

The Future of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain30th October 2009**Introduction**

During the lifetime of today's youngsters, the signs are that religion will become less important and less supported. There may be events to change the trends we see now, but just looking at graphs of church going, attendance and giving suggest that churches in Britain will be competing for a smaller and smaller pot of wealth. Looking at the economy, as a driver of social and family issues, we can already see a sharp decline in our standard of living as people have to repay debts and pay more for energy, imports and food. Life for the next generation in Britain is not going to be as easy as in some other richer countries. This will cause a shift of power from the West to energy and resources rich countries, which will be a shock to us. We will be like Bruges, Vienna, Venice or Istanbul, the remains of a once proud capital of an empire where the world has moved on.

The economic forces will shape our employment and work in Britain. People will face lower wages and less security in order to compete on the world stage. This will result in a vast difference between state administration salaried and pensioned careers, and production work with little or no benefits. Hopefully there will be no riots or revolutions. We have been living beyond our means, and this will show as we pay back our debts. This will in turn have an effect on our national wealth, which will go to other newer Asian nations, so our ability to send children to private school, to fly abroad or to buy luxury cars will decline. When things become expensive or in short supply, people move to substitutes. With wealth we have been able to fly abroad for holidays and breaks, but as the pound falls and costs and taxes rise, people will stay in Britain. Therefore the range of expensive luxury substitutes, like Virgin or Ryanair flights, will cease.

The example set by the family is important in a person's choice of religion. If the family set aside time for going to church, or prayer, that may be continued. However, if they did not go to church, and do not understand or feel comfortable with the rituals, or were brought up escaping on flights or shopping, then this growing block of the population will find going to church or meetings difficult. The type and level of education, chosen by one's family and parents, is important in the selection of one's preferred religion. If you are used to silence at home, and to being well behaved, then being silent for an hour at meeting will be easy, but for most of the population it will be hard. Not having a preacher or an order will be hard too.

The availability of affordable housing will affect the ability and demand for churches in the next fifty years. The cost of housing rose to an all-time high, and it is now going down to the long-term level of three times average earnings. Millions of people are going to be in negative equity or bankrupt. They will not be able buy luxury cars on credit, or go on holiday. We will see the 2007 housing bubble come back to bite the public with a vengeance. Poverty will be widespread.

Technology will continue to improve TV and musical recordings. Entertainment will be very important as people work longer hours, and have to return to menial boring factory jobs, to earn a wage and to provide the wealth for our economy, no longer dependant on banking, shopping and tertiary level services. Having your own music or radio will help get through the day. People will also benefit from cheaper, more powerful mobile phones, which can access TV, music and the internet or e-mail. Everyone will be more accessible, and phones will buy goods, open doors and act as ID cards.

There will be growing competition from other religions, and other sects of the Christian religion for money and congregations. Many worshipers will do as now, worship in two or more places. However the Oriental religions may seem to offer enlightenment to bored tired factory and office workers, employed as in the Far East now with long hours, long commutes, and little time at home. Employers can be choosers. This could provide a growth in the demand for religious experiences, as in Victorian times, when moving country people to the towns cut local ties, which were replaced with religious affiliations. The change to our work patterns and work types will affect people's lives severely, for example we will go back to having our own coal mines, as we will find importing coal expensive. People used to nice clean office jobs now will have to work in dirtier factories and mines to get work and pay, and this may send them into our churches looking for a respite.

The shortage of easy money and work that gives "haves and have-nots" will cause social problems. There will be less benefit, so more people will have to live with their family or in hostels. Crime will

rise, as those who can afford the technological goodies will be burgled and mugged by those without, as in the USA. More prisons will be built for offenders. Children will live at home longer, and parents will find themselves paying for their parents' care homes, as well as the children and any illegitimate offspring they have. There will be quite a pressure on salary earners in the poorer classes. This will give rise to health problems, whilst the national Health will be under great pressure financially. Therefore the standard of health will decline. Charges may be introduced for hospitals and doctors, again mirroring the Asian nations' idea of a two level society, the rich and the poor.

The style of Quaker Meetings is important to discuss here. Entertainment provides a noise to drown out worries and fears. The silence of a Quaker Meeting is quite opposite to what people see on TV and are comfortable with. The silence of a Quaker Meeting will not change, it will never be "happy-clappy," so the Religious Society of Friends will need to target particular groups for its members. Looking at the various areas described below, one can see why this is foreseeable.

Economics

At the end of 2009, we can see a few trends that will shape the next few decades. We have been borrowing from nations rich in resources and the new Asian economies for years, and this money will soon need to be repaid, or we will always be a poor nation. In order to generate the wealth needed to pay back our debts, we face a stark return to a Victorian lifestyle, with a defined hierarchical social order, a wider split between those with money and those without, and lean times for anyone without a skill in demand. The nation needs to recreate factory jobs to create wealth, and primary industries like mining and farming. We need a balance of wealth-creating industry, and not just clean services work.

By importing our energy, food, technology and entertainment (foreign holidays), the British have been exporting their wealth for a generation. Income has been less than expenditure, and now the banks have required a huge cash support, there is an imminent risk of the UK running out of countries willing to supply us with credit. Once their national banks decide that we have reached a limit of sustainable borrowing, we will be reliant on the International Monetary Fund of Washington DC to help us out of our debt crisis. We are like a household living off a Visa card, and the time we reach the credit limit is approaching. When we do, outside bankers will tell the Government what they can do, and what they have to close or scrap to satisfy the lenders' requirements. It will be very painful.

We are living through the late 1970s again, then we owed 6% of our national earnings or GDP, but now we owe 12% of our GDP (gross domestic product), and so things are far more serious. Some economists are predicting a "perfect storm", like a ship at sea in a gale, where we have a declining income from our industry and a rising expenditure from our debts! Note that the funds to cover our debts are given in foreign currency by foreign governments and banks, so if the pound sinks in value, as it will as investors shun it, servicing the debt will become more onerous.

We may need to leave the EU to use our "club" payments to pay off our debts, and to have total control over our taxes and expenses. This could have an effect on international firms that want to have factories here, eg Nissan or Toyota. It would also affect the rights of millions of EU workers to migrate here for work. Therefore there might be no Eastern Europeans to harvest our vegetables or to work in shops. UK workers would have to do this work. Therefore there will be a regression to harder work for many millions of people. A shortage of Government funds will also mean that there are less benefits, and so more people will have to work to earn their money. This could be quite a shock for the lesser qualified workers.

Part of the "credit crunch" that we are experiencing now is due to too much easy credit and over-lending by banks on bonuses and short term marketing goals. We will return to the tried and tested 1950s credit control systems, which will impact severely on families used to living on their Visa cards, or selling their house every year for a profit, there will not be one. People will be forced to live within their income, possibly in a 1950s style, renting homes, cycling and having allotments.

Increased international competition for car making and other production jobs, as Brazil, China and India gain high technology industries, will mean that the UK has to fight harder to sell its production. This will put pressure on workers here to accept less pay. Energy will be more expensive, partly due to increased production costs to stop global warming, partly due to an agenda by some energy sources

to control their users, eg Russia. There will be a return to coal power, as Europe has huge reserves, but cleaning the emissions will be expensive. China may also demand our obedience to its agendas.

Our purchases of food from abroad will slow for three good reasons. Firstly a low pound will result in foreign food being expensive. Secondly the cost of energy to bring it here will be expensive, and possibly to avoid global warming, we will need to reduce our use of CO² emitting fuels in planes, ships and lorries. Then thirdly we will want food security, after 35 years of buying foreign food through the EU, grain from the USA, or chickens from Thailand and Brazil! If we get a few shocks and food shortages, people will decide they want locally grown food they can trust, both for price and supply. Britain will have to do more agricultural research, and to train more farmers to grow our food.

Work will be more stressful, involving longer hours and greater output. There will be less pay and benefits like pensions or healthcare or cars, so there will be less disposable income for workers and families to use for travel, entertainment or purchases, and for charitable giving. The Government may have to reduce its assistance to the elderly, so free bus passes and TV licences may have to end.

One problem Britain faces is that it owns few world-class brands. Most have been sold to foreign companies, who now produce them abroad, eg Heinz make HP sauce in Holland, the Chinese make MG cars, the Germans make Decca records, the Malaysians make Lotus cars and the Japanese make Dunlop tyres. We could shortly find that Ford and Vauxhall cars are not made here too, already they are mostly Spanish or German. Work will also be part-time, to save money, so employees will get few of the benefits of workers in the past. Benefits like paternity leave may have to be cut too.

Work, Employment & Pay

There will be less work for this country to do, with competition from Asia, Brazil, Eastern Europe and even North Africa. However we will not be in a position to just import goods as we have done for the past 20 years, as a poor exchange rate for the pound, due to our international debts and poorer banks, will give a higher cost for items, and the public will not have the funds to buy them.

There will be a lot less Government salaried and pensioned careers about. Workers will have to be productive, and the mismanagement of offices of staff will have to stop. There will be an increase in the number of local offices to save people travelling far, as fuel and cars will be dear, but this might not cover all the people employed by quangos and current Government programmes.

Work may be centred less in London. As products will have to be manufactured at cheap prices, the factories will have to be located in cheaper areas, where people can get cheap housing. The amount of well paid professional jobs will decline, as there will not be the firms needing advice, audits or loans, and the train companies providing a service to London may see a large loss of custom. Factories may use robots to make products, or to do dangerous work like welding and paint spraying, so not all the manufacturing work will need people to do it. There will be a decline in public sector jobs too.

Wealth

There will be less wealth in Britain, with money flowing to Asia, and the growing economies now, especially those with energy deposits or cheap labour. Oil states in Arabia and Russia will enjoy flexing their muscles to show they have the whip-hand. Expensive fuel will create new powerful nations, as we are seeing in the Gulf States. The USA has huge debts like the UK, so it will be in no position to fund military campaigns to keep energy cheap, and its industry will benefit from having high prices, eg Esso. High technology will attract money to its inventors and producers, so any firms here who do not invent devices, or have the technology and labour force to produce goods cheaply, will be sidelined. There may be no EU investment here, if we are talking about leaving the EU, so we face a difficult period. Like in South America or SE Asia, the rich are rich and the poor are poor, and it will be that way here too. The days of social mobility may be over for a generation.

Bankers can move quite freely, they do not have a factory to relocate. If Britain wants to be a hub of banking activity, it might have to accept that this mobility will stop any high taxes being applied to banking and the City. For many years the City has controlled how the UK Government runs the country, but after the 2008 crash, it will possibly not have the same power or public respect. As HM The Queen said at the London School of Economics, "Why did you not predict this crash?" The power of bankers, economists and politicians now lies in ruins, and the public just see greedy fallible

cheats and spivs. This does mean that our pensions are less secure, so many of today's workers will be a lot poorer in old age than their parents.

Substitutes

Currently religion has a number of economic substitutes competing with it. Stressed workers can jet off to New York or Rome for a break, and a whole new industry has emerged of low cost airlines to provide a quick remedy, eg EasyJet. There are also other substitutes freely commercially available, such as wide-screen TVs, DVD recordings of films, home cinema screens with surround sound, Hollywood action films or satellite TV, CDs, and on-line downloads of films and music. Much TV entertainment is aimed at a particular social group, and the constant action, bright colour, sexiness and loud music, eg X-Factor, Strictly Come Dancing or Big Brother, means that viewers will be bored with slower and refined events. Many people currently use the internet for entertainment, swapping files of music and films illegally. On-line social networking sites like email, Facebook, Friends Reunited or chat-rooms help people isolated at home to contact others.

There are other substitutes that affect attending religious services. Mobile phones are getting more sophisticated, and are giving full access to the web. Personal radios and Apple's I-pod music players are now regarded as essential equipment for the young. Religions will have to compete with this new way of life, and it will be difficult.

Besides international travel, local and national travel is a substitute. Having a weekend away in a hotel or caravan is accepted as a refreshing break from work and ones problems. Escapism is everything, but it comes at a price. Like Las Vegas, consumers are attracted by the lights and glitter, and rarely think of the real reasons behind a product or a service.

Population

We have lived through a period of mass immigration from the EU and the Commonwealth. We face a population growth of ten million people over the next twenty years. The actual sustainable level for the population of these islands is calculated at about 17 million. Politicians seem to ignore the wish of the indigenous population to control the borders, so there is a move to elect right wing politicians who hear the will of the people. In the 1960s and 1970s there were race riots in the USA, as Hispanic and Asian immigrants arrived, and took the work from the blacks. The same could happen here.

As a result we are facing a number of challenges. Firstly we could easily have more riots like in Toxteth (Liverpool) and Brixton in the 1980s. This would cost money to fix, to police, and damage our exchange rate, increasing the costs of imports. Secondly, if we have a recession, we will have an excess of labour, which will have a high cost in benefit payments. Thirdly, some of the people who have come here have brought their domestic customs and values with them, and we face a serious problem from excluded youngsters turning to crime and drugs to fill their time.

As problems increase over the next few years, those people with skills or wealth may opt to emigrate. Countries like France, Spain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada could attract our wealth, causing more headaches for politicians trying to balance the books as they run Britain, and repay huge loans. In 2012 Britain will be the 4th most indebted nation in the world, so living here will be expensive.

Family Life

Families face a difficult time. As parents get older, the wage earners will find the care-home bills eating into the family wealth. Children may be forced to live with their parents longer, in order to save for a deposit on a house, or to pay for university and education. If they want a typical singles lifestyle, driving fast cars and partying, the children will have to live at home to use their earnings for transport costs. Single parents will find there are fewer benefits, if any at all, and living at home or using an adoption agency will become the norm. With these pressures on the freedoms we have become used to over the past 30 years, life will be difficult. There will be less inherited wealth to help families meet bills and enjoy life. The high divorce rate will swallow up family wealth and wellbeing.

The family unit trains children to attend a church or to follow a religion. People who have not been trained to attend a religious meeting may feel over-powered by facing strangers in a strange building, doing what is familiar to them but not to outsiders. It all depends on what we feel comfortable with. There will therefore need to be information for newcomers, to help them feel at home at Meetings.

Education

The education level of a person will affect their ability to accept silence, and to cope with no set order or leader. Not all people can do this. Not everyone can speak clearly and coherently in public, and therefore Quaker Meetings will attract people who can do this. Lower standards from our schools and colleges will result in less good quality professionals, as many colleges turn out media and drama graduates. Perhaps we are in a transition period where we will move to defining the jobs that will exist, i.e. not hairdressing or acting, so that new recruits to the labour market will not be out of work too long. It is possible that in time we regress to a 1950s style of education, with valued exam passes.

The supply of wealth to buy a private education is drying up, as houses are stabilising in value and will decline to a lower multiple of earnings. This will stop people borrowing on their house to provide for their children and grandchildren. As a result, more and more people will be happy to use the state education system, to home-teach, or to provide charity schools run by the parents as teachers. An additional problem with our possible decline in national wealth is the likely closure of some low ranking universities and colleges. Students do not need three years on a course, with huge debts now we have tuition fees, and then they go out to work as shelf stackers at Tesco, or retrain as teachers. The government will be looking for ways of seriously reducing their expenditure, and so colleges that do not recruit enough students to remain viable will face closure. We will see in the next decade a number of events that we thought were impossible only five years ago.

Trying to teach religion and bible stories is a problem at schools today. Many RE teachers retire hurt with a mental breakdown. The children just do not want anything that interferes with their goal of being a celebrity, pop star, model or footballer! Schools often use drawing Muslim and Hindu symbols as a way of getting through the lesson without too much disruption. One area Quakers could help in is how to teach religion at schools, as it appears that moral issues are ignored in some areas.

Housing

The cost of housing will fall outside London, which acts as a refuge for international leaders, and there will always be a market for a house near to Heathrow Airport, in case they need to quickly exit their homeland. Houses will fall in price from a high in the early 2000s to a more constant multiple of earnings of three times the average pay. However as the recession grips, average pay may fall too, so house prices may fall to leave many millions with a high negative equity or even bankruptcy.

The housing bubble of the last ten years will leave millions of people in serious debt. No longer will a house be seen as a good investment. People who believed the banks advertising, and took out a large mortgage, will regret their greed. Not only will there be less house-building, but less furniture sales, less DIY, less services like mortgage consultants, removals and solicitors, and less money being made to sell land. People involved with housing in the last ten years will have to retrain to get work. As one can no longer make a quick profit from selling a house, there will be less money being spent.

Children will not be able to get such easy mortgages. They will have to live at home until they have saved the deposit for a house and mortgage. This will result in crowding at the parent's home, which could mean a need for silence, space, and a visit to a Quaker meeting!

Entertainment

TV and the computer are the main entertainments of the vast majority of the population. On-line films downloaded from the internet, or watching a film on a DVD are the common ways to relax after work. Hollywood drama's special effects make it hard for many people to settle to silence and doing nothing, they want excitement. Hollywood, games and publishers also use religion to create satanic heroes and monsters, as this sells well and is commercial. Entertainment has become more visual, and is well crafted to excite and grip the senses, unlike a religious service or Meeting. Those people who reject television and listen to the radio will be more able to adapt to the silence of Quaker Meetings.

TV affects the taste of the public, giving action packed dramas or sport, which jars with the style of a Quaker Meeting. Therefore this affects where Quakers advertise their Meetings, and who the target market is. Modern entertainment, marketing and purchasing are all about satisfying needs now. Like in business, everything is wanted now. Mobile phone companies and pay-TV make a lot of money out of people's loneliness and isolation.

Communication

Mobile phones, or cell-phones in the USA, are a fact of life. They will enable owners to do a lot more in the future. Buying goods or using ticket and vending machines is all possible today with phones. What will happen is that the internet and emails will soon be popularly available, so the full power of a PC computer will be in a phone. The internet will have more pages, but probably less operators, smaller search engines and providers will go to the wall, as in car production (Hillman, Jowett) or cameras (Agfa). Again, people will demand immediate satisfaction and entertainment, as the people used to choice, colour, movement and action, not silence and stillness. People are now used to instant communications and entertainment; this is the Now generation, wanting instant gratification.

The world has become much smaller with the internet and mobile phones that allow you to text Europe to Australia for pennies. The internet also allows people to see issues around the world instantly; disaster, repression, hunger and disease. Those who are concerned about social and moral issues in our society can exchange views immediately around the world, there are now few hiding places. What these people want is someone to listen, somewhere to exchange ideas; enter the Quakers.

Laws & Litigation

There have been some major changes to the law in the last few decades, some deliberate, some by default. If we stay in the EU, we will have to implement their Directives that require new laws. Some laws have been very good, like the Unfair Contract Terms Act 1977. However, our legislators in Parliament are being diverted from domestic problems by having to implement EU laws. As new Directives will take away vetoes, set taxes and control armed forces, there could be a backlash against more integration from European politicians. People are becoming more litigious too.

There has been a quiet change over the past 40 years over the area of intellectual property and the control of information and entertainment. Copyright, trade-marks, patents and registered designs are now a lot more common, as people control their ideas and inventions, to get money. Quakers do not usually use hymns or service sheets. However the tightening of the controls since the 1960s, when it was common to copy pop songs for dances or even records, means that it is now very costly to copy a protected work illegally. Great care is needed in using logos, music or poems in any public activity.

Professional Marketing

Well crafted marketing, using highly trained professionals who use all the psychological tools and hooks to attract and keep customers, are accepted now as a way of life by consumers. It is boring if it is not so well crafted. Children and young adults are going to have to learn to be bored, as we go back to a 1930s style economy. Religions offer intangible benefits not here and now toys as required today.

The problem for a religion is that it is ethical and a charity, and therefore cannot spend as much as commercial enterprises on marketing and adverts. Any adverts will have to pass a test of being decent too. Religions and ethical organisations therefore face a problem, namely how to engage people who are well trained by wealthy commerce to ignore amateur and unprofessional messages.

Religions & Beliefs

The end of the twentieth century has seen the rise of right wing fundamentalists, especially in the USA. Whilst the Muslim faith has been attracting new converts, and has a high birth rate (the second most popular boy's name in Britain in 2008 was Mohammed), the size of congregations in protestant churches has been falling. One estimate calculated that the Methodist sect, active since the 1750s, would die out by 2030, it has been declining slowly for 100 years now.

Other faiths and other sects provide competition to the Quakers. The moves by the Pope in October 2009 to help the Catholic Church attract ex-Church of England priests and congregation show the level of competition present. Religions know they are competing for a limited pool of followers. In their October magazine, the Canterbury Diocese showed the results of a survey and report in 2005, which showed that the available pool of believers was falling, and in 15 years there would be half the number there are today. However, it must be said that after two decades of schools ignoring religion, parents found that religion helps school league table positions and behaviour, so now believing occurs when finding a primary or secondary school!

People have been interested in Asian religions for many years, and if there is a rekindling of interest in religions, the alternatives from Asia may grow first. Curiosity in Buddhism, Zen, Sikhism and Hinduism may attract some followers to these peace loving groups.

Global Warming and Climate Change

If the warnings are true, the emissions of carbon dioxide over the past century will give rise to melting ice-caps and resultant sea level rises. The coastline of Britain could be quite different in 50 years' time, eg the sea could reach the A1 road at Peterborough, or flood Chichester, Lincoln, Exeter, Norwich or Canterbury, only ten metres above sea level (sea-level is below the low-water mark)! Many countries, such as Bangladesh, could lose half their land area. Many islands face inundation. This will create large-scale emigration from these areas, and could create wars and civil unrest.

Climate change could alter rain patterns, either causing drought or floods and loss of food for millions of people, which could cause migration and wars. The need for water and food could become critical in some areas. Britain could face immigration from relatives of people here, which it cannot afford when repaying vast loans, neither will it be able to donate large gifts of aid; it will need aid itself!

Sustainability is a key issue in the fight against global warming. Taxes and poverty will reduce British use of transport, heating, flights and foreign holidays. Instead of paying farmers to leave fields fallow as set-aside, British farms will see a resurgence in the demand for British food. This will help farmers' incomes, which have been often low in the past 20 years. Using EU food may be too dear.

Politics, International Issues, War & Peace

Over the next few decades there will be a rise in the power of some once third-world nations, China, India, Brazil and Iran. Oil wealth and natural resources are one source of power, cheap labour and a huge home market are another. Hopefully there will be no global wars with the United Nations, but at times the situation does look grim. Hopefully the example set by a less radical US President will help negotiate a way out of these situations. The USA and Britain cannot afford the wars they have now, and certainly they cannot afford any wars in the next decade. Both will see their exchange rates drop, their imports rise in price (including energy), and they will be busy repaying their debts to improve their global standing. Hopefully China, Russia or North Korea will not want to expand their borders.

People interested in global affairs and social issues will have sufficient problems here in Britain to resolve, without looking abroad. We will need patience to deal with insults from once small countries, pleased to see our plight. If well trained diplomats can resolve issues, there should be few problems. Only when politicians want to show their macho image at elections do we need to worry.

Social Issues, Concerns & Social Conscience

If there is going to be a shortage of money and less unskilled work, then there could well be a problem for society. There will be less social welfare payments, so those out of work will have little to use for their bills or drugs. This could mean that crime will rise, as the police have warned in a recession. Also with the children living off the bank of mum and dad, and grandparents living with them to avoid expensive care home costs, houses will be more crowded, and this could lead to more social unrest or attacks on people. The quality of housing will decline, with more multiple occupancy.

Fairtrade is one way of helping foreign farmers get a fair price for their foods. Unfortunately many goods are not in this system, eg petrol, so it has its limits. The way supermarkets control areas of towns and our shopping habits may cause alarm. Some economists are asking for them to be broken up, to stop them using their monopoly power. To have small shops in a High Street offering a service, supermarkets may have to accept restrictions, otherwise our councils will get no rates from empty shops, and house taxes will be higher. Better control of alcohol in our towns may be required.

There will be plenty of domestic issues to look at. Hunger, homelessness, poverty, work stress and childcare are all going to be key issues. We need people to ask key questions, like why are British trains the most expensive in the world, or why are our goods in shops all priced perceptively at 49p or 99p? We need people to look at how to run the country more fairly, and with better politicians who are more honest. Why is using the law so expensive? Why does the NHS have queues, and why can you miss a queue for an operation by seeing the same surgeon privately?

Health

There will be two major pressures on the health service. Firstly cost will force possible limitations to what is covered, as not everyone will be able to have a heart replaced, or expensive cancer treatment. Secondly there could be higher National Insurance payments to cover it, reducing family expenditure in other areas. The NHS and our pensions could actually be a huge Ponzi scam for those born in the 1950s and later. They have been paying the Government of the day for 20 to 40 years, but when they retire or need an operation, there may be not enough money available for their care or payment. Patients may also have to pay for part or all of their treatment, to help the Government pay off the billions of pounds in National Debt incurred in 2007-10.

There will be more stress at work, as there will be less salaried and pensioned careers. This could cause more psychological upsets like depression or anorexia, and there has never been much interest by doctors in counselling, nor the time to do it. As a result, work and bullying employers may create more misfits and long-term sick than at present. In Japan, some young people do not come out of their bedrooms for years, and get food trays left by the family by their door. It could be the same here, more poverty is more illness. Are we training the psychologists to counsel those with anxieties?

Meetings Style

To attend a meeting requires both good behaviour and an education level to cope with the silence, which can gnaw at a person with personal anxieties. One also needs a discernment to ignore TV news and other distractions, so that one can relax and focus on prayer and contemplation. Whether there are many people who have these attributes is open to question.

At one Sunday Meeting, a new attender criticised the babble of those speaking, as it interfered with her silent meditation! A problem with attracting new members is that they may arrive with preconceived ideas of how the Meeting will run. Some Meetings are more Humanist, and do not have Bible readings or Christian teachings; some Meetings even have more pagan attenders. Therefore care is needed in explaining what is expected as the norm at a Meeting, so that possible future members are not excluded before they join.

Conclusions

There will be a much weaker economy with much less work about. Asian competition will result in the need for lower pay and longer, harder work; output will be monitored. There could well be a serious shortage of money in the future, and this will impact on what people can buy and their lifestyles. Debts need to be repaid, national and personal, and this will result in a reduction of any spending people can do. There will be lower wages, with more factory, mining and outdoor work, with only skilled jobs available. This will create more demands on the bread-winners in each family, and therefore there will be much less disposable income to use for charity and religious giving.

The decline in the value of houses, and the losses people will make, will create a population who cannot move easily, who have a poor credit rating, who have debts that will take generations to repay, and who are angry with politicians that they were deceived. If people cannot travel as much, and the cheap airlines are facing a very bleak future, there may well be more people accepting the need for religion, and not just diversions. Those people who cannot repay their loans will create a serious bad-debt problem for the banks, who will find loan defaults are a major problem to their income.

Friends may well appeal to a smaller sector of the community, but that sector is out there. The Me-Me-Me generation are used to having instant gratification on a plate, but not all may want organised religion, and the Friends neatly fill that space for quietness and reflection. People who want to be involved in creating a fairer country and fairer world will be looking for an outlet for their energies.

Recommendations

Meetings may have to consider whether to meet at other times of the week, to suit the shift patterns of workers, and not just on a Sunday morning. Using house-groups for Bible-study is one way to introduce new blood into an existing group. Using the internet to give the address and time of Meetings will be essential to attract new members, and to show a lively and active Meeting. Mobile phones will be increasingly used to give data and information, like on the web now, and like political parties are doing to win voters (e.g. President Obama's 2008 campaign).

Use of the buildings by other groups, needs to be promoted, to create awareness of the existence of it. Social conscience issues reported in the local press or on the web will guide people to a local Meeting. Professional societies and clubs can be targeted to attract potential members who might like Meetings, with guides for new-comers to a Meeting. The seeds need to be sown to school children, with painting competitions, or human rights and social issues for discussion at all levels, especially in the sixth form. Links need to be forged with the EU and UN agencies, to get the ear of policy makers.

To attract the sort of people who feel comfortable with silent worship, Meetings and the central organisation at Friends House in London will have to target graduates and university groups. More professional marketing will be needed to appeal to a TV generation brought up on good advertising.

As the value of building land will be falling, there is no point in selling meeting house sites until the next boom in about 30 years' time, as already the value of sites has fallen, and any developments would be harder to sell or let. Meetings need to be more active in promoting themselves, with marketing help from Friends House, and regular activities to attract new members. Using a Meeting's buildings for a crèche, children's nursery or playschool is a useful social activity, but few parents come to Meetings. Possibly providing a lunchtime prayer and reflection time would help reduce stress in office workers, as work gets more onerous, and homes more crowded and less harmonious.

Women can be more interested in religion, and they are the key family member, especially in times of so much divorce. As we approach a long period of 1930s or 1950s style austerity, they will need help and support. If the Quakers are there, they can turn to a Meeting's members for advice and help.

Leading local and international volunteer work could help Meetings' attendances. There will be less money available for gap-year projects, so keen school-leavers may want to help and get experience in both UK and international projects. There will be plenty of problems to solve in Britain, needing help. Numerous international problems will exist, and Quakers can lead the peaceful fight against these. Immigration may be reduced, but asylum seekers will still come to these shores seeking help.

Work and life are changing so fast, there is a need for good training centres to help raise skills, discuss changes to peoples' lives, and to help people cope with rough periods. Quakers are seen as educated older people, who have a lot of good experience, and who can provide independent good sound advice. Help sheets could also be produced, but one does not want to compete with the Citizens' Advice Bureau. Adult schools will be needed to help raise literacy and numeracy levels. As work will be more stressful Quakers could lead campaigns against bad managers and poor conditions.

Social conscience issues could attract new members, and being active in feeding papers with stories of how Friends are helping the local and national community would help recruitment. There will be plenty of issues in Britain to be concerned about: housing, poverty, prisons, rights, employment and hunger. Leading the local pacifists, to reduce our use and the world's use of war, could attract new members with common interests. Perhaps each generation has to see a war to absorb its atrocities.

When the dust has settled on the events of the past 20 to 40 years, and historians decide who did what, and what political policies were to blame, the public will be looking for better honesty in politics, and a better role model to rely on. More electorate need to vote. Recent Governments were elected by about 30% of the vote, and were unrepresentative of the country as a whole. There is a good opportunity here for Quakers to help lead the way to better voting systems, better Upper Chamber selection, and fairer electoral areas. The whole area of politics is seen as corrupt by many, and we need a guide to better things. The Quakers can be this respected independent guide and oracle.

John Rowntree in 1859 wrote a pamphlet which goaded Quakers into action in the 1890s. We are about to see a major upheaval in the way Britain earns its keep, with shock waves going through all parts of the economy, and many casualties. In that respect we are living through the late 1700s again, with our own South Sea Bubble to destroy wealth and confidence. In the next few decades, people who can see a way out of our economic mess will provide a crumb of comfort to millions of Britons who believed in the politicians of the late 20th century, and who became poorer as a result. It is a good time to discuss what is wrong, and how to solve it. Millions of families will be heartened that the debate has now started on how to resolve the crisis left to us by politicians who concentrated on their expenses and positions of power in Europe more than running this country properly. (Words7470)

APPENDIX 1

POTENTIAL INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT ZONES 2010-2050

1. INDIA v CHINA - their border is imprecise in areas.
2. BANGLADESH v INDIA - global warming floods Bangladesh
3. KOREA
4. RUSSIA v CANADA
5. USA v CANADA Canada's northern islands are very mineral rich.
6. VENEZUELA v COLOMBIA Venezuela has oil wealth to spend.
7. RUSSIA v Southern States Closure of rivers for Russian irrigation will deprive ex-satellites of water
8. RUSSIA v UKRAINE Russia needs its grain provider again.
9. LIBYA v CHAD Border to south is imprecise
10. IRAN v ISRAEL Iran has oil wealth, Israel's US friends are poor
11. INDIA v PAKISTAN Kashmir border is imprecise and disputed.
12. BRAZIL World needs Amazon forests to trap CO₂
Brazil needs farmland for food exports.
13. VENEZUELA v PANAMA Closure of Panama Canal to upset USA.
14. SOMALIA Lawless area. piracy rife
15. USA East Coast Numerous cities are at sea level - rising with global warming
16. Caribbean Flooded islands due to rising sea levels
17. HOLLAND + UK Flooding reduces land area.
18. CHINA v UK or USA China demands its indebted trading partners to toe the line.