Documentary Theology: Testing a New Approach to Texts in Religious Communities

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ABSTRACT

Scholars of religion have much to gain by studying texts, produced and used within religious communities and institutions, as documents. Documents, as theorized in a growing body of literature in the social sciences, offer distinctive perspectives on the dynamics within religious communities, and in particular on theological development. We demonstrate this approach through a study of an early twentieth-century document, "Foundations of a True Social Order," which constitutes a turning-point in British Quaker approaches to social justice. We show how treating documents, firstly as effects of practice with effects in practice, secondly as spaces or places, and thirdly as "transitional objects," can disclose aspects of their religious significance that are otherwise obscure. Indicating directions for future development, we suggest ways to explore critically the implicit theologies of religious documentary practices.

IN THIS ARTICLE we argue, and demonstrate through an example, that theologians and scholars of religion have much to gain by studying texts as documents. Documents, as theorized in a growing body of literature in the social sciences, offer distinctive perspectives on dynamics within religious communities and, in particular, on theological development. We show through an extended study of an early twentieth-century document how approaching documents as effects of practice with effects in practice, as spaces or places, and as "transitional objects" can disclose aspects of their religious significance that are otherwise obscure. Beyond this, we propose that a focus on documents can produce critical reflection on the implicit theologies of religious documentary practices and the ways in which these take up, challenge, or stand in tension with other theologies of documents in modernity.

For the purposes of this discussion, studying a text as a document involves studying how it works apart from, or beyond, its being read as a text. To treat texts as documents is to look at their social production, at the occasion or significance of their inscription, and at their enduring presence and power in the social world—to ask, in short, how they do things. Maurizio Ferraris's extended account of documentality (Ferraris 2012, 2015) develops from speech-act theory an account of how documents, as the inscriptions of social acts, continue to afford and constrain agency. Documents, whether anyone is intentionally reading or invoking them, form social and political subjects, confer responsibility, and determine social relations; and they do this not so much by their semantic content as by the nature of the social acts they inscribe. Drawing on the theoretical work of Ferraris, Latour, and others, a growing body of work in social anthropology, social policy, and international relations demonstrates both how to study texts as documents and what can be gained from this approach.

It is easy, in the lives of most academics, to find everyday examples of situations in which documents function. I attached the documents for our meeting to an email (at the

second attempt if not the first). You printed them out and brought them along; in the meeting we approved one of them, noted another as received, and passed another to a different committee. The production, movement, reception, and authorization of the documents has done something even if—perish the thought—none of us read them; at the very least it has reproduced certain structures of power within the organization and ensured that an audit will find us with our papers in order. It is to be hoped that, depending on the meeting, one of us at some point treated the documents as texts; we read and interpreted them, considered what further interpretations they might generate, composed critical or constructive responses – although, as Marilyn Strathern (2006) explains, attempts to do this with certain documents, such as university mission statements, are likely to be fruitless.

How and why do documents, in this sense, matter for the study of religion? Of course all scholars of religion read and produce texts, and most scholars work in organizations within which documents play an important role. Many, perhaps most of those who do historical or ethnographic work incorporate documentary material into their descriptions and analyses of institutions and communities—often, institutions and communities in which the production and circulation of documents is common (see Davie and Wyatt 2013). There are notable examples of specific theologically significant documents that are known, remembered, and studied as such—most obviously the South Africa Kairos Document of 1985. Outside the study of how scriptural texts are received and used there is, however, relatively little interest within theology or religious studies in how documents work—in how they configure and disrupt patterns of relationship and structures of power, and how they form, deform, or transform lives; or in the implicit or explicit theologies of their production and use. This might not be a problem; after all, the mere existence, usefulness, and ubiquity of something is not a reason to devote scholarly attention to it, and since documents are or were the "most despised of ethnographic subjects" even in a wider context (Latour 1988, 54),

it is perhaps not surprising that they are beneath the notice of theologians and scholars of religion.

Prima facie, however, whether we take the broad definition of documents proposed above or the narrower working definitions that appear in most of the contemporary literature on documents (understanding them as specific to modern and/or bureaucratic regimes of knowledge), there is something here that should interest scholars of religion. Although when reference is made to the power of texts within religious communities we are most likely to think of scriptural texts, religious groups in fact produce and use a wide variety of documents: texts that do things in ways that affect and are affected by distinctive identities, traditions, beliefs, and practices. Documents are, at the very least, potentially interesting religious artifacts.

More than this, thinking about how documents are "texts that do things" in religious contexts brings us fairly quickly into implicit or explicit theological discussion—into questions of, for example, the sources of power, authority, and agency. It is noteworthy that theology, in fact, appears around the edges of a number of recent works on documents—gestured towards in the context of discussing documentary power, of acknowledging that "by working on papers alone… it is still possible to dominate" (Latour 1986, 30). Freeman and Maybin begin their discussion of documents in policy-making with the suggestion that "the document was there even before government: think of the way the authority of texts has its origins in religious organisation ('In the beginning was the word…')" (Freeman and Maybin 2011, 155). Richard Harper, noting a shift in social scientific work towards the study of the power of documents, suggests that "if for Christians God is in the Word [sic], for contemporary sociologists Society is in the Text" (Harper 1998, 37). Ferraris ends one of his discussions of documents as social facts with the image of "divine omniscience… as the

holding aloft of a book, in which everything is written and nothing is forgotten" (Ferraris 2015, 432). In Latour's own account, he marks the emergence of the modern scientific regime of knowledge as the point at which "a written, printed, mathematical form has greater credence… than anything else: common sense, the senses other than vision, political authority, tradition and even the Scriptures" (Latour 1986, 24).[1]

These theological gestures, in the context of discussing the detailed workings of contemporary secular bureaucracies and other regimes, both acknowledge and render questionable the everyday power of the document. Specifically, they draw on an implied contrast between (some or all of) the premodern and the modern, the sacred and the secular, or the "Christian" and the "sociologist" to announce a demythologization or demystification of documentary power. Documents in modern organizations—so these gestures imply— aspire to the power of an originary word, understood as imposed unidirectionally from above and compelling obedience; and they cannot achieve this kind of power because they are woven into organizational relationships, subject to resistance and rereading. The gestures also, however, in their references to the Johannine prologue and to the book of Revelation as well as to the idea of scriptural authority, unwittingly reveal the scope for a critical theologically informed engagement with documentary power. How do documents work, and how can their power be thought about, in communities and organizations that engage with both the modern world of documents and specific traditions of thinking about power, authority, trustworthiness, and text? Are there alternative "theologies of documents," or are there, at the very least, theologies implied in the ways documents operate?

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[1] Latour also notes that the power of inscriptions in the modern scientific worldview reflects a "peculiar tendency to privilege what is written" that itself relates to ideas of scriptural authority and the authority of the written L/law (Latour 1986, 24).

In the next sections of this article, we discuss a small-scale historical case study, first to indicate why we might want to consider a specific text as a document, and second to show what might be gained from doing so. We present an account of a short theological text—the "Foundations of a True Social Order" (hereafter referred to as "Foundations"), produced by the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain in 1918—studied as a document. Following a brief introduction to "Foundations," we draw on the recent literature on documents to consider it, first (following Florian Weisser) as an effect of practice that has effects in practice; second (developing ideas from Richard Freeman and Jo Maybin) as a place or space, using the theologically freighted idea of "gathering"; and third (following Shona Hunter) as a "transitional object." As we shall see, the principal motivation for approaching "Foundations" in this way is the desire to do justice to what was, and remains, a very influential text within a specific church-community, in the broad area of thought and practice on the relationship between faith and social justice—while recognizing that the ways in which this text exerts influence are not easily captured in an account of how its contents have been interpreted or read.

INTRODUCING A THEOLOGICAL DOCUMENT: "FOUNDATIONS OF A TRUE SOCIAL ORDER"

In May 1918, Quakers in Britain, at the annual meeting that was (and is) also the principal authoritative decision-making body for the British Society of Friends, agreed and adopted the short text generally known as "Foundations of a True Social Order." The text, setting out in eight points an account of a Christian vision of a social order, subsequently appeared as the centerpiece of a key section of the extensively rewritten Quaker books of discipline — thecollections of writings that present, both for internal and external purposes, the collective

self-understanding of Quakers.[1] "Foundations" has occupied a similarly prominent position in subsequent revisions of the books of discipline, most recently in the 1990s (London Yearly Meeting 1925, 134–35; Britain Yearly Meeting 1994, 23.16).

Although, as already suggested, the content of "Foundations" is not at the heart of our discussion, the text is brief enough to be quoted here in full:

1. The Fatherhood of God, as revealed by Jesus Christ, should lead us toward a brotherhood that knows no restriction of race, sex, or social class.

2. This brotherhood should express itself in a social order that is directed, beyond all material ends, to the growth of personality truly related to God and man.

3. The opportunity of full development, physical, moral, and spiritual, should be assured to every member of the community, man, woman, and child. The development of man's full personality should not be hampered by unjust conditions nor crushed by economic pressure.

4. We should seek for a way of living that will free us from the bondage of material things and mere conventions, that will raise no barrier between man and man, and will put no excessive burden of labor upon any by reason of our superfluous demands.

5. The spiritual force of righteousness, loving-kindness, and trust is mighty because of the appeal it makes to the best in every man, and when applied to industrial relations achieves great things.

6. Our rejection of the methods of outward domination, and of the appeal to force, applies not only to international affairs, but to the whole problem of industrial control.

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[1] For further background on British Quakerism in this period, see Kennedy 2001; Frost 2013, 78–83. For a brief contextualization of "Foundations" in the wider history of Quaker social thought and social action, see Muers 2015, 21–28.

Not through antagonism but through cooperation and goodwill can the best be obtained for each and all.

7. Mutual service should be the principle upon which life is organized. Service, not private gain, should be the motive of all work.

8. The ownership of material things, such as land and capital, should be so regulated as best to minister to the need and development of man.

In the years following 1918, "Foundations" was referred to repeatedly as British Quakers responded—collectively and through smaller groups—to social and political challenges, and sought to articulate their distinctive ecclesial and theological voice in a new set of national debates. It was a key influence on British Quaker contributions to the first worldwide conference of Quakers in 1920 and to Quaker contributions to ecumenical discussions on economic and social issues in the 1920s.[2] Attempts were made to have it read aloud regularly in Quaker meetings for worship throughout Britain, although there is limited evidence that this was actually done (London Yearly Meeting Proceedings 1923, 182); study materials and guides were produced and speaker meetings organized.[3] Proposals to revise it in the 1940s were eventually abandoned, but resulted in the production of a similarly brief additional text (London Yearly Meeting Proceedings 1945); there have been several subsequent exercises in revisiting and reconsidering its contents. Most recently it has been cited prominently in

[2] On the world conference, see Kennedy 2001, 421–30, and note also the initiation of plans for the conference alongside the preparation of the "Foundations" document (War and Social Order Committee minute 23 of February 1917). For the links with ecumenical activities, see, for example, minute 20 of Yearly Meeting in 1924 on the Conference on Politics, Economics and Citizenship (COPEC) (London Yearly Meeting Proceedings 1924, 251), and the report of the War and Social Order Committee in the same year on cooperation with—and sometimes leadership of—other church bodies in relation to the problem of unemployment (London Yearly Meeting Proceedings 1924, 112–15).

[3] War and Social Order Committee, "Propaganda" subcommittee, minute 11 of June 1919 discusses the printing and distribution of the study materials; minute 3 of December 1918 notes the extensive demand for specialist speakers at local meetings.

framing British Quakers' national deliberations on responses to social inequality. Successive British Quaker documents on questions of social justice, notably the 2015 publication "Principles of a New Economy," have similarities to it both in content and in form and often refer to it directly (Britain Yearly Meeting 2015). It can plausibly be said that from 1918 onwards British Quakers increasingly understood themselves as, and acted as, a community with a specific vocation for witness to a "true social order"—reflected both in official publications and in the development of the organization.

This historical outline cautiously attributes to "Foundations" considerable power and influence. It stands at or near the beginning of a recognizable and significant "turn" in Quaker social action and in Quaker ecclesial self-understanding in relation to social action. There unquestionably is a developed and continuing tradition of Quaker social witness—comprising both statements on specific issues and activities by organizations and groups—for which "Foundations" is in some sense a key document. Indeed, "Foundations" has been referred to as an example of "Quaker social teaching" by analogy with Catholic social teaching (Tackney 2014). The name "Foundations of a True Social Order" itself—not to mention the overlaps of times, places, and issues—invites comparisons with the distinctive twentieth-century thread of Anglican social theology centered on Temple and analyzed most recently by Alan Suggate, John Hughes, and others (Brown 2014).

A theological reading would demonstrate that, as a text, "Foundations" is dominated by themes familiar from Christian socialists and social reformers in Britain and from the Social Gospel in the United States: the emphasis on universal human brotherhood, on community founded in mutual service, on the development of personality truly related to God and to humanity, and on the ordering of economic relations to the common good. It is not altogether without specific interest for theologians and theological ethicists; in particular, the reframing

of a historic Quaker emphasis on simplicity and plainness in lifestyle so that it becomes the basis for economic justice in the social order is a move without obvious parallels elsewhere.[4] However, this important turn, which can also be traced in later twentieth- and twenty-first century documents, is at no point the object of sustained theological discussion among Quakers. Indeed, looking more widely, there are relatively few instances—within Quaker thought, let alone within twentieth-century theology more broadly—of the core claims or underlying assumptions of "Foundations" being taken up, developed, critically interrogated, or used as the basis of further theological or indeed political work. It is, as we have said, referred to or quoted as part of the frame or the introduction when social issues are under discussion—but it is not "conversed with," used as evidence or justification for a position taken. Given its extreme brevity and its lack of explicit structure or argumentation, this is probably not surprising.

All of this suggests that "Foundations" is one among perhaps many texts with theological and ethical content that proves most significant as a document. That is, it has effects, and carries weight, beyond and apart from engagement with its content; and we miss an important, perhaps the most important, dimension of its significance and influence if we focus only on what it says rather than on what it does or how it works.

For theoretical resources to take forward our study of "Foundations" as a document, we can draw on recent work from other disciplines that seeks to correct a perceived overemphasis on the importance of text in the study of organizations, while giving due weight to the power of documents. Freeman and Maybin (2011), among others, note that

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[4] Its most obvious source is the writings of the eighteenth-century Quaker John Woolman—and in particular his "Plea for the Poor and a Word of Remembrance and Caution to the Rich," which, partly due to Quaker influence within the Fabian Society, was reprinted in 1898 as one of the most popular Fabian tracts (Woolman 1898).

scholarly discussions of documents have tended towards (what they term) either the positivist or the representational. The positivist approach treats the document straightforwardly as a "mapping" of some aspect of the organization; the "representational" approach takes a broadly Foucauldian line and treats the document as the manifestation of a regime of power/knowledge. Both these approaches, while telling us something about this document—or any other document in relation to the organization that produces it—have their shortcomings; as Carol Greenhouse puts it, they forget "the extent to which texts fail to cover the surface of social life," and in particular they ignore the myriad social processes within which documents are embedded and have their effects (Greenhouse 2002, 18; see also Riles 2006, 11–14).

This insight proves particularly important in the interpretation of "Foundations", which was produced and adopted within a church-community that tends (as we shall see in a later section) to play down the capacity of texts qua texts to represent the most significant aspects of its life and faith while still devoting enormous energy to the production, circulation, and preservation of documents. If we applied a positivist approach to "Foundations," we might, for example, say that the document shows us what Quakers thought about Christianity and the social order in 1918 and treat any apparent indications to the contrary as aberrations, signs of dissent, or failures to live up to principles. We might, for example, say that "Foundations" demonstrates the construction of a single authoritative vision of the "true social order" that can be used as a touchstone for orthodox or authentic practice and that produces a regime of individual and collective self-criticism. Neither of these would produce a particularly good account of what happened in and to Quaker social thought after 1918, nor, more importantly, of the role of "Foundations" in those developments. In what follows, we apply three related approaches to documents from the recent literature to "Foundations," at the same time drawing these approaches into conversation with the "theologies of documents" articulated and implied among Quakers.

"FOUNDATIONS" AS DOCUMENT: (1) EFFECT OF PRACTICE WITH EFFECTS IN PRACTICE

Using a set of categories developed by Florian Weisser (2014) in relation to United Nations documents, "Foundations" can be understood first as an "effect of practice"—produced through a specific set of material and organizational relationships—with ongoing and changing "effects in practice." Approaching the document in this way allows us to recognize the significance of its production and authorization within the community and to account for the diversity of its subsequent effects.

Turning first to the question of the document's production, it is noticeable not only that there is no named author (which is common enough in the case of documents produced by committees and adopted by organizations) but also that the roles of individuals in its authorship are hard to determine from the historical record.[5] Historical attention to the document has often focused, with much justification, on its collective "author," the War and Social Order Committee.[6] The committee, set up by the Yearly Meeting in 1915, had the

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[5] The most likely candidate as the major influence behind it is Maurice Lotherington Rowntree (1882–1944), who studied theology at Balliol College, Oxford (a contemporary there of William Temple, R. H. Tawney, and William Beveridge), undertook further studies in Marburg and Heidelberg, and was subsequently assistant warden at the Quaker educational settlement in Leeds. Rowntree was the author of the widely-read pamphlet *Co-operation or Chaos?* (1917), printed and reprinted by the War and Social Order Committee, which contained a list of "Fundamental Principles of the Kingdom of God" similar in many respects to "Foundations" (1917, 17). Others on the War and Social Order Committee who seem likely to have played a key role in the development of the text include Lucy Fryer Morland (1864–1945), whose major public lecture delivered at the Yearly Meeting in 1918 includes both an extended critique of the shortcomings of nineteenth-century Quaker humanitarianism and an extended apologia for both the form and the content of "Foundations" (Morland 1918).

[6] The processes around its production feature prominently in Thomas Kennedy's account (Kennedy 2001) of the transformation of British Quakerism from its nineteenth-century conservatism into a theologically creative, politically engaged, and outward-facing body, with a strong sense not only of collective identity but also of a distinctive mission. These same processes feature rather differently in historical surveys of Christian socialism, notably that of Peter D'Alroy Jones (1968, 367–89).

general brief of examining the connections between war and the social order (London Yearly Meeting 1915, minute 64). The committee, while being expected to produce regular reports, was not specifically asked to produce a statement for common approval, nor was this the main initial focus of its activities. Throughout its institutional lifespan, the committee's wide-ranging work comprised extensive research on social, political, and theological issues as well as the development of a wide range of practical proposals for "experiments" in alternative economic and industrial models.

The lack of any record of individual contributions to "Foundations" masks the fact that the War and Social Order Committee itself consisted at various times of up to fifty members from across the country, a colorful range of characters with a colorful range of affiliations and backgrounds, from a colliery-owning baronet to Bristol's first female city councillor to Britain's first elected communist MP.[7] Prominent members of the Fabian Society were on the committee, as were proponents of early schemes for worker control of industry and others with a strong interest in guild socialism—and many with no known political commitments.[8] Several of the male and at least one of the female members spent time in prison between 1916 and 1918, as "absolutist" conscientious objectors (COs) or for

Without wishing to detract from these studies, we hope to demonstrate in what follows that a focus on production and authorship—which goes along with a focus on the content of the "finished" text, and tends to ignore its reception, use, and effects—results in an incomplete picture of "Foundations."

[7] Respectively, John Pease Fry (1864–1957), Mabel Tothill (1868–1964), J Walton Newbold (1888–1943). Further biographical information on all the committee members, with links to relevant sources, can be found on www.quakersocialorder.org.uk.

[8] The Fabians included Mary O'Brien Harris (1865–1938) and J. Theodore Harris (1870–1958). Malcolm Sparkes (1881–1933) was known for his development of a scheme for industrial democracy in the building industry, initiated after industrial unrest in the early twentieth century that had affected his London building firm. On guild socialism and Maurice Lotherington Rowntree, see note 7 above.

distributing unauthorized anti-war literature.[9] All were "lay," if that has any meaning in a church-community without clergy; several held positions of responsibility or authority in local congregations, and a few were employed by Quaker educational institutions. They were mostly of working age, some employed and others of independent means; an early stated aim of the committee was to recruit more working-class members, but in this they met with limited success. Their individual biographies supply indications both of the diversity of prior learning and experience that fed into the committee's work and of the shape of Quaker social action after 1918 in which many of them played leading roles.

"Foundations" itself was developed from the closing statement of a conference held in 1916, of which the broad agenda began with a session on "The War Spirit and the Social Order" and ended with "Our Corporate and Individual Duty to God and the Future." In May 1917 the "seven points" of the closing statement from the conference were sent out for consideration to all local Quaker Meetings. Responses were reviewed and agreed at the regional level; on the basis of these responses (and largely on the basis of a draft text provided by Quakers in London and Middlesex), the committee prepared a revised draft of "eight points," and brought it for approval to what proved to be an extraordinarily eventful Yearly Meeting in 1918.[10]

The intersecting practices of which "Foundations" is an effect, then, include the intensive collective study of the most pressing questions of 1916 to 1918 in interaction with other church and political bodies, individual research, individual political and social action

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[9] Rosa Hobhouse (1882–1971), imprisoned in 1916; the male COs on the committee who spent time in prison included Malcolm Sparkes, Maurice Lotherington Rowntree, and Robert Mennell (1882–1960).

[10] It coincided with the trial and subsequent imprisonment of three national office holders for the publication of an unauthorized anticonscription pamphlet; see London Yearly Meeting minute 11 of 1918, and the explanatory discussion in Thompson and Briggs 2015, 278.

(including the deliberate breaking of the law), participation in Quaker worship and in the

wider life of a religious body increasingly in the national spotlight, and the distinctive

deliberative processes of Quakers (of which more below). Understanding its genesis does, of

course, change and deepen a reading of the text, but that is not the main point of reading it as

an "effect of practice." The point is, rather, that the document-forming process itself played a

significant role in shifts and developments in Quaker social thought in the final years of the

First World War—not only within the War and Social Order Committee but among the much

wider group of Quakers who read and considered drafts, formulated and approved responses

in local and regional meetings, and participated in the large open meeting that finally

approved the text. These shifts and developments in Quaker social thought can be traced not

only in the written responses to the document, but also in the activities that surrounded them:

the organization of study circles and conferences, and specific initiatives identified as

practical responses to the issues raised in the document.[11]

What of the document's "effects in practice"? The activities, projects, and issues that

were at various times framed in relation to "Foundations," just in the first two or three

decades after its adoption, included work on new towns and garden cities; moves to ensure

that all pupils at Quaker schools had access to education up to age sixteen; the development

of allotment schemes; experiments with worker control of industry; and the payment of

expenses to attendees at national committee meetings. Few of these activities and discussions

were ever justified or explained by specific reference to the text of "Foundations"; for all of

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[11] For example, during the period of consultation that preceded and immediately followed the adoption of "Foundations," Quakers in Yorkshire held a conference on war and the social order with the explicit aim of enabling dialogue between "business men" and others (Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting minute 13 of March 1917), considered how to ensure the education of younger members in an environment "free from class feeling" (minute 23 of July 1917), and established study circles on issues of social order in all local meetings (minute 12 of July 1918).

them, however, it can easily be argued that the adoption of "Foundations" was a sine qua non. In particular, its adoption was first taken as a mark of the wider Quaker body's support for the more extensive work of the War and Social Order Committee; second was a key determinant of the agenda for the first worldwide conference of Quakers in 1920, which subsequently paved the way for the incorporation of very expansive statements on social responsibility into the book of discipline, thus setting the general direction of the Quaker community individually and collectively towards practical engagement with questions of social order. Once this was done, within a generation it became possible both to state that Quakers had a distinctive and established "social testimony" and to embed into the structures of the Quaker organization a body focused, not on researching questions about the "social order" but on "fulfilling the responsibilities" of Quakers nationally in this area.[12]

What can we learn, with broader application, from treating a theological text as an "effect of practice" that has effects in practice? For one thing, it is instructive to look back to the actual content of "Foundations" and compare it with its effects. A text that appears in terms of its content highly abstract, universalizing, and/or noncommittal has acquired, as a document, a specific location within which its meanings and effects can be traced and evaluated. To use categories popularized by David F. Ford (2011, 23–41), a text written in an "epic" mode—purporting, as far as its content goes, to establish an overarching framework or narrative into which every particularity is supposed to fit without remainder—becomes, as document, part of the ongoing "drama" of historical and ecclesial life. It is affected by, and

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[12] The Industrial and Social Order Council, the successor body to the War and Social Order Committee from 1928 onwards, was established with notably different terms of reference that reflect the settled view that there *were* clear corporate "responsibilities." For the establishment of the Council, see London Yearly Meeting minute 23 of 1928; for the relationship between the Council and the War and Social Order Committee, see Pointing 1932.

affects, particular interpersonal and social situations; its presence (embedded within various institutional relationships) and not merely its voice makes a difference.[13]

The wider relevance of this work is further indicated by John P. Bradbury's work on Reformed theologies of church reform and renewal, which focuses inter alia on the development and adoption of confessional statements by specific church communities (Bradbury 2013). Bradbury understands the practice of writing confessional statements— including, but not limited to, confessional statements framed in response to specific historical developments—as itself expressive of the church's commitment to self-renewal. Not only the texts and their contents, but the processes of producing and receiving them thus carry theological weight (Bradbury 2013, 68); in some cases, Bradbury suggests, "it is the formulation of such statements that is of significance, rather than their use" (and, by implication from context, rather than the influence of their content) (Bradbury 2013, 65). This approach in turn draws on a wider body of contemporary literature, in Christian theology, on "doctrine as practice." None of this literature, however, has yet followed through at any length one obvious implication of treating doctrine, and hence the production of theological texts, as a form of church practice—viz. that the texts themselves can be studied as effects of practice and for their effects in practice.[14]

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[13] It is probably not going too far to say that the document becomes a *character* in the drama, albeit of an unusual kind. It is not a prop, insofar as its role is not reducible to the intentions of individual authors or authorizers, nor—and here we depart to some extent from the framework suggested by Ferraris—is it the script, or the determining context, setting out in advance everything that the other characters do. We are not saying that the document is a character *just like* human characters, any more than Latour, in attributing agency to documents and other objects is saying that they are *just like* human agents. Agency, or being a character/playing a role in the drama, does not imply intentionality.

[14] Bradbury himself, working with documents that have various structural similarities to "Foundations"—approved by national church bodies after extensive consultation, significantly identity-defining at historical turning points—focuses chiefly on their contents rather than on their production and effects (Bradbury 2013, 61–86).

"FOUNDATIONS" AS DOCUMENT: (2) GATHERING PLACE

The wider literature on documents not only pushes us to study a text like "Foundations" in the context of community and organizational practice; it also provides conceptual frameworks that help to focus that study. Recent attempts to move beyond positivist and representational accounts of documents have used spatial imagery to account for how documents function within organizations—spatial imagery, moreover, that focuses on spaces of encounter, movement, and change. For Freeman and Maybin, the document is a "conduit or corridor" along and through which "other things (power, meaning) flow" (Freeman and Maybin 2011, 165). For Hunter (2008) the policy document and the process of its production is a "space" that can hold (without resolving) organizational and individual ambivalences, complexities, and struggles.

Our argument in this section is that "Foundations" was authored, authorized, and used, less as a settled "position"—which is how it is liable to be read if we focus on its content—than as a space that enabled future reflective and practical engagement with specific contexts and opportunities. Its form, very uncharacteristic for Quaker texts—with its brief articulation of principles and minimal specification of the further steps to which the acceptance of these principles might commit individuals or groups—made it possible, and arguably necessary, to develop diverse and sometimes conflicting enacted interpretations.

This form had, moreover, been chosen deliberately. The War and Social Order Committee explicitly rejected, for example, the approach taken in the report by the Interdenominational Conference of Social Service Unions on the future of the social order, which appeared at around the same time.[15] A detailed specification of the minimum

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[15] Discussions of the report are noted in the War and Social Order Committee minutes of June and July 1917; minute 15 of June 1917 comments on the need for "a much more

requirements of a good social order would (it was felt) detract from the vision of a "true social order," the promotion of which was—so Lucy Fryer Morland argued at the time—the core task of Christians in political affairs (Morland 1918). More significantly, it might inhibit the pursuit of experiments both in thinking and in enacting new forms of the social order. In approving "Foundations," the Yearly Meeting noted that its adoption was merely a prelude to reflection on its implications for individual and collective practice (London Yearly Meeting 1918, minute 69).

To understand why it made theological sense to write and approve a very bold but highly general statement like this—and then to expect it to generate a wide range of reflections and applications—we need to consider the process used in producing and adopting the "Foundations" document. Behind the documents of a Quaker business meeting lies an unspoken commitment that is rather rarely expressed in words and only hinted at in the "Foundations" document, although it emerged in several related, equally short, documents from the 1920s.

In a standard Quaker understanding of business process, the Holy Spirit guides the gathered body into both truth and unity; truth and unity is primarily embodied and enacted; and the verbal expressions of the unity reached on particular issues—the minutes or the documents adopted—arise from and enable the shared ecclesial life (see Grace 2000; Anderson 2006; Burton forthcoming). While "Foundations" itself has a distinctly understated theology (and a particularly understated Christology), records of the deliberations of yearly meetings on "Foundations"-related subjects bring out the theological claims that underlay the

definite and far-reaching statement of the ultimate ideals aimed at," and minute 5 of July 1917 on the excess of detail and lack of broad vision in the interdenominational report.

document, its production, and its reception.[16] Quaker meetings for church affairs, locally and

nationally—including the May 1918 meeting that adopted the text—took (and take) a form

similar to Quaker meetings for worship, framed as a collective seeking of divine guidance,

conducted without voting and with a set of standard procedures that have the effect of

discouraging debate or the adoption of fixed and opposing positions. Minutes are generally

agreed in the meeting at the conclusion of each item of business; they record whatever the

group is able to affirm as the shared conclusions, the decisions reached, and the actions to be

taken.[17] Rather rarely do they indicate the course of a discussion or the details of individual

contributions; even more rarely is a polarized and irreconcilable disagreement (if it arises)

recorded as such.

This distinctive form of Quaker minutes may well have influenced the nondiscursive

style of "Foundations." What can be said with more confidence is that the way in which

"Foundations" was read and used was shaped not only by the conditions of its production but

also by its theological underpinnings. Thus, for example, the committee that produced

"Foundations" felt itself entitled and indeed mandated repeatedly to challenge the wider

Quaker body over its failure to take the text seriously, because the adoption of the text by

Yearly Meeting implied the unanimous recognition of a leading of the Holy Spirit for the

group.[18] The reluctance of participants in later debates to criticize the "Foundations"

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[16] A good example is minute 27 of Yearly Meeting in 1925 in a session focusing on "the problem of our service": "Our Meetings for Worship should be for us celebrations of holy communion, and when we have together come into touch with the spirit of Christ, that spirit will work through us and lead us to creative action" (London Yearly Meeting Proceedings 1925, 245).

[17] The War and Social Order Committee itself took more "ordinary" minutes of its proceedings—ordinary that is for modern non-Quaker organizations—that recorded the significant comments of individuals; alongside this, its significant decisions were recorded as "Quaker" minutes, that is, statements of the committee's shared discernment that were agreed in the meeting by all those present.

[18] For example, as early as October 1918 the clerk of the committee wrote of the urgent action needed "if the 'Foundations' are to be something more than pious aspirations

document directly, even when they might have framed their views as disagreements with its claims or with its general direction, also makes more sense in light of the process for its approval.[19] Political differences and debates within the War and Social Order committee—most notably, over questions around the nationalization of industry and "industrial democracy" and more generally the broad differences between Fabians, guild socialists, and those who did not identify with socialism in any form—are not obviously reflected in "Foundations," nor are they resolved.[20] Theological differences, of which there almost certainly were many within the committee in the recent aftermath of Quakers' turn to liberal theology, are even less evident.[21]

The very strong emphasis on shared discernment—and on verbal statements as articulations of a deeper unity—that forms the background to "Foundations" and also shapes

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(which is the evident desire of the Yearly Meeting)" (War and Social Order Committee paper 193, letter to London and Middlesex Quarterly Meeting). In 1921 the Committee claimed that "the eight Foundations have been adopted without any full appreciation of their implication" and proposed that "their application in industry and in the daily life of us all" should be reconsidered urgently (War and Social Order Committee minute 5 of July 1921).

[19] Thus, for example, the authors of the pamphlet *The Function of the Society of Friends with Regard to Social and Industrial Problems* (Wood, Fry, and Rowntree 1927), while criticizing in remarkably frank terms the political direction of the War and Social Order Committee, and even the "element of danger" in its title and constitution (1927, 21), explicitly praise the "Foundations"—to which their opponents would have looked as a key justification for their approach.

[20] Anxieties about the War and Social Order Committee's political orientation, perceived or actual, were present throughout its organizational life. At its first meeting, one of the first questions discussed was whether to change the name—because, it was suggested, "Social Order" had "an unfortunate association with Socialism" (War and Social Order Committee minute 2 of June 1915). Toward the end of the committee's organizational life, the pamphlet by Wood et al. (1927) discussed in note 21 above reflects a fierce (by Quaker standards) public controversy over the extent to which the committee was promoting a specific policy platform associated with the Labour Party. Ongoing criticisms of the committee and its work are reflected upon in its final report (London Yearly Meeting Proceedings 1928, 78–82).

[21] Indications of the differences of theological opinion within the committee can be seen, for example, in the record of a discussion of the relationship between "doctrine" and practical experiment in the work of the committee (War and Social Order Committee minutes of July 1922).

its continuing use, raises some questions about how it should be read and evaluated. For example, one standard way to tell the story—found in the work of both Kennedy and D'Arcy Jones—focuses on a perceived struggle between more radical and more moderate political voices, within the War and Social Order Committee and within Quakerism more generally, and reads the "Foundations" variously as evidence of a compromise between the groups. While such accounts work—and can be sustained and critiqued—perfectly well in their own terms, it is worth noting that the "internal" theological narrative about the document, and of the processes in which it was and is embedded, runs counter to this approach. Certainly some of them did want to persuade the wider Quaker body to share their perspective on (for example) the social and political implications of Quaker tradition; but the processes in which they were involved located the task of persuasion within an exercise of collective discernment in which efforts to "win the argument," or to claim that one had done so, were systematically discouraged.[22]

Looking at the history of "Foundations," the fact that among Quakers a reticence about, and indeed suspicion of, doctrinal statements goes alongside enormous devotion to the production, authorization, and preservation of documents is perhaps less surprising than might at first appear. With no strong tradition of, and no structure to support, the development of authoritative documents that are written in one place and implemented in another, the production of documents can run alongside, and complement, other forms of

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[22] Many histories of Quakerism (at least those written by non-Quakers) adopt, intentionally or otherwise, a suspicious reading of Quaker decision-making process, tending to assume, for example, that a meeting's decision in a particular direction reflects the greater power of persuasion of certain individuals, or the settled views of the majority. By contrast, contemporary scholars of organizational and management studies (including non-Quakers) have shown considerable interest in the distinctive effects and experiences of Quaker decision-making processes and their capacity to disrupt assumptions about, for example, majority rule or the nature of leadership; see the examples in Burton (forthcoming).

reflective action; and the processes by which documents are developed can run smoothly into the processes by which they are "received," interpreted, and taken as contexts for action. Thus, for congregations and individuals, the process of consulting on the text of "Foundations" prior to its adoption was rather similar in terms of the issues it raised and the types of action it generated, to the process of discussion and reflection following its adoption; and both of them fitted within the larger common practice of discerning and following the calling of God in a situation of social crisis.

We referred above to "Foundations" as a space for reflection, engagement, and encounter. We can now make that claim more specific and more concrete by suggesting that it is a gathering together of reflections and experiences that becomes a gathering place for Quakers deliberating over social action. Talk of the document as "gathering together" deliberately calls up several interrelated claims in the contemporary literature on documents. Latour's immutable mobiles, the documents that form networks of power in the scientific world, are made by "drawing together" and recombining inscriptions and claims; like them, "Foundations" is much more "mobile" than the various social experiments and theological/political arguments that it draws together. Freeman and Maybin, alongside the corridor or conduit analogy cited above, suggest that the document, like the architect's drawing, "draw[s] different practices together in the realisation of a future project"—gathering, then, to orient shared action (Freeman and Maybin 2011, 165).

Talking about "gathering" has specific weight in a Quaker context. The idea of being "gathered" appears in key and oft-cited accounts of the formation of the Quaker community, in which the agent of "gathering" is the Holy Spirit; the same is the case in the tradition of referring to meetings for worship (or decision-making meetings) as "gathered." Being gathered is preparatory to, and enabling of, mission and service. It connotes the intensity of

shared worship, with the re-formation of a social body in and through divine encounter at a particular place and time. Being gathered has priority over "gathering" as successful performance—just as, in the account of decision-making above, the givenness of the community's shared life has priority over its verbal expression. By using the term about a document like "Foundations," we can invoke this context as a challenge to the "theologies" of documentary power discussed in our introduction without disabling critical interrogation of its contents and subsequent use, or attributing to it a status that its authors would have denied. Talking about the document as "gathering point" asks both how theologians can engage with all the aspects of how texts work in social contexts, and how theology can ask wide and deep questions about how documents and organizations envisage power and meaning.

Furthermore, our reference to the "Foundations" document as a "gathering point," especially seen in relation to the literature that compares documents to the built environment, suggests that it may be fruitful to apply to documents some of the approaches used for integrating the study of places into theological work. The documentary "architecture" of church communities and institutions, and the ways it is inhabited and used, invites constructive and critical theological interpretation that goes beyond the study of text. How (on the large or the small scale) do documents function to gather disparate narratives, experiences, and reflections within religious communities—and what issues of power or authority are at stake? What affective responses do they evoke, and what forms of collective attention do they enable? How and to what extent are they "places of redemption"—or if that terminology comes uncomfortably close (as indeed does some of the language around the "Foundations") to collapsing ultimate and penultimate concerns, how do they become sites of flourishing and healing?

The reference above to the affective power of documents, noted also by Weisser (2014, 54), brings us to a third complementary approach to reading "Foundations" as a document. While it may seem counterintuitive to talk about the affective power of policy documents outside religious communities, scholars of religion are accustomed to the idea that at least some texts are artifacts that evoke responses of attachment, reverence, fear, and so forth. In this section, we treat "Foundations" as an object evoking specific affective responses and enabling specific emotional work within an organization; here we follow Shona Hunter (2008) in evaluating the document as a transitional object. Hunter's account, focused originally on the production of a policy on diversity, captures the relational and emotional power of a document in an organization undergoing change and its role in enabling a process of change, the outcome of which is radically underdetermined.

As we have noted, the War and Social Order Committee, which produced the "Foundations" text, was a very disparate body, politically and (to some extent) socially. During the period of the "Foundations" production and approval, the committee experienced several significant disputes and breakdowns of agreement—not all of them easily mapped onto a "left to right" political scale.[23] Attitudes to the question of a "true social order" varied

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[23] The clearest example was a long-running dispute over a minute about state ownership of industry that was first agreed by the committee and then repudiated. War and Social Order Committee minute 4 of July 1917 urged Quakers to promote the "transfer of "capital" from private to public control." After extended discussion minute 2 of March 1918 stated that the earlier minute "should not be endorsed or made further use of as an expression of the views of the committee"; the matter was considered again in May 1918 without conclusive outcome.

widely and were emotionally charged; the work of the committee was disrupted by members'

sporadic imprisonment and shaped by momentous global political changes.[24]

Also traceable in the records of the committee is the aftermath of the enormous

theological shift that had occurred within British Quakerism two decades earlier, with a

decisive turn to a liberal theology, framed as distinctively "Quaker" and rooted in a reading

of early Quaker history, and committed to positive engagement with modernity and with the

sciences (including the social sciences). The committee's deliberations, in the aftermath of

this turn, reflect anxieties about the proper relationship between theological claims and social

analysis, and between religious and political matters—even while frequently expressing the

optimistic view that these will not ultimately conflict. Thus, for example, in response to some

members' concerns the committee decided to circulate, alongside the early version of the

"Foundations," a statement to the effect that "in all our work the main object must be to bring

men to a living touch with God" (War and Social Order Committee, October 1916, minute

11).

The work of producing, framing, and distributing the "Foundations," then, enabled the

committee to work through in miniature—without ever fully resolving—the tensions that

emerged at a time of political upheaval and theological transition. The second point to note is

that once the document had appeared, it rapidly became a focus for the committee's work—

not only a "gathering place" for their deliberations, but a symbol of their shared enterprise

and its precarious place within the larger organization. They took on the task of raising

awareness of it, entering into correspondence with influential groups who were either

explicitly or implicitly challenging it, promoting discussion of its implications or

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[24] For a discussion of the relationship between the War and Social Order Committee and the Leeds "Peace Conference" of 1917, held in the aftermath of the (February) Russian Revolution, see Kennedy 2001, 381.

applications; they experimented with organizing their deliberations in terms of its structure. This sense of collective ownership and mission formed in relation to the text was sustained until the committee's dissolution and was still noticeable within its successor body. From 1918 onwards the War and Social Order Committee repeatedly—and almost as a matter of routine—criticized the larger body of Quakers for failing to take the document seriously in practice. These criticisms themselves became a way of representing, containing, and working through the committee members' continuing disappointments—both locally (with the failure of Quakers to embrace or effect large-scale political change) and nationally (with a series of post-war political crises and continued social injustice). Thus, the standard form of the committee's annual report to the Yearly Meeting combined repeated appeals for more serious engagement with the "Foundations" and with social injustice, with a record of work done— small-scale, experimental, inconclusive, but nonetheless recognized as substantial. Meanwhile, the larger Quaker body struggled, as noted above, with internal political differences, and with tensions over whether they should adopt political positions at all, while faced with increased expectations and national visibility following the war, and negotiating their own economic and social, as well as theological, transitions.

Shona Hunter's narration of her experiences around the writing and adoption of a diversity policy document, almost a century later and in a very different organization, has striking resonances with this aspect of the story of "Foundations." The idea she takes from Winnicott, that the document functions as a transitional object (Hunter 2008, 519) "able to withstand and contain multiple apparently paradoxical perspectives… and the related uncertainty and anxiety… [enabling the authors to] realise the limits to [their] own powers" applies surprisingly well to Quakers, and in particular the War and Social Order Committee, in 1918 and for some indeterminate period thereafter. The "Foundations" document allowed the War and Social Order Committee to realize, and work through, the limits to its own

powers in relation to the larger Quaker body; and it allowed the larger Quaker body itself to realize and work through the limits of its powers in relation to the changed national situation.

There are significant theological implications to understanding a document like "Foundations" as a transitional object. Hunter finds contingent and limited hopefulness through the characterization of the diversity policy document as transitional—treating it neither as pure "window-dressing" nor as an accurate description of a transformed organization, and focusing on the practices and relationships of which it is both effect and enabler. When we turn to the "Foundations," however, it may seem rather odd to associate limited and contingent hope with a document that is so explicitly—and many would say unrealistically—visionary, or to call it "transitional" when its focus is a "true social order." One of the characteristics of the theological transitional object, however, is that both as a text and as a document it represents its own limitations. As a text, it points to effects—such as, in this document, the fullness of human life in relation to God and humanity—that it cannot represent or bring about; and as a document, as we have seen, it is framed as a starting point for extended exploration and reflection.

Bringing in Hunter's account of the "transitional object" allows us to see more clearly how a document like this in its time can become not only a gathering point but a point of emotional intensity, and how this in turn can shape its reception and effects. More importantly for wider studies, however, it suggests a new approach—neither entirely naïve nor entirely cynical—to the phenomenon of church communities devoting enormous amounts of time, energy, and intellectual and emotional effort to the writing, revision, and approval of documents that are scarcely read or used. The production of documents is itself a way of handling and enabling transitions, reconfiguring relationships, dealing with shifts in organizational self-understanding, and realizing and negotiating the limits of power.

This also suggests, it should be noted, a very different theology of documentary power from that suggested in the wider literature on documents. Instead of the document usurping divine power and then being demoted in its turn, the document serves as a sign of both the reality and the limitations of individual and collective human agency. In this, it points beyond itself both to the divine context of human agency and to the ongoing and open-ended processes of interaction and encounter, opened up but not exhaustively determined by the making of a document. This last comment points to one obvious direction for future work in this area: bringing the theological study of texts as documents into conversation with the wider literature on the theology of signs, particularly insofar as the latter engages with speech-act theory and with words and texts that "do things."

CONCLUSION: DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Given the diversity of practices around the production of documents within ecclesial communities and institutions—and the diversity of associated theological accounts of authority—what wider relevance can such a reading have? One obvious suggestion for future research, perhaps especially relevant to the growing subfield of ecclesiology and ethnography, is simply that more "church" texts could be read as documents—as texts that do things, as effects of practice with effects in practice, as organizational spaces or places, and as objects on and through which emotional work is done. Those seeking to use ethnographic methods in ecclesiological work would benefit from critical attention to how texts, at least in particular contexts, work as documents, and how this process itself reveals the theological assumptions and motivations operating in a particular church community.[25]

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[25] An obvious extension of the study would be the examination of other twentieth-century Quaker texts that "do things" in and beyond the Quaker community in ways that are not fully accounted for by an analysis of their content. From Britain, the clearest example would be the (in)famous landmark publication *Towards a Quaker View of Sex* (Heron et al. 1963). For a brief discussion of this document, already beginning to

Answering these questions in relation to any given document would, of course, still involve attending to its content and form. The document—particularly the document with theological content—as an object of study may help, in fact, to break down the division between pure and applied theology that has bedeviled the field. For example, studying texts as documents—as effects of practice that have effects in practice—connects ethnographic theology or theological ethnography to a well-established set of questions about the significance of genre and literary form for theology, while pushing for claims about genre to be placed in their wider social and material context so that we see how, for whom, and for what groups of readers this particular text works in this way. In the terms popularized by Cameron et al. (2010), studying texts as documents opens up a different perspective on the relationship between the "official theology" that might be the content of the text, and the "operant theology" of a religious community that might, in our analysis, be revealed in how the "official" text works.

An area not considered at length in this article, but directly relevant both to "Foundations" and to the wider issues raised, is how the study of documents in religious communities might expose and call into question assumptions about the relationships of sacred and secular space. Given that the study of documents is most "at home" within modern bureaucracies—into which, as we saw at the beginning of this article, theology mysteriously intrudes—and given that documents from "secular" bureaucracies enter into the lives of religious communities in various ways, how do documentary practices shape the relationships between religious and secular spaces, or, more generally, between a religious community or organization and its "others"? Moreover, the study of documents exposes and calls into question assumptions about what is core to the "religious" nature of a religious community—

reorient theological attention away from the details of its claims and towards its occasion and influence, see Muers 2015, 163–71.

inviting us to consider, for example, the "religious" implications of governance structures, decision-making processes, or practices of consultation and communication.

While the discussion of "Foundations" finished on a cautiously hopeful note, we would suggest, finally, that there is much to be gained from keeping the study of documents in theology and religion properly "suspicious." There are, after all, plenty of examples in theology, as well as within the study of religion, where a theological text's capacity to "do things" in its social context might not be benign. When Karl Barth read the infamous "manifesto of the 93" intellectuals supporting the Kaiser in 1914—one of the many documents in theological history that is better known for its effects than for its actual contents—he objected to it not only for what it said, but for what it did; it reflected and reinforced a catastrophically distorted and destructive set of relationships involving not only the ninety-three intellectuals but also the imperial state, the Protestant churches, and the key cultural institutions of pre-war Germany. A rich understanding of how the "manifesto of the 93" operated in its context, what effects it had in practice, how it generated new coalitions and conversations, and so forth would—as far as Barth was concerned, at least—only make things worse because of the misdirection of the whole enterprise. To move from the sublime to the ridiculous, contemporary academics who agree with Marilyn Strathern (2006) that their universities' mission statements are (quite precisely) nonsense—devised to protect and underpin an entirely self-enclosed system of audit impervious to meaningful critique—would probably not be reassured by a further elaboration of how the nonsense of the mission statement and the anxious internal policing of the organization interact and mutually reinforce over time. And to come back to the example we have discussed in this article, the Quaker tradition of social action around the "Foundations" document will strike many readers as much too activist in orientation and too liberal in theology, never mind the question of whether its politics is radical enough. A critical theological engagement with documents,

then, would have to ask what kind of openness and generativity, what kind of contextual reading, what kind of "gathering" towards what end, was set up by any particular document and its use.

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