposes. A number of people employed on behalf of the Yearly Meeting to either assist with internal Quaker work or to undertake externally-facing work commissioned by Quakers have offices here, and it is relatively common for Friends to contact someone working at Friends House seeking advice or assistance with a particular project.

The Friend

A national Quaker magazine, published weekly, carrying news, opinion, and letters.

Gathered Meeting

Although Quakers do use the word 'gathering' in the ordinary sense of 'a coming-together of people' (e.g. Summer Gathering, or when combined with Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering), there is also a more specialised use of the term in which 'a feeling of gathering', often of 'a gathered Meeting' suggests a collective numinous experience which may also involve a felt Presence (of God, Christ, the Spirit, or whatever the Friends present prefer to call it).

The Kindlers

The Kindlers are a project of North West London Area Meeting (which is to say: they were formed in London, consist mainly of Friends living in London, and are funded and spiritually supported by North West London Area Meeting), and have also become a national Listed Informal Group. The group was formed in response to Britain Yearly Meeting's five-year plan *A Framework for Action*. They are particularly concerned with the spiritual well-being of Meetings, and have engaged with members of Britain Yearly Meeting as a whole through a series of publications, the offering of day workshops to Meetings, and other events such as conferences. Many of the founding members of the Kindlers – such as Alec Davison and Jennifer Kavanagh – were previously involved in Quaker Quest, and the experience of outreach work of this kind has informed their approach to other matters.

Listed Informal Group

A group of Quakers with a unifying interest, existing outside the formal structures of Britain Yearly Meeting but recognised as related to it. Topics covered by Listed Informal Groups at present include social concerns (for example, homelessness, death and dying, alcohol and drugs), the arts, history, international links, politics, and – as discussed in chapter 1 – theological positions. Listed Informal Groups mentioned in this thesis include the Quaker Universalist Group, the Quaker Women's Group, the Kindlers, and the Non-Theist Friends Network.

Local Meeting (formerly Preparative Meeting)

A local group, holding regular Meetings for Worship. A local meeting may vary in size between a few and a hundred Friends, and meet in any convenient location. The local meeting is usually the level at which Friends socialise; depending on the size of the meeting it may also run study groups and other events.

Meeting

A gathering of people; a group of people who sometimes so gather. As with the term 'church', the term 'meeting' can be used to indicate both the event of a meeting (a Meeting for Worship, or a Meeting for Worship for Business such as an Area or Yearly Meeting), and the people who habitually attend such a meeting. It is possible to be a member of a meeting (of an Area Meeting, for example) without ever attending the actual gathering of that Area Meeting – although one would be expected to be a regular attender or at least known at one of the Local Meetings which is a constituent part of that Area Meeting.

Meeting for Sufferings

Originally, a Meeting for Worship for Business held in London with the central purpose of recording the sufferings of persecuted Friends in Britain. Latterly, principally a representative governing body which includes a member of each Area Meeting as well as some staff members employed by the Yearly Meeting; Meeting for Sufferings is the national body of Britain

Yearly Meeting when the Yearly Meeting itself is not in session. Britain Yearly Meeting, as a charitable body under UK law, has specifically appointed Trustees who are responsible for many practical issues, while the focus of Meeting for Sufferings is, in theory, on vision and policy matters. It considers many issues, mainly brought to it in the first instance by minutes from Area Meetings or central committees, makes decisions and can issue public statements on behalf of the whole Society, but must refer some points back to the Yearly Meeting itself for further consideration or final decision.

Meeting for Worship

In the British Quaker tradition, a period of unprogrammed worship – often but not necessarily an hour – during which most present are silent, but anyone can speak if they feel led to do so. For a more detailed discussion, see Chapter 1.

Meeting for Worship for Business

A Meeting for Worship, as above, to which items of business are brought, often known as 'business meeting'. For a more detailed discussion, see Chapter 1.

Member, membership

Someone who, following a formal process and acceptance by an Area Meeting, is in membership of the Religious Society of Friends. Memberships are held and administered at the Area Meeting level although membership in an Area Meeting which is itself part of Britain Yearly Meeting also confers membership of (and therefore, for example, the right to attend) the Yearly Meeting.

Outreach

Publicising the existence of Quakerism, without intending to convince or convert anyone to Quaker ways. The word is now in use among Quakers to cover a wide range of 'telling people who we are and what we do' activities, and seems to be favoured because it avoids the negative connotations of terms such as 'mission' and 'evangelism'.

Overseer

A member asked to take particular responsibility for the pastoral care of the Quaker community. In fact any Friend can act in this role, but in many meetings it is found helpful to appoint some Friends specifically – for limited terms, usually no more than two consecutive periods of three years each – to attend to those who may need practical or financial support, the management of bursaries and similar funds, and the social health of the meeting. Sometimes this role is combined with that of an elder.

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain

The formal name of the body constituting Quakers in Britain, of which Yearly Meeting is the national gathering and governing body. The term 'Britain Yearly Meeting' is often used synonymously with this to indicate all the Quakers in Britain, or more accurately, all those in Britain who are members of an Area Meeting which is a member of Britain Yearly Meeting.

Quaker (see also Friend)

A member or attender of a Quaker meeting; someone who is associated with the Society of Friends.

Quaker Faith and Practice

As described by its subtitle, this is "the book of Christian discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain". The current edition, approved by Yearly Meeting in 1994, contains in one cover three key elements: Advices and Queries, chapters on church government, and collections of inspirational or guiding material in the form of extracts from other Quaker sources (including previous versions of the book of discipline). The book of discipline is revised as a whole approximately once a generation, in a process taking about a decade and including extensive consultation, and changed in more minor ways by the Yearly Meeting almost every year (these minor updates usually affect the church government sections and react to changes in the Yearly Meeting's policy or British law). There is some debate about how prescriptive various

parts of the book are meant to be or should be, but in general the book of discipline and the Yearly Meeting (in the broad sense) are interdependent: the Yearly Meeting (in the narrow sense) agrees the book which in turn lays down how the Yearly Meeting (in both the broad and narrow senses) should be run.

Quakerism

The Quaker way.

Quaker Quest

A particular format for outreach work, developed in central London by many of the same people who later formed The Kindlers, and now in use throughout Britain Yearly Meeting (and in some other places, e.g. in the US). Quaker Quest events are public meetings, usually held in the evening, which aim to offer an introduction to Quakerism. The evening includes six presentations from three speakers, who are selected in advance to represent a range of Quaker perspectives on the issue at hand – typical themes for a Quest event include God, Faith in Action, and Worship. There are also opportunities for discussion in small groups, to ask questions of the presenters, and to experience a short period of Quaker worship. Usually, the events run regularly for a number of weeks and ideally the themes are repeated on a cycle – this means that a potential Quester, an interested member of the public, has multiple chances to attend, but also that speakers become more confident over time. As well as materials giving instructions on running the evenings, the Quaker Quest group has published a series of pamphlets collecting the sorts of things which are said in presentations – the *Twelve Quakers and...* series, published in a single volume as *New Light*.

Yearly Meeting

In the narrow sense, an annual Meeting for Worship for Business – for the specific use in the context of England, Scotland, and Wales, see Britain Yearly Meeting – but also used in a broad sense to describe the community which is formed around the annual meeting, including all the members of all the Area Meetings which belong to the Yearly Meeting. On formal internal

documents, this community is the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, and on outward-facing documents it is usually called 'Quakers in Britain'. The narrow and broad senses are often distinguished by the use of the phrase 'in session' – the Yearly Meeting in session is the Meeting for Worship for Business. Key decisions are made by the Yearly Meeting in session, but others may sometimes be made on behalf of the Yearly Meeting by committees of it, such as Meeting for Sufferings.

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