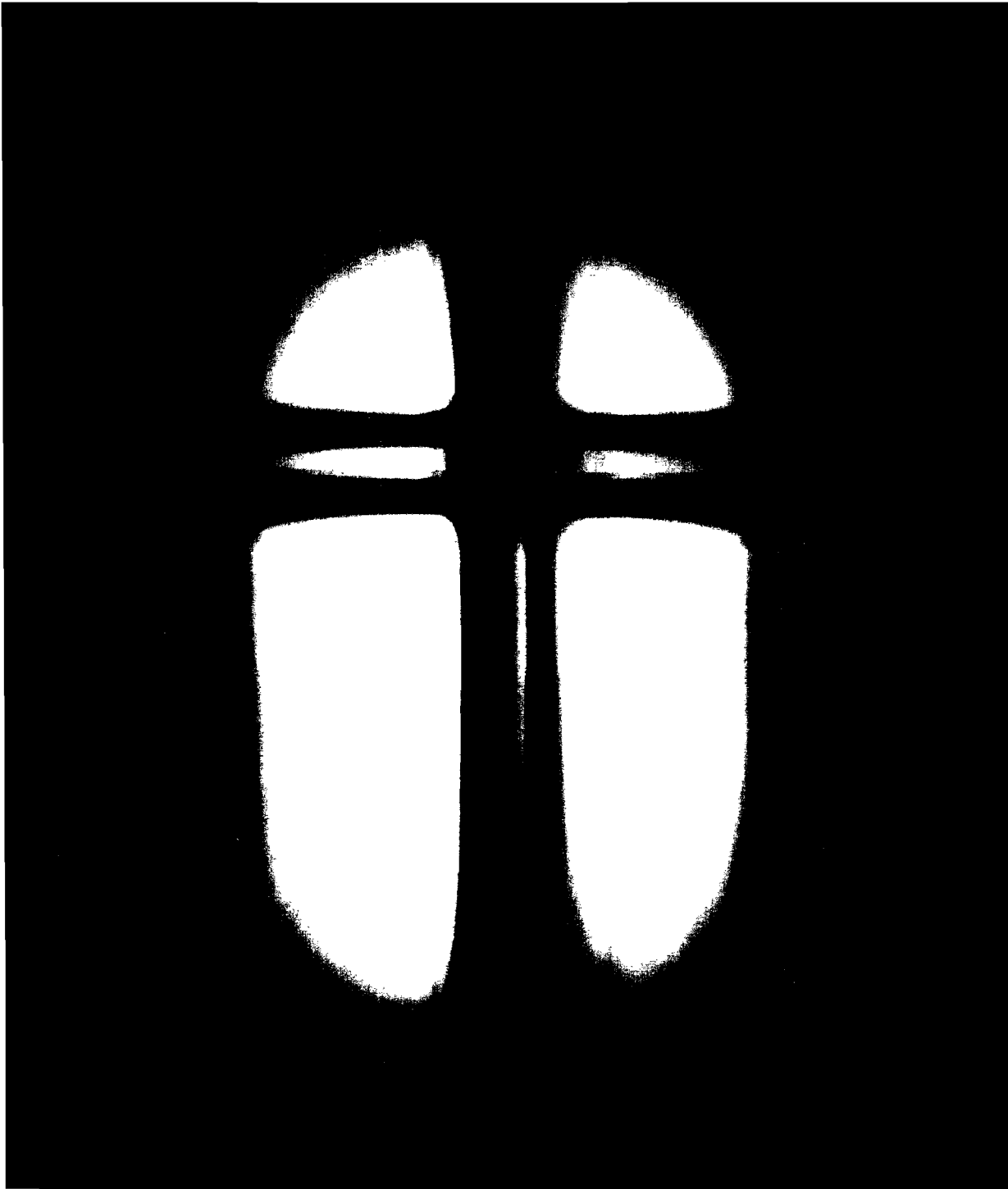


"A New Spirituality"



"The Future of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain"

Introduction

'I saw that there was an ocean of darkness and death but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness' (George Fox)

I stumbled upon these inspiring words whilst reading *Illumine*, a book on the artwork of Gary Fabian miller (cover image). I knew nothing of the history of George Fox, or his involvement in the Quaker movement, but these words spokɛ to my soul. Approximately a year later whilst attending a Buddhist meeting in Swindon, I recognized his name on the bookcase and picked up *George Fox and the Quakers* by Cecil W. Sharman. On reading Sharman's book I was thrilled and relieved to find a voice in George Fox, which reflected my own deep spiritual convictions and frictions with the Christian church. I read about somebody filled with the power of God and fearless, consuming passion for truth, and of individuals who followed his concepts, prepared to struggle against the current, and risk their lives for the truth. Their beliefs echoed my own, and their actions backed them up, resulting in the founding of a truly spiritual form of Christianity.

I attended two Christian churches regularly for eight years, the first in my hometown and the second when I moved to study my MA. During these years my relationship with God progressed significantly, the church helped me to understand that God loved me, and I rediscovered my true self in Him. I was aware from the beginning however, that the church was comprised of fallible human beings and I found myself alienated from them on several occasions. When I first started to re-establish my relationship with God, I thought wrongly that the church if anyone would understand the spiritual battle I was experiencing, but the leaders couldn't relate to what I was describing, and only exacerbated the problem.

I felt that wherever I turned the darkness presided and realized that only the divine within me would be my consistent teacher and protector. I could relate to George Fox's words, 'I went to many a priest to look for comfort...but found no comfort from them' (Yolen: *Friend, The story of George Fox and the Quakers*, 1972, p19). Only God could help me, and my faith would be based on him alone, as George Fox wrote 'then the Lord did let me see why there was none upon the earth who could speak to my condition, namely that I might give him all the glory'. I did continue to attend the church but I was aware I was going to have to separate the good from bad within it.

I was baptized in the second church, which was a beautiful experience I felt my whole body become replete with the spirit. My heart felt huge, as though Jesus' heart had been transplanted into my chest. My instinct for Gods truth grew and I began to notice the problems within the church more prominently. When attending a service my Buddhist friend said "I can see god in you, but not here". She pointed to the arrogance that was complicit in the attitude, only we have the true path to God. As with the previous church both the members and the leaders functioned on a superficial level of Christianity. Only scratching the surface of their relationship with God and not accessing the depth of wisdom within the Bible, whilst giving it too much authority.

It occurred to me that too many Christians liked to keep their hands clean when inspired by God to help a homeless Christian, who I met on his own in the church, he was recently released from prison for the fifteenth time, he and his friend were both drug addicts. One

evening I was unable to help these pair and looked to someone else in the church to take the sickest one home briefly, to dry his feet out, as he had trench foot due to bad shoes and weather, but nobody would help. We sat on a wall outside the church in the rain as the three of us watched everyone get into comfortable dry cars, I thought it sad that this had become the example of Jesus, Christianity was never intended to be a comfortable, complacent religion.

I described my issues to a church leader who I could see had the spirit of God and explained the Light within me was recognizing too much head, and not enough heart within the church. I pointed out the importance of humility and warned of assuming Gods wisdom as our own. I expressed my belief that the church could be so much closer to God, and I could sense the Holy Spirit wanting to work and move within it, but was being restricted by too much human control. I also pointed out that the church depended on the Bible as though God were dead and all we have left of Him is Biblical doctrine.

I could see my statements hitting pride, however I recognized sufficient grace in the leader for him to accept I was speaking the truth, and I prayed with him. He said I had the gift of prophecy but I was trying to explain they also would become prophets, if they were walking closely enough to God. Harvey Gillman writes, 'Quakers would say that if people are open to the power of love and light in their lives then they will themselves become prophetic and priestly, and will not need to follow an external authority of church leaders' (A Light That is Shining, 2006 p24). Having read this in a booklet introducing the Quakers, I knew this inspired movement could provide the vacuum from which God could be heard, move and work

During the course of this essay I will be describing how I have experienced the same predicament in the church today as Fox did in the seventeenth century. I will be highlighting the problems within Christianity and describing a depth of faith, which I believe the church should be functioning on. I will be referring to the higher consciousness, which when accessed, enables us to become one with God. To remain close enough we need to surrender ourselves to God on a daily basis, and let go of all earthly attachment and pleasure, to be sustained by immutable spiritual happiness alone. We therefore become as Jesus and can love unconditionally, forgive endlessly and rise eternally. This is the power in having and being nothing, other than an earthly vessel for God to realize His truth in the world, as demonstrated in the lives of Gandhi, Buddha, and George Fox.

I have debated how religion has produced unnecessary barriers between other faiths and science, and how there is a consistent truth running through all. I have discussed how George Fox and the Early Quakers embodied the light of God, and used their whole lives to emancipate the truth at great cost. Commenting on the present Quaker movement and the adjustments, which I consider can be made to insure it remains affective in radiating Gods Light. I have asserted that now is an important time to return to true spirituality and for the power of God to rise up through the Quakers to Christianity, to Gods truth in all faith and throughout Science, philosophy and politics.

The Problem with “Christianity”

The Gnostic bishop Stephen Holler noted, ‘William James....remarked that to most people faith means having faith in someone else’s faith. In the minds of many religious folk, faith has thus developed into a belief received second-hand from other believers, none of whom are likely to have had any experience of the object of their faith’ (Hoeller, Gnosticism: New light on the ancient Tradition of Inner Knowing; cited by Martin p30). In my experience many Christians have little knowledge of the voice of God within them, consequently they must rely entirely on the bible and the church leaders for guidance, this however creates a distance between the believer and the divine and leads to someone else’s interpretation of the truth.

It seems that many Christians turn immediately to the Bible whenever a challenge to their faith occurs, as though it were a religious handbook. Cecil W Sharman writes of George Fox, ‘He carried the book with him and Knew it thoroughly, so that he could often catch out opponents,in arguments he could quote texts as readily and as wearisomely as any of them’. In my experience the Bible is a tool for learning about God and our spiritual heritage, a complicated history; which is occasionally explained to us in the simplistic form of a children’s story. I respect the Bible and believe it to be inspired by the spirit of God, it is an affective tool for asserting Gods authority, as Jesus did in the desert, but it should not be used as a replacement for our own inner voice and relationship with God. I believe that the Bible has become a crutch for many Christians who are too scared to listen to the voice of God within. When I explain to them that I converse with God directly they respond “it might not be God”, even when I make statements like God wants Church members to have a closer personal relationship with him, I receive the reply “I will have to see if that concurs with the Bible”.

The puritan priests Fox confronted also considered the Bible to be the final authority, they believed, ‘The spirit and the scriptures are inseparable’, and the spirit that produced it was no longer in the world. Fox believed that the spirit was not only in the world but in everyman, he understood the book to be secondary, a written record of past teachings and experience. He believed the Bible literally but treated the narratives as metaphors. Patricia Williams writes ‘The original Quakers metaphoric treatment of scripture means that, when science and biblical criticism declare so much in scripture false if read literally, the Quaker theology of the seventeenth century stands firm. What mattered then and matters now, is the Bible’s inner meaning, what we might call its spiritual import’ (*Quakerism: A Theology for our Time*; 2007,p6).

The difference between knowing God personally and believing in somebody else’s interpretation of the divine is the difference between religion and spirituality. As Christians we should walk closely to God personally, and apply ourselves to becoming pure vessels emanating Gods light; learning from each other, rather than only learning from the Bible and reading about people who knew him in previous tense. The spirit of God lives amongst and within us, the same spirit as spoke to and dwelt in those featured in the Bible stories including Jesus. Robert Barclay writes ‘It is only by the spirit that we are led into all truth and taught all things, then the spirit and not the scripture is the foundation and the basis of all truth and knowledge’ (cited by Williams 2007, p44).

I believe Christianity has overemphasized Christ divinity at the expense of his humanity, consequently 'we lose track of the utterly remarkable human being he is' (*The meaning of Jesus*, Marcus Borg p8) by making him God, Jesus is taken further away from our ability to relate to him as brother, friend and mentor. Pierre Ceresole writes 'If you allow me to have Christ simply as a friend, he may become what you call God; if you force him on me as God he cannot become a friend' (1920: *Quaker Faith and Practice*). I would go so far as to say that both Jesus and the Bible have become idols within the Christian church, because they are often given equal reverence to God. They themselves are worshiped or relied upon rather than God, and become a barrier between believers and the divine, when they are intended to be the window and doorway, through which we access the divine for ourselves.

The author of reflection six in *Twelve Quakers and Jesus* writes 'The Jewish rabbi has been transmogrified into God, and he himself worshipped. Jesus the Jew would have found this blasphemous in the extreme' (p18). By misunderstanding the term incarnation of God, we allow ourselves to remain weak and merely human in comparison to Jesus, as Job Scott writes 'Christ has not conquered to excuse us, but that we should follow his steps' (1972, *Quaker Faith and practice*). When we accept the identity of Jesus the martyr "who died for me", it becomes too easy to take the attitude "he did it so that we don't have to". I believe that Jesus is the perfect example of the higher self that we are each called to become through sacrifice and obedience to God.

I believe Jesus was the perfect image of our perfect God, the child reflecting the father. When we have our correct relationship with God we all become the reflection of His character, "God created man in his *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1: 27), Marcus Borg writes:

'God is the encompassing spirit in whom we live and move and have our being. Within this view, Jesus as a spirit person was open to the presence of God. Writers on spirituality sometimes speak of "emptiness" as a condition of the psyche that makes possible, being filled by God. For whatever combination of reasons (genetic inheritance, socialization, spiritual practices, and so forth), we imagine that Jesus was so "empty" in this sense that he could be filled with the spirit....He is not different in kind from us but as completely human as we are. In the fully human life of this utterly remarkable spirit person, we see the incarnation of God.' (*The Meaning of Jesus*; Borg; 1999, p148)

I believe that we are all born knowing God, every one of us is His child, but as the mother demon in Earst Barlach's novel *Der Tote Tag* says, 'the strange thing is that man will not learn that God is his father' (cited by Jung, *Modern Man in search of a soul*, 1933; p138). Our instincts for hearing His voice have become drowned out by the noise and influence of our cultures fashions, technologies, beliefs and religions. Fox believed we are all born innocently, but like Adam and Eve, we fall into sin. However, unlike Adam and Eve the modern world is already full of sin, which subtly affects us detrimentally, unless we have strong positive examples and unconditional love. We separate ourselves from God further by choosing this fallen world and it's trapping over our relationship with Him. The story of Adam and Eve provides the lesson for us all to live in obedience to God. Unfortunately many of us turn our backs on Him, without even realizing the implications, which is why retaining our spiritual soul voice is so vital and the truth so precious.

I believe we all have the potential to emanated God's light on earth irrespective of religious beliefs, as George Fox states 'every man was enlightened by the divine light of

Christ, and I saw it shine through all', we are each being called to live in a higher spiritual consciousness as one with our creator, therefore whole and the best person we can be. 'God is glorified by the highest possible development of man's potentialities as a rational being, and every moral act of man has therefore an intrinsic value, (*Aquinas; An introduction to the life and works of the great Medieval thinker*; Copleston ed, 1991; p211).

Quakerism shows more respect to people of other faiths, I have found it more in line with my own beliefs because it is not condescending towards, or fearful of other religions. As Jim Pyn writes in *Listening to the light*, 'Quakers have discovered (realized) that there is within each person something of the Divine. This is not just a small spark; it is our life, our being, and awareness of it is capable of transforming our lives in ways that we could not ever have thought possible.' Unfortunately few people access the true depths of this relationship and fail to realize the full potential of their faith and therefore themselves. I struggle all the time to stay as close to God as He intends me, and rarely fully utilize, or appreciate the beatitude of my own relationship with Him. I find myself continuously wrestling the overwhelming thoughts produced by ego mind.

Dante Alighieri refers to the power of the lower self at the beginning of his epic poem *The Divine Comedy*, he writes "I dragged my stronger foot and limped along", one foot represents the love of God and the other, love of the world. In order to ascend to God, pilgrim must exert great force over his stronger foot, which symbolizes the stronger pull of the world, to prevent himself from slipping back into the "dark wood".

Christ demonstrated how to overcome the divided self, and we find this wisdom, much of which I believe we have lost from Christianity, in the Gnostic Gospels. Sean Martin quotes from The Apocalypse of Peter in his book *The Gnostics, The First Christian Heretics*: 'Jesus explains to Peter that, "He whom you saw on the tree, glad and laughing, this is the living Jesus. But this one into whose hands and feet they drive the nails is his fleshly part, which is the substitute being put to shame, the one who came into being in his likeness. But look at him, and look at me"' (The Nag Hammadi Library in English, Cited by Sean Martin). Jesus has overcome the physical body, no longer living in the flesh and feeling pain but living as spirit.

George Fox believed that Christ's death ended the age of sin and broke mankind's bondage to it as perceived according to the Old Testament. He believed that Christ's crucifixion opened new potential for individuals to leave the old self behind and make spiritual and moral progress towards the perfection spoken of in the gospels, and could once again live as in the first brief age of innocence. When we achieve this, we will be 'no longer a Christian, but Christ' (The Gospel of Phillip, The Gnostic Bible; cited by Sean Martin, *The Gnostics*)

In the higher consciousness we become one with God, and can reflect His love into the world, needlessly and fearlessly 'perfect love casts out fear' (1 John 4:18). When we realize God is all we truly need to be happy, the power of fear disintegrates, because we do not need to hold on to anything, or one, other than Him. Essentially we realize we do not need our ego false sense of security, and ultimately do not need to hold onto physical life. We can trust that we will see our loved ones again and we know true peace lies beyond this world, but we can bring a glimpse of it into the now by keeping our minds eye fixed on spiritual truth. Eckhart Tolle writes, 'every moment your consciousness creates the world that you inhabit...highly conscious beings who are aware of their connectedness with the source and with each other would inhabit a world that to you would appear as a heavenly realm- and yet all worlds are ultimately one' (*The Power of Now*, 1999, p165).

I have had moments of pure bliss when I have been aware of my own soul as my true self, free from my mind and body, from time, from all boundaries between life and death. I have experienced true happiness, complete God consciousness and freedom from ego. However reaching this nirvana and remaining there is an extremely challenging experience and one I struggle with on a daily basis. I am still learning to die entirely to self, crucify my ego, and leave all attachment to this world on the cross.

‘When we come face to face with the cross we have a choice to make: we either recognize its implications and bring ourselves; our passions and all that we are, to be crucified with Christ so that we might live within the sound of his voice and the feel of his heart, or we walk away from the cross and live feeling alienated from God. But this is where the lie comes in- believing that we can be close to the father without dying to ourselves. In Christ’s own ministry this was impossible. We hear so much about “coming to Christ”. We hear too little of being crucified with him. When we come to him with all our past baggage, nothing will change if we do not let that old self be crucified’.

(Ravi Zacharius; Cries of the heart)

This in my opinion represents the main problem with Christianity we are not dying entirely to self. The problems I have highlighted within the Christian church today are the same problems that were challenged by George Fox and his followers in the seventeenth century. They travelled the country in William Penn’s words, ‘calling people to repentance with their hearts as well as their mouths’. ‘They so strongly emphasized salvation through grace-the Light within- that the orthodox accused them of neglecting Jesus Christ’s saving atonement on the cross’ (Williams 2007, p74), I also have been confronted by this same argument. They objected to the priests talking about the blood of Christ without realizing it was inside them. They challenged the authority of the Bible and the Church’s right to rule, and contested the belief that only Christians have the pathway to God.

‘The established church, fearing a religion based purely on the spirit would lead not only to anarchy but a loss of the church’s money and its privileged place in society, had sought alliance with the state to supplement its own authority The Church of England encouraged the official persecution’ (Jane Yolen, *Friend*, 1972, p115). Tens of thousands were imprisoned, thousands died there, many more were tortured and executed. Some of the treatment endured by Fox and his friends is so ridiculous, like being beaten up with The Bible for example, that it is almost comical were it not so appalling.

The degree to which the churches are making these mistakes may have differed but they remain imbedded in the foundations of the Christian faith. I think they still need addressing and in my opinion we must continue carrying the torch for truth, which the early Quakers carried so bravely.

The Problem with “Religion”

I believe that religion is the enemy of truth because it continues to represent man speaking for God, not God speaking through man as he did Jesus. By crucifying Jesus the embodiment of Gods voice, the religious leaders were assuming Gods authority as their own as a result I believe the multitudinous religions of the world are a combination of truth, misrepresentation and guessing. ‘We are shadows of the real but not the real we live by half truths and half facts’, (Ivan Albright, cited by Schwartz, 1996; p40).

The books and teachings intended to aid our enlightenment can become tools to aid our destruction, fanaticism, control, fear and hatred. In losing contact with God we lose sight of His huge perspective and our tiny one becomes all we know. ‘Everything is based on sense experience...but man sets limits to his sensual consciousness and then he atrophies and dies’ (DH Lawrence, 1981, *Apocalypse*, p16). We attempt to squeeze the almighty into boxes of various descriptions limiting our creator to specific books, buildings, human or animal bodies or half human, half animal bodies. The truth becomes adulterated with human intelligence, imagination and insecurity, and Gods message becomes like a Chinese whisper contaminated by human error.

We are closed off from wisdom when we think we have the answers, and become fearful of other beliefs. It is important to remember Socrates statement, ‘the only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing’. When religion gets mixed up with cultural identity, politics and selfish desire, Gods name becomes merely a smokescreen. ‘Once you get rid of the religion you don’t get rid of the bigotry and violence...when you take God out of the problem, you still have the problem of human nature’ (*The Trouble with Atheism*, Channel 4, 18/12/06).

It is this problem of human nature, or as I would term it our weak ego imposter identity, which makes religion so divisive. The majority of the time religion is not arguing about anything other than the argument itself. ‘Quakers believe that the same God who is graciously present with us is also known in other religions of the world, and by all who are ‘humble, meek, merciful, just, pious and devout’...beyond the other faith there is the whole people of God the whole of humanity’ (Quaker Faith and Practice). Whether through religion or science we are attempting to reach the truth from different angles and can only understand a tiny part of Gods picture intellectually, the truth therefore becomes dissected and spread through all areas of our philosophy, art, science and religion.

In his book *The God Delusion* Richard Dawkins argues against the religious or supernatural idea of God, but has no comprehension of a personal God, which is the only way to know Him, ‘science will not discover God, nor should it. The Light is within revealed by inner experience’ (Williams 2007,p110). Whether we see God in nature or science, depends largely on how much we want and expect to. New information can only be understood in the context of what we already understand to be true. It is thought that the brain uses seventy percent memory when interpreting visual information, and the same logic could be applied to psychological knowledge. ‘Only part of what is perceived comes through the senses from the object the remainder always comes from within’ (Lukiest, cited by Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy* 1996; p170).

Richard Dawkins refers to scientific knowledge, which consolidates my understanding of spiritual truth and higher consciousness, rather than undermines it. As Goethe states 'there is a difference between seeing and seeing;...the eyes of the spirit have to work in perpetual living connection with those of the body, for one otherwise risks seeing and yet seeing past a thing' (Goethe on Science, Naydler, 1996; p115). Dawkins argues that we all have a natural tendency towards 'instinctive dualism', which is especially strong in childhood. Philosopher Rene Descartes invented the concept, substance dualism: the division of body and soul. He famously concluded, "I think therefore I am" equating soul with mind. A statement, which according to Eckhart Tolle has 'given expression to the most basic error: to equate thinking with being and identity with thinking' (*The Power of Now*; 1999, p12). Descartes theory became the more secular friendly separation of body and mind. However science backs up spirituality, because neuroscience has demonstrated that mind is a product of brain and the two are connected. Therefore ego/mind is tied to the physical realm, and the soul is specifically spiritual.

Dawkins claims that this innate dual consciousness is evidence for our predisposition to religion and renders us more easily brainwashed into it. I would argue that this is evidence of our instinctive antenna for God and our true nature as soul, which dissipates as we acquire worldly consciousness. Aldous Huxley reflects that in our saturated environment we function on 'the carefully selected utilitarian material which our narrow, individual minds regard as a complete, or at least sufficient, picture of reality' (Aldous Huxley; *Doors of Perception*; 1954, p22). In my opinion many of the belief systems we are socialized into accepting as subjective truth, by the various cultures into which we have been raised, are spiritually polluting. They steer us away from our true heritage as children of God, or "children of the light" as early Quakers preferred to term it.

The origin of life is described by Dawkins as 'a near- impossible chemical event' (p374) and he refers to the significance of the number seven in the process:

'The strong force is 'the force that binds the components of an atomic nucleus, the nuclear force that has to be overcome when one 'splits' the atom. It is measured as E, the proportion of the mass of a hydrogen nucleus that is converted to energy when hydrogen fuses to form helium. The value of this number in our universe is 0.007, and it looks as though it had to be very close to this value in order for any chemistry (which is a prerequisite for life) to exist.' (Dawkins; 2006, p142)

The number seven is reiterated throughout the bible most relevantly in the seven days of creation and most prolifically in *Revelation*: 'These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars' (Revelation 3), 'out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues' (Revelation 15: 6).

Since the Enlightenment the emphasis of our understanding has been based on evidence, which can be empirically verified within the physical realm, and this is the foundation on which Dawkins builds his argument. However he demonstrates that we cannot rely on our limited understanding, or our eyes to interpret truth. He makes the point that the atoms which currently constitute our bodies, are not the same ones that our bodies were contrived of in the past, arguing we were not physically there at all. He quotes Steve Grand 'matter flows from place to place and momentarily comes together to be you' (Dawkins, p372). I immediately related this to my own understanding of the higher consciousness, which involves basing reality on spiritual truth, and accepting the physical realm as illusion,

this coheres with my argument that we are truly our soul self, the external shell is just the casing to which ego attaches identity. Bede Griffith writes 'our error is that we mistake the forms of this world for reality; when the illusion has been dispelled, then we shall know ourselves and all things as they truly are' (p 173).

Patricia Williams discusses the similarities between science and Quakerism. In her book *Quakerism: A Theology for our Time* she describes how the early Quakers explained the biblical fall into ego consciousness and how the Quaker interpretation of a metaphorical Bible is congruent with scientific evidence. She writes 'theology today can retain early Quakerism's core and place it in the new framework science offers, from the big bang, to the evolution of our species, to evolutionary psychology. Evolutionary psychology derives from the fact that we evolved and inherited dispositions from ancestors going back millions and even billions of years, rather than possessing a fallen nature inherited from Adam and Eve. (2007; p8)'

The new discoveries in Quantum mechanics have changed sciences concept of matter, it is no longer thought to be solid and comprehensible but intangible, intelligent, energy. Which is in keeping with a spiritual definition of God 'As Briton notes, modern science fits spirituality far better than the older, mechanistic science' (Williams 2007, p103). Williams suggests that the "Tao" in *Tao Te Ching* and "The word" in the Bible are potentially the same as constant string theory; science currently suggests that tiny strings vibrate at different wavelengths, which underlie everything. She points out that science uses metaphor to explain the indescribable, in the same way that spirituality does, but argues these similarities are lost in orthodoxy. However, negative comparisons can also be made between science and religion.

I believe science to be a hybrid of fact and speculation, In his essay *Tall Tales and Tortoises* published in *New Scientist* Henry Nicholls writes, 'Inaccurate histories of science are all around us. This leaves me with what may sound like a surprising question; does it matter? They persist because people are so keen to believe them, and because they fill a need for narrative.' (15th July; 2006) The same could be said about religion, which will do whatever it takes to preserve the fictional narrative it is constructed on, repressing whoever stands in its way, presenting truth through science like Galileo, or through spirituality like George Fox.

Science is usually developed attesting good intentions but with the potential for huge misuse, for example genetic engineering or the Atomic bomb; the test explosion site in the New Mexico desert led Robert Oppenheimer to exclaim 'I am become death, the destroyer of worlds' (cited by Gillott and Kumar, 1995; p263). The same is true of religion; we combine truth with our own ideas and act from our intellect rather than Gods. The intention maybe good but preaching religion with insufficient wisdom and humility is destructive not productive:

'Humility means being aware that no one possesses the truth, but that all of us stand under the judgement of truth, the humble man knows that he needs the help of others to see events and circumstances truly, and so he watches carefully to detect what his enemies may be seeing that he doesn't. Aware of his own past errors of judgement, mistakes and misperceptions, as well as of the potential distortions introduced by his own passions and urgent interests, and recognizing from past experience his own limits, he shows his adversaries and weaker allies a serious and genuine respect'. (Novat, *A Universal Culture of Human Rights*; Dunning ed, 2003; p263)

A New Spirituality

I believe that the way forward is the polarization of Religion and spirituality, all faiths coming together and learning from each other, the truth rising up from contaminated religion. As the author of reflection four in *Twelve Quakers and Jesus* writes: 'I...learnt how the Jewish and Christian traditions and religious writings had developed, and came to see them as a record of one of the strands of evolving human religious consciousness' (2007,p12). Also science, philosophy, art and politics must start working in conduction with a higher spiritual consciousness. 'Arthur Peacocke, biochemist and Anglican priest, calls for a radical revision of Christianity. It fails, he concludes to fit the standard of rational enquiry. Christianity must stop clinging to authority, whether the Pope, The Bible, or The church...moreover he says, many doctrines must go: the virgin birth, the empty tomb, original sin, and the atonement. Instead religion and science must join hands, seeking a mutual explanation of a common reality' (Williams 2007, p121).

I believe that were there more humility and open-mindedness in religion and science, they could work together for the glory of God. Galileo although persecuted by the Catholic Church was no threat to spirituality, only religion, believing that God was the answer to two great books 'the Bible' and 'nature' (*The Story of God*, BBC1 18/12/05). In my opinion all areas of intellectual significance could benefit from a closer relationship with their adversaries, Goethe wrote:

'Everything we call invention and discovery in the higher sense is...the activation of an internal feeling for truth, which has long unobtrusively been developing and then suddenly and unexpectedly leads with lightning speed to fruitful knowledge. It is a revelation, which proceeds from within the human being, to act on the external world, and it gives us an intimation of our kinship with God. It is a synthesis of mind with the external world, and it gives the most comforting assurance of the eternal harmony of all that exists.' (*Goethe on Science*, 1996; p120)

We are at a pivotal, wake up or die, moment in history, because all the current destruction to the planet and one another is not an accident but a manifestation of the destructive power of the ego, the 'egoic mind has become like a sinking ship. If you don't get off, you will go down with it' (Tolle, 2005; p84). The negative imposter self is attempting to consume everything beautiful and positive and replace it with devastation. We experience it personally as worry, addiction, anorexia, stress, suicide or socially as violence, vandalism, or theft and globally as war or pollution. D H Lawrence writes in *Apocalypse*:

'How they long for the destruction of the cosmos, secretly, these men of mind and spirit! How they work for its domination and final annihilation! But alas, they only succeed in spoiling the earth, spoiling life, and in the end destroying mankind! Instead of the cosmos, man cannot destroy the cosmos; that is obvious. But it is obvious that the cosmos can destroy man. Man must inevitably destroy himself, in conflict with the cosmos. It is perhaps his fate'. (*Apocalypse*, 1981; p172)

The spiritual God consciousness is starting to rise, and is a product of tension encompassing the globe, which leaves us nowhere to go but up. I experience this new consciousness attempting to rise within me on a daily basis and it is extremely challenging, frustrating and occasionally traumatic. I also see it manifesting itself in other people, who are similarly struggling with consuming ego. Making us feel that we do not want to be here on earth at all, but it is the ego consciousness that we are no longer meant to be living in, and God is ensuring we don't remain there any longer. When we start to evolve on mass we can draw all the fragments of truth together and start working as one. I am encouraged by the popularity of such books as *The Power of Now* and its message being shared through seminars like the 'Be the Change', inspired by the Gandhi quote 'you must be the change you want to see in the world', invited to lecture at Quaker area meeting. However the initial stages of physically realizing this new way of thinking, which will lead to a new way of living is laborious:

'We knew that through wave after wave of successive generations we would be born into the physical plane, and no matter how long it took, we would strive to wake up and unify and evolve, and eventually implement on earth the same spiritual culture that exists in the afterlife. Certainly the journey would be difficult even torturous, with the first intuition to awaken, we would sense the fear of aloneness and separation. Yet we would not go back to sleep, we would fight through the fear, relying on the dim intuition that we weren't alone, that we were spiritual beings with a spiritual purpose on the planet' (James Redfield, *The Celestine Prophecy; Tenth Insight*)

To bring in this new consciousness the secular world needs to accept there is more to understanding ourselves, and our purpose on the planet than the understanding the physical world and gaining pleasure from it. As Einstein stated, 'not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted' (cited by Davies, *Social Responsibility and Corporate Values*, Dunning ed, 2003; p317). Limiting our knowledge to our immediate environment is creating an intellectual goldfish bowl. 'Kept in a small bowl the goldfish will remain small, with more space the fish will grow double, triple or quadruple its size' (Tim Burton, *Big Fish*; 2003). We are not breaking beyond the fish bowl while we are dissecting what it is made of, Bede Griffith writes:

'Western science and technology are based on a false philosophy which has undermined the whole of western civilization. It is based on the belief...that the human mind can examine this world objectively and so arrive at a knowledge of "reality" which will give him control over the world...the old fashioned view of science and reality still dominates the ordinary man in the west....The only hope lies in a deliberate break with the whole system and an attempt to reconstruct science and technology on a new basis. This will only come when the world has undergone a radical change of consciousness- a change which will probably be accompanied by a breakdown of the present system- and has recovered the wisdom of the ancient world, the world not only of Christian Europe but of India and China and Islam (The Golden String, p8).

Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche attacked this concept of physical reality being illusionary, and the lesser world. He recommended we address the nihilism of a pointless existence, which we have made pointless ourselves by removing spirituality as Schwartz writes in *The Culture of the Copy*, 'Boredom becomes the despondency of the tin human,

whose chest is hollow' (Schwartz; 1996, p317), not by seeking spiritual enlightenment, but by getting everything we can out of life, through our "will to power". He suggested we take control of our lives by assuming the freedom to do as we please and become our own Gods or "supermen". Nietzsche wrote 'any activity or emotions that can lead to the experience of intense feelings are to be actively pursued', among the most powerful according to Nietzsche are: music, singing, dancing, sexual excitement, making love, giving birth, hatred, fighting and war' (Sarah O' Brien Twohig; *Dix and Nietzsche*, 1992, p41).

Nietzsche's concept of humanity assuming Gods power for itself because, "God is dead, God remains dead and we have killed him" inspired Hitler and Nietzsche died of syphilis (Hallowell and Porter; *Political Philosophy* 1997; p610). Which demonstrates where a rebellion against Gods authority leaves us, however we are still embracing his concept of reveling in free will regardless of the personal, social or environmental costs. In this current world, our carnal, heart and material desires take precedence. However our souls desire the discarding of all ephemeral, external happiness for internal peace in union with God, living harmoniously with each other, as our true selves.

We have saturated our intellects with the opinions of scientists and philosophers and have inundated our habitat with visual and audio static. When in search of something deeper we are faced with an array of disparate religions and denominations within religions, which offer us somebody else's interpretation of god. Baudrillard writes, 'The human species could be dedicating itself to a sort of automatic writing of the world, to automated and operationalized virtual reality, where human beings as such have no reason for existing anymore. Human subjectivity becomes a set of useless functions, as useless as sexuality is to clones.' (Baudrillard *The Vital Illusion*; 2000, p47)

In my opinion we therefore must become united in spiritual truth, by each listening to and obeying God, for me Gods truth is the only objective truth and we can only hear God subjectively. As Jung argues 'it is precisely the most subjective ideas which being closest to nature and the living being deserve to be called truest, but what is truth? (*Modern Man in Search of a Soul*; 1933, p133)' When we learn to recognize the God voice within we have direct access to Gods' truth and wisdom. We have an individual, free and spontaneous faith without fear or categorization. The early Quakers used many metaphors for this God voice within, the most popular being the Inward Light.

I started attending Quaker meetings because it is closer to my own Christian beliefs than church based orthodox Christianity. I have found many profound and important values amongst friends: The Holy Spirit has room to move and to use everyone to teach, because human control is kept to a minimum. Nobody or belief system stands between us and the living God, He is our teacher and we teach one another, we do not assume god's wisdom as our own, but understand we are the vessel. We do not follow a small God but consider Him in terms of light, vast, infinite and uncontainable. As described by artist Gary Fabian Miller, 'I'm drawn to the Christian theology that sees God in light....I'm interested in pursuing man in relation to nature and larger concepts such as light and light- giving life' (Fabian-Miller, 2005; p17). Reflecting the Gnostic idea of Jesus being 'light dwelling in light' and 'wearing a garment of light'.

The strength of Quakerism is the emphasis on our personal subjective inner God voice; once we learn to discern this voice for ourselves audibly, emotionally and instinctively, it becomes a comfort, guide and teacher, and we become His living word. We have no need for books, creeds, church buildings or intercessors. Our inner voice is the solid foundation by

which we vet all outside information, gained via other people of all faiths, through books and art, ancient or modern or, visions, dreams and premonitions. By releasing Gods voice from the church, the Bible and all religion we have a much more spontaneous and inspired relationship with our source, we do not go off course because we have a map within us.

It is only when we start relying on external maps and look to someone else to guide us that we lose our innate instincts, like the ancient wisdom of memorized landmarks and waterholes being replaced by maps. When we start listening to and trusting our minds over our instincts, then our pathways become restricted, like the lines on a map there is no space for serendipity. Our inner voice is all we can trust to keep us from getting lost in the wilderness of religious opinion, which is in my perception infected with limiting human intelligence. Carl Jung writes, 'the statements of the conscious mind may easily be snares and delusions, lies or arbitrary opinions, but this is certainly not true of the statements of the soul' (*Answers to Job*, 1954; p15).

It is vital to empty both our environment and our minds to hear our God essence and our true selves. As John Main writes in *Word into Silence* 'The all-important aim in Christian meditation is to allow God's mysterious and silent presence within us to become more and more not only *a* reality, but *the* reality in our lives; to let it become that reality which gives meaning, shape and purpose to everything we do, to everything we are (p3; 1980)'. By meditating continuously on the light we can access a far deeper level of closeness to God. J I Parker writes that meditation is the means for turning knowledge about God into knowledge of God, 'Its purpose is to clear one's mental and spiritual vision of God, and to let its truth make its full and proper impact on ones mind and heart' (Knowing God).

When I am focusing on God and sufficiently still, I become aware of two divine voices within me, one voice I recognize instinctively as my father God, but there is another curious voice which I know to be my true self, I call it my soul voice. Sometimes in prayer my own mind which is praying for something which my ego fear is battling with, is occasionally interrupted by a deeper self which starts praying the correct way, saying I trust you father, your will be done. My conscious mind does not change direction, my true self just takes over and this is a bizarre experience. Although I am aware it is my higher self and is the true me I have become so identified with the imposter ego voice as self, that this other voice is somehow foreign and yet familiar. The Gnostic Nag Hammadi text, *The Exegesis on the Soul* contains the following about the soul regaining its true nature:

The soul stirred. Her divine nature and her rejuvenation came from her father so she might return to where she was before. This is resurrection from the dead. This is ransom from captivity. This is the ascent to heaven...The text then urges the reader to repent through prayer, not by using our physical voices...but with the spirit, which is inside and comes from the depths (Sean Martin, *The Gnostics* p91)

I find that when in deep meditation God will speak to my current condition through visual metaphor. Whilst attending a group Christian meditation this morning I became aware of the need to relearn everything from a spiritual perspective, to reach a place where I was walking and talking singularly with God. I imagined myself in a womb like state, only rather than my mother's body I was in Gods womb Mother Nature, surrounded by a massive universe rather than confined to a human body. God was sustaining my every physical and emotional need through a spiritual umbilical cord. My job was only to lay suspended, weightless, naked and empty of material possession or human name and ego identity, with

God alone my provider and companion, warm, comfortable, at peace. This was a powerful experience and as the meditation group began to disperse, I felt I didn't want to leave my comfortable, safe environment. However it occurred to me I didn't have to God would carry me around inside him, as a mother does her unborn child. I would have no autonomy and no say in where I was going. I would just lay comfortably content, going in whatever direction God intended.

In Taking leave of God Don Cuppitt writes, 'To become spirit I have to die to death by breaking out of the old habit-bound, decaying and egotistical self and letting myself be created anew. Because I have to cease being a painfully self-limited self, the basic disposition I need in order to achieve salvation is simple receptivity and self-surrender' (2001, p122). By surrendering our ego, we access our higher self, as we each slowly evolve into our true selves, we will begin to live in a new spiritual consciousness. To access this soul self we must be continually turning our faces towards God to reflect his nature. We must look at the world through spiritual eyes, by being more conscious of God than ourselves, returning to our nature before we became self-conscious at the fall. Brother Lawrence wrote 'I renounce for the love of him everything that was not he, and I began to live as if there was none but he or I in the world...keeping my mind in his Holy presence, and recalling it as often as I found it wandering from him (The Practice of the presence of God).

Quakerism seeks to eliminate all unnecessary practices, because they can become habitual and obstruct our relationship with God rather than enhance it. However I value many Christian practices, which are not particular to Christianity and were practiced by Jesus, especially prayer, but also fasting and Baptism. I believe that all these things amongst others have crystallized my inner instinct for Gods truth, which I have used in conjunction with knowledge gain from many books including the Bible.

Although I struggle personally with the Bible, and believe it is undermined by editing and interpretation. I am aware it does contain powerful words of truth, and is a tool to assist us in our spiritual journey and personal challenges. Fox himself referred to the Bible regularly in his debates and speeches, but he understood its metaphorical relevance and the primary importance of our inner truth over all else, an area in which orthodox Christianity is still lacking. Knowing the Bible and using it correctly can aid us in rectifying Christianity as Fox did in his debates, and Barclay did in *Catechism*, to argue Quakerism follows scripture more adequately than Protestantism.

There are examples of Baptist type practices within the Buddhist faith, and Gandhi baptized himself in the Ganges on his return from England. The Gnostics attached great value to baptism believing that it was during his baptism that Gods divine nature entered Christ. Sean Martin writes:

'Baptism, as in the mainstream church, enters the Gnostic into the faith. Given the importance that some Gnostics (such as the Italian Valentinians) placed on Jesus' own baptism at the hands of John the Baptist, its importance cannot be overstated. Becoming baptized was a way of showing that one had renounced one's former life and was entering a new one, which would lead ultimately to returning to the Pleroma and the true God' (The Gnostics p59).

George Fox and another prominent early Quaker Robert Barclay believed Baptism to be an inward experience. They believed as I do, that we are baptized by the transforming light of God and by his spirit, they therefore saw no need for an outward expression of this. I

agree that God works in us gradually transforming us by his grace daily, however I postulate that if Jesus decided to be baptized with water then we should follow his example, not mechanically, or because everyone else has, but as the spirit in us propounds, performed not by a minister, but by the spirit of God in anyone. Jesus hears the voice of God succeeding his baptism, and after some refining challenges in the desert he starts his own ministry, having previously followed John the Baptist. Jesus' Baptism is a mark of spiritual maturity, he subsequently carries Gods message himself, as a purified vessel.

I believe baptism to be the outward acknowledgement of Gods transforming power within us. It is a means of thanking God and demonstrating our commitment to being changed by Him and living for Him alone. It is a way of saying my life belongs to you and I will work with you to become a better person, in a similar way that marriage seals an already established and growing relationship. Barclay makes this association between human relationships and the love of God, he uses the metaphor of people in love, who constantly remember the beloved and avoid doing anything that might upset them, suggesting we all love God in this way.

I came to Quakers with an established and profound personal relationship with God, but what about the many individuals who have not had the opportunity to re-establish and fully comprehend this relationship? Although as I mentioned earlier I have problems with the Christian church it provided me with a solid foundation to love myself, to understand that God loves me and love him back, by living my life for him. It helped me to establish will power over destructive, hedonistic ways of living and to respect myself. I agree with the Quaker message "each man is his own minister". However I am sympathetic with the majority both secular and religious who have lost contact with the voice of God within them.

I consider a certain degree of loving guidance is required to assist people in rediscovering the spirit of their true self, their inner light and to establishing a personal relationship with their spiritual source. The spirit of God within has become so buried that believers and non-believers alike must be re-connected to "the teacher in himself", before they can follow its guidance. Fox believed his calling was to lead people to the inner Christ "their teacher, their counsellor, their shepherd to feed them, and their bishop to oversee them and their prophet to open to them, and to know their bodies to be the temple of God and Christ for them to dwell in" (Williams 2007, p38). I agree passionately with Fox however my argument with modern Quakerism is, are group attendees, members and visitors being adequately guided to their inner voice? I personally feel there is an element of being left to our own devices to make of God what we will.

George Fox would write and preach prolifically about unity in prayer, unity with one another and unity with God. I would like to suggest perhaps opening the meeting for worship with a prayer to offer the meeting to God, to ask for his help connecting us with each other, and the light for the hour, and ending with a prayer to ask God to help us stay connected with him throughout the coming week. Also perhaps some time set aside specifically for sharing what God has shown us during the hours meditation would be useful, before we discuss general notices, it would provide greater opportunity to learn from one another's personal experiences. I often want to share the visions God has shown me after meeting for worship and sometimes do, to which other people tell me what they were experiencing and a discussion takes its own initiative. I find that within the Christian church our attention is taken away too quickly from spiritual matters by secular discussion and tea and biscuits, it is what I term tea and biscuit Christianity.

The Quaker decision making practice of taking every members opinion into consideration is inclusive and keeps the movement united through equality and democracy, which is far more constructive than the dictatorial leadership of the church. It enables the spirit of the majority to be heard and the Holy Spirit to be the lead. However it is of vital import to ensure the majority gathered in discussion, are familiar with the voice of the light within them and their instincts are in tune with Gods intentions. To ensure the will of God is the loudest voice, and not opinions derived from individual intellect, mind and ego. Patricia Williams writes 'discernment is a perennial problem for people claiming spiritual enlightenment. Are there any signs or tests enabling the people themselves or, better yet, objective observers, to know they are spiritually inspired rather than egocentrically self-deceived or even demon-driven' (2007, p43).

If we are walking sufficiently within the light we can develop an ability to recognize the origin of our thoughts, words and feelings. I have had the beatitude to be able to discern instinctively, that which is in line with God and that which is not. If I am unsure, or someone asks me something I do not have the answer to, I ask God, and usually God tells me. I generally never ask questions which I believe is knowledge intended to be out of bounds to humanity at this time.

The control exercised by the church in an attempt to keep Satan or ego out, only results in it being trapped within the church. Ego will always invade to a degree whether you control everything or not, because we are all human and fallible. There has been dissention within early Quakers and groups have been segregated because of differing beliefs. There has been the unfortunate tale of James Nayer and his followers, attaching too much ego to his Jesus identity. However by having the faith and trust in the power of the spirit to always prevail, the serendipity of God can flow.

Quakers are most importantly submission to the authority of God alone and have a genuine desire to realize Gods truth without the interference of man. I believe this has kept the vision of George Fox and the early Quakers alive, but perhaps the passion and desire to see Gods truth realized throughout Britain and its churches is lacking. I pray to see the revolutionary spirit of the Quakers challenging the lies, which have undermined both the foundation of our churches and the culture of British Society today.

I believe that mainstream Christianity should be thinking more Quaker, and Quakerism should be promoting the example of authentic Christianity, not bible based and dogmatic but unorthodox and spirit based. Offering all the good aspects of traditional Christianity, with none of the bad ones, which I identified in 'The Problems with Christianity'. I believe that it was George Fox's intention for all of Christianity to embrace his vision of simplistic, inspired, spiritual faith open to wisdom of God in everyone regardless of gender, age or belief, Fox wanted to return to the simple Christianity of the Bible.

Quakerism understands the value of our empirical experience making us all profit and ministers including those of other faiths, and has the important role of refining Christian truth. I would like to see all the various denominations considering early forms of Christianity, which became sidelined to establish a specific vision preferred by the early church, and a reintroduction of the lost books of the Bible like The Gnostic Gospels. Basing the Christian faith on God inside of us, consuming us with light, so that God is no longer thought of as outside of us, limited to Jesus and the Bible but we become him. 'Maximus...talked of Jesus as someone transformed and transfigured by the divine-representing what we could/would all become' (author four anon, *Twelve Quakers and Jesus*, p14).

I believe those with the fire of God in their hearts, and an instinct for His truth should be speaking out to the church as George Fox and the early Quakers did, in an assiduous attempt to steer them back on the course Jesus intended for Christianity. All the great faiths contain wisdom of union with God and we can learn from the truth within them, to build one complete picture of God's truth. We need to bring the true Christianity to Gods wisdom and spirituality in the other faiths, Bede Griffith Writes 'There is only one "absolute" religion or an "absolute" way and that is the religion of the Holy Spirit, which is the spirit of love, present in some measure in every religion and in every man, and drawing all men into this unity for which man was created' (*The Golden String*; p4).

In my opinion we need to lose the concept of religion, it is an outdated word, which describes man made, and man manipulated interpretations of God. These ideas compromise Gods' truth as I discussed in *The Problem with Religion*. George Fox believed that religions are often ways to resist the transforming power of God and is why he was so critical of both Protestantism and Catholicism. The religious idea of man assuming ownership of God has resulted in Gods' own authority and truth being challenged and termed blasphemous. The stories of both Jesus Christ and George Fox attest to this, as they were both victim to human control and earthly power, which corrupts spirituality and sabotages the truth.

During one of the many court cases held in order to acquire evidence of George Fox claiming Gods power, he was asked: "Are you sanctified? Have you no sin? Are you then Christ?" Fox would not say that he was God only that there was God in everyone but the judges sentenced him to six months for blasphemy. At the Lancaster courtroom, forty priests colluded with one another to lie about Fox. All their evidence was hearsay and second hand, none of them had heard him preach. These accounts of Fox echo Jesus questioning by the high priest, which led to his crucifixion for blasphemy: "I put you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God!" (Matthew 26:63)

This is the legacy left by religious mindedness and why I believe the word should be disassociated with Quakerism. I prefer the spiritual and inclusive term "children of the light" used by the early Quakers or just "Society of Friends" as Quakers became known in the 1800s, rather than the term "The Religious Society of Friends". Or perhaps friends of the light, or friends in the light, to me seem to more accurately reflect the disposition of Quakerism.

Conclusion

The future of the Quakers is in my opinion the same as the future of all faiths, to help raise the consciousness spiritually amongst Churches and religions. Bringing the different denominations of Christianity together, to establish a truly spiritual faith and converging this with the spirituality within other beliefs. Respecting peoples right to worship in different ways rather than losing the idiosyncrasies, and celebrating diversity socially, amongst our country and its culture. Quakerism is in the ideal position for bringing the faiths together, because it is built on a spiritual foundation of the truth within, not a religious foundation based on somebody else's narrative. 'I have become a Quaker following Jesus, not a Christian following the Church' (reflection 10, *Twelve Quakers and Jesus*; 2007,p27). We need the spirituality to rise up from religion to regain a solid foundation for ourselves, our culture and society.

T.S. Elliot writes 'men have left God not for other Gods, but for no God; and this has never happened before' (*Selected Poems*; 1958). We have been living in the age of science since the ironically named enlightenment, when we closed down our minds to spiritual truth and looked to science for the answers, but progress without being sagacious about how to use our intelligence becomes a destructive weapon. As the character Alexander, in Tarkovsky's film *The Sacrifice*, laments in his soliloquy:

'Man has defended himself always, against other men, against nature. He has constantly violated nature. The result is a civilization built on force, power, fear, dependence. All our "technological progress" has only provided us with comfort, a sort of standard. And instruments of violence to keep power...as soon as we make a scientific breakthrough we put it to use in the service of evil. And as for the standard, some wise man once said that sin is that, which is unnecessary, if that is so, then our entire civilization is built on sin from beginning to end. We have acquired a dreadful disharmony an imbalance if you will between our material and our spiritual development'. (Andrei Tarkovsky; 1986)

The next generation to which 'neither religion nor its denial seem very important anymore' (Miller, Brief History of Disbelief, BBC2 07/11/05), currently needs to be inspired by a spiritual vision, a spirituality accessible to everyone and a respect for each other and our planet. By working in conjunction with all faiths, we can reunite fragmented spiritual truth and overhaul outdated religious beliefs and practices. The morals of Quaker conscientiousness need to underpin our society as instrumental in awakening the new consciousness. We need to be proactive in ways which raise conscious awareness, socially, environmentally and spiritually, by taking seminars like 'Be The Change', which highlighted the urgency to wake up, to a wider audience.

When you mention the word Quaker, people usually associate it with porridge oats, it is a typical reflection of current British culture that the Quaker name should be remembered for, and associated with, commercial success over spiritual. However it also demonstrates the conservatism of modern Quakers in comparison to the founding believers of the movement, as Jane Yolen writes 'the next period of Quakerism was different.... The Quaker church was no longer willing to go out and save the world' (*Friend*, 1972, p166). I think we need to rejuvenate the message of the Quaker movement because, 'Coming into Gods kingdom and

seeing it realized on earth is the very purpose of being a Quaker' (anon, reflection three, *Twelve Quakers and Jesus*).

Quakerism has become very English, polite and politically correct in comparison to its formative years. Since the revolutionary attitude of the first Quakers, it seems that Quakerism has been content to keep its head down, 'when the Georgian years of ease came, they would be years of outward respectability and inward spiritual decline' (Braithwaite, cited by Yolen, 1972, p166), I don't think that the true spirit of the first Quakers has been carried into today's Quakerism. Issac Pennington says 'the Quakers form a fellowship that meets in the Light, not an assembly that agrees with each other. Unity is preserved by staying in the Light not by conformity. He thinks mutual agreement might be satisfying, but it does not imply obedience to the Spirit.' (Williams 2007, p39) I believe as the early Quakers did that the truth should be elevated no matter what the cost, not aggressively but firmly and respectfully. I think we owe it to the Friends who gave everything, to continue their work of liberating the truth throughout the churches and our society.

I believe we should be following the example of the first Quakers who confronted deception within the church, society and the marketplace. Practica Williams writes 'The Light brings all into harmony, so carrying the good news to others is important for the flourishing of humanity on an ecologically variable Earth'. (2007, p137) The consciousness is rising gradually within Christianity, and other religions, the church will be more responsive to Fox's vision. We have far less to lose, we are not going to be beaten or locked up, and as I have demonstrated George Fox's message still needs delivering. I believe we owe it to those who lost their lives, to speak diplomatically to church leaders and write letters highlighting the true message of Christianity.

The anonymous author of reflection three in *Twelve Quakers and Jesus* writes 'I was becoming frustrated with a religion that seemed to be defining itself by what it was *not*: we don't have creeds, we don't have sacraments, we don't have priests' (p10). Rather than taking the Christianity out of Quakerism, I would like to embrace the true spirit of Christianity and see the dogma taken out and the fear it has induced redressed. Orthodox Christianity has misused the Bible and distorted Christ's message. However we should not condemn our Christian heritage. I believe it is the task of true spiritual Christianity to undo the damage inflicted by religious Christianity, by resurrecting the true message of Jesus and using the Bible, as it was intended; complete with the rediscovered books to expatiate the deeper truth that Christ epitomized.

I believe that Jesus is our primary example of walking, living, breathing and most importantly, speaking the truth of God. Quakerism has become a refuge for many disillusioned Christians who have come to escape the self-righteous, narrow-minded, controlling tendencies, within some orthodox Christian churches, but how do we retain the spiritual wisdom of Christ without the Dogma of Christianity? In my opinion we must be careful of stripping Quakerism of all things Christian for fear of being too religious. I understand that Quakerism must remain accessible to all, and different Quaker meetings function differently; I have only visited a few other meetings than my own. I am also aware of the previous problems the Quaker movement has had with people trying to reintroduce doctrinal Christianity to Quakerism. However whereas some may find Quakerism too Christian, I have found meetings for worship to have largely lost its Christian roots, so how do we find the balance?

I believe we need a combination of personal quiet time with God, and teaching from other sources, as John Churchman stated in 1734 'Ministry should be of necessity, and not of choice, and there is no living by silence, or by preaching merely'. (Quaker Faith and Practice). It is vital that the hour worship be reserved for God to speak and not us, with the exception of occasional God inspired ministry, however it is easy for Quakerism to become too silent. I believe we should be sharing and learning from each other more, so that God can work through us, this is particularly important for people in the early stages of their search for depth and truth, who may not know God, or much about Quakerism.

We should also be reaching out to the secular world and encouraging the next generation to listen to the voice of God within them, not through religious preaching, but by appealing to the deep truth within each of us. Therefore compensating for the spiritual void created amongst our current generation, which it attempts to fill by consumption of all kinds: Sex, food, shopping, drugs, alcohol, relationships, whatever the ego is filling with, anything other than God. Something as simple as watching television to alleviate boredom or loneliness demonstrates how the world has become a surrogate parent to fill the spiritual void, but we are growing up insecure and malnourished as a result. We each contain the seed of our true nature, the soul self, before we were given an earthly name and earthly fears and anxieties, but we need fertile soil, fecund ground in which to flourish.

We have been sold a lie through all areas of our civilization, which is why George Fox calls us to 'Be valiant for the truth upon the earth'. We are not sinful by nature, as religion has suggested, we do not have selfish genes as science has suggested, and God is not dead, as philosophy has suggested. I do not believe Jesus is going to return to save us, we are going to have to take responsibility for turning back the damage ourselves, by crucifying our own egos as illustrated in the Gnostic Gospel of Phillip 'Jesus came to crucify the world' (Martin, *The Gnostics*, 2006, p86). Similarly Eckhart Tolle writes in *The Power of Now* that Jesus will return through us. In *A New Earth* Tolle writes:

'When faced with a radical crises, when the old way of being in the world, of interacting with the realm of nature doesn't work anymore, when survival is threatened by seemingly insurmountable problems, an individual life-form -or a species- will either die or become extinct or rise above the limitations of its condition through an evolutionary leap...A significant portion of the earth's population will soon recognize, if they haven't already done so, that humanity is now faced with a stark choice: evolve or die. A still relatively small but rapidly growing percentage of humanity is already experiencing within themselves the breakup of the old egoic mind patterns and the emerging of a new dimension of consciousness. (2005, p21)

Our external environment is the product of years of increasing ego unconsciousness and distance from God. It seems we are currently sleepwalking into death, I think it imperative that we wake up now before the damage done becomes irreversible. It is not as simple as changing our habits and being conscientious; it involves a whole shift in planetary consciousness, becoming one with God and each other to access our true power and potential as children of Light. We must listen intently to our source, each other and our instincts, step out of our comfort zones, and follow the example of George Fox and all the other spiritual teachers, who choose God over life, truth over lies and 'light and love' over 'darkness and death'.

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