

The World needs Friends to Change

36
2 pieces

Where Friends have come from

George Fox set off on a journey in 1652, which was to lead to the formation of The Religious Society of Friends. In this, aged 28, he was mirroring Jesus, who had begun his own ministry (as far as we can tell, according to his interpreters) at a similar age. Fox was only able to do this, by virtue of two facts that had led to him being inspired.

Firstly, the King James Version of the Bible had been published in 1611, the first available real English translation. By virtue of the printing press, copies were becoming commonly available. Fox had his own copy, so did not have to attend church, and somewhat unusually in those times, could read. Non-readers could only learn from the parts of the Bible that the clergy chose to read to the people. Indeed family copies were available to many of the early Friends. Those who could read them did so aloud to those who couldn't. What they perceived as the direct word of God was a revelation to the early Friends, that the Church did not have a monopoly of the truth. [Indeed this is seen in the dispersal of Christianity from its origin to today's Coptic, Orthodox (Greek & Russian), Catholic, Protestant, Free etc., each having further sub-divided so that there are now hundreds of different Churches.]

Secondly, through reading for himself what Jesus had said and done, he came to realise that the Churches had distorted and corrupted the message that Jesus had for humanity. Hence his obvious dislike of "steeple-houses". They were the physical manifestations of establishments clearly at odds with the wandering preacher which Jesus appeared to have been. Of course Fox was not alone in this re-interpretation. When he walked around, as Jesus had done, and spoke in the open air to groups of people, again as Jesus had done, he found many who agreed with him, and began to desert the Churches. They were Seekers who listened to the inner wisdom and found that through sharing insights they were able to refine their inner guidance, to guide their outer life.

Despite the phrase "as Jesus had done" in the previous paragraph, in the light of modern scholarship, it may be better to say, "as Jesus is reported to have done". Even the existence of one person named Jesus is in dispute between academics these days. Jesus, of course, as was usual in those days, would probably have been unable to read or write, which is why he left no written record. Centuries later, Fox was able to do this. We really do know now that there are grounds for doubting the authenticity of Gospel accounts. They are not to be taken to be similar to a modern media, contemporaneous and intended-to-be-unbiased report. [cf *Who on Earth was Jesus?* by David Boulton]

Of course in George Fox's day, there was no significant questioning of the notion that "*The Bible was the authentic word of God*". People had been brought up to believe that, since the council of Nicaea in 325. Of course most of that time the hand-copied versions in Greek or Latin were kept locked up away from the general population, who would not have been able to read them anyway. So, for over a thousand years, there had been little opportunity to question the historical accuracy of the contents. Interpretations (many curious) were

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preached. Many enthusiastic preachers were vying to outdo each other in describing the horrors that would befall, in Hell, those who denied the Churches' teachings. (Modern trainee priests were often asked "*Are you strong on Sin?*")

But George Fox and other early Friends realised that the essential message from Jesus appeared to be **Love**. As reported, when asked what was the greatest commandment, his reply was effectively to **Love God and your neighbour as yourself**. It's all the same thing.

Early Friends did come to realise that, in practice, this order needs to be reversed. Until you love yourself, you can't start to love another. Loving oneself involves acceptance of oneself, which in turn requires knowledge of oneself. Hence the ancient wisdom of Delphi, where "**Know Thyself**" was the instruction over the doorway. (We'll return to this subject later.) Then extend this love to others, and so on to God. "**Seeing that of God in others**" is how it's often summed up, by Friends.

Knowing oneself is achieved by sitting still, with closed eyes, so that the attention can go within. "**The still small voice of calm**" is accessed by sitting in silence, preferably in a group of like-minded others. Our brainwaves then harmonise and settle to a deeper level. This helps to provide access to "the Inner Light" or the kingdom of heaven within. One can test the authenticity of this voice with other Friends.

This appears to be the essence of The Quaker Way for the past 350+ years.

However, the influence of the background of Christianity, in Britain, was difficult to escape. It was so powerful that Friends were unable to see this entire faith without the foundation stone. That foundations stone, for them, was The Bible.

However Friends did travel around the world, and in so doing encountered other religions. Those of other faiths were often so impressed by Friends that they wished to join The Society. This process accelerated during the twentieth century. Growing numbers of Friends began to see that if there was indeed one God, then the god of Christians, Jews, Hindus, Muslims, Shintos, Pagans, Buddhists or whatever, was all the same. Hence many Friends began to describe themselves as Universalist rather than Christian. By the end of the past century, The Religious Society of Friends, in Britain, was composed roughly of half Christo-centric and half Universalist (or other) Friends.

Probably the major point of disagreement between these two types of Quakers is one that separates out Christians from all other faiths. It is the stumbling block of Christianity. That is the notion of Jesus as the *only* Son of God. Yet this was the man whose most significant prayer, which he taught his followers to say, begins with the words "**Our Father**" Hence, he understood that we are all children of God, and have "that of God" in us. Most Friends today seem to know this.

If only all Christians were able to accept that their notion that "*there only ever was and will be one Son of God and that was/is Jesus*" may not be the whole truth, then Muslims, Hindus, Jews and those of many other faiths, could engage them in

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dialogue. So it is with some Christo-centric Friends. If they can let go of that notion, then they can begin to accept where Universalist Friends come from.

One notable feature of the history of Quakers is that they have been willing to change, not only with the times, but frequently **ahead of the times**.

Quaker dress has been discarded, as have the thee/thou language and the numbering of days of the week and months, by most Friends. Quakers went into banking and because they were committed to truth, equality and integrity were successful in that sector. In industry, they were innovators, e.g. in cast iron and chocolate. Subsequently education and social services became more important. The Quaker Tapestry explains much of this in a uniquely Quaker format.

British Friends have of course acknowledged that times change, by periodically re-writing their guidance for Friends. The current version of this is of course ***Quaker Faith and Practice*** published after approval by Yearly Meeting in 1994. This does bear as a sub-title ***The Book of Christian Discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain***. A bit of a mouth-full, but also an indication of where we have come from. The word Christian has dropped from the main title. It was part of the main title in the previous version. ***Christian Faith and Practice in the Quaker Tradition***. Perhaps that's the best indicator of the direction in which the Religious Society of Friends is moving. 'Quaker' tends to be sufficient to identify us, and even "The Religious Society of Friends" is rather cumbersome for the twenty-first century. Perhaps a review is already long overdue. I'll return to this later.

Once upon a time, it was common knowledge that the Earth was essentially flat. If you are only walking to the local shop, that idea will still be workable. However, if you want to fly across the world, it is more useful to know that the earth is roughly spherical. That paradigm shift, from Flat Earth (with the Sun, Moon, stars and planets all going around it) to Spherical Earth (with only the Moon going around it, and itself going around the Sun and rotating to give the appearance of the other bodies going around it), was such a difficult transition for people to make, that most would still describe it as flat a few centuries ago.

At the time of Jesus, everybody knew that the Earth was flat, and that the sun and moon went around it. By Fox's day, many would have known that it was spherical, and that it went around the sun, although the moon went around it. That would have been a difficult change of view for individuals to make. Many in the centuries around then, would have died (and eventually did) rather than change their view.

Views have been slow to change during the past two millennia. During that time, Christianity split into hundreds of different churches or factions. Few Christians realize the pagan roots of their faith. Paganism has had an even greater diversity than Christianity. Perhaps that is because it's been going longer.

In its origins, early Paganism around the world, involved worship of the Sun (on which of course life on earth utterly depends, it seems to all scientists) and worship of Mother Nature (or as Lloyd Geering now says "Gaia", the living earth). The planets and stars were assumed to provide guidance for humans to follow, in

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some cases because that was where it was thought the revered ancestors had gone. Such ideas appeared in indigenous societies around the world.

Of course some strands of Paganism got caught in sacrifice (human and animal), which was a dead-end in two senses. Of course the cannibal strands ate those they admired (or defeated enemies) in the hope of absorbing some of their strengths. {Transubstantiation, arguably, has the same meaning in the Eucharist, for many Catholics.}

Christianity took on the bits of Paganism relating to the Sun, e.g. in the sense of orienting churches, so that the altar was towards the East, where the Sun arose. They would want it to keep rising, (as we all still do today, but praying to it doesn't help). They also fixed Easter by the full Moon following the Spring Equinox, and Xmas according to the Winter Solstice. Both these were established festivals long before Christianity. Of course Harvest Festival was always a celebration to give thanks for the fruits of the earth. Herbal medicines from Nature were the forerunners of today's modern medicines.

The days of the week are still, derived from pagan terms, named after the Sun, Moon, Mars, Saturn, or pagan gods Wodan, Thor & Freyja also related to planets. Many Emperors, Kings, Pharaohs etc were declared as gods in ancient times.

Few Christians have much idea what a cobbled together affair their religion was. No wonder then it took at least four major conferences from Nicea in 325 to Chalcedon in 451 BCE, to agree on what The Bible should contain. The end result was a complex mixture of religious ideas. For example, 76% of The Bible is the Old Testament, stolen directly from Judaism. Likewise much of the New Testament wisdom had been present in other teachings. {Knowledge of Buddhism and Hinduism had certainly reached the Mediterranean by 140 years BCE, indeed they may have come back with Alexander the Great when he returned from India about 180 years before that.}

What is appalling to me is that we then, for over 1500 years have had Churches which have shown great reluctance to update The Bible at all. I see that as simply ancestor worship in the extreme. Those who wrote it were said to be *taking dictation from God*, and nobody has been able to do so since. Calling this hotch-potch of old stories *Holy* is a travesty. (A large proportion of the world's population today, have never seen the Bible, but manage to live lives of contentment without it.)

George Fox would probably have found it hard to accept the discoveries of modern biblical scholars, that Jesus was just a man, albeit an exceptional one.

Fox lived in a hierarchical society. Not only was God at the top, the King had powers vested in him by God. Below that the Nobility, Gentry and on down the classes. The English Civil War challenged that view, by claiming sovereignty for the people. However, even after the king had been executed, the class structure remained and people still needed a titular head. Cromwell as Protector provided that role at first, but later the monarchy was reinstated. However, only some

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men were allowed to vote at first. Real democracy is still to come, in Britain. We are not there yet, some people, like prisoners, still can't vote.

Likewise, the paradigm shift that is being called for from us now, is going to be a difficult one for us all to make today. We are now required to make a more personal change than any previous ones. Let's explore the present challenge.

Where Friends are now, in the early 21st century

You are not the same person you were 10 or 20 years ago. Indeed none of us is. Not only have you learnt and grown older (and hopefully wiser) but also your physical make-up has changed. Our bodies are made up of billions of living cells, in a constant flux. These cells are always dying, and being replaced with new ones. The fuel and raw materials for this work, all come from three sources: the air that we breathe; what we drink; and the food that we eat. The source of these three things is always the natural environment. Each of these three flows into us, and the waste products flow back out into the environment. (Maintaining these items artificially is a major problem for space-travellers.)

Thus we inevitably depend on the environment around us. We breathe it in every minute, drink from it each day, and need to eat of it every week. It is quite true to say that we could not exist without the Earth. Astronauts even need to take some of it with them on their travels. It makes long journeys hard for them.

Not only are we dependant on these sources, but we inevitably share them. Scientist statisticians tell us that every adult alive today is likely to have breathed in some molecules of air that were breathed in two thousand years ago by Jesus, when he was alive. I'm not sure whether George Fox knew that, in his day, when he proclaimed that there was "that of God in everyone" there was potentially a scientific truth, if he'd said "that of Jesus....". We may each contain today, some physical atoms that were once in Jesus. (That's if Jesus as an individual did live.)

When Friends sit in Meeting for Worship (MfW), we share not only the same room, but also the air within that room. We breathe it in, then, as we breathe out, we pass it on to someone else. Hindus would say the prana, or life-force within the air is shared in this way.

Our western scientists still don't seem to be able to identify quite what this prana is. It is the difference between a live body and a dead body. This life-force seems to me to be one thing that (temporarily at least) appears to go against the Laws of Thermodynamics. These "Laws" tell us that everything is inevitably going to die. But in the meantime we are alive.

It is however possible for scientists to measure the brain waves and see how they change in their pattern, going into deeper levels. The normal alpha level may change to theta level during Meeting for Worship. This is the level achieved during meditation. During a group meeting, the presence of others engaged in similar activity, tends to assist one in achieving this altered state of brain function, switching into the theta level pattern.

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This is one of the ways that Friends help each other to centre-down when we meet in MfW. By sitting mindfully with others in a worshipful manner, we deepen our individual self-knowledge. Stillness and silence help also.

“No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main” wrote John Donne. In a very real sense though we are more like fish in the ocean; part of what we are immersed in; formed from it; nurtured by it; and we may potentially be eaten by each other. Both analogies fall down however, because we do have more control over our environment than islands or fish do.

This fundamental concept, known to the ancients, and shared in the East as well as traditions of indigenous peoples, is the idea that the humans are *part of creation – not separate from it*. Individuals are an integral part of creation, and each plays an important role in the daily events within that creation. Such concepts are just as valid today and are essential if we are to address the impending ecological crisis we face.

We have come to see ourselves as individuals, and indeed there was perhaps a need for us to develop individuality in order to take personal responsibility for our personal development. We need to recognise the need for unity again.

When I was young, we were taught that there were two fundamentals that determined our personal development. These were usually known as Nature and Nurture. Nature was the genes with which one was born. Nurture was the surroundings that one was brought up in. The relative merits and combination of these two were said to make us what we were. There is a great deal of sense in this. The two cells which came together at conception grew and split into the billions of which I am composed today. They were able to do so only because of the surrounding physical matter that they were able to incorporate.

But in addition to the genes of our parents and the physical surroundings, we now know that there is a third factor. That factor is to do with what we think. It is now known in medical circles as psycho-somatic effects. That is evident in the Placebo Effect. The thoughts that we choose to select, influence how our body behaves. This is the fact that coaches of sports champions need to be able to focus. Indeed it seems possible that we may get the body we think ourselves into. {cf. *The Biology of Belief* by Bruce Lipton} I would caution against blaming oneself in any way for having done this, as it most usually happens unconsciously. For changes to one's thought pattern, see Louise Hay's *You Can Heal Your Life*.

We now know that we also contain, within our physical bodies, the memories of the experiences that we have had, throughout our lives. We are in a constant state of change, learning, or avoiding opportunities to learn, until the day we die. Of course there is also present in us all (more so in some than others) a desire for certainty, which seems to consider change as a threat. This is equally true of Friends as it is of the population at large, although maybe less so.

But we also now know that change is an inevitable part of living. Indeed even the inorganic universe is so affected. Much of human history has been about the attempts to understand and therefore be able to control our surroundings. To channel change in the direction(s) that we think best suit our purposes, either

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individually or collectively. Thus we hope to make our lives easier, according to what we consider are our most important concerns.

If one is to name the two greatest mentors for Quakers, there is little doubt who they would be. Jesus appears to have been dead by his early 30s, Fox was by the age of 66. If, as is commonly supposed, wisdom is more likely to be acquired through aging, then Friends today, many of whom are in their eighth or ninth decade, should have got a fair amount of it by now. But have they?

Both these mentors, began their teaching, as was said earlier, in early middle age. They had the energy to go out and share their convictions, with great enthusiasm, and the courage to be more challenging than older sages. *{This factor is appreciated by those who organised this Essay Competition, who anticipate that someone under 35 is perhaps most likely to be able to challenge the norms of the day.}*

Indeed throughout the history of The Religious Society of Friends, there has been a willingness to change, for example by revising, each generation, our own book (currently *Quaker Faith & Practice*), to reflect these changes. George Fox appears to have had an aversion to biblical scholarship. As I've said before, in his day, it was generally assumed that The Bible was the authentic word of God. Within recent centuries however, biblical scholarship has cast a great many doubts on the authorship, authenticity and authority of the so-called scriptures handed down in The Bible. Today, many Friends question the historical truth of The Bible, and consider it rather more a collection of myths. They contain some wisdom, but most of it is of no relevance to life in today's world as we know it.

So what do Friends mean when they talk of "God"? Not all do of course, many avoid it, because the word has such a variety of loaded meanings. Indeed there are said to be thousands of names for God, not just the basic ones Jehovah, Yahweh, Allah, Brahma, Tao, Great Spirit, Universal Spirit, Love, Light etc. Whether one is monotheistic or pantheistic, atheistic or agnostic or whatever, will colour one's view of the word "God". Quakers in programmed meetings in the USA or other parts of the world will have very different ideas from the bulk of Friends in Britain.

What do we British style Quakers mean by God? Again reference to David Boulton, in this case his book *The Trouble with God*, can bring some clarification. What we do know for sure, which Fox did not, is that there is no Heaven up above the clouds. We've most of us flown up there nowadays and seen that there's nothing there. Certainly not a human-like giant looking down on us, waiting to welcome us "up there" when we die. In the words of John Lennon in *Imagine* "... there's no Heaven,... no Hell below us, above us only sky"

Conceptions of God held by individual believers vary so widely that there is no clear consensus on the nature of God. In *Does God Matter?* by Paul Froese and Christopher Bader, they found in surveys in the USA and France, for example, that beliefs followed very different patterns. However they did go on to conclude that "to the extent that individuals imagine God to be a judgmental and watchful deity, they will be more alert and obedient to what they believe God wants."

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Thus the well documented "Protestant work ethic" emerges from their basic belief of a watching and judgemental God.

For several centuries, Quakers appeared to be much like this, hence their great industry in those times. In more recent times, this seems to me to be less apparent. The great Quaker commercial enterprises (Barclays, Lloyds, Frys, Cadburys, Clarks, Friends Provident etc.) seem to have morphed into secular multi-national conglomerates. Of course the firms have generally lost their old Quaker values on the way. They leave our world worse as a result.

Many people would even go so far as to say that the Biblical based belief that one day '*God will come in his glory*' and '*until then we may do whatever we like with this Earth*' because '*He (its not usually She) will then put it all right again*', is the root of the environmental crises we face today. Many Christians still believe that there will come an apocalypse followed by '*a new Heaven and a new Earth*'. Most Friends are, I suspect, now willing to challenge these assumptions.

Indeed some meetings have now excluded The Bible from the table in the centre of their Meetings for Worship, in favour of our own *Quaker Faith & Practice*. I would submit that this is not going against what Jesus or Fox taught, but rather up-dating it to the world in which we live in the twenty-first century.

The God of the Old Testament was a self-obsessed tyrant, if you consider the Ten Commandments. He (the first error) was 'One God' only (not the first such claim, of course.) He presented himself as a person to Moses. Indeed, he was one who was only accessible to a privileged few. One who ruled by fear. He established a hierarchy of priests and rulers beneath Him. They likewise ruled by fear.

The God of the New Testament was Paul's more 'Loving God'. He not only presented as a person, but lived as a man also. Paul took Jesus as his 'God-man'. Of course that was not unusual in those days, as many rulers, including Roman Emperors were considered to be gods in their own lifetimes.

But of course Jesus is not reported to have made such claims about himself. He did however suggest that the most important Commandment was that we should Love. Who should we love? We should love God, our neighbour and ourselves. In order to do this of course we have to do it in reverse order. Until we love ourselves, we cannot love our neighbour. How to do that? We'll come to later.

But the Roman Emperors had their faces engraved on their coins. Hence the reported injunction of Jesus, "render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's". By changing Jesus into a God like Caesar, the early Roman Catholic Church became able to extract payment from people. That is something that Jesus would never have done. Early Friends often suffered for their unwillingness to pay tithes. Hence the reluctance of many Meetings to impose a quota figure on individuals.

That God, who Catholics say has power over not just Earth, but also Heaven, (where one is expected to go after death) became the one to be feared. *Only the Catholic Church could intercede on behalf of each individual, provide you pay your dues* (in money, belief and actions) to guarantee a place there. Such teachings, that account for the massive wealth of the Roman Church, are still prevalent

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today! Other Evangelical churches have often followed this pattern, and by being allowed charitable status currently sit on vast wealth.

Friends on the other hand, do try to stick by what they consider was the original message of Jesus. To live peacefully, simply, respecting each other and the Earth. They do also follow the advice of Fox, to **“Live adventurously, answering that of God in everybody”**. Nevertheless, Friends have managed, in some meetings, to acquire appreciable wealth. There are varying views as to what should be done with this money. Other meetings do struggle to survive financially.

Where are Friends going?

It has already been suggested, by some Friends, that BYM will have all died out by the middle of this century. Of course that assumes that our modern civilisation still continues. Even that is no longer assured.

What is your image of God?

It has also often been said that if you asked any group of Friends this question you'd get a different answer from each of them. That diversity is often described as a strength. What is the chance of our image of God ever coalescing? Would that be useful in holding Friends together? If so, would we be more likely to move back to the out-dated Christian view of God, or would we be more inclined to move forward to a more Universalist view. I would suggest that the latter is the only sensible way for Friends to go.

Some Meetings have already decided that The Bible is so out-dated that they leave it off the table in their Meetings for Worship. Quaker Faith and Practice is sufficient for them. Even this latter is again due for a review, perhaps just titled “Friends Way” and perhaps much shorter and more readable. Each generation needs to update QF&P, none more so than today's.

People from the Baby-boomer generation, are the age group most likely to approach Friends these days. The only Saints John and Paul that they are likely to think of are the St John and St Paul who were associated with St George and St Ringo, in their youth. The spiritual progress of the Beatles through Transcendental Meditation with the Maharishi, would be their youthful recollection of matters spiritual.

Younger people today are still fully engaged in their own daily life, and often have little time for spiritual pursuits. How could we be more open to them? They again may quite likely have learnt meditation as a means of coping with the pressures of the modern life. Could we encourage them to meditate with us?

The other likely reason why young people may approach, and hopefully remain interested in Friends, would be if Friends are seen to be intensely active in Green or environmental issues. In looking to the future of the Earth, peace is a first priority today. An acknowledgement that we're all in the same boat, is a good starting point.

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It makes no difference whether we say God, Goddess, Allah, Tao, Brahma, Jehovah, Great Spirit, or any of the thousands of names used around the world, it's one and the same. Humanity's sacred books are just ancient parchments, **not "the word of God"**. They all contain both good and bad advice. As Gerard Benson said in a letter to *The Friend* in Nov 2009 "...all (are) welcome to sit with me in expectant waiting and I hope they'll welcome me." Friends must be open to all peoples who are willing to join us.

What is the purpose of the Quakers in Britain?

What do Friends see as the essential purpose of The Religious Society of Friends in Britain? Is it simply to maintain itself as a legacy from the past? Is it to be a living museum? Should we only be interested in maintaining the historical beliefs of the early Quakers? What do we expect of ourselves? Are we just to be a social society, which carries out occasional good works? Should we sit on the laurels of the Nobel Peace Prize won half a century ago? Of course not.

In previous centuries, Quakers became bankers, because they could be trusted to deal honestly. Many of today's bankers seem anything but honest, creating their own credits and charging interest, dealing in derivatives etc and creating their own fortunes at the expense of the rest of humanity. Perhaps it is as well that Friends are no longer engaged in that. It's doubtful that the mere presence of Friends would have stopped the avarice.

The world has moved on in the first decade of the twenty-first century, and Friends, who have always prided themselves as being ahead of the social changes, need to be setting the agenda, if they are to maintain that aspect of their tradition. So, it's not enough to sit on our laurels, and the decisions taken on marriage at this year's Gathering are just an indication of the sort of things Friends could be doing.

In this context, it is about time Friends learned to move rather faster. The MfS minute in 1987 (QF&P 22.45) predicted this change two decades ago. We can't wait another generation to change some of our ways.

We are in the vanguard of change in the Christian (Western) world. If we're not, then we should be. If we don't keep ourselves informed about what is going on, and in particular what is going wrong in the world, how can we influence things for the better? Isn't that what we should be doing? Isn't that speaking truth to power?

Some Friends may still think that God is going to come with a second coming, and put the world to right, but the only hands and voices that God (if he exists) has on earth are ours. Not only is 'that of God' in others, it is in each of us, whispering for us to act.

This Earth is all that we have. It is up to us whether we make of it a Heaven or a Hell. Action for humanity to share sustainability is becoming urgent.

Fox set up the system of Preparative, Monthly, Quarterly and Yearly Meetings because for him a hierarchy was the natural order. But it is not so today. Democracy has matured somewhat, and is doing even more so today. With the

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internet for better communications and environmental crises looming, we need to accept our individual personal sovereignty, and network. Top down solutions are not working. It has brought us to the verge of Apocalypse. However, that may not necessarily mean Armageddon.

The original meaning of the word Apocalypse is very different from Armageddon (the prophesied supreme conflict between the nations) although the two are often considered as synonymous. However, an Apocalypse is simply a revelation. Today the Revelation is that the headlong rush of profit based Capitalist economies is not sustainable. Not only that, but unless we can learn to co-operate as a species, to save many of the species with which share our planet, then the war of Armageddon **may** occur. It doesn't have to if we learn the lesson.

We are each evolving creatures. In contrast to creatures of the past, we have the ability (although not many people yet realise this) to influence during our lifetimes, the further evolution of our individual selves. After all, don't athletes develop their bodies by training, academics their minds likewise, and people interested in spiritual matters, can do so too. It helps in each case to begin by loving oneself.

We are, and always have been, a part of all our thoughts. We nurture seeds of our own creation within us. Our patterns of thought, when coupled with feeling, may direct our energy most efficiently, consciously and with intent. In this sense we become a co-creator of our experience and may impact the events of our world. We are able to intervene, through the acknowledgement of our oneness with creation. The process that allows us to accomplish this tuning may be considered as, using both directed thought, meshed into the process commonly known as meditation.

It becomes apparent why meditation, as in Meeting for Worship, may be an effective, though passive, form of intervention. We are aware that the experience of each individual affects the whole to some degree. If this is truly clear to us, then it also becomes apparent why it is not enough to pray, for example, for peace in the world. This may be well intentioned, the request for peace, in and of itself, but is incomplete. The highest form of intervention that anyone may offer within a given situation is not to ask for something to be, ***rather to become that which is desired***. If peace is the desired reality, peace must become the reality within your experience. **We must become that peace.**

In this context, Friends can no longer justify seeing themselves as separate from the rest of humanity. Perhaps it would help to drop the '***Quaker***' label, and just be **Friends**.

Friends Testimonies

The Quaker Testimonies are all entirely appropriate in today's context. Indeed they are essential. What is not appropriate is Friends unwillingness to put these essentials before the public at large, but in a way that is not proselytising. We don't need to try to turn the whole world into Quakers, just share with them what we know. We need to Testify, loudly and clearly the value of our Testimonies.

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They didn't come from the Bible, which is now literally apocryphal, (of doubtful authenticity). The Quaker Testimonies were written by Quakers, not that that makes them perfect. Indeed we could probably do with re-writing them again, to up-date and simplify them still more. But we need them in a format that we can distribute worldwide. Two sides of A4 should be the limit. Those to Peace, Equality, Truth, Integrity and Simplicity (also Sustainability which never gets a mention in the index of QF&P) should be detailed in a way that is clear to anybody.

The Testimony that we need to be most careful on is that of Truth. Used as Friends do, to speak honest simple speech at all times and not need to take oaths or use titles, it is fair enough. However those of other beliefs often believe that they have 'The Truth' in their teachings. We need to be aware of this, and mindful that for Friends, truth in it's broader sense is always changing, as the world changes.

Each generation has needed to update QF&P, none more so than today's. Why do we have to venerate the people of the past so? Their documents will still be available in libraries and archives for students. Could we not have a much smaller document that contains only things written in the past decade? There are possibly as many people alive today as there were lived through recorded history. Not all are foolish. We could even find some texts outside the familiar circle of Friends that would be worthwhile to promulgate both internally and also to a wider audience. That could help us all to grow in the Spirit.

Likewise we now know that we are not isolated individuals, but integral with all other people, be they Friends or not. Hence we need to be willing to share the knowledge we have within Friends, with those outside The Religious Society. Indeed it would be a good idea to change our name to "***The Spiritual Society of Friends***". The word 'religious' has connotations of 'being bound in' in the derivation, and in one dictionary definition being 'God fearing'. I think Friends have emerged from both of these, but would accurately be described as being linked by spiritual as opposed to purely material values. (I know some Friends are confuse Spiritual with Spiritualist {and Spiritualism}, though these are quite different.) Spiritual merely refers to non-material. Perhaps **Spiritual Friends** would be a suitable simple truthful name for us.

Advices & Queries

Advices and Queries could also usefully be made briefer, (again one or at most two sides of A4). It is interesting to note that the original 3 questions first sent out in 1682, made no mention of God, Jesus or Christ. It was almost a century later before the queries began to ask about faith and subsequently give 'general advices'. In the century just past, the ***Advices and Queries*** has become extended and broadened, to almost become a replacement for the creeds that early Friends had abhorred.

It is time to roll this back, and readjust the language to include non-Christians. There is no need to use words like God, Christ or even Jesus, when Spirit, Light and Love are more broadly acceptable. Likewise, it could be rather less proscriptive. I suspect that few Friends can really comply with the current 42 A&Qs, without risking self-righteousness.

The World needs Friends to Change

Meeting for Sufferings

In accordance with our need for truth and honesty in our speech, we need to drop this title, historic though it is. I would expect that if persecution of Friends were to occur today, such information could be shared much more quickly via the internet, or in The Friend. This in today's world is Humpty Dumpty language. The only suffering this meeting does is self-inflicted. In so far as it tries to be a controlling body of British Friends, it is bound to suffer. Most Friends appear to see their local meeting as their prime involvement. That trend seems likely to continue.

Whether this is a Meeting for Management, Dissemination or for Consultation, doesn't matter. What matters is that we name it as what it does. Like that those not privy to quaker-speak can understand us better.

Business Method

Although often misunderstood and sometimes even not fully practiced, there is much virtue in this. However, it seems that many Friends while active in their local MfW, are reluctant to get involved in Business Meetings. Business must be done, but clerking could perhaps be more light-hearted than seems usual. We can be Spirit guided without being boring. Perhaps these need to be renamed as **Meetings for Decisions**. That might make necessary decisions rather easier and quicker for Friends.

Conclusion

Humans are not genetically programmed to violence, hatred and aggression. Friends have the means of finding the inner peace which humanity needs to survive the impending environmental crises. Co-operation is the key.

Summary

It's not acceptable to assume that Friends can carry on with "business as usual".

Friends need to move into finding spiritual answers to today's environmental problems.

I've offered a few pointers, but all Friends need to get involved in these changes.

The world needs Friends to change. In both senses:-

- 1) **The world needs (for) Friends to change** (themselves, because)
- 2) **The world needs Friends, (in order) to (help it) change.**

The world needs Friends to change

