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What makes a Quaker?

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INTRODUCTION

In *'The Problem Of Quaker Identity'*, Peter Collins writes, *'What is a Quaker?' This is the apparently simple question that I have been trying to answer for over a decade.*¹

Indeed, the Society of Friends, also known by the name of Quakers, constitutes a challenge for anyone who tries to define them.

Simply put, they are a group rooted in Christianity, with no creed or doctrine, that believe *'that there is something of God in everyone'*.² And thus, they are *'dedicated to living in accordance with the "Inward Light," or direct inward apprehension of God'*.³

However, having no creed or doctrine makes Quakerism incredibly heterogenous. Nowadays, there are Quakers in America who at first glance seem to have more in common with Evangelists than with the Quakers in Britain, Friends who do not identify as Christian, and even members who regard themselves as nontheistic.⁴

And yet, despite being so greatly different from one another, Friends have been able to sustain their identity as a religious tradition for nearly four hundred years.⁵

In the present paper my aim was to disclosure what makes Quakers such a unique and intriguing faith, and what is so distinctive about them that it seems impossible to understand their identity.

To do that, I have examined the historical and social context of early Quakerism, how it was initiated and by whom. Equally important, I have analysed what were their beliefs, where did they come from and how Friends have lived in accordance to them.

¹ COLLINS, P., *The Problem Of Quaker Identity*, Quaker Studies 13/2, pp 205-219, 2009, p 205.

² *About Quakers*, Quakers in Britain. Retrieved from: <https://www.quaker.org.uk/about-quakers>

³ VANN, R., *Society of Friends*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Society-of-Friends>

⁴ *NontheisticFriends.org*, (n.d.). Retrieved from: <http://www.nontheistfriends.org/>

⁵ COLLINS, P., *The Problem Of Quaker Identity*, op. cit., p 206.

THE ORIGIN OF QUAKERS

When, why and how

The Society of Friends has its origins in times of great turmoil, which were to be known as the Puritan Revolution, when several denominational identities began to form within the Church of England.⁶

Of all Henry VIII's heir, it was Elizabeth I who reaffirmed the union of Church and State through her Settlement Act (1559).⁷ As a reaction to the Elizabethan reformation, Puritans and dissents began to raise their voices. At first, the intention of these dissenters was not to become separated from the Church of England, but quite the contrary. In his work, *Church and State, 1550-1750: The emergence of Dissident*, J. Coffey explains they were not '*dissident from the Church of England, but dissident within it and on its behalf*'⁸, declaring that their will was to remake the English Church and elevate it above all other Christian denominations.

At the time of the Short and Long Parliaments, Puritans, had significant political influence, and during the Civil War period they became the Establishment. As such, they took upon themselves to reform the Church of England yet again, proscribing the Book of Common Prayer and abolishing Episcopacy, among other actions. During the Civil War, Puritans were backed by politicians and military commanders such as Cromwell himself, and they called for religious toleration.⁹

It was in this climate of uncertainty, fuelled by multiple reforms, by interchanging periods of persecution and tolerance, and most importantly, by the proliferation of multitudes of different sects who claimed to be able to provide solutions and establish a unified Church of England once and for all, when George Fox and the First Friends emerged.

⁶ COFFEY, J., *Church and State, 1550-1750: The emergence of Dissident*, T&T Clark, London-New York, 2013, p 63.

⁷ Ibidem, p 50

⁸ Ibidem, p 49.

⁹ Ibidem, pp 58-61.

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George Fox, born in July, 1624¹⁰, grew up in the years that would precede the Civil War. From a very young age he was conflicted. He was deceptively upon seeing how the Puritan discourse did not match the life his peers lived.¹¹

Fox was not the only one in desperation, other young Puritans across England were also seeking for a new moral and theological guide.¹² As Ted L. Underwood points out, '*In brief, Seekers believed that the true church, ministry, and worship were "lost" in the current age of apostasy, and they were thus waiting for them to be restored by divine initiative*'.¹³

This Seeker phenomenon and other movements of the time influenced him, like the Baptist rejection of the Puritan doctrine of predestination and advocacy for a separation of church and state, that he got to know through his uncle, a prominent Baptist. These early experiences opened him to radicalised influences.¹⁴

It is unclear how the start of the war impacted Fox, since he does not seem as interested in describing worldly events as he is with his own internal conflicts. However, we know it was around that time when he decided to leave his home.

George Fox travelled and met with several priests and religious authorities, but none could answer his religious inquiries. As a result, he became aware that educated priests did not hold the ultimate authority and, as he himself wrote, '*I had forsaken the priests, so I left the separate preachers also, [...] for I saw there was none among them all that could speak to my condition. When all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, [...] I heard a voice which said, "There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition*'.¹⁵

¹⁰ FOX, J.; JONES, R. M., *George Fox, An Autobiography*, Ferris & Leach, Philadelphia, 1906, p 65.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p 68.

¹² GLWYN, D., *Seventeenth-Century Context and Quaker Beginnings*, in ANGELL, S. W.; DANDELION, P. (eds.), *Early Quakers and their theological thought 1647-1723*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2015, p 14.

¹³ UNDERWOOD, T. L., *Primitivism, Radicalism, and the Lamb's War. The Baptist-Quaker Conflict in Seventeenth-Century England*, Oxford University Press, New York-Oxford, 1997, p 14.

¹⁴ GLWYN, D., *Seventeenth-Century Context and Quaker Beginnings*, op. cit., p 14.

¹⁵ FOX, J.; JONES, R. M., *George Fox, An Autobiography*, op. cit., p 82.

It was then when he began preaching. Between 1647 and 1650 he established 'a network of worship groups that called themselves *Children of the Light*'.¹⁶ Some of this Children, later called Society of Friends or Quakers, were those Seekers or Baptists who were *seeking* for a new religious foundation and resonated with Fox's experiences.

Later, in 1650, Fox was imprisoned under the new Blasphemy Act, but his time in prison seemed to only radicalise his message even further and it deepened his conviction regarding Christ's inward teaching. It was also at this time when Quakers earned their nickname, which described the intensity of their worshipping¹⁷. By 1660, there were around as much as 60.000 Quakers.¹⁸

Quaker Faith and Practice: Equality, Peace, Simplicity, Truth

Considering Quakers follow the Light within to make their decisions and create their shared understanding of all things, the Society of Friends has never had an established creed. Nonetheless, they do have a set of shared values, which they refer to as Testimonies, that are, still to this day, Peace, Equality, Simplicity and Truth.

These are fuelled by the belief that the teaching of Christ is available directly through each person's conscience, the core of Quaker theology. The return of Christ was expressed in this Light and Spirit within all individuals, and Friends were called to live by this Spirit every day.

This had egalitarian connotations. From the beginning, Quakers had prominent women preachers, which was quite uncommon at the time. During the period when Fox roamed around listening to different preachers and religious authorities he encountered '*a sort of people that held women have no souls, (adding in a light manner), No more than a goose. But I reprov'd them, and told them, that was not right; for Mary said, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."*'¹⁹

¹⁶ GLWYN, D., *Seventeenth-Century Context and Quaker Beginnings*, in ANGELL, S. W.; DANDELION, P. (eds.), *Early Quakers and their theological thought 1647-1723*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2015, p 17.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p 17-18

¹⁸ COFFEY, J., *Church and State, 1550-1750: The emergence of Dissident*, T&T Clark, London-New York, 2013, p 18

¹⁹ FOX, J.; JONES, R. M., *George Fox, An Autobiography*, Ferris & Leach, Philadelphia, 1906, p 77.

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This egalitarianism not only applied to women, but also would be of great importance in the abolitionist movement led by Quakers, as we will address further in this paper, in the campaigns for independent juries in the 17th-century,²⁰ and, in more recent years, in matters such as marriage equality.

From the beginning and following this principle, Quakers found as well that *'it was contrary to the spirit of Christ to use war and violence as means to deal with them'*. George Fox himself wrote in 1651, *'I told [the Commonwealth Commissioners] I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars... I told them I was come into the covenant of peace which was before wars and strife were.'*²¹

Another prominent Quaker figure, Margaret Fell, addressed this topic in 1660 in a paper *'directed to the king and both houses of parliament making clear the corporate testimony of Friends 'against all strife and wars'* in which she noted they were *'people that follow after those things that make for peace, love and unity'*.²²

The testimony of truth would bring Quakers great difficulties. They understood they had to live with virtue and avoiding evil, which translated in living an honest life, being truthful persons and always search for the truth. Ultimately, this testimony made them reliable and quite successful businessmen.²³ However, it also implied Quakers refused to take oaths. Not only because Jesus and the Apostles prohibited it, but because they were supposed to always be truthful.

On this account George Fox wrote, *'They gave me the book to swear on, and the book saith, Swear not at all: But I told them, if they could prove that after Christ Jesus and his apostles had forbidden men to swear, they had allowed it, I would swear. Thus I said, and my allegiance lies in truth and faithfulness, not in swearing...'*²⁴

²⁰ *Our Values*, Quakers in Britain, nd, London. Retrieved from <https://www.quaker.org.uk/about-quakers/our-values>

²¹ *Quaker Faith & Practice*, Britain Yearly Meeting, 2016, passage 24.01. Retrieved from <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/24/>

²² *Ibidem*, passage 19.46. Retrieved from <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/19/>

²³ CADBURY, SIR, A., *Beliefs and Business: the experience of Quaker Companies*, The Foundation of Lady Katherine Leveson at Temple Balsall, 2003. Retrieved from: <http://www.leveson.org.uk/resources/cadbury0503.htm>

²⁴ *Quaker Faith & Practice*, op.cit., passage 19.37. Retrieved from <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/19/>

This brought Quakers to prison more often than not, Margaret Fell accounted, *'So they caused the oath to be read, and tendered it to me, and when I refused it, telling them, I could not swear for conscience-sake, Christ Jesus having forbid it, they made a mittimus, and committed me prisoner to Lancaster Castle, and there George Fox and I remained prisoners until next assizes, and they indicted us upon the statute for denying the oath of allegiance...'*²⁵

To this regard, King Charles II declared in 1662 *'An Act for preventing the Mischeifs and Dangers that may arise by certaine Persons called Quakers and others refusing to take lawfull Oaths'*²⁶ through which he imposed a penalty fee of five pounds for the first offense and up to ten pounds to reoffenders.

Lastly, Quakers were called to live a simple life. The purpose of this testimony was to cultivate the relationship with the Spirit abiding inside every person. For all worldly affairs were of no importance. William Penn wrote in 1668, regarding this issue, *'Personal pride does not end with noble blood. It leads people to a fond value of their persons, especially if they have any pretence to shape or beauty. Some are so taken with themselves it would seem that nothing else deserved their attention.'*

This would translate in Quakers acquiring a very distinctive appearance, especially in the way they dressed. As Thomas Chalkley (1675–1741), recalled, *'When between eight and ten years of age [...] I went mostly by myself to school; and many and various were the exercises I went through, by beatings and stonings along the streets, being distinguished to the people (by the badge of plainness which my parents put upon me).'*²⁷

²⁵ *Quaker Faith & Practice*, Britain Yearly Meeting, 2016, passage 19.38. Retrieved from: <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/19/>

²⁶ CHARLES II, *An Act for preventing the Mischeifs and Dangers that may arise by certaine Persons called Quakers and others refusing to take lawfull Oaths* in RAITHBY, J. *Statutes of the Realm: Volume 5, 1628-80*, pp 350-361. Retrieved from: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/statutes-realm/vol5/pp350-351>.

²⁷ *Quaker Faith & Practice*, op.cit., passage 19.42.

DIVISIONS INSIDE THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

Quakers in the United States of America

The first Quaker that travelled to North America was Elizabeth Harris around 1655-1656, by 1662 there were sixty Friends and several meetings had been established. Tolerance of Quakers varied from territory to territory. In Massachusetts, in 1656, two women, Austin and Mary Fisher, were seized, imprisoned and lastly expelled upon arrival. Later, Captains would be fined for bringing Friends to the land, to which Quakers responded by building their own ship, called the *Woodhouse*.²⁸

However, Friends kept venturing into Massachusetts and in 1659 a law passed that imposed the death sentence upon any Quaker who would return to the territory after having been banished twice. As Thomas D. Hamm writes, '*Puritans saw in Quakerism an almost unimaginable threat to the society that they were trying to build in the American wilderness*'.²⁹

After the Restoration of King Charles II, persecution of Dissents in England worsened. It is of no surprise then, that Friends, among others, sought to move to America to escape prosecution.

The key personality of this period is, without a doubt, William Penn. Son of Admiral Sir William Penn, he joined the Society of Friends later in life. Nonetheless he was quite involved in his newly found faith, he was imprisoned '*four times for publicly stating his beliefs in word and print.*', and '*He published 42 books and pamphlets in the seven years immediately following his conversion.*'³⁰

The King Charles II, who he befriended, owed money to his father, a debt that would be cancelled with the grant of the territories of what would be current Pennsylvania, named after William's father, to him.

²⁸HAMM, T. D., *The Quakers in America*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2003, pp 22-23.

²⁹ Ibidem, p 23

³⁰ TOLES, F. B., *William Penn. English Quaker Leader and Colonist*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Penn-English-Quaker-leader-and-colonist>

William Penn sought to create a heaven for Quakers being persecuted in England and other countries. He wanted to build his new territories so they *'would be a model for the rest of the world.'* With this objectives in mind, he provided complete freedom of religion, approved Quaker marriages, made taking oath non-mandatory, did not authorise any militia or military corps, established capital punishment only for the crimes of treason and murder and applied the testimonies of peace and truth in dealing with native populations.³¹

The different branches of Quakerism

Eventually and inevitably, those Friends who remained and flourished in North America were influenced by the realities of their territory.

The Revolutionary War made an impact on many young men, who cut ties with the Society to join the continental army, influenced by the liberal ideals like those of John Locke, which were popular in America at the time. After the War, *'They insisted merely that religious doctrines should be in accordance with reason and that men's minds should not be subjected to arbitrary dogma'*.³²

This was a reaction to the *Quaker Quietism* Friends were experiencing, when dogmatic ways were taking form and the *'Society was then a well-knit body, uniform in its dress, speech, conduct and thought. [...] They lived in considerable isolation from the "world's people," and maintained its distinctiveness by means of a rigidly enforced discipline'*.³³

One of the Friends worried about the direction the Society was heading towards, was Elias Hicks. Hicks valued the direct connection with God more than he valued Scripture, creed or dogma. On top of that, he argued that God had given humans reason and thought to grow Spiritually as well. Statements like this one, *'Is it possible that men can be guilty of greater idolatry, than to esteem and hold the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and practice, by which they place them in the very seat of God and worship them*

³¹ HAMM, T. D., *The Quakers in America*, op.cit., p 28.

³² ELBERT, R., *The Separation After a Century*, Friends Journal, 1927, p 3. Retrieved from: https://web.archive.org/web/20050908031404/http://www.friendsjournal.org/Russel_ArchivalFeature.pdf

³³ FORBUSH, B., *Elias Hicks – Prophet of an Era*, Bulletin of Friends Historical Association, Vol. 38, No.1, 1949, p 13. Retrieved from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41944370>

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as God?', however, horrified his contemporaries.³⁴ This would lead to what is now known as the Hicks Separation, at the beginnings of the nineteenth century.

Contrary to Elias Hicks, other Friends developed ties with the Evangelical movement and other Protestant faiths, giving more importance to scripture, establishing paid pastors and calling their meeting houses 'Churches', among other examples. These groups would be the ones doing missions. Consequently, in Africa, a territory with quite a large Quaker population, most Friends follow these religious traditions.

³⁴ HAMM, T. D., *The Quakers in America*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2003, p 41.

FAITH IN ACTION

The role of women

As stated previously, Quakers embraced equality between individuals. This led Friends not only to win '*large numbers of women converts*' but to have '*prominent women leaders*' as well.³⁵

Some of these women leaders have already been mentioned. One of them, Margaret Fell, a member of the gentry, became the unofficial secretary of the Society and offered her home as a meeting place. Even though she did end up marrying Fox later in life, she is regarded as one of the cofounders of Quakerism for her involvement in giving structure to the movement.

Another fascinating Quaker woman would be the formerly presented Mary Fisher, one of the two women seized, imprisoned and later expelled upon arriving to America. After that experience, she travelled to Adrianople to visit Mehmet IV and tell him about Quakerism. About this encounter she wrote, '*He was very noble unto me. He and all that were about him received the words of truth without contradiction. There is a royal seed among them, which in time God will raise.*'³⁶

Antislavery

Quakers were among the first to protest and campaign for the abolition of Slavery. George Fox, upon visiting Barbados, would write, '*if this should be the condition of you and yours, you would think it hard measure [...] do you for and to them, as you would willingly have them or any other to do unto you...were you in the like slavish condition.*'³⁷

The London Yearly Meeting condemned slavery in 1758, and American Quakers followed suit. In the 1770s, Friends were being outcasted from the Society for not manumitting their slaves.³⁸

³⁵ RYRIE, A., *Protestants, the Faith that made the Modern World*, Viking, New York, 2017, p 127

³⁶ Ibidem, p 128

³⁷ *Quakers (Society of Friends)*, The Abolition Project, (Nd). Retrieved from: http://abolition.e2bn.org/people_21.html

³⁸ CAZDEN, E., *Quakers, Slavery, Anti-slavery, and Race* [abstract], in ANGEL, S.W., DANDELION, P. B., *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*, Oxford Handbooks Online, 2013. Retrieved from:

It seems like a fast and steady progression. But Quakers, like many contemporaries, for many years profited and deemed Slavery as a fair practice. One of the earliest anti-slavery activists, Benjamin Lay, fought for decades against slavery, and he fought against Quakers themselves.

His first contact with slavery was in Barbados as well, and he was determined, upon witnessing the suffering slaves underwent, to crusade against it, going after the owners of slaves.

For him, keeping slaves was '*the greatest Sin in the World*', and argued that slave owners '*embodied Satan on earth*' and, therefore, should be '*cast out of the church*'. Those were the thoughts he shared in his book, his greatest contribution to the cause, *All Slave-Keepers That Keep the Innocent in Bondage, Apostates*, that he directly gave to his friend Benjamin Franklin to print, understanding it would have never been approved for print otherwise.³⁹

Lay ended up outcasted as a result of his claims '*in meeting after meeting that such people were apostates to the faith and should not be allowed to preach [...] arguing that none of them deserved to be Quakers at all and should be disowned*'.⁴⁰

Pacifism in the battlefield

Previously on this paper the Testimony of Peace was explained as a core principle of Quakerism. Nonetheless, we shall not confuse the will of most Quakers of leading peaceful lives with Friends not being involved in war, with the American Independence war not being the only instance. Quakers contributed in multitude of world conflicts as relief workers. Such conflicts include the Franco-Prussian War, when they designed the Red and Black Star, allowing them to be easily identified in the battlefield,⁴¹ WWI, when

<https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199608676.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199608676>

³⁹ REDIKER, M., *The "Quaker Comet" Was the Greatest Abolitionist You've Never Heard Of*, Smithsonian Magazine, 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/quaker-comet-greatest-abolitionist-never-heard-180964401/>

⁴⁰ REDIKER, M., *The fearless Benjamin Lay, The Quaker Dwarf Who Became The First Revolutionary Abolitionist*, Bacon Press, Boston, 2017, p 68.

⁴¹ SUTTERS, J., *The Red and Black Star*, American Friends Service Committee, 2010. Retrieved from: <https://www.afsc.org/story/red-and-black-star>

the Friends Ambulance Unit, a civilian volunteer ambulance, was created,⁴² or even the Spanish Civil War, in which they attended refugees and played a key role in the making of the *Comissió Internacional per l'Ajuda dels Nens Refugiats*.⁴³

⁴² *Quakers and WWI*, Quakers in Britain. Retrieved from: <https://www.quaker.org.uk/about-quakers/our-history/quakers-and-wwi>

⁴³ *Els Quàquers i la Guerra Civil espanyola*, CRAI Pavelló de la República, 2014. Retrieved from: <https://blocpavellorepublica.ub.edu/2014/12/15/els-quaquers-i-la-guerra-civil-espanyola/>

CONCLUSIONS

As it was mentioned at the beginning of this present paper, defining what constitutes a Quaker is a formidable task. An exercise that not even Friends themselves would know how to undertake.

It would seem that their distinctive feature would be the lack of creed, dogma and any other ecclesiastical form.⁴⁴ And yet, in the early decades of the nineteenth century in America, Friends started attending programmed services conducted by a pastor, and eventually they adopted certain traditions, for example the way they dressed, as part of their identity, dogmatizing them.

In truth, the understanding of how God operates made the Quaker faith a very individualistic religious movement. Friends obeying the Spirit within implied every member of the Society would have a different opinion on different topics, ranging from questioning the authority of scripture, like Hicks did while others embraced it, or the crusade Benjamin Lay initiated against those Quakers that, unlike him, had no problems with the Institution of Slavery.

This was an issue that early Friends had into consideration. *'The danger for any spirit-inspired religion is individualism carried to excess. [...] What preserved them [Quakers] was the discovery of 'gospel-order', the setting up of meetings for church affairs where individual insight was tested against the insight of the gathered group.'*⁴⁵

Thus, the Society is essential to Friends. They preach to one another and enrich each other. In the same way this would explain their usage of books and prints, *'to consolidate the movement internally, and to publicize it to the outside world.'*⁴⁶

Hence, this is the reason why the Society of Friends in Britain publishes a book, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, with recom compilations of Quaker testimonies from all times to *'express*

⁴⁴ VANN, R. T., *Society of Friends*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Society-of-Friends>

⁴⁵ *Quaker Faith & Practice*, Britain Yearly Meeting, 2016, passage 19.49. Retrieved from: <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/19/>

⁴⁶ PETERS, K., *Patterns of Quaker Authorship*, in CORNS, T. N., LOWENSTEIN, D. (eds.), *The Emergence of Quaker Writing, Dissenting Literature in Seventeenth-Century England*, Frank Class, London, 1995, p 16.

Truth through the vital personal and corporate experience of Friends'.⁴⁷ Their goal was not only to live faithful lives but to help other to do so too, as *Quakers in Britain* state on their website, '*We don't offer neat creeds or doctrine. Instead, we try to help each other work out how we should live'*.⁴⁸

However, this internal change had to be an individual phenomenon. Samuel Janney in 1853 wrote about an anecdote regarding William Penn and George Fox. He explains that having accepted the principles of Quakerism, Penn felt strange wearing a sword among other Friends, even if it was usual among men of his same rank. He asked Fox for advice and the latter simply stated, '*I advise thee to wear it as long as thou canst.'* When they met again and Penn did not wear his sword, Fox asked him about it and his response simply was, '*I have taken thy advice; I wore it as long as I could.'*

This exemplifies how the community is the pillar on which Friends, who are on an individual spiritual journey, rely upon. And even when that journey leads them to go against what the community collectively considers truth, they are encouraged by their Testimony to act upon which they themselves consider truth through the guidance of the Spirit, like Elias Hicks did.

And yet, Quakers are not really interested in resolving these problems. On the contrary, they want to explore them.⁴⁹

One could argue Friends live in a constant contradiction. They may lead a life that is different from that of the community as a whole and that would make them no less of a Quaker.

In view of this, while I agree with Collins in that '*there can be no single overarching interpretation by which we can come to understand Quaker identity'*,⁵⁰ I would suggest, that is precisely what makes Quakers, Quakers.

⁴⁷ *Quaker Faith & Practice*, Britain Yearly Meeting, op. cit. Retrieved from: <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk>

⁴⁸ *Our Faith*, Quakers in Britain. Retrieved from: <https://www.quaker.org.uk/about-quakers/our-faith>

⁴⁹ COLLINS, P., *The Problem Of Quaker Identity*, *Quaker Studies* 13/2, pp 205-219, 2009, p 206.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p 216.

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Any other religious tradition is defined by how they understand God, how they live their lives or how they worship, but Friends cannot themselves come to a consensus over any of these.

Therefore, it seems that their contradictions and, more importantly, their acceptance of these, is what truly defines them. We could say 'Quaker faith is a search for truth, not an arrival.'⁵¹

On the same note, the most compelling argument I find it to be that of Elizabeth Fry (1780-1845), a prominent '*British Quaker philanthropist [...] acknowledged as a "minister" by the Society of Friends*'.⁵² In 1799 she wrote in her Journal,

*'I think the only true standard I can have to direct myself by, is that which experience proves to give me the most happiness, by enabling me to be more virtuous; I believe there is something in the mind, or in the heart, that shows its approbation when we do right. I give myself this advice: Do not fear truth, let it be ever so contrary to inclination and feeling. Never give up the search after it: and let me take courage, and try from the bottom of my heart to do that which I believe truth dictates, if it lead me to be a Quaker or not.'*⁵³

⁵¹ *Our Faith*, Quakers in Britain. Retrieved from: <https://www.quaker.org.uk/about-quakers/our-faith>

⁵² *Elizabeth Fry*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Elizabeth-Fry>

⁵³ FRY, E., *Memoir of the Life of Elizabeth Fry with Extracts from her Journal and Letters*, Vol. I, J. W. Moore, Philadelphia, 1847, p. 86. Digitalized by Google. Retrieved from: <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=tAQLAAAAYAAJ&hl=ca&pg=GBS.PP1>

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