

## The Future of Quakerism in Britain

Quakerism is called to be the spiritual midwife of a new age of equality, simplicity and respect for the earth and our fellow peoples. The next century will require a radically different approach to economic and social life based on restraint, sharing and understanding. To meet this calling, Quakerism must show how it is relevant to the needs of the time and it must be a welcoming society that can grow in numbers.

The next few decades will be difficult and turbulent. The growth and foundations of Quakerism in a period of social change mean that we have a contribution to make in a time of change. Our spiritual foundations, independence and cohesiveness will be strength in challenging times.

Sharing our spiritual understanding will help us to grow together. Openness to new views and new people will grow from shared understanding and trust with each other. Building shared trust and vision is more important than a pre-occupation with the number of members. New people will come when we are ready to welcome them.

Quaker values and beliefs grew from Christian beliefs and are valid for all peoples and all times, independent of the historical events which are their foundation. Quakers must show how religious beliefs and values like faith, hope and love, based on our Christian heritage but freed from the limits of biblical Christianity can guide us through the chaos of the next century into a new era of human co-operation.

### A changing world

To see how our world is changing, it may be useful to look back at how the world looked 100 years ago. Then, in 1909, the sun never set on the British Empire; it circled the globe. War seemed possible, but distant. The two world wars which were going to change society's view of war and lead to the end of the British Empire were still in the future. Motor cars were an expensive curiosity.

Would British Quakers in 1909 have been able to forecast what life is like in 2009? They might perhaps have seen that the Empire was unsustainable and would ultimately have to end. The possibility of what was then called "self-rule" extending throughout Africa and Asia would have seemed difficult to believe. The idea that we would still be fighting wars in Afghanistan would have seemed too gloomy to contemplate.

#### Notes:

1 Though the topic refers to the Religious Society of Friends, I have used the term 'Quaker' throughout because it is more easily understood by people outside the Society

2 For simplicity, I have also avoided any discussion of the Religious Society of Friends in other parts of the world.

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On the technical front, computers and mobile phones would have been beyond the realms of possibility. Radio was already being used and the possibility of radio broadcasting and telephones in every home might have been foreseen by some.

Turning back to the present and looking forward to 2109, what conclusion can we draw? The first and most obvious conclusion is that by 2109 there will be some changes that we cannot now foresee. There will also be some technologies now in their infancy which will become an established and accepted part of life by 2109. Gene therapy may be an example. Perhaps people will have a spare heart grown for them out of their own stem cells and then kept frozen in reserve, in case their own heart fails. Certainly we can expect that technologies for energy generation will be much more advanced and much less dependent on oil.

Especially relevant for the future of Quakers, is the future of society and politics. In this area, the underlying trends seem challenging.

### A growing population

The major trend is a growing population. World population is now growing faster than ever before in human history. The numbers are startling. It took thousands of years for the human population to reach 1 billion by about 1800. But it only took 26 years to add another 2 billion human beings between 1974 and 2000 and reach a world population of 6 billion. Population control measures and social change, particularly women's education and employment are having some effect. The lower estimations suggest that world population might start to level off at around 7 or 8 billion by the middle of the twenty first century. But this still means that humanity will increase by about 2 billion people, or one third of the present world population.

Even if the distribution of essential goods was to remain as unequal as it is at present, it will be difficult to provide food and water for everyone. In addition, large numbers of people, especially in China and India, are earning more and demanding more, making the shortages even more serious. There is a crisis in food production. We are nearing the point of peak oil production and we are changing the world climate to an extent that has not occurred for millions of years and which is unpredictable and could quite possibly accelerate beyond our control.

The overall effect depends on a combination of population and resource use. The world could easily cope with a larger population if everyone was as careful with resources as the people of India. But if everyone

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was to be as wasteful as the Americans we would already be over-using the world's resources by two or three times.

The question of dividing a limited amount of resources between a growing numbers of people on a crowded planet will have to be faced. It will not be possible to produce more and more until everyone has everything that they want. Some sort of assessment of what is necessary for a happy life and what is possible within the limits of the planet's resources is needed.

### The limits of Economic growth

The idea that economic growth could provide enough to keep everyone happy, which has driven at least the last fifty years of world politics, is breaking down. It was probably always a fantasy and there is much evidence to suggest this may never have been what was really happening. The rising pressures of population, global warming, peak oil, and numerous individual ecological catastrophes are showing that this dream is never going to be attainable. Carrying on as we are is not possible.

There must be a fundamental change in the way our economy works. A major change in global politics and power structures is also happening. China and India are gaining influence and the United States is losing it. The strains of these changes are already causing wars and we have to expect that there is worse to come.

Allocation of land and ethnic conflicts over the division of resources is already a central issue in many wars, for example, the genocide in Sudan or the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is not possible to say exactly which crisis will hit first or forecast the exact detail of which conflicts or catastrophes will happen and which will be avoided, but the general picture is clear. We have to expect more and wider conflicts.

There are many possible technical solutions. But this should not divert our attention away from the central question of dividing resources between people cannot be avoided. Will people co-operate and manage the planet for everyone's benefit or will they compete and even destroy the world as a habitable planet? This drama will determine the future of the human race and the crucial part of it will play out over the next 100 years.

### Politics of a crowded earth

One way of looking at this great human drama is to think of the world as a crowded life raft afloat in the vast ocean of space. Unfortunately, no one is going to come and rescue us, so we have to decide how we are going to manage. There are two possible ways of approaching life in a crowded life raft. Either you say "We are all in this together we must co-operate. Essential supplies have to be equally shared. Unnecessary quarrels have to be avoided. Compromise is essential"

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But there is also the 'cuckoo' approach. "I am going to save myself and perhaps some friends. Everyone else needs to be pushed out of the life raft. If there is not enough for everyone, then I am going to get what I want, whatever the cost to others."

This world drama is already starting to play out in British politics. The older political parties are still thinking in the mind set of the industrial production age. How we can we make more and spend more?" But they seem irrelevant to many. They produce policies that sound very similar, but seem unconvincing and they seem less and less in control of events. At the same time, smaller political parties like the Green Party and the British National Party are growing fast.

The British National Party (BNP) represents the cuckoo approach "Let's grab what we want and damn the rest". Sadly, the evidence about the choice that the British people will make is mixed. The BNP has demonstrated an ability to win elections and may be growing faster than alternatives, like the Green Party, which would be much more acceptable to most Quakers. In a time of turmoil the authoritarianism and ideology of the BNP may become attractive to many people. We need to face the possibility that the BNP, or parties with similar ideologies, may be a major force in Britain during the next few decades.

### The importance of vision

*"Where there is no vision, the people perish " Proverbs 29. 18*

The central issue is not about economics or science; it is a matter of vision and will. In any large enterprise, it is culture and values that is important, rather than technical details. The senior manager does not need to know the detail of every decision; he does need to know that it will be based on a set of values that meets the needs of the enterprise. Similarly, for the vast enterprise of changing the world's economy, it is not the details that matter; it is the overall culture and approach. Scientists can work out what can be done, but they will only do it if they know that saving the world is going to be given a higher priority than national point scoring. On this subject, world politicians need to do better. A lot more could be done to manage the situation than is being done. World leaders are making great efforts to work together and face unprecedented challenges with unprecedented co-operation. It is not yet clear whether they will succeed.

### Religious view of respect for the creation

There is also a deeper religious understanding of this crisis as well as a practical one. Humankind is behaving like an angry teenager destroying their parent's house. To a small child, their parents and the

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house they live in seem impossibly big. However angry or destructive the child is, they cannot do any practical damage. A small child lacks the knowledge and the strength. 300 or 400 years ago, the relationship between humanity and the world was like that of a small child. However, destructive people's behaviour might be they could not do much damage; they did not know how.

Since then, people have learnt much more. People can now harness the primeval energy stored in oil fields and the energy of the atom. Just like a child becomes more powerful as they grow, so humanity has, as it were, grown up. Now people have the power to destroy the world, like a teenager has the power to destroy their parent's house. Just like a teenagers respect for their house grows from their love and respect for their parents, in the same way, humanity's ability to respect and care for the world is a sign of their relationship with the creative spirit that guided the world into being.

### The role of Quakers

What part does religion play in a time of social change? In any time of rapid change spirituality and a sense of faith becomes more important. Immediate challenges and sorrows are easier to face if they are seen in a wider context that includes hope and understanding. Faith, hope and love are valid in all situations, as I shall explain further on. William Penn's comment is:

*"True Godliness don't turn men out of the world but enables them to live better in and excites their endeavours to mend it.... Christians should keep the helm and guide the vessel to its port; not meanly steal out at the stern of the world and leave those that are in it without a pilot to be driven by the fury of evil times upon the rock or sand of ruin"*

William Penn 1682 *Quaker Faith & Practice* 23.02

Politics affects all of us. Most Quakers will agree that when we are considering the possibility of the growth of politics like those of the BNP, this does become an issue of religion as well as politics because their views are such a long way from the inclusive loving community that we would see as the essence of religious life.

Quakers are particularly called to face this issue which is a religious as well as a political and social issue. Quakerism has within it the building blocks of a peaceful community, able to face and reconcile conflicts, with an active approach to peacemaking and an inclusive membership, within an egalitarian, structured and secure community. Quakers arose in a period of political and social change and has developed a particularly independent set of values and strengths. Building on these foundations, we can be, for many, a place of safety in turbulent times ahead. Quakers are suited to the time because we have

- A tradition of peacemaking

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- An independent source of authority that will be resilient during a period of change
- A community which is free, yet strongly constituted
- An awareness of social distress

### Quaker peacemaking

In a time of potential conflict, Quaker peacemaking is essential. Most British people prefer a peaceful life, but this is not the same as a genuinely non-violent approach to conflict resolution. There may well be a strong inclination to view Britain as an Island of peace within a fighting world. This is a tempting vision, but one that is unlikely to be sustainable over the long term. Consider the camp of refugees at Calais, determined to enter Britain at any cost. It is possible to keep some people out some of the time but world problems will inevitably enter Britain as terrorist attacks, as crime or as racial tensions. For example, here is a quote from a North London M.P. :*" I am worried about what appears to be increasingly powerful international criminal gangs operating in parts of North London. Their racketeering, loan-sharking and heroin war is stigmatising what is otherwise a law-abiding community and creating ..... a 'survival of the fittest world'."* (David Lammy M.P. 17/11/09)'

The Quaker tradition of peacemaking and conflict resolution is a surer route forward. Quakers see conflict as natural and inevitable but believe and demonstrate how conflict can be faced and discussed without resorting to fighting. Since every war will end in a peace treaty, let's have the peace treaty first, and omit the war. This approach requires that conflicts are faced, acknowledged and understood. Every side needs to be heard and conflicting viewpoints reconciled point by point.

### Quakers' independent view of authority

Quakerism started during the English Civil War, a time of great social and political change. It was also a time when religion was intensely political. George Fox was disillusioned by Church Ministers and priests, the accepted religious authorities, and after a period of struggle and depression, found a new faith in his own direct experience of God. In abandoning accepted customs, like hat honour and the use of the formal 'you' to figures of authority, early Quakers questioned accepted rank and power. The civil authorities found this direct experience of authority from God suspicious. They need not have worried:

*"We are not for names, nor men, nor titles of Government, nor are we for this party or against another....but we are for justice and mercy and truth and peace and true freedom, that these may be exalted in our nation, and that goodness, righteousness, meekness, temperance, peace and unity with God and with one another, that these things may abound."* Edward Burrough 1659 *Quaker Faith & Practice*

23.11

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In a time of change and war, George Fox and the early Quakers took a different, pacifist stance, taking authority from their own experience, their own understanding and their consciences. In the decades ahead, as our economic system crumbles around us, as people struggle for survival and question the authorities that have allowed this to happen, then direct experience, direct responsibility and authority built on personal experience, will have an authenticity that will give a sense of direction through the chaos.

### Quakers as a strong community

From the beginning, Quakers have also realised that direct experience and direct responsibility has to be tested against the understanding of others. One of the reasons that Quakerism has survived over the centuries, when many radical groups born at the same time are just history, is the thoroughness and method of Quaker organisation which means that the individual is both tested and supported by their meeting and the wider society. This has built a system of governance and business meetings that both supports and checks the individual. At its best, Quakerism is open and inclusive, but also a remarkably strong institution. In difficult times, it will provide a robust community for those who may be worn out or mentally and spiritually lost.

### Quakers and Social Justice

Quakerism was not only conceived and born out of a period of social change, it has also, throughout its history, been both an agent and a prophet of change. In many areas, Quakers have been and are ahead of their time. Judicial reform, penal reform, social justice and the abolition of slavery are all areas where Quakers have led the way.

This is no accident. Quakerism's emphasis on a direct relationship with God carries with it also a direct responsibility for responding to perceived injustices. And Quakerism's emphasis on direct experience means that experiencing the distress of one's fellow humans also has a direct authority unmediated by the false logic of custom.

### Are Quakers responding to these problems?

If Quakers ignore these issues, pretend that they are all too complex, decide these are other people's conflicts, and hope that Britain can stay in a peaceful oasis, then we will be increasingly irrelevant.

Quakers are responding slowly to the challenges of our time. The challenges are too massive, too general and too impersonal to engage the sort of direct response that might meet the distress of individuals. But this will probably change as the distress becomes more obvious, more personal and more direct. Starving

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people, racial tensions, ethnic wars will engage the sympathies of Quakers. England is unlikely to be able to stay an island of calm. Already we face tensions from the many migrants who arrive here legally or illegally. This is likely to intensify.

Another problem is that Quakerism as it is practised in Britain has not yet gained a substantial membership outside the English-speaking middle classes. This is a difficulty if Quakerism is to be relevant to a future society that is ethnically and socially more diverse. But it may not be an overwhelming obstacle to Quakerism being effective in the years to come.

### How will Quakers make a difference?

The important contribution of Quakers is not to do something special or new and not to be any more different from the majority of people than we already are. We need to be what we already are, a religious community. Not, of course, in the sense of being monks or nuns, but by being a group of people with religious values who live as a closer community within the wider secular community around us. Quaker values are important and relevant, but they are not unique to Quakers. There are going to be many Quakers who are expert in many of the technical issues of a different lifestyle, but this is not something that Quakers as a whole should do.

Instead we need to spread our values, as we already do, by living them, and possibly by preaching them a little bit more. There are already Quakers behind many worthwhile enterprises. More will be needed. Just like Jesus saw his disciples like salt or yeast that flavours a much larger meal, Quakers can influence a wider group of people.

But we cannot just share values. We must also be a community with a common faith, because values do not exist in isolation, they exist in people. And people are influenced by the community around them. Without a supportive faith community in which to grow and strengthen our values, our values will inevitably weaken under the influence of the secular world and we will have nothing left to give.

*"It is more and more clear to me that it is only in the bosom of a religious family, freely but very strongly constituted, that the individual can render to the world the services it sorely needs and which no politics, not based on a deep inspiration, can hope to organise."*

*Pierre Ceresole 1936 Quaker Faith & Practice 10.29*



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### More Quakers needed

This raises a topic that some Quakers will consider essential to any consideration of the future of Quakerism. How do we increase our numbers? There have been some predictions that Quakers as we know them in Britain will dwindle into extinction by 2050. This prediction should not be taken too seriously, because it can be changed without too much difficulty if people join. There is no reason why that should not happen. The two essential requirements are that Quakers are relevant and welcoming. The paragraphs above have explained how Quakers will or should be relevant as we confront the issues of the future on the basis of our faith and history. The next section turns to looking at Quaker outreach and how we can be welcoming

### Being a welcoming community

Welcoming groups are those who are confident of their own identity and aware of their role. They can welcome new members with a clear explanation of their beliefs while allowing people also to find their own way into the society. We need Quaker outreach not just to preserve a Society that we love but also because it is our responsibility to other people to share with them something that may help them and our responsibility to the world to share the values and beliefs that are badly needed.

Quakerism cannot be taken apart and seen as separate sets of values, beliefs and community. Each part requires the others, the values need to be supported by religious beliefs and both need the support of a living community that gives them life and which in turn depends on values and beliefs to hold together. To discuss Quaker outreach is not just to spread values or inform people about the existence of Quaker meetings, it also means telling people about the religious beliefs which are part of the whole. And these values and beliefs do not exist in isolation; they exist as part of the experience of being a Quaker. We need to strengthen our understanding of our faith but also to become more aware of our place within a wider society.

This leads to an obvious truth, which is all too often omitted from discussions about outreach. Quakers are a tiny minority. We need to realise how uncomfortable it is to be a minority. We cannot completely avoid the tensions of being a distinctive small society. Nor can we, or would we wish to, require that every member believes certain statements of faith. But we can and should become more aware of the variety amongst us and more assured in understanding the choices that each of us make in terms of faith, action and outreach.

This will not, and should not lead to uniformity. It will make us more aware of our own views and understanding of the views of other people. It will make us a more welcoming society in a deeper sense, a

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society in which each member, new or established, is valued for their uniqueness but also encouraged and strengthened by the differing but similar views of other members. If the decades ahead are as difficult as they look like being, there will be many people who need this sort of support and assurance.

Much of the discussion about Quaker outreach is devoted to topics such as whether we should advertise; do we greet people sufficiently warmly? the appearance of our Meeting Houses. All these are important but they also seem a little superficial. They are a long way from the original vision of George Fox, which attracted a record membership for Quakers, in proportion to the population of England at that time, while offering very little that was outwardly attractive and the prospect of being arrested and thrown in jail as well!

### Quakerism a faith for all people?

Do we believe that Quakerism is a faith for all people? We need to think about our attitude to this question in order to develop our approach to outreach. There is a special fervour, faith and relevance in any new religious faith that cannot be easily re-captured later. Understanding how Quakerism has changed since those early days will help us to create an attractive, relevant and welcoming faith for today.

During the first period of Quakerism, Quakers believed that they had a new form of Christianity for the whole world. The well known quote from George Fox 'Walk cheerfully over the world, speaking to that of God in everyone' referred not just to an attempt to have good relationships with everyone but to a project to convince the whole world that Quakerism was the way to God.

After this first period, a period that lasted until between 1660 and 1690, following the scandal of James Naylor who rode into Bristol in an imitation of Christ's ride into Jerusalem, Quakers began to realise that their new convictions did not lead them into perfection and began to accept that they were not going to and perhaps should not attempt to convince everyone. This led into a period of quietism that lasted through the eighteenth century.

Any small religious group or any group with intense and different beliefs faces the discomfort of being different. The essential question is "If this is right for me, why is it not right for everyone else?" If I feel compelled to worship in silence and be a pacifist, why do my neighbours not do the same and how do I react when they question what I am doing?

*"Many people fear nothing more terribly than to take a position, which stands out sharply and clearly from the prevailing opinion. The tendency of most is to adopt a view that is so ambiguous that it will include everything and so popular that it will include everybody" – Rev. Martin Luther King Jr*

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### Different Responses

Among Quakers, there are two common responses to this strain. One is to emphasise the separateness of Quakerism. This happened during the eighteenth century, but is still quite common among Quakers today. The central idea is "I do this because I am a Quaker; you behave differently, because you are not a Quaker." There are many Quakers who will emphasise that "Quakers do this or Quakers do that" This may also be linked to a very gentle and quakerly attempt to convert the rest of the world. Quakers who believe in this approach will be horrified by the comparison, but, in terms of group psychology, this is a Quaker version of evangelism. "We are in the right group and once we have explained it to you, you will want to be in this group too". Quakers are far too non-doctrinaire for this to be at all threatening in terms of personal statements of faith, but it can have the effect of being interpreted as spiritual superiority or simply as an exclusive group.

The other common response to the strain of being different is the "personal choice" approach. Religion, beliefs and Quakerism are seen as personal choices. Everybody is entitled to make their own personal choice, completely independent of everyone else's personal choices. All that is required is that people should be flexible and reasonable about accommodating everyone else with the minimum of inconvenience to everybody. This approach is so flexible it can hardly put anyone off, but it also means that Quakers have little reason to publicise our faith, because these matters are simply matters of personal choice and why should we attempt to influence other people's choices? It may also mean that Quakerism appears so flexible, bending to the choice of every individual member, that it just seems confusing and uncertain to outsiders.

Quakers need to be aware of how we view our role in the wider world. Being aware will, in itself help us to respond to people visiting our Meetings or enquiring about the society with more genuine warmth and sympathy. If Quakers are going to influence the wider society or if we are to attract new members, we must talk about our beliefs and the best way of practising this is to do it. Rather than making this point at more length, the best contribution may be to say something about my own beliefs

This is my contribution to a dialogue Quakers need to develop about our faith. A common understanding about our faith is an essential preparation for outreach. In a diverse society it is important to welcome difference. But Quakers have gone beyond welcoming difference into what may be seen as rejoicing in confusion. I contribute this as a personal viewpoint. It does not mean that Quakers as a whole, or even a majority of Quakers, do or should believe the same. Especially it does not mean that they should formulate their faith in the same words as I use.

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### My personal thoughts about God

Those who are professional theologians will doubtless find this a very amateurish discussion but I hope, perhaps precisely because it is not professionally formulated, my statements of beliefs will encourage others to also share something of their thoughts.

We know that there are things that we will never know. On a small scale, some things are just too small to be detected. On a larger scale, astronomy deals with times and distances that are way beyond any distance that we can hope to travel. We can never go back in time and find out exactly what happened at the Big Bang that started the universe as we know it. And, almost by definition, we cannot go back beyond the Big Bang, and even if we did every question would lead to another question and there will always be something we do not know. As parents learn when they answer small children, the question "Why?" is never ending. Eventually the only answer is "Because it is".

Somehow it seems presumptuous for us to discuss whether God exists. It assumes that we know and understand what 'existence' is, so that we can then decide whether or not God has that quality. But we do not understand existence, whatever brought the universe into existence happened way outside our experience or knowledge. Whatever creative spirit has kept the universe going for thousands of millions of years might rather discuss whether a species that has existed on one planet for a mere 100,000 years is worth noticing.

So a more meaningful discussion is about the nature of God. Whether he (she) is really a creative spirit? It is possible to justify this description by a play on word definitions. "Spirit" is justified because he/she/it is not a physical body and "Creative" is justified because he/she/it created the universe. But a more meaningful discussion is to consider the possibility that everything happened by chance. Either we came into being by chance or by intention. If we came into being by intention, then there is, as far as we can understand it, a spirit or being that intended us to exist.

Here I turn, as Quakers will, to my experience. Do I experience the world as a game of chance? Does chance reflect what we know of evolution? My answer is no. There is an element of chance. Nature creates unbelievable profusion, in many species thousands or millions of young animals start out in hope and only one or two of them grow to adulthood. There is an element of chance about which animals survive. But the sheer profusion, the endless ingenuity of life in finding new forms in which to express itself argues for an underlying intention or purpose.

### Quakerism and Christianity

Going beyond belief in general, into the question of specific religious faiths and practices, why Quakerism, not Islam or Buddhism? And how does Quakerism fit into the wider Christian family? This links with the more general view about how Quakerism fits within a multi-cultural Britain. We must start by confessing our failings. Despite many good thoughts, Quakerism remains essentially white, professional and English-speaking. We should not be comfortable with that but the best way to attract a wider membership is to understand our faith better in more inclusive terms, rather than seeking diversity for its own sake.

I suppose that I am essentially Christian. By this, I do not mean that I believe in salvation by faith, as preached by some evangelical churches. I do mean that Christ embodies a unique insight into our world. This is not just what he preached, though it is related to that. Christianity like Judaism believes that God speaks to people through history. Christ is unique in being a suffering Saviour. His religious leadership was shown by suffering and dying and I think that is unique. I have some difficulties with the resurrection, not necessarily that I find that it is physically difficult to believe, but more because the Gospels do not really seem to have any use for the resurrected Jesus. There does not seem to be anything for him to do, beyond proving that he has risen and then disappearing into heaven. But it is beyond doubt that Jesus' religious leadership extended beyond death. The Christian church is living proof of this. For Jesus as a religious leader, death was the beginning, not the end.

Jesus' attitude to leadership was different to the usual custom:

*"in the world, rulers lord it over their subjects and their great men make them feel the weight of their authority; but it shall not be so with you. Among you, whoever wants to be great must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be the willing slave of all – like the Son of Man; he did not come to be served but to serve, and to give up his life as a ransom for many" Matthew 20, 25 -28*

Jesus' life, as well as his teaching, is the basis for Christian Pacifism and the historic Quaker peace testimony. Jesus' attitude to rulership is urgently needed now. Rulers and politicians need to be servants bringing the world's nations together to build our common future, instead of risking a common peril as we exhaust the world's resources and destroy the climate in pointless national competitions.

There is something in Christianity that speaks uniquely to the human condition. For example, we are told, by anthropologists that the human race outside Africa are all descended from a group of perhaps as few as one hundred people who crossed the Arabian gulf, from Africa into Asia, around 140,000 years ago. That prehistoric group of the first people needed faith in the future, hope that they would find food in Asia but above all love, in the form of group loyalty. Even though they existed long before the beginning of any

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historical record, St Paul's great passage would be as true for them as it is for us ; *"In a word, there are three things that last for ever: faith, hope and love; but the greatest of them is love."* (Romans 13,13).

Christianity is faith for humanity that can exist and draw strength from our experience of life, as well as from the bible.

Just as St Paul enabled Christianity to grow as a form of Judaism for non-Jews, so too I believe there is a role for Quakers to translate Christianity beyond a bible-based faith into a general pattern of faith and life which is relevant for everyone and which will be essential if the human race is to overcome the great challenges that lie before us.