

The Radical Hope of Quakerism

Locating Quakers in Today's Landscape

Context

We find ourselves in a 'post-modern' world (some call this post-industrial, or late capitalism) in which grand narratives and organised religion are marginalised, and where truth is reduced to individual perception. We experience a plural, fast changing world, fragmented and cosmopolitan, technology filled, global experience, a world of filled with choice and yet a world that can be paradoxically totalising and alienating. The demise of institutional religion, we are told creates freedom from authoritarian belief systems (critiqued by Fox and the Early Friends years before) secularisation takes hold and some turn to spirituality, without identifying with any specific religion.

However through both there is a loss of community (Putnam¹). The lack of community and lack of shared values mean that ethical choices are more difficult to discern, and the space left by religion has mainly been filled by ethics of the market. It is hard to escape consumerism as the market seeps into every nook and cranny of our life-worlds (Klein²). Anyone bringing up children knows this challenge.

¹ Naomi Klein in No-Logo describes the dystopia of our society saturated with so many images and adverts on every public and private space that we have become numbed, to its pervasive impact on us

² Putnam's Bowling Alone, describes in his research how in all aspects of USA life community is in demise. The one exception are Pentecostal and Evangelical churches who contribute both to their own community and to wider civil participation

Our secular post-Christian society privileges individualism and choice, and yet there is 'smoke and mirrors' trickery going on. For our individual experience, and our freedoms is manifested, and limited by the society in which we exist. Thus our choices are shaped by a highly individualistic, materialistic and consumer society. We are bombarded from birth to death with advertising, images and 'consumer choice' and our lives are socially constructed from the bricolage of media influences we are subconsciously fed. Media moguls share with global financiers the honours of being the new 'masters of the empire'. This consumer society is totalising and pervasive force. Individual choice is therefore limited to that of the market. It is in this context that we explore what Quakerism in the XX1 century.

Quakers early leadings highlighted individual experience (of the divine) over religious dogma, to the exasperation of other churches. Theirs was a radical and counter-cultural message challenging the dominant culture of the day, which they experienced as authoritarian, oppressive and leading people away from God. However early Friends individualism was bounded by two other forces; the faith community and a radical reading of the scriptures. Today the individualism we as Quakers claim, (free from creeds etc) is no-longer counter-cultural but reflects the post-modern condition of fragmentation, atomisation, individualism and relativism, where truth is dismissed, and with it justice. For some Friends, individualism free from religious institutional beliefs is good way to 'brand' Quakers, to promote how contemporary and modern we are. And it is true, we attract newcomers disillusioned from other

churches on this basis. Yet we are in very dangerous territory, potentially losing our radical core (which I will explore later) and simply mirroring society around us. We become consumers of the divine, making God fit our own individual desire. This limits an individual's opportunity to test their faith against a community belief system and tradition. An individualistic bricolage of belief, emerges at the expense of engaging and struggling with a challenging faith that demands from us to reach out to the stranger and to love our neighbour. This drift towards personalised and narcissistic belief, happens in spite of much goodwill and spiritual searching, but it is the inevitable outcome of the age, whereby individual desire is king. Paradoxically like in the rest of consumer society the desire can never be fulfilled.

Today Quakers face two simultaneous challenges:

- 1) The loss of numbers/members reflecting the general demise of religious bodies in the UK which is impacting on our religious society as with other churches.
- 2) Our ultra 'liberal' drift towards a mainstream belief in individual choice that leads to relativism. This undermines community, shared belief and values and our distinctive Quaker radicalism and practice.

Finding a Faith Community: Personal pilgrimage

I will address the above challenges throughout this paper. To begin I will share this short personal narrative to reflect how Quakerism can transform and renew worship.

I became a Friend 15 years ago, having explored many other faith traditions. I was glad to be received into a non-judgemental community, however when I tried to explore this faith community, I was disappointed by the results. I encountered a 'gathered people' of stutterer's' fearful of proclaiming something that might be divisive, or simply not knowing what their faith tradition was. A collusive silence pushed the 'big questions' out of the way, and this was reflected in the ministry, which was often safe. The ministry didn't strike me as particularly Quakerly, it was similar to what any liberal humanist might share. Occasionally someone offered something very personal, but as a psychotherapist in my past, I wondered whether Quakerism was drifting into the territory of 'therapeutic space' where people came to refresh themselves and use meeting as a personal space, and kind of self help group. Other times, one would hear ministry that spoke to the condition of the meeting, as if the divine was leading an individual. I recall ministering in the USA and a very elderly Friend came up to me saying "you were used well today Friend". It is this sense of being used by the divine, which makes Quaker worship distinctive and different from a meditation or a self-help group. Quaker worship is to create a space for the divine to work in us as individuals and collectively.

I went on a pilgrimage over a number of years to explore the Quaker tradition myself, through reading, studying, researching and talking to many Friends and attending many meetings over the world. Quietly and unexpectedly I underwent a deep 'spiritual formation'. I recognised within myself an unfathomable belief in God that had been suppressed within me, but which

emerged and was fed by repetition of contemplative worship, reading text (the Bible, Friends writings and other contemplative work), engaging with my Quaker community at home and afar, and also visiting Christian monastic hermitages, sites of Shaker communities and an Amish community, that has helped me reflect and to understand Quakerism in new ways. Quakerism gave me a sense of belonging to a 'gathered people' in my local meeting, historically, in the UK and internationally. It also went beyond the Quaker community and I felt close to other peace churches and their members, and to other people of faith. It is from this journey that I discerned the radical core of Quakerism that I will now describe.

The Radical Core of the Quaker Tradition

Quakerism privileges personal and community experience of the divine over dogma and creed. My personal journey, based on my experience and research, has helped me identify three core anchors which informed the Quaker tradition and led Early Friends to experience a covenant with the divine. These anchors I believe are the basis for a radical core of Quakerism that is vitally important today and forms the base of our Quaker practice, theology and liturgy.

The radical core of Quakerism consists of three principle activities:

1) *Embodied Spirituality*

This means experiencing a real, physical and bodily experience of the divine, a taking in of the transcendent light of Christ (this replicates Christ's incarnation on earth). The early friends privileged this real experience of Christ that was both personal and communal. They were made 'tender' by

this experience: i.e. humbled, made holy, given grace, and they were given the courage and direction to act in the world. The communal experience led to the belief that they were being blessed by a 'new covenant of light'. This embodied experience was given priority, it was the essence of their faith and privileged over other inspirations such as the Biblical text. This embodied spiritual experience manifested itself in many ways, the best known 'Quaking' defined the Quaker name.

2) A Quaker Theology of Liberation

Early friends had a deep knowledge of the scriptures and they read them as a liberation and living text. This led to the radical egalitarianism, pacifism, simplicity and spiritual truth that enabled the Quaker challenges to the power elites of their times. This resonates with the Liberation Theology and base communities of Latin America in more recent times. The Quakers believed the scriptures also had to be 'embodied' and taken inwards. The Bible was not regarded as infallible but was to be discerned against personal and communal experience. In reverse, Quaker experience was also discerned against scriptures. In this way 'spiritual truth' was discerned. The truth that was discovered unleashed personal transformation and community transformation.

3) Contemplative Worship

Quakers waited in the light, without rituals or hired clergy. This silent worship, a receptacle for the spirit, became formalised and a regularised practice of contemplative, silent and egalitarian 'meeting for worship' on first day. This contemplative worship has provided personal and

communal spiritual leadings, insights and nurturance for Quakers over the centuries. It is radical in its simplicity, and in the contemporary world of noise and bustle, it is truly radical and counter-cultural. It provides a place of not-knowing, a place of opening oneself to what might be. To sit in silence and wait is an 'act of faith', it is a radical departure from the world which only values 'doing'. This contemplative worship is a great source and a real strength is that the insight of taking this into our business discernment.

These three core anchors, led the Quakers to their radical social vision that the light of Christ was universally available to all people and could lead to social transformation. The inward light transformed early Friends personally and collectively. They tested their embodied experience of the divine against the scriptures, realising the light of Christ was available to all people not just an elect few as preached by the puritans at the time. As they waited in contemplative worship together they were led to tenderness in their community, to pacifism, and to challenge corruption, oppression and deceit. Their mission was to create Gods 'peaceable kingdom' being brought about on earth. I will now address how we have lost at least one of these core anchors of Quakerism, and the two others are under threat.

The Loss of the Text and the losing of a Quaker Liberation Theology

Without The Text We Get Trapped In Our Context (Thomas Cullinan)

Today's tension between a Christian or Universalist Quaker position is a false tension. Quaker Universalism comes directly out of the Christian Universalism. The light of Christ revealed that universal Grace was possible not only for Jews 'a chosen people', but was a light for all people. Quaker radical notions of equality also came from universal spiritual truths and from scripture. St Paul's teaching is a truly radical teaching on Universalism.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galations 3.28

Alain Badiou (an atheist philosopher) claims that Paul demonstrates a revolutionary universal thought, one of equality and casting off of difference. It is a shame that an atheist sees what we as Quakers no-longer recognise. A radicalism and universal truth born from Christianity and that was highlighted in our Quaker tradition. A universal truth that gave John Woolman the insight and courage to work to free slavery, 100 years before Wilberforce campaigned in England. Much energy and misunderstanding is lost in this false dichotomy.

The real tension is between losing our Quaker distinctiveness and slipping into a kind of mainstream post-modern spirituality (some call it New Age spirituality) where individuals pick and choose their path of desire. They become by default one and the same, and Quaker renewal becomes lost in the translation. The task is to find a way of making Quaker distinctiveness alive and kicking in the 21st century.

It is the three anchors together that act as the internal dynamic of Quakerism, and we have lost one in particular. It is Quaker Liberation theology, that

liberates individuals from despair, alienation, and re-unites them with the divine. It is the sense of being 'free at last' as Martin Luther King famously said. This is both an inner freedom and a freedom from slavery and oppression. This is very different from having liberal views about people's rights. As we discover an inner peace and courage we are challenged to act as radical social change agents.

The text (the Bible, Friends writings old and new, and other works of spiritual wisdom) is like a backdrop a rich tapestry to engage with, it challenges and guides us, helping us to discern spiritual truth in a turbulent world. We have lost our ability to 'read the text' creatively and openly. Reading the text and letting it read us, so that our experience of the divine is sharpened and clearer has been a core anchor and inspiration to our Quaker tradition. Reading the scriptures does not take away from our understanding of the direct experience of God, it adds to it. Contemporary Quakerism reveals the absence of the text. We need to re-engage with the Bible in a way that allows us to get beyond our 'baggage' and resistances, and which allows us to read the text playfully, to read it as a liberation text rather than a dogmatic text, and to let it challenge us and work on us and in us.

Reading the text can again become a source of deepening our worship and our faith and challenge us to work for peace and justice, and to transform our own lives. Unfortunately many friends have had painful experiences of other churches and many associate the Bible with fundamental, evangelical or

Catholic Christianity. However we are throwing away 350 years of struggle if we allow the Bible to be distorted by fundamentalists! Early friends suffered and died to claim a revolutionary Christianity, where the scriptures were not infallible but had to be read with a radical egalitarian body. The mythos of the word goes beyond narrow readings by literalists.

Until we are grounded in our own tradition and faith, reading others texts becomes an exercise in eclecticism and pluralism without developing a depth of faith and understanding. Early Quakers read the scriptures and proclaimed that women should preach, because 'we were all equal in Christ' (350 years later other Christian churches still struggle with this!).

Recently I attended a Scriptural Reasoning event, where Jews, Muslims and Christians read their texts together. Orthodox Jews reading and interpreting the Koran with Christians and Muslims (and vice versa) was a powerful experience. I learnt so much from this and I also learnt that Quakers bring important insights to this process. My input was valued even though I was the least 'scriptural literate' there. We too have our interpretations based on our tradition, but we must rediscover this gift. I was told a Jewish saying that encapsulates the richness of reading the texts '*These and these are the words of the living God*'..., it is for each of us to be inspired and take in the meaning of the text, to let it work in our community.

Learning from the Early Friends is important, I read their poetic and charismatic writings with awe, they are beautiful and inspiring. We can also learn from other faith communities, and must! Liberationist theology coming

out of the poorest communities of Latin America, Feminist Theology, Queer Theology and the Black Liberation theology tradition of Martin Luther King. We can learn from other contemplative traditions, the early desert fathers, Thomas Merton. Richard Rohr the Franciscan theologian writes of the need to reclaim the Bible by minorities and the poor and links this to the Quakers tradition:

We have a lot to learn from people like the Quakers and the Mennonites. They're well practiced in being a minority. They don't need to have crowds around them to believe in the truth. They gather in little grouping to share the word of God..... Whatever gave us the idea that a select group of overeducated people would best understand what God was saying to all people?

The poor and uneducated are reclaiming the world of God.... And we are finding that the word of God is being read with vitality, with a truth, with a freedom that is frightening and makes us wonder if we've ever understood it before. When we see what the gospel demands of our lives, we may not even want to understand it. (Rohr 21)

Richard Rohr places Quakers in this tradition and rightly so..... but today in liberal friends we are fast losing this ability.

New Light

With regards to new light from other sources, I believe we should be open to and explore new light from all sources available. Like a good orchestra, we should be playing a strong Quaker symphony and then let new light work like a contrapuntal melody, weaving in and out of our tradition, shedding light on it for us, helping us question assumptions and positions we hold. Holding onto our faith we can also share our tradition and truths with others. Coming from a clear faith position allows us to ask the challenging and deep questions of ourselves and of others and this world needs challenging and inspiring questions at this very important epoch.

The Difficult Journey to Modernity

I want to share a brief overview of how Quakers have made important transition in the past. After radical beginnings, persecution, and finally consolidation the Quaker movement then went through different periods usually summarised as the Quietist period, the Evangelical period and the Liberal period of today. Within this journey, we can identify our successes and influences on the world; our social engagement and vision speaks for itself, but I feel we might learn more about ourselves by reflecting on how in the past we have transformed ourselves when facing the abyss.

My research, a longitudinal study of the Quakers, explored that by tracing this journey over 350 years there were key moments of transition points, and at each of these transitions the Religious Society of Friends could easily have self-destructed or split into factions (as happened in the USA). For example, early friends created 'Gospel Order' to develop a method for corporate discernment, and discipline, this prevented self-destruction in the face of great persecution that was made worse by individuals undisciplined behaviour and deviating from 'right ordering'. Later, Quietist friends were faced with severe declining membership due to a very inward, rigid and controlling culture that enforced marriage within friends and strictly inhibited individual freedom (known as the Quaker hedge). Numbers became very low, but in the mid-1800s a change swept through the Society of Friends, moving towards a more open society, losing plain speech and dress and allowing 'marrying out'. Individuals gained more of a private life as they opened up to the world, and

Quakerism survived. Late in the 19th century during their Evangelical period Quakerism narrowly managed to avoid losing their distinct Quaker/Christian identity as they experienced the cultural Christian revival movement of the time, and became very close to merging with mainstream Christianity. This came to a head at yearly meeting, over a decision whether to accept the Richmond Declaration, that read like a standard Trinitarian and Christian 'creed'. It had much support and was/is the faith statement of many yearly meetings in the USA. A British friend J.B. Braithwaite wrote it and there was a strong expectation this would be accepted which would have aligned Quakers with other Christian churches. However yearly meeting refused it, opening the way for the Manchester Conference in 1895 that signalled a shift towards a distinctive liberal Quakerism distancing itself from evangelic and mainstream Christianity. At each of these changes I wondered how they had discerned their path when many other small religious groups when faced with change, so often implode, or quietly fade away? Academic and historical writings use secular and rational explanations to describe changes in Quakerism, but in my research these retrospective rational explanations didn't really add up. What they omitted was the particular 'Quaker way' of discerning the divine will. Waiting in silent worship, at our business and worship meetings creates a space of contemplative spiritual reflection, from which wisdom and 'spiritual truth' flows. The core tenants of Quakerism manifested together to create change when all seemed lost. At each crisis point Friends went back to their core, they trusted the silent meeting, they experienced in their bodies what needed to happen, and at the heart of their beliefs is an emancipatory divine

spirit: what will set us free? Each time they faced the abyss, they emerged with a transforming culture change. The spirit moved them, to give up and lose precious things- plain speech and plain dress must have been so hard to let go for those who grew up with it. What Quaker worship does is place us in what Keats called 'negative capability' "*when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.*" Quakers have known how to wait in uncertainty with a particular ear to God since their conception. It is who we are, and I will return to this capacity that has lead us so well in the past, through our own transitions and to lead social change. It is this ability to act without knowing the future that will transform Quakers again.

Our meetings provide a place we God can dwell, where we can listen to the living word and it is this listening that has led us to make important decisions. This has not only been about internal affairs but the radical social innovations we are proud of, our pacifism, our fight against slavery, prison reform, industrial welfare, same sex marriage, have all arisen from being 'led by the spirit' out of our contemplative worship tradition, our liberation theology, and our embodied spirituality.

Moving from Modernity to Post-Modernity

Perhaps this invitation to write an essay signifies another point of change, our numbers yet again fall, and our liberal belief system is at a point again of merging, not this time with mainstream Christianity, but with mainstream society. Our distinctiveness becomes ever diluted as we slide towards relativism and individual choice. This is the danger we now face. The core

anchors of our radical tradition become weakened, our Liberation Theology becomes liberal thinking, which is something very different as discussed previously. Contemplative worship slips towards personal meditation, personal reflection time. Again this is something quite different from a collective act of worship that results in powerful ministry, leadings of the spirit emanating from the experience of a gathered meeting. Embodied spirituality means to take in the spirit, the light of Christ, a powerful moving experience that occurs when we open ourselves up to the divine. This is radically different from eastern meditation that is interpreted in the West as an emptying of the self, a letting go, the aim being to lose oneself. Embodied Spirituality is about discovering our true selves, ourself as God knows us. It is to be fully alive and as fully human as we possibly can be, it is to embrace the divine, to take in rather than to let go. Quakerism is an active engagement with the spirit, echoing Early Friends quaking and acting as one body, creating a 'living church' to try and create the kingdom on this earth.

Modern Quakerism eagerly tries to promote its openness to new light, but at the expense of closing the door on an eternal light. In an attempt to be modern and relevant we have been seduced and engulfed by individualism and the choice of the market. We are sliding into the subjectivity of the western world, where life becomes reduced to questions of identity and the self, obliterating notions of society. I-identity replaces We-Identity (Elias 1991) and 'loving God' and 'loving our neighbour' becomes sidelined in our rush to celebrate individualism.

Quaker faith has been underpinned by a theology that liberates us from ritual and creeds to listen directly to God, but it then demands that we discern and act to transform our relations with others and by doing so transform ourselves. In contrast today we avoid difficult conversations within our own faith community. Like it or not, if you do not have a tradition and history underpinning a faith community, then contemporary culture floods into the empty space. There are no anchors or reference points from which we can resist the mass media. We become so caught up in our own culture that we no-longer can see anything outside of it. Marshall McLuhan in the 1960's predicted that mass marketing would be so dominant that it would shape the way humans think, act and perceive the world.

All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered. (McLuhan 1967:26)

We now must awaken ourselves from this drift, build on our strengths and move towards a collective transition again.

The Future: Acting in Faith with Radical Hope

*If you point your cart north when you want travel south
How do you expect to arrive? Ryokan*

The radical core of Quakerism remains constant and is the basis for a living contemporary faith. We have our testimonies that have arisen from these core anchors and our tradition.

Acting in Faith when we don't know the future.

The clarion call is to 'act in faith' to bring about transformation within our community and beyond. However we sit at a place in our history where we cannot predict the future. Yet our tradition of coming through transitions and 'near death' experiences should give us hope. It is a time for Radical Hope.

Jonathan Lear writes about radical hope, focusing on the Crow Indians who faced the total destruction of their way of life, and had to make decisions about their future. They knew that their culture and life as they knew it was destroyed, the buffalo had gone, whiteman had won the battle for the plains, and all of their signifiers and co-ordinates as to how they should be a people, a community, had changed. Nothing would be the same again, and potentially they faced genocide. Their chief Plenty Coups had a dream, and the dream harnessed unconscious imagination and spiritual guidance, that they followed, acting in faith without knowing how the future would unfold:

(the dream) "...gave the tribe the resources to adopt a stance of radical hope- in that it enabled them to go forward hopefully into a future that they would be able to grasp only retrospectively, when they could re-emerge with concepts with which to understand themselves and their experiences" (Lear 1008:115)

I believe that the Quakers, are at a point where we need to 'act in faith' and use our core anchors 'to dream'. The Crow Indians used dreams in an institutional/ritualistic way, to discern their future. We use our contemplative worship, our liberation theology and our embodied spirituality in this way too. Both are similar, in that neither are scientific/rational ways of knowing. We have to act in the space of the unknown, we can only act in faith, and our faith comes from our past, our present experience and it will lead us into the future.

Faith is the leap between the now and the eternal. Discernment is our emergent way of fathoming our path, and it is our worship, our texts and traditions and our bodily experience of the divine, that underpins discernment and this will be our guide.

There is a secular world that is desperate need of spiritual awakening. We need to reclaim our divine spark, the Quaker charism, that can ignite change in ourselves and in the world. How will this manifest? We don't know. How then can we act without co-ordinates for an unknown future? As we have done in the past with a deep faith and by using our resources that have taken us through turbulent times in the past.

Structural change goes with Spiritual Renewal

Our meetings for worship are counter-cultural, they set us apart, silence in the face of turbulence and noise, this is our forte. However, our structures will need to become more flexible and adaptive. Letting go is a vital part of radical hope. We need to embrace the world but not to follow it, to engage in transforming it. We need to live our radicalism, marrying same sex couples is a hopeful spark that shows what we can do. We need to stand-alone when we have to, and to stand with others when our purposes and hopes are aligned.

Technology, websites, social networking are all expansive ways to engage each other and the world. New forms of online-worship and meetings will emerge. We should not be afraid of this. We need to experiment in the light.

We are rediscovering our testimony of simplicity, applying it to the environment, to consumption, and to challenge the madness of our busy lives, and we need to continue this path and find new ways to be beacons of hope in the face of social and environmental demise.

Imaginings

I imagine a community of Friends in 10 years, where we move towards a living network and away from being a highly structured organization. I imagine a community of communities, big and small, real and virtual, local and global, some specifically Quaker, and also partnerships, collaborations, and networks where we are connected to a plurality of those sharing a commitment to social transformation. I imagine regional cluster meetings, connecting with local and national meetings, with autonomy and slimmed down processes. Decision-making will be distributed so that local meetings have greater autonomy and are responsive to their local communities. The relationship to regional and our national bodies will move towards friendship and communication, allowing innovations at local and regional meetings that will respond to local diverse needs. Self-managed processes will emerge where truth is discerned and brought to the yearly meeting. Quakerism will evolve in plurality of ways, and we need to re-think our relations between the edges and the centre. Courage and trust will be necessary to make difficult decisions about downsizing, letting go of buildings and losing some meetings in the forms they currently exist. I imagine more informality yet more intentionality. New forms of Quakerism, new ways of organising and new

forms of worship will evolve, if we undergo this process with radical hope, using our radical core anchors.

The internet will be one of many new spaces for discovery, friendship, theology and study, and for sharing information and spiritual friendship. Its already happening on QuakerQuaker' for example (<http://www.quakerquaker.org/>). Radical hope means to allow for emergence whilst renewing ourselves spiritually.

A faith community's task is not to keep up with the times, but to stand outside of the times, to be prophetic, to discern eternal spiritual truths and then to bring these into the world. However, we don't have to shun new potential ways of engaging and sharing our Quaker gifts. Early Friends travelled far and wide, wrote letters and pamphlets, held open meetings and were experts at communicating their message at every opportunity. Their example should be ours.

As the printing press enabled the Bible to be read by the multitudes, so new technologies also can bring new connections, new potential and unexpected results. I imagine virtual meetings taking place alongside Sunday worship, new decision-making bodies online, rather than the costly travel and time implications of our current structures. We must be creative, adaptive and generative in our responses to change.

I imagine a lighter and more adaptive community, it will have offshoots and I have no-doubt that some Quakers will be very different from others. Some will embrace our Christian heritage and some will not. Some Quakers will

merge with other groups and others will start new social movements. We will seed many things. Unity has always been a Quaker value, and now our task is to understand what unity means as we face diversity like we have never known before. Without diversity we will shrink and die. However we will also shrink and die if we just become another campaigning body, another self-help group, or another site of 'new age' spirituality without maintaining any of our history, or Quaker distinctiveness.

Holding together must be based on solidarity in spirit rather than conformity of practice and behaviour. The former is living in the spirit the latter killeth the spirit.

I imagine Quakerism being a spiritual hub in a cluster of clusters, and the hub will be a sanctuary, a place of welcome to others, a spiritual home, based on our core anchors that keep us in-tune with the divine work of being a Friend. It will also be a dynamic hub generating love, peace, simplicity, truth and friendship to others. Friends will conceptualise Quakerism as an eco-system within other eco-systems, growing, always changing and always emergent. The whole is always greater than the sum of the parts and our fruits will demonstrate this.

The starting place for renewal is in our own lives and our faith community. Our radical core will guide us, we should celebrate and share it. The beauty of our simple and silent contemplative worship, the radical emancipatory reading of our texts where we accept and see the light in all sentient beings, and our embodied sense of the divine. The journey will be filled with beauty and

grace, challenges and sadness. This journey will reveal many wonderful things, if we speak and live 'spiritual truth' together.

The Truth is one and the same always, and though ages and generations pass away, and one generation passes and another comes, yet the word and the power and the spirit of the living God endures for ever, and is the same and never changes. Margaret Fell (QFP19: 61)

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