**2014 Swarthmore Lecture - What it means to be a Quaker today**

The lecture can be accessed at [www.woodbrooke.org.uk](http://www.woodbrooke.org.uk) (Type Swarthmore in the search box)

The 2014 Swarthmore Lecture was given by Quaker author and academic Ben Pink Dandelion. Ben’s lecture explores the theme of transformation, ending with a call for us as Quakers to return to a transforming and transformational faith. His words:

*I use the term ‘transforming’ to refer to how early Quakers were transformed in their spiritual experience, how they tried to transform the world around them, how the tradition has transformed, and how we can be transformed, transform our Meetings today and act as agents of transformation in the world, all of which is what it means to be a Quaker in the world today.*

**Summary**

**PART 1. What I think it means**

Four core insights

We can encounter the divine directly (we are all ministers)

We have developed ways of interpreting the spiritual experience i.e. discernment

We have forms of worship which nurture the encounter

We live a certain kind of life. i.e our testimony, our calling

Thoughts on these four

The focus is on process rather than a detailed theology. Can ultimate truth be expressed in words?

The four are inherently collective. Not a DIY religion but a DIT faith (do it together)

You can’t encounter the divine – individually or collectively – and not be changed by it. Our process is inherently transformational. We become agents for transformation in the world.

**PART 2. What are some of the challenges we face?**

As society has changed, Quakers have have become a bit fuzzy - more permissive, more individualistic, more secular

The last two began to have influence from the 1850s onwards, with implications for:

1. Belonging. We have much more freedom as individuals to decide what is and isn’t Quaker. Breakdown of dynastic Quakerism (87% of UK Quakers joined as adults). We can say no. We have options.
2. Belief. Spiritual experience is primary. There are a multiplicity of theologies.

Various aspects of fuzziness and confusion:

We celebrate diversity and uncertainty but diversity can unpick the theology which underpins our practice

If we are confused internally about belief, what are the implications for outreach?

Nominations – trying to match gifts and roles. Recognise individual gifts. When we are faithful to our gift then we are living our ministry.

Rather than saying ‘We love you and what is it you want from us?’, it is to say ‘We love you and this is who we are’.

The red book (*Quaker Faith & Practice* – downloadable from the Quaker UK website) is very clear (chapter 11). But there is a gap between it and how we are as individuals. That is, ‘we have lost a single voice and we suffer because of that.

**PART 3. How can we reclaim a strong sense of Quaker corporate identity?**

* Resist the secular, resist individualism, reclaim the spiritual
* Avoid a preoccupation with falling numbers, dialogue about the detail of the divine and recognise that our structures are not set in stone

We have so much in our favour, huge strengths in our traditions, few obstacles

Need to inhabit our traditions

Be transformed in order to become agents for transformation